Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Social Marketing and the School Library: An Effective Path to Collaboration?

A Review of:
Immroth, Barbara and W. Bernard Lukenbill. "Teacher-School Library Media Specialist
Collaboration through Social Marketing Strategies: An Information Behavior Study."
School Library Media Research 10 (2007). 22 April 2008
<http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrcontents/volume10/immroth_teacherslmscollaboration.cfm>.

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Abstract

Objective – The study attempted to apply
the strategies of social marketing theory to
collaboration between school librarians and
teachers.

Design – Based on the 1972 theory of social
marketing by Zaltman, Kotler and Kaufman,
a cohort of students in a graduate-level
practicum established a collaborative unit
with selected teachers within their school.
In addition, two focus groups were
conducted in alternate schools to gauge the
overall attitudes of teachers toward
collaboration with school librarians.

Subjects – Students (student librarians) in a
graduate-level certification class for Texas
school librarians, and both teachers and
librarians in host schools/districts for the
graduate students' practicum experiences

Methods – Researchers used qualitative
approaches, both case study and focus
groups, to gather data about the
collaborative interactions between teachers
and school librarians. The interactions were
designed using the social marketing AIDA
model (Attention, Interest, Desire, and
Action). Social marketing, based on models
of commercial marketing, assumes that
social goodwill is a motivator for
establishing interactions between groups –

or selling a service that is for the greater good.

Students in a graduate-level practicum were instructed to develop a strategy based on the AIDA model to elicit and carry out a collaborative unit with teachers in their host schools. They were given specific guidelines by the principal investigators that included:

- Instructions for designing announcements, leaflets, and conferences as marketing strategies
- Instructional unit designs for subject content and information literacy skills
- Incentive payments of $200 to be used for library resources as an incentive to collaborate.
- The steps to engaging in the collaborative process
- Procedural guidelines for taking field notes, unobtrusive observations and informal evidence.

Summative evaluation was based on a reflective journaling exercise by both student librarian and teacher. Measurements and recordings were analysed using accepted case study methods.

Main Results – Social Marketing Model

The researchers evaluated the study in each of the four aspects of the Social Marketing Model.

Attention (A) – Gaining Attention and Convincing.

Efforts to gain attention through student choices of flyers to teachers were not successful. E-mail announcements were more effective, but it appeared that direct librarian-teacher contact was the most effective. The monetary incentive also did not appear to have an effect on response

rate. Host librarians did make suggestions regarding the appropriateness of when and how to distribute the flyers in some cases. Researchers concluded that perhaps such a straightforward advertising approach did not fit in the established relationships, and may be a better choice for new librarians who are establishing their presence in schools.

Interest (I) -- Promoting Interest in Services and/or Products

Researchers noted that initial strategies did not promote interest in the field study project. Teachers cited time and test–related curriculum restraints, and viewed the project as an "extra" responsibility. The researchers note the need to establish the value of the collaborative instruction to long-term goals for both teachers and librarians. The focus groups showed more interest in collaboration, and an awareness of the value of librarians' collaboration in promoting effective teaching and improving student achievement.

Desire (D) and Action (A) – Recognizing Values and Taking Action.

Field test responses did not reflect desire on the part of teachers to collaborate with student librarians. Only two teachers responded directly to the advertisement. The offer of monetary incentive ($200 in library supplies) also did not appear to increase motivation of teachers to participate.

Results after the field test showed that overall, teachers gained an appreciation of the value of collaboration with school librarians, and indicated they would be open to future projects.

Action Process themes of successful marketing campaigns were evident in the results of the study and benefits in being

exposed to new resources and information approaches were reported by teachers.

The concept of territoriality of teachers, and how much authority is shared with librarians in a collaborative setting, was an aspect not explored by the study, although indications from both the field test and the focus groups showed that the perception of the competency of the student librarian, and the teacher's personal approach (structured vs. more relaxed) affected the release of teaching authority.

The librarian bringing ideas, concepts and directions to teachers can enhance collaboration. Opportunities to collaborate based on objectives of state-mandated exams to develop specific skills can also foster collaboration.

Main Results – Collaborative Research

This project reflected much of the earlier research in collaboration and added data to support the importance of the findings of the landmark Mettessich and Monsey (1972) study of collaboration. Shared interest, mutual trust, flexibility, adaptability and clear roles and policies were all reflected as needs in the current study. In addition, clear communication, shared goals and purposes and the need to have leadership from the school librarians in establishing collaborative interactions was reiterated.

Predictive behaviour of teachers toward collaboration included time and overall commitments to other teaching responsibilities. Confidence in the skills and knowledge of the librarian also affected the teachers' willingness to collaborate.

Conclusions – Social exchange theory and community psychology were cited by the researchers as two theoretical concepts that affected the design and interpretation of

data. They suggest that these two strategies may be most helpful in situations that have less than optimal environments for collaboration, where librarians have not been successful, or are not considered equal to the tasks.

Commentary

The findings of this study present a structured method for school librarians to approach collaboration. While largely unsuccessful, the methods used in the study were illuminating in that they clearly illustrate the challenges in creating a collaborative environment in a school setting.

The act of offering monetary rewards seemed curiously at odds with the educational setting and the research objectives, and although no reference was made to teacher reactions (other than stating that only two teachers were motivated by the reward), it seems likely that the monetary aspect may have been a deterrent rather than a motivation for many teachers. Although monetary incentives are routinely used in commercial marketing ventures (and commonly given to focus group participants), they may be less appropriate in school settings.

More concrete analysis of the findings would help practitioners understand the results:

> 1. The researchers state that "Most, if not all" of student librarians chose to use flyers. It would have been helpful to see a chart of exactly how many respondents chose flyers, and what the other choices for gaining attention were, with the problems and successes clearly noted.

> 2. Stating the total number of participants in these focus groups,

and the makeup of the sample: disciplines, ages, years of experience, and comparative percentages that would clarify the strength of the conclusions.

One well documented aspect of collaboration is the need to establish trust with the collaborative partner (Matessich and Monsey, 1992), and it appeared that student librarians had not established the necessary trust with teachers or, in some cases their mentor librarians who may have been unwilling to risk their existing relationships with teachers and administrators by endorsing the somewhat unknown skills of student librarians.

It appears that the shared goal of "the greater good," the approach of social marketing as defined by the researchers, does not match the current emphasis on student achievement that is the overwhelming concern of both teachers and school librarians. Student learning, while ultimately defined by educators as the "greater good", was not clearly stated as a possible shared gain in the approaches used by the student librarians. They would benefit from reframing the goals of collaboration to clearly link both teacher and librarian in activities that promote collaboration as a means to affect measurable outcomes of student learning.

Works Cited

Mattessich, Paul W. and Barbara R. Monsey. Collaboration: What Makes It Work. A Review of Research Literature on Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration. St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1992. 22 April 2008 <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/14/53/ba.pdf>.

Zaltman, Gerald P., Philip Kotler, and Ira Kaufman, eds. Creating social change. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972