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**Abstract**

Research has shown that collaboration between teachers and librarians has a positive effect on student learning, but can be difficult to achieve. In order to explore the incorporation of teacher and librarian collaboration into preservice education, two master’s level classes studying young adult literature, one in teacher education and one in library and information studies (LIS), were given an assignment that required them to work together to complete a week’s worth of lesson plans for a high school English class based on a commonly read novel. Student responses demonstrate limiting and enabling factors that affect integrating collaboration into professional preparation.

Keywords virtual collaboration, pre-service education, U. S. schools, youth librarianship, English language arts, information literacy, online education

The professions of teaching and librarianship have common interests and complimentary skill sets that are integral to student learning. Research shows that when both are present in schools, student learning, particularly in the areas of reading, writing, information literacy, and computer skills, is enhanced (Lance and Hofschire 2012; Lindsay 2005; Loertscher and Todd 2003). Many studies identify collaboration between teachers and librarians as one of the important variables that correlates with this outcome (Kaplan 2010; Lance 2002). However, teachers and librarians do not always have the opportunity to work together as part of their inservice training. Once on the job, collaboration between teachers and librarians can be difficult to achieve in the context of day-to-day professional life.

In order to explore incorporating collaboration between teachers and librarians into preservice education course assignments, we conducted a study of two master’s level classes studying young adult literature, one in teacher education and one in LIS, at a university in the Southeastern United States. Master’s students were given an assignment that required them to work together outside of class in virtual environments, to complete a week’s worth of English Language Arts lesson plans (for their choice of 9-12 grade) based on a commonly read novel. Working outside of class and in a virtual environment was essential as the LIS class was conducted online and many of the students did not live in the local area. Increasingly the need to work virtually is a reality of modern life. This is true not only in terms of the movement toward online education, but also as a way to facilitate collaborations in which both parties are not at the same location. For instance, collaborations between teachers and public librarians cannot always take place in person. The choice to pair a traditional course with an online course also reflected
the need to pair students that were at the same level of study. The professional degree for librarianship is a master’s degree and the MLS program that is part of this study is a fully online degree program, while the master’s degrees for certification in English Education is a face-to-face program.

The participants in the study were tasked with producing lesson plans that would teach both content (English Language Arts) and technology or information literacy skills. A copy of the assignment is provided in the appendix. The resulting group reports, the completed lesson plans, personal reflection essays, and peer evaluations allow for observation of the process, content, and perceptions that students in teacher education and LIS bring to collaboration between the two professions. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which:

- Students in teacher education and LIS collaborate on a common assignment to design instruction for adolescents
- Students in teacher education and LIS reflect on and respond to their collaboration on a common assignment for adolescents
- Collaboration between programs and departments can be created to strengthen collaboration between teachers and librarians in their professional positions

Data from this study will increase understanding of the perceptions of preservice teachers interested in teaching high school level English courses and librarians when collaborating virtually to develop common assignments for adolescents. This data will also inform faculty on how collaboration between teachers and librarians can be incorporated into preservice courses.

The research questions that guided the study are:
RQ1: What are students’ in teacher education and LIS perceptions of collaboration on common assignments for adolescents?

RQ2: In what ways do students in teacher education and LIS collaborate to form common assignments for adolescents?

RQ3: What factors facilitate collaboration between students in teacher education and LIS when required in a common assignment?

RQ4: What factors limit collaboration between students in teacher education and LIS when required in a common assignment?

**Related Literature**

The literature of library and information science (LIS) is replete with articles focused on the importance of collaboration with teachers, reflecting the distinct knowledge base and skills that librarians can bring to student learning. This literature also includes examples of successful collaborations with teachers and how they were achieved (e.g. Ewbank, Guy, Tharp, and Welty 2011; Lambert 2013; Oehrli 2014). Reports on funded projects in which researchers have sought to understand and support collaboration between teachers and librarians have mainly focused on continuing education for inservice teachers and librarians. Two major examples of efforts in this area are Harada’s development of a practice-based model of professional development (Harada n.d.) and Montiel-Overall’s extensive work on collaboration and the effects of teacher and librarian collaboration on student outcomes (Montiel-Overall 2008, 2010; Montiel-Overall and Hernández 2012; Montiel-Overall and Grimes 2013).
It is difficult to find articles on collaboration between teachers and librarians in the literature of education (Hartzell 2002; Kupfer 2012; Montiel-Overall 2010). Multiple literature reviews bring up less than a handful of examples of education faculty or inservice teachers talking about working with their school or public librarian. In addition, research in LIS has demonstrated that the profession of librarianship is not necessarily well understood by teachers or administrators (Hartzell 2002; Lindsay 2005). The low visibility of librarianship and collaboration with librarians in the education literature is one indication that positive partnerships have not been widely experienced and/or examined.

**Collaboration between Teachers and Librarians**

In response to many factors, there has been an increasing interest in moving away from independent work and toward collaboration in the world of work and in education. In education forces driving this movement include declining resources, increasingly diverse student bodies, and the proliferation of new media and information sources, standard-based curricula, and increasing complexity of learning environments (Montiel-Overall 2005).

The need for K-12 students to develop information literacy and the need to integrate technology into the classroom are topics of interest in teacher education, as they are increasingly incorporated into educational standards in the Unites States (Henderson and Scheffler 2003). At the university level, collaboration between colleges of education and instructional librarians has been demonstrated to be a useful partnership in meeting National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards (Birch, Greenfield, Janke, Schaeffer, and Woods 2008).
Because of their strength in technology skills, librarians can assist teachers in meeting standards and staying current with new technologies as they become available.

