

# Principals: Catalysts for Collaboration

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*Because principals are the main decision-makers and chief catalysts for collaboration, teacher-librarians need to align their efforts with the school's mission and the principal's vision. Principals have strong academic backgrounds and professional standards. As they are held accountable for the successful workings of their school sites, effective principals use broad-based governance systems. Teacher-librarians need to make known to principals their unique and collaborative contributions to students' success. Several strategies for mutual collaboration between principals and teacher-librarians are described. Assessment of such collaboration is also the key to sustained efforts.*

## Introduction

Teacher-librarians (TLs) realize that their influence in student achievement depends on their successful collaboration with the rest of the school community as they incorporate information literacy into the curriculum, promote reading, and integrate technology into learning experiences. Therefore, TLs need to align their efforts with those of the school in general, and specifically those of the principal.

The chief catalyst for collaboration at the site level is the principal, who serves as the vision-maker and curriculum facilitator. The principal is the decision lynchpin, determining who is hired or at least who is retained. With responsibility for overseeing the operations of the school, the principal is most likely to know all the personnel and to make effective connections to optimize student achievement.

## The Role of the Principal

Few TLs would wish to change places with principals, even with the commensurate pay increase. Principals are ultimately responsible for the smooth operation of the school and typically work long hours throughout the year to carry out this work. They are accountable to the entire school community and must answer to the community-based board of trustees. At the same time, they also need to support and facilitate the efforts of all school community members as they endeavor to implement the school's mission.

Principals need to manage the school and lead people through effective goal-setting, communication, decision-making, and development (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) identified the following principals' responsibilities.

- facilities management;
- budget management;
- safety and security management;
- student placement, evaluation, and management;
- staff supervision and development;
- curriculum development; and
- interaction with parents and community.

As the leaders of schools, principals should inspire a shared vision, provide direction to accomplish the vision, challenge existing assumptions in order to clarify understanding, empower others to act, and facilitate a positive school spirit (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Similarly, Bellamy (2006) posits four areas that principals should strive to accomplish: sustainable goals, strategic focus, effective action, and developed social and civic capital. This last area emphasizes the influence of individuals in advancing social agendas and promoting effective citizenship.

Current educational trends have put significant pressures on principals. In the United States, the *No Child Left Behind Act* has mandated that all students must succeed and that educational practices must be built on empirical research. The push for data-driven decision-making requires systematic data-collection and analysis. Increased accountability about student achievement has been accompanied by an increase in stakeholders' demands and bureaucratic paperwork. Amid these pressures, principals often must deal with issues of diversity and social inequities. Furthermore, in many cases, principals are asked to do more with less financial support (Klinker, 2006). In a Illinois study of preservice and inservice principals, several negative aspects of the job were identified: time and work demands, legal actions, lack of mentoring programs and professional development, a sense of isolation, lack of support, and loss of control (Mulhall, Hartter, & Camp, 2003).

On the other hand, site-based management and shared decision-making point out the need for collaboration. Principals need not act alone or in a vacuum. A new vision of educational leadership is emerging that encourages inculcating a sense of community and responsibility. The idea of transformational leadership has also taken hold, with the idea of setting direction, developing people, and redesigning organizations (Starrett, 2003).

### Principal Preparation and Standards

Just as TLs have formal preparation to meet legal and professional standards, so too do principals. Like TLs, they arrive at this position through several career paths: classroom teachers, service/support services, or outside business. Most principals earn advanced degrees or credentials. US standards for principals include:

- spearheading a school vision and direction;
- promoting a positive school culture through an effective instructional program and development;

- managing resources, operations, and organization;
- working with the school and larger community; and
- understanding the contexts of the school while demonstrating professional behavior (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002).

Because principals are administrators, they are often evaluated by superintendents and school boards. In the US, the latter have the power to appoint administrators, so the position is seldom permanent; principals serve at the pleasure of the board. Thus principals are expected to meet national standards, but are accountable to local standards.

Fortunately, several studies have identified qualities that optimize principals' success in meeting both sets of standards.

- clear, feasible vision and goals;
- focus on—and interaction with—students *and* teachers;
- support of innovation and evidence-based practice;
- communication of high expectations of the school community;
- facilitation of team spirit and positive collaborative atmosphere; and
- warm and caring personality (Blankenship, 2000; Mulhall et al., 2003).

