Leadership Requires Collaboration: Memes Have Meaning

One primary activity of leaders is to inspire and influence the thinking and behaviors of others. School librarians serve in the largest classroom in the school. They are stewards of the widest range and variety of resources. In many schools, they also have the most up-to-date technology tools and have expertise in marshaling the power of technology to improve student learning. Collaborating school librarians have the potential to influence teaching and learning for every classroom teacher and every student in their building. To embrace a leadership role is an opportunity to cocreate a collaborative school culture that truly transforms education.

"Leaders maintain an understanding of what the mission and goals of an organization are and how these can be fulfilled" (Riggs 2001). Today's education leaders seek to move their faculty colleagues or organizations forward to embrace the instructional strategies and the tools of our times. As a district superintendent recently noted: "Oftentimes I hear people say librarians support literacy work in classrooms. We need to change the word 'support' to 'lead'" (Doherty 2018).

In order to achieve this high-impact level of service, school librarian leaders nurture, develop, and sustain relationships with all library stakeholders. They build their confidence by continuously improving their skill sets, including pedagogical strategies and technological innovations. School librarians develop their communication skills in order to listen and respond to the ever-evolving needs of learners—students and educators alike. Through relationships and communication, school librarians lead with confidence (Everhart and Johnston 2016).

Principal and School Librarian Partnerships
"Leadership is about social influence, enlisting the engagement and support of others in achieving a common task" (Haycock 2017, 11). Principals are charged with leading the school in developing a vision, setting and achieving goals, and creating the conditions in which students, educators, and families reach their capacity. A collaborative culture is one condition that supports individuals, groups, and whole schools in reaching their potential.

Principals who engage in distributed leadership empower other educators, including librarians, as leaders (Johnston 2015). Principals and school librarians can colead a collaborative school culture. If library programs are to reach capacity, school librarians must invest in building mutually beneficial partnerships with principals. Together, school librarians and principals colead a change process that spreads innovation throughout their learning communities (see Sturge 2019).

Classroom Teacher and School Librarian Partnerships
In a collaborative school culture, principals "endorse a whole school, 21st-century learning environment where educators model collaboration for students as they collaborate; encourage a culture of innovation, risk taking, and high expectations; and acknowledge the actions school librarians take to shape a school culture of deep learning" (Todd, Gordon, and Lu 2012, xxii).

"Collaborate" is one of the American Association of School Librarians shared foundations and a competency for students. Therefore, school librarians are called upon to take the necessary risks to model, practice, and achieve their own level of competence in collaborative work. Collaborating educators believe that their instructional practices develop at a much greater rate with more assured improvements when they collaborate. As centralized instructional partners, school librarians help classroom teachers reach student learning outcome targets based in the classroom curriculum and work to solve instructional challenges with their colleagues (see Berg, Kramer, and Werle 2019).

Dynamic School Cultures
"Adult learning (and leading) in schools is best implemented at the point of practice" (Moreillon and Ballard 2013, vi). When they coplan, coteach, and coassess student learning, classroom teachers and school librarians provide reciprocal mentorship for one another. Classroom-library coteaching creates a context for job-embedded professional development that is intended to provide educators with instructional and cultural interventions that "help create new norms that foster experimentation, collaboration, and continuous improvement" (Guskey 2000, x).

Leadership and collaboration are memes that are imbued with meaning through professional practice. Leadership, at all levels, in schools has been described "as an essential condition of innovation and change" (Mardis 2013, 41). Collaboration is an indispensable behavior of school librarian leaders who help all library stakeholders reach their capacity. Through leadership and collaboration, school librarians cocreate and colead future ready education.

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