School and Public Library Consortium for eResource Sharing

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“The relationship between schools and public librarians is a critical one.”
-Marta Murvosh

Objectives:

- To form alliances with local schools to share hyperlinked resources in digital collections.
- To serve school students by curating and managing digital collections to support their literacy needs, sparking curiosity and supporting Common Core standards.
- To increase our circulation numbers and core value within our community.

Executive Summary

Collaboration between public libraries and schools:

- increases literacy rates in young people
- empowers school districts to offer digital literacy resources to students that their budgets alone cannot maintain
- allows public libraries to provide user-centered hyperlinked resources to youth, which are aligned with Common Core standards and life-long learning

OverDrive offers a unique opportunity for public libraries and school districts to collaborate on their collections and streamline student access through hyperlinked library accounts. Through their devices, students have access to library collections that are unique to schools and the community at large. Curating hyperlinked collections for e-readers can increase access, foster cultural competence, increase library patronage, and support life-long learning in more meaningful ways than if public libraries did not collaborate with schools.
Introduction

Currently, only 30% of public libraries and schools collaborate to support literacy in school children (Miller & Girmscheid, 2012, p. 1). As a result, strategic planning and purchasing by Youth Librarians often lack direction in developing resources that will support the academic information needs of community youth. Public school districts struggle to offer eBook resources because they lack access to expensive collections; at the same time, public schools are closing their school libraries at rapid rates, despite dismal literacy rates. For California, school librarian positions have decreased, largely because school libraries are not seen as essential, which was spurred by deep budget cuts following the 2008 recession. Given the next looming recession, there is an even more dire need for students to gain access to eBooks and hyperlinked literacy resources to make up for the school libraries that are inaccessible because of shelter-in-place or that are disappearing on campuses. Also, this program can increase access to sources that school libraries cannot physically carry, even if their libraries are operating.

The unique consortiums in which public libraries and school districts collaborate illustrate how both parties stand to benefit financially and holistically. In considering the mission of life-long learning and a public library’s rich potential and responsibility in supporting school children and their needs, collaboration through hyperlinking with schools is essential. In particular, sharing hyperlinked resources is the most powerful way to bolster student literacy. In cases where libraries and school districts have collaborated sharing eBook resources, circulation numbers have dramatically risen for public libraries, in some cases three-fold (Murvosh, 2013, p. 4). Such collaboration is a win-win for both parties, and best of all, the children reap the benefits—the users on which both schools and libraries center.

Trend

Collaboration between public libraries and schools should be a primary relationship. Despite the alarming low percentage rates of this collaborative trend, Miller and Girmscheid (2012) contend that “Given the serious budget crunch all libraries face, there’s no better time than now to join forces to deliver the best services we can” (p. 1). Each stakeholder benefits from combining services:

In public library and school consortiums that already collaborate through OverDrive apps like Sora, success has been impressive: Educators who implemented the [Sora] app in the classroom during the 2018—2019 school year noted that students using it nearly doubled the amount of time they spent reading” (Maughan, 2019).

Research shows that such consortiums to share hyperlinked resources reap benefits. Murvosh (2013) argues that “The relationship between schools and public librarians is a critical one. Even before the recent recession, few school libraries could match the buying power of a large branch or a mid-size public library system” (p. 2). As we face yet another economic risk with the pandemic, there is even stronger reason to build literacy partnerships which all youth are served.
“Teaching children to read and enjoy books is the primary goal of early childhood education.”
-Sonia Livingstone

**Technology**

The technology that bests enhances collaboration between public libraries and schools needs to be a flexible, dynamic, comprehensive, and hyperlinked digital resource carrier or platform. For the purposes of this proposal in collaboration between schools and libraries, OverDrive offers the best eBook platform thus far which also accommodates Libby and Sora apps, which many schools already use. In this consortium scenario, students will only have one log-in to access resources, streamlining hyperlinked access to the public library, while building a foundation for life-long patrons.

Public libraries have been expanding collections to include hyperlinked access to resources in order to legitimize our value in the digital age. Since eBook borrowing has been on the rise, public libraries must continue to embrace Library 2.0 services that support hyperlinked reading especially in our young community who are accustomed to screen learning. Harlan (2018) concurs: “Even in the Information Age, the format changes and the availability of audio or e-books, the focus on reading promotion remains an important role for school librarians (in Hirsch, p. 77). Furthermore, digital collection building must be decisive for fiscal reasons: “With limited resources, it is critical for the collection manager to adopt a more ‘demand driven’ philosophy and look for collection-building processes that focus first on community demand before considering other selection criteria” (Disher, 2018, in Hirsch, p. 293). What better way to meet demand, than work with local schools to adhere to student needs?

**OverDrive**

OverDrive has helped many public libraries and schools to merge collection culmination and sharing. OverDrive is “… the industry’s leading digital reading platform [and]…offers the largest digital content catalog in the world to more than 43,000 libraries and schools in 75 countries and the highest-rated apps that are built to create reading happiness” (OverDrive, “Who We Are,” para. 1).

The benefits of OverDrive and its accompanying apps are that its curated book collections are user-focused for school children based on their community demographics defined by schools, libraries, and librarian educators at OverDrive. The collections are age appropriate, classic and cutting edge, and culturally competent. They also serve differently abled learning needs.
Challenges

One of the main challenges that this consortium faces is to ensure that students have access to devices, which should be negotiated between stakeholders, keeping in mind the following realities:

- “A vast percentage of teenagers have a cell phone, and 80 percent of them report that they sleep with their devices” (Sheninger & Murray, 2017)
- schools can and do offer devices to use throughout the school year
- students can utilize public library rental programs

Another challenge is highlighted in the debate between the kind of learning that happens in print books, which allows for “deep reading,” vs. eBooks, which could account for weaker cognitive comprehension. As one of the leading scholars on exploring the reading brain, Wolf (2010) observes: “Few need to be reminded of the transformative advantages of the digital culture’s democratization of information in our society” (p. 2), which supports such a consortium in support of promoting reading for all. However, at the same time, Wolf’s research illuminates the need for supporting “deep reading” practices which occur with print books. Wolf would likely prefer print books for good reason for such a consortium, but eBooks provide more of a quantitate (albeit less expensive) approach to increasing access to reading resources for young people. Livingstone’s (2019) call for further research into the debate suggests that even if the medium matters in our metacognitive reading skills, the focus ought to be on “maximizing the learning opportunities with digital books” (p. 5). While most might argue like Wolf that print books provide the best opportunity for “deep reading,” access to literature is the first step in engaging youth to read. Since libraries and schools have both found that reading numbers increase given access to resources like OverDrive resources, it stands to be argued that digital reading is better than no reading if we can’t provide a rich collection of print books.

Conclusion:

Given the success of collaboration between public libraries and schools, and the award winning OverDrive organization (a B Corp by the way), it seems that as a public library we can’t afford not to reach out to our public schools and look for ways that we can hyperlink student literacy needs, as well as support their collection deficits. This preliminary consortium would foster potential for further efforts to provide collaborative services and programs that best serve our youth, and even foster “deep reading” skills. As we continue to look for ways to be significantly valued as a library in our community, increasing our e-readership in youth is one of the most sustainable ways for our patronage to continue to be active and valued. There is no greater mission than to support the learning needs of our young people, and no better institution with which to collaborate in this effort than the schools that are responsible for their learning and literacy.