The American Association on Certification Competencies of Educators (1994) also has developed a set of library-related competences for administrators:

- support the incorporation of information literacy into the curriculum and make classroom teachers accountable for such actions;
- support resource-based learning through the effective allocation of human and material resources;
- model and expect teachers to foster positive reading experiences;
- use technology to allocate and evaluate the use of resources; and
- support teacher-TL collaboration through budgeting, scheduling, and decision-making.

In each of these cases, administrators deal with the big picture, management, communication, and school culture. Collaborative efforts are significantly affected by these elements.

### Conditions for Collaboration

Increasingly, hierarchical bureaucracy is being replaced by shared governance, with the assumption that active participation in decision-making leads to more effective school improvement. Collaboration involves those stakeholders who share a collective goal and work together to achieve it. Recent studies have demonstrated that a collaborative school environment fosters student achievement. For example, Designs for Change (1998) found that the following practices resulted in higher-performing schools: broad-based decision-making, emphasis on collaborative teaching and learning, and follow-through with site improvement plans based on school community commitment.

The basic collaborative process involves at least two parties, whose strategic interdependence of knowledge and skills makes an otherwise unattainable goal a reality. Leadership should be distributed among the participants rather than concentrated on one person. Substantive roles for each person or group should be determined in order to facilitate accomplishing the overall goal. In addition, the entities should have sufficient control to effect change and should be accountable as a whole as well as individually. Typically, both an academic and social task are involved in a collaborative initiative: developing a sense of belonging to a team as well as accomplishing an intellectual goal. Parties should be able not only to accomplish something to benefit the school community, but should enjoy their interaction. (Johnson, 1994; Slavin, Sharan, & Kagan, 2002).

Nevertheless, intent is not enough. For collaboration to improve school programs and affect student achievement, several conditions need to be in place. First, the principal needs explicitly to encourage and support collaborative educational goals and ensure that adequate resources are allocated for their accomplishment. Second, a school-wide commitment to collaboration needs to be present. The school culture should exhibit a sense of inclusion, where everyone is accepted and respected, a sense of cohesion and interdependence, and a sense of accountability (Senge et al., 2000). Third, structures for facilitating collaborative efforts need to be institutionalized such as shared planning time, teacher teams, collaborative professional development, and site-based decision-making (Fauske & Johnson, 2003).

Even with these conditions in place, collaboration requires willingness on the part of the stakeholders and sometimes requires change. Moving from the status quo can be difficult; it involves disequilibrium, new modes of thinking and acting, and the resources to support change. On the other hand, collaboration can facilitate change to improve the school's effect on students. Critical management theory posits that principals need to look at the school as a dynamic system and examine the organizational factors that impede and facilitate change. In this model, diverse and self-controlled collaborative teams that are coordinated with other teams can lead to improvement throughout the school because information is fluid and staff are empowered. The principal coordinates these efforts and manages change in the system (Fullan, 2001).

### How Principals Can Foster Collaboration

Such a climate of collaboration shifts attention from a centralized leadership style to a distributed leadership model. Nevertheless, the principal is largely responsible for facilitating this change in governance. Principals have the power derived from their position to make or break collaborative efforts. Opportunities for collaborative leadership must be available. A consensus-based decision-making process needs to be institutionalized. Control, responsibility, and accountability for actions need to be shared.

As instructional leaders, principals can affect the conditions for teaching, encouraging the delivery method as well as the content to be addressed. If the school focuses totally on textbooks and rote learning, then the library program might need to focus on personal readers' advisory services and sources. On the other hand, if the principal believes in a constructivist teaching-learning philosophy and encourages engagement with a variety of resources to address various curricular and individual needs, then the conditions for providing a rich library collection that fosters information literacy are more likely to exist. In addition, if the same principal sets the stage for collaborative curriculum development and implementation and appoints the TL to curriculum meetings, the way has been paved for the TL to take the initiative for collaboration.

In terms of resources, principals are the major decision-makers for prioritizing and allocating human and material resources. Is time allocated for collaborative planning? Are there enough library staff to do collaborative planning and implementation? Do staff know how to collaborate, and are they given opportunities to learn these skills? Are enough resources available to collaborate successfully? Are collaborative efforts, which usually extend beyond the normal daily teaching operations, recognized and supported?