The need to ensure that K-12 students attain information literacy skills has resulted in the integration of these skills into various standards for learning. In the United States, nationally recognized standards for information literacy at the college and university level are published by the Association of College and Research Libraries (2015). Information literacy standards relating to K-12 education are published by the American Association of School Librarians (2007). Information literacy is a traditional core competency of librarianship.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) seeks to communicate expectations for learning at each grade level. Making connections between the Common Core and 21st Century Learner standards is facilitated by the AASL crosswalk document, which relates AASL standards to the Common Core Standards many educators must address in their classrooms (1997-2014). All three of these documents were used in the classes described in this study and the integration of content and either information or technology skills was a requirement of the collaboration assignment (see Appendix).

There are other frameworks that the fields of education and LIS in the United States have embraced related to student attainment of information literacy and the need to integrate other “new” literacies such as media literacy, technology literacy, and other 21st century literacies seen as important to student success. Among these are The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Framework for 21st Century Learning (2009) and The National Council of Teachers of English
recently updated, NCTE Framework for 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment (1998-2014), which states:

Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to

- Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
- Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

(para.3)

In addition, other professional organizations such as National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the International Reading Association (IRA), Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE), and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) have incorporated information literacy into their standards but have not been fully integrated into teacher education (Henderson and Scheffler 2003). The increasing attention being paid to the need for information literacy is another reason to promote collaboration between teachers and librarians.

Group based work and the need for collaboration is increasingly common in American businesses (Small 2002). One of the most comprehensive discussions of collaboration is provided by Schrage who emphasizes that organizations need to consider the “kind of
relationships organizations need to create and maintain if they want to deliver unique value to their customers and clients” and the need to express the problems they want to solve and the opportunities they want to seize in ways that support collaborative efforts (1995, xii).

Friend and Cook (2013, 6), writing about collaboration in the school environment, define collaboration as, “a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal.” They further specify that collaboration is voluntary, requires parity among participants, is based on mutual goals, depends on shared responsibility for participation and decision making, and expects that those individuals who collaborate share resources and accountability for outcomes (6 – 9).

Montiel-Overall (2005) reviewed definitions of collaboration from various fields, including Schrage’s work, and developed a definition specific to collaboration between teachers and librarians:

Collaboration is a trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning and shared creation of integrated instruction. Through a shared vision and shared objectives, student learning opportunities are created that integrate subject content and information literacy by co-planning, co-implementing, and co-evaluating students’ progress throughout the instructional process in order to improve student learning in all areas of the curriculum.

(Section A: Defining Collaboration, para. 9)

Montiel-Overall’s definition of collaboration is adopted in this study. The dimensions she specifies of shared vision and objectives, shared thinking and planning, and shared integrated
instruction were embedded in the design of the collaborative assignment used in this study (see the appendix) and also provided a framework for data analysis.

As Small (2002) has written, one way to increase teacher awareness of the role librarians can play in student learning and the benefits of collaboration is to incorporate collaboration between teachers and librarians into preservice education. The study reported here is a first step toward implementing this strategy.

**Barriers and Enablers of Collaboration**

Johnston (2012) found that the ability to collaborate is all about relationships. Her survey research demonstrates that collaboration is fostered in environments where the principal is supportive of the school librarian and where teachers are willing to work with the school librarian in a team relationship. Likewise, her work demonstrates that school librarians have a difficult time collaborating when principals and teachers do not support collaboration and when teachers are unwilling to collaborate.

Another important enabler for school librarians’ ability to collaborate with teachers is support found through professional organizations (Johnston 2012). Participation in professional organizations assists with collaboration as it exposes school librarians to practices in other communities, fosters personal relationships with other school librarians, and provides opportunities for continuing professional development.

As useful as professional organizations and relationships with other school librarians can be, it should be noted that teachers are by definition not directly involved in these relationships and conversations. It is easy to see how a good relationship with principals, teachers, and other
staff can enable collaboration. However, the problem of how to collaborate with teachers who are already working hard and who may not be open to collaboration is unlikely to be solved by individual school librarians in a comprehensive way.

Another barrier that is mentioned in the literature is time. Interestingly, Kovalik, Jensen, Schloman, and Tipton (2010) found in their survey of education faculty that education students with teaching experience are more open to incorporating information literacy skills into their lesson plans and are less likely to suggest that time is a barrier that keeps them from teaching information literacy skills. However, education faculty do cite lack of time as well as a lack of expertise in information literacy as barriers that keep them from updating courses to include information literacy standards and skills.

**Preservice Preparation**

While the need to collaborate with teachers is emphasized in many school library programs, the role and the contributions of the librarian and the library are not generally emphasized in teacher preparation (Hartzell 2002). Though collaboration in schools is becoming more common (Friend and Cook 2013) these collaborations are tend to be among teachers and less often promoted between teachers and librarians. Teachers are not taught to collaborate with librarians (Hartzell 2002; Lindsay 2005). This approach may limit teachers’ ability to take advantage of the support librarians can provide and prevent teachers from considering librarians as potential partners in the classroom.

On the other hand, teachers are being called upon to incorporate technology and 21st century literacies into their classrooms and are not always prepared in their preservice classes to
develop their own literacies in these areas or to teach them to K-12 students in the classroom. A metasynthesis of articles published since 1998 that examines the preparation of information literate teachers concludes that “many teachers continue to graduate from university-based teacher education programs with insufficient library skills,” unprepared to integrate information literacy concepts into lesson plans, and that “preservice teachers are not typically provided with opportunities to collaborate with school librarians” (Duke and Ward 2009, 254). The study reported here is one response to this problem.

Stockham and Collins (2012) surveyed education majors at two universities in Kansas as well as school librarians in the state to ascertain new teacher familiarity with information literacy. The findings suggest that the participating preservice teachers needed further training on information literacy concepts, how information literacy concepts relate to the content teachers are preparing to teach, and how partnerships with school librarians can facilitate their work as professional teachers.

