Jane Hammons and Kapil Vasudev

Connecting school and academic librarians through professional development

A pilot project

Collaborations between school and academic librarians centered around the professional development of K-12 media specialists may represent a scalable and sustainable method by which school and academic librarians can support information literacy. This article outlines a pilot project developed between The Ohio State University Libraries (University Libraries), located in Columbus, Ohio, and the Columbus City Schools (CCS) that was intended to forge connections between school and academic librarians through professional development.[1]

Background: School and academic librarian collaborations

Both school and academic librarians have expressed concerns about students' information literacy and the transition to college.[2] And there is evidence to support these concerns. For example, a Project Information Literacy study found that many new freshmen were not prepared for college-level research assignments.[3] As a result, some librarians have called for closer connections between school and academic librarians.[4] Without such collaborations, students may find that the approach to information literacy at the college level differs from their high school experience. One study of school and academic librarians found that skills that high school librarians rated as being extremely important were sometimes considered less important by academic librarians, suggesting a potential disconnect between what students are being taught at each level.[5]

There are numerous examples of collaborations between academic and school libraries.[6] Many involve academic librarians providing instruction to high school students. As an alternative, some have proposed the train-the-trainer model, in which academic librarians provide professional development for school librarians.[7] Supporting the professional development of school librarians has the potential for multiple benefits. Studies have demonstrated that the presence of school librarians has a positive impact on students.[8] However, media specialists may struggle to access professional development relevant to their needs.[9] There are a few examples of academic librarians providing professional development for school librarians, but the literature is limited.[10]

Development of the Ohio State and CCS collaboration

In March 2019, the director of outreach and engagement in the University Libraries reached out to the CCS supervisor of library services to inquire about the possibility of a collaboration

Jane Hammons is assistant professor and teaching and learning engagement librarian at The Ohio State University, email: hammons.73@osu.edu, and Kapil Vasudev, formerly of The Ohio State University, is now collection development strategies librarian the at the University of Maryland, email: vasudev@umd.edu.

in support of K-12 students. Such a collaboration aligned with the strategic directions of the University Libraries, which includes a commitment to building partnerships outside of campus. After a series of conversations, a plan was created for a pilot program in which representatives from the University Libraries would lead two 90-minute professional development workshops on CCS professional development days.[11] The CCS media specialists would receive Continuing Education Units for attending. This focus was selected based on the needs of the CCS representatives, who explained that the professional development opportunities they typically encountered were not always relevant for librarians.

Workshop descriptions

Information literacy

The first workshop, Information Literacy: Supporting the Transition to College by Addressing Common Misconceptions, took place in the library at one of the CCS high schools. Participants were introduced to the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, familiar to many academic librarians but less for school librarians. The participants were encouraged to reflect on how the conceptual focus of the Framework compared with their own understanding of information literacy.

The second component of the workshop focused on identifying common misconceptions that students have about information and research. The media specialists reviewed a list of misconceptions developed by academic librarians, which included "research is a linear process" and "every question has a single right answer."[12] Participants each wrote down a misconception they have encountered, then all responses were examined to identify themes. For the final part of the session, participants were encouraged develop a plan for helping students move beyond a misconception.

Comics in the classroom

The second workshop, held in March 2020, was to be on a topic related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. The education librarian decided to focus on a method for media specialists to welcome students into the library and encourage them to engage with and take ownership of the physical space of the library. The workshop centered on comic creation activities that the media specialists could share with their students. This decision was inspired in part by the success of the Comic Book Project, an initiative started by members of Columbia University's Teachers College to improve literacy education outcomes by engaging middle school students in comic creation.[13]

The workshop began with an overview of the history of the medium. Participants were introduced to a major concept in understanding comics: representational drawing. Representational drawing means drawing an image that communicates a concept to the viewer. The media specialists participated in an activity involving volunteers drawing increasingly difficult concepts that had to be guessed by their colleagues. The concepts ranged from the more concrete (like "judge") to the more abstract (like "justice"). The group discussed what details in each drawing made it effective in communicating the concept.

The next part of the workshop focused on comic creation activities. Several studies have been conducted about the value of students participating in comic creation activities to express personal narratives based on their own lived experiences.[14] After being shown examples of comics created by students participating in the Comic Book Project, the media specialists

created a single comic page depicting their typical workday using a 3x3 panel grid, and then an 8-page minicomic, complete with a cover. The goal was to model an activity that could be used with their students to create art for the library.

Additional workshops

There have been two additional workshops, both held over Zoom because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The head of bibliographic initiatives at Ohio State led a one-hour MARC cataloging workshop for 11 CCS librarians. The workshop reviewed current cataloging practices and resources for creating bibliographic records using the MARC format and how these practices are applied in the Follett Destiny catalog used in CCS libraries.

The education librarian also led a 90-minute workshop on digital literacy skills. Participants engaged in conversation about their experiences teaching students to verify information. The workshop covered how to trace information sources online upstream to their origin and the skill of lateral reading, which is using additional tabs to search for information about the source.[15]

Benefits, challenges, and recommendations

Despite the disruption of COVID-19, the project proved valuable to both sides and is one that the University Libraries hopes to continue. From the perspective of the CCS media specialists, the workshops addressed a major concern, the lack of professional development opportunities oriented to their needs. Another major benefit was the development of a professional librarian community within Columbus that can share experiences and information. While both academic and school librarians in Columbus have similar goals, there has not previously been formal opportunities to engage. In fact, there have not always been sufficient opportunities for the school librarians to meet with each other.