### Barriers to Collaboration

In some schools, principals neglect to include TLs in collaborative efforts. The typical reason is that they do not see TLs as central to student achievement (Hoiser, 2002). In their academic preparation, principal candidates seldom examine the roles of TLs except for legal issues. Usually libraries and librarians are regarded in terms of resources and their use and abuse: plagiarism, circulation records, and copyright violations. For principals, no library news is good news, particularly in an environment where difficult decisions are a daily energy drainer.

In daily operations, some TLs are clustered with other support personnel such as health professionals, counselors, psychologists, reading specialists, and technicians. When Lau (2002) asked principals what they thought about TLs, principals responded by saying that TLs were more interested in things than people; libraries were warehouses of materials for students' use; the main duty of TLs was to develop and maintain resources; and TLs should be responsive by helping students with reference, finding information for teachers, and administration. In short, TLs were perceived less as collaborators than as responsive helpmates (Hartzell, 2002a). For example, principals said that TLs located school-related research, but only a third of the respondents said that the TL shared that information (Lau).

In another study, Oberg (1995) clustered principals' contributions to library program collaboration along these lines: supervising teachers and TLs; managing resources that support the library program; modeling personal commitment to the library program; and giving library program value and visibility through mentoring and communication with the com-

munity. However, principals and TLs may hold other perceptions about the principal's role relative to the library. Oberg found that principals thought that the TL should spend more time instructing, although TLs self-reported more hours in this role than principals realized. On the other hand, principals thought they should do more to advocate for the library program and provide adequate staffing. Both agreed that principals needed to spend more time convincing teachers of the importance of the library program and seeking library funding.

### The TL's Role in Facilitating Collaborative Efforts

Principals focus on the bottom line, namely, student achievement. They look for and support resources and actions that help the school reach this educational goal. So far, the emphasis has been on the TL's expertise to address the collaborative needs of the community. However, if TLs want library programs to be sustained, they must show how these resources and services uniquely contribute to student achievement and how their use can be optimized through collaborative efforts. Fortunately, dozens of studies make this case. Substantial bibliographies may be found on the American Association of School Librarians Web site (<http://www.ala.org/aasl>) and in Farmer's (2003) synthesis of research findings. Some of the main points include access to a rich collection of relevant resources to address the needs of all students; availability of certificated library staff to provide effective physical and intellectual access to information and ideas; information literacy instruction integrated across the curriculum to facilitate transfer of learning and articulation of knowledge; and collaboration with the school and community to provide a systematic an interdependent program of teaching and learning. In addition, many TLs are expert collaborators based on the necessity of their working with the rest of the school community in order to affect student achievement.

In terms of collaboration, principals and TLs agree that the library program should support students and staff and provide supportive resources and value-added services. The message is that TLs need to be more proactive in setting the conditions for collaboration, showing what the library program can bring to the collaborative table; then principals can facilitate the occasions for collaboration based on the library's contributions. Some of the contributions made by the TL include:

- knowledge of resources: what interests students and adults, what is developmentally appropriate, what fosters learning and enjoyment;
- knowledge of students and adults: how they learn, what motivates them, how they communicate and interact;
- knowledge of curriculum: content matter and skills, student outcomes, articulation across academic domains and grades, connections with information literacy;
- knowledge of research processes: information-seeking behaviors, use of resources, effective instructional interventions;

- knowledge of technology: tools and their uses, digital information resources, their effective incorporation into teaching and learning, ethical considerations;
- ability to organize and manage resources (Lau, 2002).

Just as principals can help TLs collaborate with the school community, so too can TLs advance principals' agendas through collaboration. Based on their expertise noted above, TLs can conduct literature reviews about administrative issues such as student retention, family involvement, and year-round scheduling. TLs can take a leadership role in professional development through their knowledge of peer coaching, technology, and content. TLs can help determine cost-effective allocation of resources through their evaluative expertise. They can help manage school knowledge through their ability to gather, organize, and make information available.

### Facilitating Principal Support of Library Program Collaboration

Principals need to be aware of library media programs, and they need to *care* about them if they are to be effective agents for collaboration. Using Bloom's 1974 taxonomy of the affective domain, TLs can help principals become more proactive in fostering collaboration.

*Receiving.* Get the principal's attention relative to library-related collaboration issues. Share evidence of collaboration: representative lesson plans and handouts, sample student work, co-sponsored events and programs, collaboratively produced products and policies. Provide data analysis that demonstrates the effect of TL collaboration in support of student achievement. Have other school community members share their successful collaborative efforts with TLs.