Kovalik, et al. (2010) surveyed teacher education faculty in 16 states where information literacy and technology are part of state education standards. Of 154 institutions of higher learning contacted, 46 participated, resulting in 160 individual survey responses. Their findings indicate that the teacher education faculty who participated in the study are aware that information literacy standards exist and that preservice teachers need to attain these skills before graduation. A majority of respondents (2/3) indicated that they collaborate with instructional librarians to provide information literacy content to their students. However, many programs did not require preservice teachers to integrate information literacy into the lessons plans they create...
for class assignments and did not assess the information literacy skills of preservice teachers. No integration of preservice teacher education and library science students was reported as part of this survey.

Latham, Gross, and Witte (2013) undertook an exploratory investigation of faculty views of teacher/librarian collaboration at one university. Interviews with six faculty members in Education and six faculty members in LIS revealed that faculty in both disciplines believe that collaboration between teachers and librarians is a useful practice. However, they also cite issues of territoriality, standardized testing, and the measures of accountability used in schools as making on-going collaboration between teachers and librarians difficult to achieve. None-the-less, faculty in both Education and LIS supported the idea of incorporating collaboration between teachers and librarians into these professional programs.

While none of these studies provide generalizable findings, they do point to the need for further research and for interventions that will address gaps in inservice training in order to better prepare professional teachers and librarians.

**Method**

Master’s level students studying young adult literature in courses held in the School of Teacher Education and the School of Library and Information Studies at a Southeastern university in the United States read Karen Russell’s *Swamplandia!* (2011) as part of their assigned coursework. *Swamplandia!* , an award winning book rich in discussion topics that has appeal for both young adult and adult readers, was required reading in both courses. After studying *Swamplandia!*, master’s students were placed in small groups that included at least one
student from teacher education and one student from LIS. Working in groups, their assignment was to produce a week’s worth of cumulative learning activities related to the novel Swamplandia!. The lesson plans were to bring together both content related to English Language Arts and information literacy skills and assumed that the target high school class had already read and discussed Swamplandia! (Please see the appendix for a copy of the assignment.)

The teacher education class was a traditional face-to-face class that met once a week. Total enrollment in this class was twelve. One student in this class was currently working as a teacher (with alternative certification), one had teacher certification but was not currently teaching, and the rest were working on their teacher certifications.

The LIS class was an online course that met one evening weekly in Blackboard Collaborate and had a total enrollment of 25 students. Blackboard Collaborate is a virtual classroom that provides two-way VoIP, multi-point video, built-in phone conferencing, interactive whiteboard, application and desktop sharing, rich media, breakout rooms, mobile collaboration, and session recording (http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/Products/Blackboard-Collaborate.aspx). About a third of the LIS students were studying to be school librarians. The balance of students were planning to work in public libraries.

Once students were assigned to their groups, the groups met and worked outside of class time using their choice of communication technology. A dedicated Blackboard site was constructed where the groups could meet, post weekly updates on their progress, and store draft
documents. All groups were offered their own Collaborate rooms if they wanted one. Groups were also allowed to utilize additional means of communication (e.g. Skype, Google Docs, Facebook, etc.) for their collaboration spaces if they wished. Students were given ten weeks to complete the entire assignment.

Before any data was collected, the project plan was reviewed and approved by the University’s Internal Review Board. All students were informed of the instructors’ intention to use the documents produced during the life of the assignment as data for research on collaboration. They were also informed that while the assignment was a class requirement, participation in the research was voluntary. It was explained that if they chose not to participate in the research, this would not affect their grade or their relationship with their instructors, their program, or the university. Students were advised that their names and personally identifying information would be kept confidential. They were further advised that their assignments would not be used for research until after the semester ended and final class grades had been submitted to the registrar. All students but one opted to participate in the study. This student’s work, as well as all work produced by this individual’s group, was removed from the data pool. This means that only eleven of the twelve assigned groups are considered in the data analysis step.

**Data Analysis**

Data sources include weekly group progress reports, completed lesson plans, written personal reflections on the process, and peer reviews of group members submitted individually by students. The unit of analysis is at the group level. Analysis at the group level sees each group as a case and aggregates all data sources for analysis. The data analysis was performed using the
HyperResearch® software program. Themes and categories were derived from the data as the components of the assignment were analyzed using an iterative process in which data sources were compared and considered in terms of the research questions, Montiel-Overall’s definition of collaboration, and the requirements of the assignment. This process was informed by the first stage of the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis outlined by Glaser and Strauss (2006/1967) and discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The objective was not theory building, but rather to use a method of building codes that is sensitive to the context and open-minded (Miles and Huberman 1994). Data were coded iteratively and triangulated across data sources looking for both agreement and divergence in process (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

During the course of the project data were coded multiple times and inter-coder reliability was checked. Data were coded, compared, and discussed by the co-researchers and two doctoral research assistants until consensus was reached. One researcher and one research assistant coded all of the data. One researcher and one research assistant coded subsets of the data to check coding structure, terms, and agreement on definitions. The resulting codebook and analysis reflect consensus among all four coders.

**Findings**

Due to difference in the enrollment in each class (12 in teacher education; 25 in LIS), most groups were composed of one teacher education student and two LIS students. One group had three LIS students and one student from teacher education, and one group became a team of two (one LIS student and one student from teacher education) when one LIS student dropped the class.
Groups had a difficult time getting started. Members of six groups talked about rocky starts, difficulty getting together, and members who were nonresponsive in the beginning. Communication (discussed below) was the main issue groups grappled with. For most groups, once the communication issue was resolved, the actual work proceeded well. However, three of the groups did not result in successful teacher-librarian collaborations. These groups divided responsibilities, worked independently, and combined their separate sections in order to submit their “group” paper.

