

## Collaboration: A Teacher's Viewpoint

Article

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I was so excited to talk with this month's co-editor, Heather Kerns. She currently teaches third grade at Discovery Elementary School in Ashburn, where she's been for the past three years. Prior to that, she taught kindergarten and preschool. We were able to connect for an authentic telephone conversation, and I could tell she was one of those teachers with whom we all wish we could collaborate. When I asked her if she collaborated with her school librarian, she was excited to share her experience.

"The collaborative library" Kern explained, "was a new concept to me when I arrived at Discovery. I'll be honest, at first I didn't understand how or why *I* could be effective in teaching library lessons. However, our librarian was completely fabulous. She attended our bi-weekly team meetings in which we discussed the standards we were teaching in every subject and the areas of support we were looking for, whether it was helping students learn the correct ways to research, conferencing with them on their writing, or instructing them in valuable skills such as using the reference section and reference books. The librarian would then write up a lesson plan, and we would usually divide the students into groups, with her teaching one part of the lesson while I taught the other. We would then switch groups. She was eager to help us implement any ideas we came up with, which in turn excited us to think outside the box in terms of the way we could instruct and support our students.

The collaborative library is so beneficial in so many ways. First, it allows us to work with smaller groups of students, meaning that more students get more of our attention. Second, we can split our groups into either homogeneous or heterogeneous groups; if the groups are homogeneous in terms of their abilities, the librarian and I can adjust the lesson to meet their academic needs. Third, the collaborative library allows us to explore the learning standards at a deeper level. Finally, the collaborative library at our school also has a flexible schedule. This means that when our students are engaged in a project, we can sign up for library time two, three, or four days in a row, allowing for consistent support and instruction for the students."

The other thing I love almost as much as collaboration is inquiry. It is such a natural way to awaken students' thirst for learning about things. Again, Heather's school has that in place already:

Heather tells us, "Our school engages in inquiry-based learning as part of a county initiative called One to the World. The students enjoy opportunities to learn about, investigate, and propose solutions to real problems in the world around them. For example, last year students got to video conference with an expert on the Chesapeake Bay who discussed with them the issues of pollution in our water sources. The students then explored how pollution and erosion were affecting the school grounds and came up with a proposal to help ameliorate this. They presented their proposal to the principal in PowerPoint form and were thrilled to come back to school this fall and discover a part of it had been implemented! More recently, the third graders enjoyed a series of speakers from local branches of organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Special Olympics, and Friends of Homeless Animals. The speakers talked about the purpose of their organizations and how members of the community can help support the organizations in achieving their goals. The students will move on to choosing which organization they would like to help support and what they will do to bring awareness to this organization. All of these projects have guided research components as well as a variety of writing options."

To wrap up our wonderful conversation, I asked one final question. How and where in the curriculum do you provide differentiation or personalization for your students? "I feel that providing differentiation and personalization is such an important aspect in education. This is my second year teaching in an ELL classroom, and we have a variety of interests, abilities, and levels residing within our classroom community. Designing assignments that allow students to explore a subject at their own pace and present their knowledge in a way that best reflects their individual learning styles and capabilities is so rewarding for me as a teacher and fills the students with such a strong sense of pride and accomplishment. To that end, while I deliver the same material to every student, I let them practice and/or demonstrate their understanding of that material in different ways. In math, for example, some students may complete worksheets on word problems; others may write and illustrate a poster of a word problem; and still others may create a slideshow presentation to "teach" younger students how to find code words in word problems. Similarly, in science or social studies, students may choose which animal or famous figure they research, use articles leveled appropriately for their reading abilities to conduct their research, and present their findings in a manner they find most engaging or befitting."

It is exciting to watch this kind of inquiry learning, collaboration, and differentiation occurring in our primary grades. Heather's example of collaboration is wonderful to hear about. If you have this kind of relationship with your teachers, at whatever grade level, I would love to hear about it. Are you lucky enough to have teachers who talk about your library program like Heather does? I hope so. If you do, I would love to hear from you for possible future articles. Email me at [Liz4lib2000@yahoo](mailto:Liz4lib2000@yahoo).

### MLA CITATION

Deskins, Liz. "Collaboration: A Teacher's Viewpoint." *School Library Connection*, January 2017, [schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/2057226](http://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/2057226).

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/2057226?topicCenterId=2247903>

Entry ID: 2057226

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