*Responding.* Provide opportunities for the principal to experience successful library program collaboration (e.g., class visits, committee work, participating in conferences of professional organizations).

*Valuing.* Get principals' commitment to the underlying value of library program collaboration through management decisions about resource allocation, endorsement of TL-classroom teacher collaboration, and enabling TLs to conduct professional development sessions.

*Organization.* Provide data for the principal to support library program collaboration when possibly conflicting values arise. Demonstrations of support include mandating that new classroom teachers be required to be oriented to the library program, requiring incorporation of information literacy in courses as they are developed.

*Value complex.* Publicly recognize and thank the principal when consistent advocacy for library program collaboration is evidenced. Examples of principals' support include substantial resources allocated to school-wide collaborative efforts that incorporate the library media program, staff retention decisions based on effective collaborative effects, assessment of student outcomes linked to collaborative instruction, and teaching that incorporates the library program.

The following strategies exemplify specific actions that principals can take to facilitate collaboration in the school community at large. TLs should not wait passively for these actions to occur, but rather should become aware of potential opportunities and alert the principal of their willingness to participate. TLs also need to learn about other people's jobs and their contributions to the school's mission. Only then can they build trusting professional relationships that will lead to collaborative efforts in support of students' learning. Following each strategy are accompanying actions for TLs.

*Principals appoint committee and task force members.* TLs can research the mission for each group and identify how it aligns with the library programs' mission. They can also find out who serves on the committees to determine their potential influence on the school in general.

*Principals mandate collaborative efforts as part of teacher retention.* TLs can develop professional goals that incorporate collaboration and seek partners to achieve these goals. They can volunteer to collaborate with classroom teachers, pointing out several possible methods for collaborating as well as identifying instructional units that lend themselves to collaboration (e.g., research projects, technology products). TLs can mentor new classroom teachers, providing examples of successful collaborative activities and professional reading on collaboration.

*Principals allocate resources for collaborative efforts.* TLs can serve on decision-making committees that review budgets and allocate resources. They can make a case to the principal as to the cost-effectiveness of providing a rich collection of resources in various formats, as well as related equipment, that can be used efficiently by the entire school community. TLs can work in collaboration with classroom teachers to select resources that meet students' needs. They can research information about collaborative efforts and supportive resources that can address the needs of underserved populations such as English-language learners or students with physical challenges. TLs can gather evidence of collaborative practices in the school and develop a database for the entire school community to draw on.

*Principals schedule time for collaboration and class access.* TLs can conduct literature reviews about effective time management that support collaboration. They can show how library portals can be accessed remotely to maximize collaborative access to resources.

*Principals create professional development opportunities that foster collaboration.* TLs can locate and share documents that describe effective collaboration. They can locate and help create online tutorials about collaboration. They can locate existing conferences and workshops that focus on collaboration and identify experts who can conduct professional development workshops on collaboration. TLs can co-present professional development sessions on collaboration. They can report on conferences they have attended that address collaboration issues. They can serve as collaborative coaches for classroom teachers, observing their collaborative

efforts and suggesting ways to improve them. TLs can collaboratively organize communities of practice that focus on collaborative efforts.

*Principals develop and encourage policies for library use and collaboration.* TLs can locate and help create policies that foster collaboration.

*Principals recognize and award collaborative efforts.* TLs can help identify school community members who have made significant collaborative contributions.

Whenever possible, these efforts by TLs should be made in collaboration with other school community members. As administration expert Hartzell (2002b) noted, these factors are independent, and their effects are cumulative.

### Assessing Collaborative Efforts

As TLs try to measure the effect of principals on setting the conditions for collaboration, the following questions may be asked.

- How are material and human resources allocated to facilitate collaboration?
- How is time for planning periods and flexible scheduling allocated to foster collaboration?
- What communication venues facilitate collaboration, for example, telecommunications, school community meetings, staff development events, and publications?
- To what extent is information literacy integrated into the curriculum and explicitly addressed in teaching and learning?
- What opportunities for leadership roles are available to TLs? What is the regularity and substantiality of these opportunities?
- What is the effect of collaborative efforts on student achievement and school improvement?
- How are collaborative efforts publicly recognized and awarded?

By regularly assessing the fruits of collaborative labor, TLs can determine which efforts are effective and what underlying conditions need to be strengthened in order to optimize the effect of future initiatives. Most important, though, TLs need to communicate these findings with principals and collaborate with them to improve the entire collaborative enterprise.

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