As explained above, the definition of collaboration guiding this research is Montiel-Overall’s (2005) definition of collaboration between teachers and librarians. The collaboration assignment reflected this in its requirements. Students were required to demonstrate shared integration of instruction through the use of Common Core and 21st Century Learner standards; and shared implementation and shared evaluation by establishing that the role students were to take was that of co-teachers. The assignment specified that all group members should be in the classroom for the delivery of the lesson plan and all group members shared responsibility for student assessment. Findings for each of these three aspects of collaboration are discussed below.

**Shared integration.** Although the lesson plan assignment required the inclusion of a minimum of three Common Core standards, one to three 21st-Century Learner Standards Skills Indicators, and one to three 21st-Century Learner Standards Dispositions, Responsibilities, or Self-Assessment Strategies, five of the eleven groups did not completely satisfy this requirement. Three of these five groups had fewer Common Core Standards than the assignment asked for and three of these five groups had fewer 21st-Century Learner Standards than required.
Shared implementation. The assignment specified that group members are “co-teachers,” that all group members must be in the classroom during the lessons, and that when not teaching directly, group members must take a supportive role in the classroom. This expectation was met by eight of the groups in their lesson plan documentation.

Among the three groups that did not fully demonstrate shared implementation, one group mentioned librarian responsibilities in the classroom in only one of five daily lesson plans and teacher responsibility in only two days of the five day lesson plans. The other three lesson plans did not specify the activities of any group members. In another group’s lesson plans only the teacher was given a role in the classroom. No classroom responsibilities were specified for the librarian(s) at all in this case. In the third group, only one day’s lesson plan included the librarian in classroom activities.

Shared evaluation. In the assignment the co-teacher relationship included the specification that all members of the group would be included in the plan of assessment of student work within the lesson plans. Three groups had explicit statements indicating that both the teacher and the librarian group members would make student assessments. One group included the librarian in assessment in one out of their five daily lesson plans, in four groups only the teacher was tasked with student assessment, and in three groups student assessment was described, but responsibility for who would conduct the assessment was not assigned. For example, students were to turn in homework, but the lesson plan did not say who would receive the homework or who was responsible for grading.

Approaches to Collaboration
The process of collaboration undertaken by the student groups can be described in three ways: (1) Work together on all aspects of the assignment; (2) work together to get started, then make individual assignments that are later reviewed, edited, and approved by the group; or (3) meet in order to divide up the lesson plans and then work independently.

Two groups worked collaboratively throughout the project, including writing their lesson plans together. In one of these groups the teacher completely dropped out of the assignment, after telling the group he did not have sufficient Internet access. This member did not submit a Reflection, so this member’s point of view is missing from the group reports.

The majority of the groups (seven) collaborated by engaging in joint planning, brainstorming, and decision making before making individual assignments and then came back together to discuss progress, provide feedback on individual work, and to proof and edit the final product. These groups emphasized the need for everyone to participate and to help each other where skills and/or knowledge were weak or missing. One of these groups wrote their first lesson plan collaboratively before going off to work independently on their remaining lesson plans.

For two of the groups collaboration was about agreeing on a plan, dividing the work fairly, and working independently. These groups approached the assignment by meeting to agree on a topic and divide up the writing of the lesson plans. Before submitting their assignment for grading, one member of the group compiled the individual work into one package to turn in as the final assignment. In one of these groups there was some shared proofreading, but that was as far as the collaboration went. Interestingly, both of these groups had “weak” teacher members from the library student point of view, who were reported to be unresponsive to communication.
One of these teachers demonstrated a clear preference for working independently in the Reflection assignment stating that once agreement about the fair division of labor was achieved, further interaction between group members should not be needed: “Collaborate on ideas, not the execution of the ideas.” The other teacher did not voice an awareness of being perceived as absent by the group, but did indicate a lack of experience with technology.

This demonstrates that students have different perceptions of the mechanics of collaboration that are persistent even when the assignment calls for a different approach.

**Attitudes toward Collaboration**

For some, previous bad experiences with group work colored attitudes going into the assignment. One student said, “We frequently view collaboration as a hassle. The most significant roadblock is instilling the desire for collaboration. If the desire is present, the other roadblocks can be overcome” (L, Group 2, Reflection).

Other students had more severe reactions:

When I...discovered we were going to do this project a chill ran down my spine. Those ominous words, group project, brought back all sorts of unpleasant memories of high school and undergrad where “group project” meant” “lots of work for me” because I care about my grades more than others do. (L, Group 2, Reflection).

This reaction was not common to all students however. One teacher said, “I know from my teaching experience what an asset to a school and to an English teacher a good librarian is” (T, Group 4, Reflection). Likewise, a librarian shared that: “Every term in this master’s program students are required to work in teams, and every term I am shocked by how much I appreciate my teammates by the end of the project” (L, Group 2, Reflection).
However, LIS students who were not enrolled in the School Library program had some difficulty seeing the relevance of the assignment to their specialization.

Overall, I thought the project was an effective way to facilitate a collaborative spirit between teacher and school media specialists. However, lesson planning seemed less helpful in regards to those librarians who work in a public library setting. (L, Group 4, Reflection)

Another LIS student said, “I must admit that sometimes I felt like the odd man out, being that I work in a public library setting and was the only member of the group that did not have an education background” (L, Group 4, Reflection).

Many of the groups had difficulty getting things started. Collaborating outside of class in a virtual environment was new to everyone. When communications were not immediately responded to groups tended to panic. For most groups collaboration smoothed out once contact was made and improved when the group settled on the technology they wanted to use for meeting and as workspaces.

