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**Learning Commons
Professional Development
Administration
Collaboration
Booktalking
Inspiration**



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NOTEBOOK



Year of the Learning Commons

David V. Loertscher and Elizabeth "Betty" Marcoux

In this issue of *Teacher Librarian*, we announce the Year of the Learning Commons that begins in April of 2015 and ends in May of 2016.

This initiative invites everyone interested in any aspect of the learning commons concept to celebrate, present, write, advocate for, and demonstrate how the transformed school library moves toward the center of teaching and learning in the school. Check out the website at:

<https://Sites.google.com/site/yearofthelearningcommons>

Transforming the traditional school library that is the center of resources and consumption into a vibrant center of knowledge creation, creativity, inquiry, and the center of high tech information and experimentation is a wonder to behold. As the transformation happens in schools we have visited, a whole new sense of excitement and interest arises from students, teachers, administrators, and the community. It becomes a model worth advocating for as this century of rich information and technology marches on.

Drs. Loertscher and Marcoux examine the state of the Learning Commons (LC) through their recent survey results. They report on what is happening presently in terms of the Learning Commons and offer suggestions for future work as a Learning Commons. The examples they offer can be customized as well as emulated when looking at your own Learning Commons. This feature article is followed by an elementary school's journey to become a Learning Commons. It is colorful, interesting, and full of amazing ideas about how to develop your own LC.

Of course any LC can't materialize without the partnerships and collaboration of many constituencies. This is not only evident in the aforementioned article by Steele, but reinforced emphatically by the subsequent article. Ellis and Jacobs-Israel talk about the New York School Library System and the benefits they receive as a unit rather than as individuals. They work under a mandate to not only provide relevant professional development offerings, but also work concertedly on communication with each other.

Finland, Collaboration, and Co-teaching

David V. Loertscher and Carol Koehlin

For a decade it seems, Finland's schools have been touted as a model of the best schools in the world and a model that we in the United States should adopt. But, the news we hear about the Finnish system has never been quite satisfying and certainly unsatisfying to teacher librarians because most Finnish public schools don't have libraries or librarians. Recently, a blog post appeared that gives a significant clue about what really goes on.

Tom Walker, an experienced U.S. teacher moved to Finland and got a teaching position. What he discovered instantly was that he was not only teaching many fewer hours per week but co-taught often with various other teachers and specialists in the school. You can read his blog post at: <http://tinyurl.com/m23tkqw>

Many officials in Finland don't care to have this practice known since it seems a much too expensive model to adopt in the U.S.

The Baber Research Project I wrote for the December issue of *Teacher Librarian* makes even more sense when compared to what goes on in a typical Finnish classroom when a classroom teacher and a specialist or even another classroom teacher teach together. And it makes a lot of sense. In the Baber research, I discovered that when a classroom teacher teaches alone, a certain success rate can be expected but when two adults combine their expertise, the percent of students achieving adult expectations skyrockets. From this research, it becomes very clear that the best use of both the classroom teacher's and the teacher librarian's time is to teach together rather than separately. But, it takes some creative juggling to accomplish.

Perhaps a different approach to thinking about this concept might stimulate more conversation in the school. Both the classroom teacher and the teacher librarian have curriculums that they wish to teach across the school year. When illustrated in parallel columns, the result might look like this:

Classroom Teacher's Curriculum	Teacher Librarian's Curriculum
Unit 1	Topic A
Unit 2	Topic B
Unit 3	Topic C
Unit 4	Topic D
Unit 5	Topic E
...	...

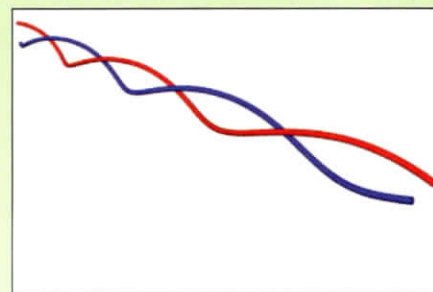
If we picture the two curriculums this way, the very listing itself indicates that each adult has a separate curriculum to teach and by its very nature suggests that each adult begins their work at the beginning of the school year and ends with some kind of total assessment for which each is accountable. The visual suggests: "This is your task - this is mine; you do that - I have to do this; this is my territory - that's yours; my kingdom - your kingdom..."

Such a pattern continues to isolate teacher librarians from the classroom. Some give up on the idea of collaborating, because there is a wall between the two learning environments. However, a closer look reveals that there is much overlap between the two camps. Some teacher librarians try to do parallel work by taking notice of what is going on in the classroom and then taking those themes when library instruction happens.

Let's examine a different picture that would suggest a very different pattern.

In the picture below, there is a twisted pair where two wires intersect but are also separate. It is something like a DNA double helix and shows the two curriculums in our case intersecting even though they are separate wires, treads, or curriculums. It is the natural intersections that matter to teacher librarians.

Examples abound. The classroom teacher has a unit on animals that invites exploration. The teacher librarian wants to teach better research techniques. The classroom teacher wants learners to prepare various positions on a controversial issue. The teacher librarians wants to teach what quality information is.



Teacher librarians and professional organizations have discovered such intersections and done crosswalks of standards that correlate one curriculum with another. So, this is nothing new, but in our observation, teacher librarians often address the intersections as suggestions for parallel teaching rather than co-teaching. Our point, based on the Baber research, is that the intersection of curriculum is the signal to co-teach. If one takes a look at the curriculums of various specialists in the school, such as tech integration specialists or gifted and talented, additional wires twist together providing even more intersections and co-teaching possibilities.