However, there were also challenges. While the workshops were well received, it is difficult to measure the long-term impact on the teaching practices of the media specialists or student learning. Also, the University Libraries has not yet successfully scaled up this project beyond the current 90-minute workshop model. The school librarians have been invited to participate in some additional professional development programming offered by the University Libraries, but the timing of the events as well as the fact that some of the programming takes place through the campus learning management system have created roadblocks.

For those considering a similar initiative, there are a few important things to keep in mind. As noted by Jane W. Nichols, Lothar Spang, and Kristy Padron, it is important to make sure that such programs are collaborations, in which the experiences and perspectives of both sides are valued, rather than cases in which the academic librarians impose their view of what is needed.[16] In this collaboration, the content of the workshops was developed by the Ohio State librarians, while the CCS librarians determined the topics that they wanted for the presentations. It is also important to ensure that there is sufficient time for group discussions to allow the media specialists to share with and learn from their colleagues.

Conclusion

The pilot project has been successful in starting to build a professional community of school and academic librarians in Columbus. The results indicate that collaborations between

academic and school librarians centered around professional development can be one way both groups can support students' information literacy and the transition to college. *

Notes

1. This article is based on a presentation the authors gave as part of a webinar series sponsored by the IFLA School Libraries and Information Literacy Sections. The first webinar, Information Literacy as a Continuum for a Successful Transition to Higher Education, took place on October 27, 2021. The recording is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0FIHWl67T8.

2. Laura Saunders, Jenny Severyn, and Jes Caron, "Don't They Teach That in High School? Examining the High School to College Information Literacy Gap," *Library & Information Science Research* 39, no. 4 (2017): 276–83.

3. Alison J. Head, "Learning the Ropes: How Freshman Conduct Course Research Once They Enter College," *Project Information Literacy Research Institute* (December 4, 2013), https://www.projectinfolit.org/uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/pil_2013_freshmenstudy_full-reportv2.pdf.

4. For an example, see Jo Ann Carr and Ilene F. Rockman, "Information-Literacy Collaboration: A Shared Responsibility," *American Libraries* 34, no. 8 (2003): 52–54.

5. Saunders, Severyn, and Caron, "Don't They Teach That in High School?" 281–82.

6. For a few examples, see Kenneth J. Burhanna, "Instructional Outreach to High Schools: Should You Be Doing It?," *Communications in Information Literacy* 1, no. 2 (2008): 74–88; Katelyn Angell and Eamon Tewell, "Collaborating for Academic Success: A Tri-Institutional Information Literacy Program for High School Students," *Public Services Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (2013): 1–19.

7. Christine Schein, Linda Conway, Rebecca Harner, Sue Byerley, and Shelley Harper, "Bridging the Gap: Preparing High School Students for College Level Research," *Colorado Libraries* 36, no. 1 (2011): 1–4.

8. Sara Poinier and Jennifer Alevy, "Our Instruction Does Matter! Data Collected from Students' Works Cited Speaks Volumes," *Teacher Librarian* 37, no. 3 (2010): 38–39.

9. Carol A. Brown, Lana Kaye Dotson, and Elaine Yontz, "Professional Development for School Library Media Professionals: Elements for Success," *TechTrends* 55, no. 4 (2011): 56–62; Judi Moreillon, "Building Your Personal Learning Network (PLN): 21st-Century School Librarians Seek Self-Regulated Professional Development Online," *Knowledge Quest* 44, no. 3 (2016): 64–69.

10. For a few examples, see Delores M. Carlito, "Urban Academic Library Outreach to Secondary School Students and Teachers," *Urban Library Journal* 15, no. 2 (2009): 35–49; Jane W. Nichols, Lothar Spang, and Kristy Padron, "Building a Foundation for Collaboration: K-20 Partnerships in Information Literacy," *Resource Sharing & Information Networks* 18, no. 1–2 (2005): 5–12.

11. The project team from the University Libraries included the two authors, Amanda Folk (head, teaching and learning) and Quanetta Batts (director of outreach and engagement). An additional workshop was provided by Morris Levy (head of bibliographic initiatives). The CCS representative was Lynda Ray (multiple literacy specialist).

12. Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, Allison Rand, and Jillian Collier, "Predictable Information

Literacy Misconceptions of First-Year College Students," *Communications in Information Literacy* 12, no. 1 (2018): 4–18.

13. Michael Bitz, "The Comic Book Project: Forging Alternative Pathways to Literacy," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 47, no. 7 (2004): 574–86; Comic Book Project homepage, https://www.comicbookproject.org/.

14. Alyson E. King, "Exploring Identity and Multiliteracies through Graphic Narratives," *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 9, no. 1 (2015): 3–20; Martha Newbigging, "What Do Comics Want? Drawing Lived Experience for Critical Consciousness," *Journal of Illustration* 5, no. 2 (2018): 265-86;Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, "Image, Text, and Story: Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom," *Art Education* 61, no. 6 (2008): 13–19.

15. For more information on this method, see Civic Online Reasoning, "Intro to Lateral Reading," https://cor.stanford.edu/curriculum/lessons/intro-to-lateral-reading/.

16. Nichols, Spang, and Padron, "Building a Foundation for Collaboration."