Overall, student attitudes at the end of the assignment were positive toward the idea of teacher/librarian collaboration. Representative examples of comments from students in education include:

- “I think I learned a lot about collaborating with others, being flexible, teaching for our strengths (while not ignoring our weaknesses), and generating creative lessons for students” (T, Group 8, Reflection)

- “I think this was a very important experience for me personally to see how interactions strictly online would go and I learned that there will always be those who are very determined to get the task done and those who are less willing to put in the hard work” (T, Group 9, Reflection)
- “I think this project] was valuable because, I, being an education major learned more about library resources and more of what librarians actually do. I think that the librarians also learned more about what teachers do, and perhaps in a real life setting, the teacher and librarian would have a much easier time collaborating in lessons” (T, Group 12, Reflection)

LIS student comments include:

- “By the end of the project we were all lamenting the reality that we would not actually be able to teach our lessons” (L, Group 2, Reflection)
- “I loved how our ideas grew as we shared them and each would add their thoughts and ideas. Our project is definitely a representation of three minds working together” (L, Group 8, Reflection)
- “I had fun doing this project and thinking like a librarian, a teacher, and a student all at once. It gave me a new respect for all the work teachers go through to make lesson plans, that’s for sure!” (L, Group 11, Reflection)

While these laudatory statements are encouraging, they must also be taken with a grain of salt. Students were responding to an assignment, and though they were encouraged to be candid about
their experience and opinions, there may have been some propensity to say what they felt the professor wanted to hear.

Benefits of Collaboration

Related to positive feelings about their collaboration was first-hand experience of the benefits collaboration can bring. Among the benefits noted were a lightened workload, stronger lesson plans, improved integration of content and technology, the development of friendships, and a more cohesive learning community.

Both students in education and students in LIS made statements about valuing an increased knowledge of what the two professions have to offer each other as well as the observation that the positive collaboration experience resulting from the assignment left them open to engaging in teacher/librarian collaborations in the future. Representative comments include: “The most important thing we learned as a group about teacher librarian collaborations was that with our different backgrounds we all had something different to bring to the table, but all of it was useful” (T, Group 4, Reflection) and “…the school will become more close-knit and integrated. The teacher will benefit from the added help of the librarian…the librarian will benefit from working with another professional to better serve the community” (L, Group 11, Reflection).

These findings point to the value of the collaboration experience in helping students understand the professional roles, where they intersect, and where they complement each other in support of student learning.

Factors that Facilitate Collaboration
The main factors that students said fostered collaboration can be summarized as good working relationships, a well-structured process, and good communication. Good working relationships overall meant the ability to work together harmoniously. Students wanted group members who were willing to take the initiative, carry their share of the work, and meet deadlines, but who also were encouraging and helpful, willing to teach as well as learn from other group members. The traits of group members that were valued include willingness to work together, respect for others, and a desire to get along. One representative expression of this is: “As a group we learned that working together can actually be a lot easier than anticipated if all the people “Click.” This was overall an extremely positive group experience that gives us hope for future, easily successful collaborative groups (they do exist!)” (Group 1, Progress Report).

A second important aspect of successful collaborations is well-structured process. Groups who took time to plan and to develop a structure that included specified goals, schedule of completion, and assignment of responsibilities (whether shared or individual) tended to be more comfortable with the assignment. In two groups the importance of leadership came up. In these groups, members felt that it was important for one person in the group to step up and take charge of the project and were happy that one member assumed this role.

The third important factor for a successful collaboration is good communication. Groups needed to manage their collaboration outside of class using their choice of communication technology. Students did not meet in person and so the ability to establish relationships where a healthy exchange of ideas and information could happen among strangers was vital. Group
members need to be able to take and give feedback and to be able to compromise at times. Communication also meant it was important for individual group members to let others know if they were falling behind, needed help, or were facing other situations that might impact the group’s work. As one LIS student put it, “there really is no replacement for a good discussion when it comes to collaboration of needs and ideas” (L, Group 1, Reflection).

While working relationships, a well-structured process, and good communication are all important, communication is vital to the establishment of good relationships and the development and enactment of a well-structured process.

**Factors that Limit Collaboration**

The factors that can get in the way of a successful collaboration can also be summarized in three categories. These are communication, scheduling, and not understanding professional roles.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle groups faced was establishing how they were going to communicate with people they had never met, who like themselves had busy lives, and whose ability with technology differed. All groups were given their own group space on Blackboard, the option of requesting their own Collaborate virtual classroom, as well as permission to use any other form of communication that they wished. The types of communication technology groups tried included Blackboard, Collaborate, Google Docs, Email, Skype, Facebook, telephone, and two students had an in-person meeting.

There were many complaints about Blackboard. Groups found it to be a difficult platform for sharing documents, objected that it would not alert them when group members posted, and
found it was not always available when they wanted to work. Groups report that they were most productive and established the best working relationships when they were able to meet synchronously on a weekly basis. They also often wanted the ability to collaborate on documents between meetings and found that Blackboard was not a good platform for collaborative writing. Groups found that using a variety of communication tools worked best. For example using Collaborate or Skype to meet, Google Docs to share lesson plans, and email for other messages as needed. Lack of responsiveness to communications and lack of familiarity with Web 2.0 tools were two aspects of communication that created a lot of anxiety and tension among group members. A lack of responsiveness was often interpreted as a lack of accountability, unequal effort, and left an impression of a group member being problematic.

Another barrier, scheduling issues, had to be overcome for groups to work well together. While almost all groups favored weekly meetings, finding a time that worked for everyone and being able to maintain weekly meetings was a challenge. While all members might not attend all meetings, this appeared to be manageable as long as group members openly shared their difficulties and a sense that every member was “pulling their weight” was maintained. This was another place where breakdowns in communication could wreak havoc with the cohesiveness of the group and introduce stress into the group relationships. “Problem” members were reported in four of the groups. In one case an LIS student dropped the class during the assignment, resulting in a group that was a teacher/librarian team. This team worked independently to complete the assignment. Two other teams reported members (in one team an education student, in the other an LIS student) who were unresponsive. Despite these perceived problem members,
the other group members were able to pull together to work collaboratively in producing the assignment. However, the lack of teacher involvement in one group mean that the collaboration was between two LIS students. In another group with an unresponsive teacher, team members worked independently and combined their work in one document for submission.