The challenge in various school cultures is how to capture those intersecting opportunities to duplicate the model in Finland. Some months ago, I was very impressed with a visit to Dundalk High School in Baltimore MD where Asst. Principal David Stovenour had developed permanent co-teaching teams, usually a language arts teacher or math teacher with a specialist such as a special ed teacher or ESL teacher. With thirty languages spoken in the school and few to none passing state tests, a reorganization of the school provided an opportunity to hire pairs of teachers who were comfortable co-teaching together all year. These teachers could also



JUNIOR FICTION

STUART GIBBS ADVENTURES

Gibbs, Stuart. **Belly Up** (FunJungle). Simon & Schuster Books for Young People, 2011. 304 p. \$6.99. 978-1-416-98732-1. Grades 5–8. Teddy Fitzroy is known for his pranks throughout FunJungle, the zoo his family lives and works at, so when Henry the Hippo (the beloved if irascible zoo mascot) dies and Teddy declares that it's murder, no one will listen. Except the killer . . .

Gibbs, Stuart. **Poached** (FunJungle). Simon & Schuster Books for Young People, 2014. 336 p. \$15.99. 978-1-442-46777-4. Grades 5–8. When Kazoo the Koala goes missing, prankster Teddy Fitzroy is the main suspect. Security is out to get him, and security footage seems to prove he did it—even his parents can't understand what happened. He's innocent, though—and he's going to prove it!

Gibbs, Stuart. **Space Case** (Moon Base Alpha). Simon & Schuster Books for Young People, 2014. 352 p. \$16.99. 978-1-442-49486-2. Grades 5–8. For twelve-year-old Dash, being a settler on Moon Base Alpha isn't as exciting as he'd been promised, until an MBA scientist walks out an airlock improperly suited up and only Dash and a mysterious new arrival believe it was murder.

Gibbs, Stuart. **Spy School**. Simon & Schuster Books for Young People, 2012. 304 p. \$15.99. 978-1-442-42182-0. Grades 5–8. When Ben Ripley is recruited to attend the CIA's top spy school, he's thrilled—until he discovers that he's actually been brought in as bait to catch a double agent, and he has no idea who to trust. Is anyone who they say they are?

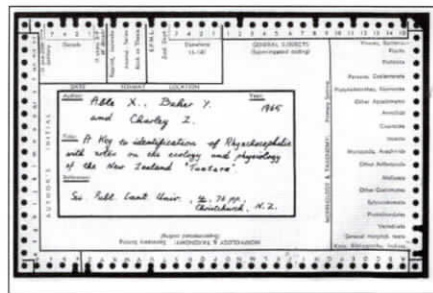
take advantage of a collaborative librarian. Such teaming brought major progress to the academic subjects, test scores, and a change of culture.

While we might cite other research supporting the notion of co-teaching and the integration of expertise, the results of a twisted pair of integrating information and technology skills into subject disciplines should speak for itself in your school with your teachers, and with other local specialists.

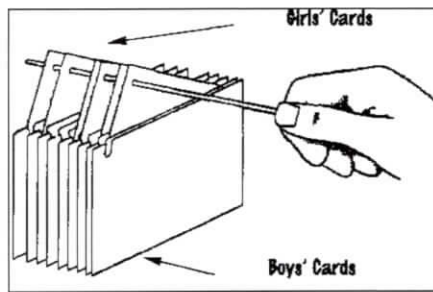
One of the major pieces of a library learning commons program would be what we termed an experimental learning center. This is a physical space and a virtual space dedicated to experimentation in the school where ideas are tested by both adults and learners before they go viral throughout the school. Everyone expects some ideas to flourish; others to fail; the latter chalked up to an essential element of making progress.

Perhaps one more visual might stimulate even more conversation. It is one from the early days of computing and automation and was an ingenious invention for its time. It was called punched card indexing. Its purpose was to use punched cards in a way to link research articles from various magazines by subject. The question is and was: How do we link the twisted pairs of curriculum, as illustrated above, so we can discover when and on what subjects to co-teach?

Using a large cardstock card, the teacher could write on the card the title and a sentence description of a unit such as animals or famous persons or rocks and minerals. On all four sides of the card were punched holes where the teacher could list skills the students would need to help with that unit: For example, wide reading, finding information, citing sources, multimedia production, etc. On the animal card, the teacher might want the students to be able to find information and do wide reading. She would use a paper punch to punch out a slot on the card on every skill she DID NOT WANT, leaving the enclosed hole in the two she did want. You can see the example above.



The librarian would have a similar card with all the skills listed around the card and no slots punched to the outside. Then, to match up the skill: say wide reading on the librarian's card with those on the various teacher card, she would stick a long wire through the deck as pictured below and would lift out all the units in the school where teachers wanted wide reading to happen. This is pictured below.



This was an ingenious invention before we had computers to easily sort through a stack of idea cards so the librarian knew who to approach for coteaching a unit with a wide reading component.

Today, we can do the same tasks easily on a spreadsheet as we create crosswalks between the teacher's curricular topics and the skills we as teacher librarians want to embed in an appropriate topic at an opportune time. It requires a bit more time but the outcome can and should be infinitely better than trying to teach both curriculums separately.

As the various specialists in the school team together to make a difference across the curriculum, everyone needs to recognize that a collaborative stance, like that demonstrated in Finnish classrooms, is worth a try.

What would it take in your school to discover if a different approach might produce results?

How can you test such an idea in your own school or district? It is a challenge worth leading.