The third factor that caused problems in the collaborative groups was a lack of understanding of professional roles. It was not only the case that some education students did not understand the role of librarians, but also that some library students were not sure of their role in the context of lesson plans. Role uncertainty in the classroom environment was an issue for some entering LIS students as well as for LIS students who did not have a background in teaching and/or were not students in the School Library program. When an education student who did not understand librarianship was in a group with one or more LIS students who lacked confidence in what they could do or how they could contribute to the classroom environment progress was difficult. Also, LIS students who were not credentialed teachers lacked orientation to lesson plans and standards and needed assistance to fully contribute to the group. Sometimes this help came from other library students who were credentialed teachers as well as from students learning to be educators.

Representative comments on this topic include:

One of our weaknesses is a bit of confusion to incorporating the librarian in the lesson planning – we have found it to be awkward. I suppose this is because we don’t have much experience as students where the teacher and librarian co-taught. (Group 1 progress notes)
One education student commented that, “Librarians don’t know their own standards or Common Core” (T, Group 5, Reflection). While it is somewhat surprising that students would not have a stronger understanding of the work of their own or their group mates’ professional role, this underscores the need to questions assumptions made about the knowledge and skill level of students, even those studying at the graduate level.

While the need for communication remains central to fruitful collaborations, understanding the role of each profession in the context of the school is critical to success.

**Suggestions for Successful Collaboration**

In their personal reflection papers, students were asked for suggestions as to how to make collaborations successful. Responses included support for teaching collaboration and requests for more opportunities to practice collaboration as part of their inservice training. Students made comments such as, “I believe there should be more cross-training in schools to facilitate collaboration. Librarians and teachers both need to have a greater familiarity with the challenges of the other’s position” (L, Group 4, Reflection) and “I think assignments like this are actually great to facilitate future collaboration between teachers and librarians. It not only gives much-needed cross-training…but also allows teachers to learn how working with librarians can enrich their curriculum” (L, Group 4, Reflection).

Another suggestion for improving teacher/librarian collaboration was for school principals and administrators to require, encourage, and support such behavior in the schools. For example, one education student said, “Require teachers to collaborate on at least one lesson per
year. Have librarian explain to teachers in a meeting at the beginning of the year about how they can help” (T, Group11, Reflection).

As noted above, one important limitation to keep in mind is that these collaborations occurred in the context of preservice coursework and therefore may be colored by ideas about professor expectations for classwork. However, the assignment did not specifically ask students to comment on the question of the extent to which collaboration between students in teacher education and LIS should be incorporated into their programs of study.

Discussion

While the classroom context is likely to provoke some propensity to please the instructor, it may also provide some extra motivation to make the group successful, particularly in terms of ensuring that the products created respond to the assignment instructions, a concern that may not manifest in professional practice. None-the-less these groups developed, in terms of establishing their relationships and how they would function, as well as creating a group identity in normal ways. One of the leading models of small group development (Tuckman, 1965) famously describes this process as “Forming, storming, norming, and performing” (Tuckman and Jensen 1977, 419). In this model, small groups form by working through uncertainty, go through a period of disagreements that often “test” the teacher, figure out how to best work together and then perform the task assigned. Later an additional stage called Adjourning was added recognition that as the life of a group ends, group members may feel proud of their achievements as well as sense of loss (Tuckman and Jensen 1977).
In this particular group assignment, students were aware that their work, in addition to helping them meet the course objectives, would also provide data for a research project on teacher/librarian collaboration. Students were asked to be candid and assured that their participation in the research would not affect their grades or relationship with their teachers or the university. In assessing the validity of the data produced, the long length of the assignment (10 weeks), and the multiple data sources that provide multiple views of the collaboration experience for each group must also be considered. Over the course of the assignment students shared sources of frustration, challenges, and successes. Data from all submitted documents were triangulated to reveal commonalities of experience within and between groups as well as anomalies that reveal the range of group experiences that occurred as students responded to the need to collaborate with a student outside their program of study. The Discussion of findings is focused on how the data relate to this inter-disciplinary collaboration and not on the general process of group work in the classroom context. Toward this end, the discussion is organized below to consider the findings in terms of the research questions posed for this study.

RQ1: What Are Students’ in Teacher Education and LIS Perceptions of Collaboration on Common Assignments for Adolescents?

Students perceive collaboration as shared responsibility for a product. Shared responsibility primarily refers to equality of effort, responsive communication, and constructive relationships. This was true regardless of how cohesive the group was or the extent to which their lesson plans were the result of a fully participative process. While some students began the
collaboration assignment with some trepidation, overall students reported satisfaction with their group members and with the lesson plans they produced.

The need for individual group members to carry their weight in the collaboration was a point of great importance and was mentioned by both groups that worked well together and those that had rocky relationships. When group members were perceived as unavailable and as not meeting deadlines it caused stress and tension as the more involved members of the group labored to make up for missing work or were left to submit work that they recognized as not meeting their personal standards. In this class assignment accountability was at the group level and the relationship between the professions as co-teachers was stressed. This may not always be true for inservice teacher/librarian collaborations depending on how their collaborations are structured and the extent to which they are able to fully share accountability for the student learning they are working to enhance.

Responsive communication between group members was a factor that could both help build a sense that responsibility for the project was in fact being equitably shared, but also worked to build empathy rather than bad feelings when a member failed to meet a deadline or was having trouble with the assignment. Students in both programs reported having very busy lives and were able to accept that timelines might slip here and there as long as they understood their collaborator had strong intentions to come through as soon as a momentary challenge elsewhere in their schedule was tackled. Students also sought to assist collaborators who could voice deficiencies in skill or knowledge that were limiting their ability to participate in the group. Sometimes these deficiencies had to do with the familiarity with and the use of communication
technologies and sometimes they had to do with course content, such as understanding learning standards or constructing lesson plans. Setting standards for communication in groups and teaching interpersonal communication may be a necessary part of preparing professionals to collaborate that is overlooked.

Constructive relationships was also an important theme in student perceptions of collaboration. The preference for agreeable, helpful group members supports Johnston’s (2012) finding that the relationship between collaborators is central to the ability to collaborate. Groups in which members got along tended to interact more often and reported greater satisfaction with their collaboration experience. Both the perception of equality of effort and responsive communication helped to establish constructive relationships, but also important here were individual characteristics such as open-mindedness, willingness to compromise, and the ability to provide and receive feedback.

Regardless of the level of the quality of their group experience, students in both classes talked about the benefits to be gained through teacher/librarian collaboration. Interestingly they suggest that more than one opportunity to collaborate with each other during their preservice preparation would be beneficial and that in the “real world” collaboration can be fostered if required by principals and administrators. This is interesting in light of the common difficulty groups had in getting started with the assignment. Their satisfaction with the collaboration and openness to future collaboration appear to be connected to their satisfaction with the relationships they were able to develop with each other and their pride in the lesson plans that they were able to produce.
RQ2: In What Ways Do Students in Teacher Education and LIS Collaborate To form Common Assignments for Adolescents?

When assessed against Montiel-Overall’s (2005) definition of what collaboration between teachers and librarians entails, this investigation demonstrated that student groups were able to produce lesson plans that integrate subject content and information literacy skills regardless of the actual process of collaboration employed. The resulting lesson plans demonstrated a high level of creativity extending study of the novel, Swamplandia! into subject areas such as business marketing, environmental studies, social studies, geography, and science. Although the assignment itself was designed to require integrated instruction, shared instruction, and shared evaluation, these requirements were not adhered to by all groups and the degree to which the groups engaged in shared thinking and planning varied. The level of collaboration that they were able to achieve rested on their ability to establish good communication and their willingness to share the work as a group. Some students held a strong opinion that they needed to work independently and that to do otherwise was a waste of their time.

Collaboration among the groups spanned a continuum from complete collaboration on all aspects of the assignment to agreement on a plan that was then accomplished individually and collated for submission. Groups functioned best that were able to find communication mechanisms that worked for all members and held regular synchronous meetings to check on progress; share opinions, ideas, skills, knowledge, and to receive and provide feedback and help. However, a sense of equal effort was not reliant on a high level of interaction. Groups that
divided up the work and completed it individually were also able to experience a sense that all members were participating equally.

**RQ3: What factors facilitate collaboration between students in teacher education and LIS when required in an assignment?**

As noted in the findings section, good working relationships, a well-structured process, and good communication were identified as the main characteristics of groups that operated at the higher end of the collaboration continuum. Groups in which individual members were unresponsive or aloof were often at a loss about how to gain that member’s attention and participation. This resulted in frustration and exacerbation. Groups with “problem” members of this type often had to proceed and take on more work in order to meet deadlines. Individuals were also perceived as problems if they were seen to be inflexible, disagreeable, or unable to take criticism. Good working relationships had members who were willing to listen and to compromise. Group collaboration broke down when one member of the group had a strong opinion that the others did not share and could not be convinced to look at the issue in a different way.

Agreeing on a structure for the project and good communication often accompanied good working relationships among group members, but were not enough in themselves to ensure that collaboration would not collapse. The fact that collaboration was required by the assignment was not enough in every case to motivate people to work together. Some students eschew group work or face other issues (e.g., lack of skill, personal problems) that keep them from being perceived as collaborative members of the group.
RQ4: What Factors Limit Collaboration between Students in Teacher Education and LIS when Required in a Common Assignment?

While differences in expertise is one of the core reasons for collaborating (Schrage 1995) in these teacher/librarian groups differences in specialty and skills were often factors that limited collaboration. One example of this was varying degrees of facility with technology, specifically communication technology. LIS students were typically more comfortable working virtually and had wider experience with various Web 2.0 products that might be used to facilitate the collaboration. In groups that had good working relationship students were able to bring each other along where various gaps in knowledge and skill existed, but this did not happen in every case. All groups were given working spaces in Blackboard. However, Blackboard did not prove to be a sufficient platform for working collaboratively on documents and required students to check it several times a day to stay on top of other group members’ posted work or messages. Therefore, groups sought alternative ways to collaborate and had difficulty moving forward if all members could not agree on an alternative mode of communication, were unwilling to learn a new application, or were uncomfortable working virtually rather than in person.

Time was also a limiting factor for collaboration. Busy students on different schedules and with competing responsibilities found it difficult to schedule time to collaborate even though they valued synchronous meetings. Competing responsibilities may have been a factor for those students who were perceived as unresponsive in their groups. Time is a barrier to collaboration that has received attention in the literature (e.g. Kovalik et al. 2010). Developing trusting
working relationships takes time as does the planning, development, and execution of shared lesson plans.

A critical finding was the importance of the understanding the professional roles, knowledge, and skills of each profession as a basis for collaboration. All students need to be oriented to the special expertise that comes with programs of study that prepare students to be teachers and librarians as well as brought to understand the skill sets that these professions share. These understandings should not be taken for granted or assumed. Even though all students may have a sense of what teachers do, that does not mean that they understand how educators prepare to teach, the standards teachers must respond to, or how rubrics for student assessment are developed. Likewise teachers do not necessarily understand librarianship, nor are they always aware that preparation for school librarianship is not identical to preparation for librarians who will work in public or academic libraries. Finally, library students just beginning training may not have a firm grasp of their domain, and librarians not training to work in school libraries may not realize all that this specialty entails. In directing teacher/librarian collaboration an orientation to professional roles is essential.

Implications for Research and Practice

Some important findings emerged from this study that should be considered in teaching collaboration, undertaking collaborations in the field, and in further study of collaborations between teachers and librarians. First it is important not to make assumptions about the collaboration skills that individuals at the graduate level of education or as professionals in the field bring to partnerships and group work. Content on the importance of communication,
communication skills, how to establish good working relationships, and how to structure projects will facilitate success. While a collaboration assignment may not change established attitudes, the collaboration experience may benefit from an understanding that the formation of a collaborative partnerships can be difficult, but that if participants are willing to work through the difficulty and work toward common goals they may be surprised at the satisfaction they will experience in the end product of the work. Future research may want to consider ways in which to facilitate the early stage of collaboration in which participants are establishing relationships and common goals.

Another important finding from this work is the need to provide explicit education as to the nature of professional roles as part of training for collaboration. Librarians do not necessarily fully understand the work of the teacher and vice versa. Likewise, both teachers and librarians need to fully understand what strengths they bring to collaboration as well as what is reasonable to expect from partners. Providing students with the opportunity to collaborate as part of their professional development is one step toward helping them understand how the professions can work together to ensure PK-12 student learning. A side benefit of many of the collaborations in this study was the sharing of expertise between students. Students in teacher education were able to assist LIS students in understanding the design of lesson plans and LIS students taught information communication technology skills to students in teacher education.

The assumption of the study reported here is that if collaboration is taught, it is more likely to be achieved in the field. Research is needed that will help fine tune pedagogy, but also to assess the extent to which preservice preparation for collaboration actually results in an
increase in collaborative work between teachers and librarians. Future research should also consider collaborations that involve different types of librarians (school, public, academic, special) and instructors PK-20.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This investigation sought to explore the integration of collaboration between students in teacher education and LIS into preservice training. Students in teacher education and LIS collaborated to complete a week’s worth of lesson plans based on a commonly read novel. They worked virtually, employing the information communication technologies of their choice and choosing their own process for completing the assigned work. Similar to prior research in LIS, this study revealed that constructive relationships facilitate collaboration and that these relationships are fostered through good communication, equal participation, and a well-structured process for the collaboration. Barriers to collaboration included issues with communication technology, time constraints, and a lack of understanding of professional roles.

These findings suggest that preservice assignments that provide opportunities for teachers and librarians to collaborate do not require students to be in the same class or to meet in person. Views of what constitutes collaboration vary and instructors may wish to consider to what extent how students collaborate should be structured as well as consider including content on communication skills, time management, project management, and professional roles.

Both students in education and students in LIS reacted positively to the opportunity to collaborate for a class assignment. Some students suggested that collaborations between preservice teachers and librarians should be integrated into more classes, so that students have

the opportunity to practice collaboration more than once while completing their programs. Students also suggested that principals and school administrators require teachers and librarians to collaborate and find other ways to encourage and support these collaborations.

Educating for collaboration between the professions of teaching and librarianship is a research area that needs more attention. Little work has been done that focuses on preservice education that is a collaboration between the fields. Education and LIS faculty can improve preservice teacher and librarian education by working together to develop assignments and curricula that foster collaboration. It is also important for faculty to engage in research to determine the efficacy of these efforts and their long term impact on collaboration in the schools and on student learning.

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**Works Cited**


Appendix

Collaboration Assignment

This assignment is a team project in which graduate students in Education will partner and collaborate with LIS students to develop a week’s worth of engaging learning activities related to the novel, Swamplandia!. You are tasked as a team to come with an engaging learning activity that brings together both content and information literacy skills.

- The relationship of the members of each team is that co-teachers. It is assumed that all members will be in the class at the same time and when not teaching directly will take a supportive role in the classroom. Likewise, all members of the team will be involved in assessment of student work.
- The resulting lesson plans will be geared for a high school level (grade 9 -12) classroom.
- Lesson plans for the week may be presented for a traditional scheduling format (five, 45 minute to one hour class sessions) or may reflect block scheduling (three, 90 minute class sessions).
- Lessons plans assume that students have read and studied Swamplandia! in class before the proposed learning activities begin.
- Lesson plans may work on comprehension, but should go beyond an analysis of the plot. Lesson plans may choose to make other connections, such as to science (e.g. swamps in Florida), or creative responses to the text (e.g. movie trailers using Movie Maker).

Likewise, student assignments may range from traditional research reports, to presentations, to other kinds of creative responses.
Lesson plans must incorporate an even balance of skills in information or technological literacy and English Language Arts.

Lesson plans should be as realistic as possible. Present a plan that you could take into a school and use.

Teams will be assigned by the instructors and work groups set up on a dedicated Teacher/Librarian Collaboration Blackboard site. This assignment will begin the week 7 and will be due week 16. In the spirit of teacher/librarian cooperation, team work will be assessed by both instructors.

Assignment outputs:

1. Weekly progress updates posted to a discussion board on the Teacher/Librarian Collaboration Blackboard site.

2. A week’s worth of lesson plans geared at the high school level reflecting learning activities for students who have read Swamplandia!. The set of lesson plans reflect the effort of the team. One copy should be submitted to Dr. XXX and one copy to Dr. XXX.

3. A personal reflection (each member of the team should write his or her own) of about 500 words, describing this collaboration experience, potential roadblocks to teacher/librarian collaboration, and how collaboration between teachers and librarians might be facilitated. This part of the assignment will be completed separately by each student and submitted directly to your instructor.
4. An assessment of your own and your team mates’ contributions to the success of this collaboration assignment. This part of the assignment will be completed separately by each student and submitted directly to your instructor.