

Chapter 1

Relationships Take Work

True collaboration is not spontaneous. It involves building a relationship—like a marriage, friendship or business partnership.

—Kathleen Baxter and Susan M. Haggberg¹

Beginning a relationship with another library and opening yourself and your institution to all its wonders and pitfalls may initially seem daunting. While research supports the importance of collaboration between libraries, it falls to *people* to create, maintain, and develop these relationships over time. Creating a bond with another library—with another person—takes time, and in some cases, a good deal of patience. As in any relationship, someone must make the first move and wait to see whether the overture will be returned or rebuffed. Successful first moves can be broken down into specific actions, and crafting a link with another library is no different. While building a partnership with a fellow librarian should be less difficult than creating a profile on Match.com, it still helps to be prepared. Knowing ahead of time what you want, and what you are willing to give, will assist you in launching a productive collaboration.

Establishing a Connection

You decide it would be a good idea to form a relationship with another library. The question then becomes, how should you begin this process? Many factors enter into the answer to this basic query. One very fundamental concern is whether your administration will encourage or discourage a partnership. After all, without

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their backing, your enterprise can go up in smoke very quickly. You may wish to test the waters by having an informal discussion with your administration before taking the time to create a more thorough presentation on the expected benefits of your endeavor. (Find some strategies to sell collaborative ventures to your administration in Chapter 9.)

Taking some basic beginning steps will increase your chances of success in dealing with the other library. As librarians know, the ability to ask the right questions lies at the heart of any reference interview; the same holds true when dealing with partnerships. Ask the following questions to ensure you start off on the right foot:

- Whom should I approach to initiate a collaborative partnership?
- When would be a good time to approach my colleague in the other library?
- What is the most effective manner of contacting the potential partner?
- What kind of assistance can I reasonably expect from the other library?
- Where should we conduct our collaborative work?

Finding the One

When you have settled on a potential partner library, you need to determine the right person to approach at the other institution; nothing will happen until you reach out to create a link with someone. Your situation determines your choice of contact, so I'll talk about this first from the perspective of the public librarian, then from the viewpoint of a school librarian.

But That's Private!

While this book focuses mainly on the connections that can be developed between the public library and the public school library, you can enlist the same techniques and recommendations in public library/private school partnerships. Many private school libraries are woefully underfunded and rely on assistance and support from the public libraries in their area. In addition, private schools can be an extremely supportive demographic group for public library programs and activities.

It's natural to be apprehensive when moving out of your comfort zone to try something new and different. Public librarians might be especially hesitant to enter into partnership with librarians in a private school out of concerns about bringing in materials or promoting programs that do not mesh well with the goals of the school. Librarians in private schools might feel tentative about working with a public library, fearing that they will meet with resistance from public librarians who may not want to serve a private entity. Keep in mind, though: Libraries are libraries, whoever funds them, and you will find commonalities in any partnership.

Simply be forthright when working together; don't hesitate to state any concerns you might have regarding materials or programs.

Public librarians need to factor many considerations into their decision-making process. The relationship you establish with school libraries depends in part on the number of schools your library serves. If your public library district encompasses multiple elementary, middle, and high schools, it can be difficult to build a personal partnership with someone in each school. Start by focusing on the schools closest to your library to avoid becoming completely overwhelmed. In a rural setting, it can be more manageable

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to truly get to know the people in all the schools, simply because there are fewer schools to connect with.

Of course, which schools you choose to connect with also depends on the population you are trying to target. For instance, if you are a young adult librarian, you will probably focus on middle and high schools, and children's librarians will look to the elementary levels; the way in which your library and school districts divide students serves as the final determination. As a young adult librarian, I worked with sixth- to twelfth-grade students, but I spent nearly all my collaborative energy on the four middle schools in our district. While I maintained a presence in the high schools through regular letters to English and social studies teachers, I established a more personal partnership with teachers and school library media specialists in the middle schools. (And, within those middle schools, I further targeted English and social studies teachers with my booktalks rather than opening these up to all teachers.) Utilizing your time efficiently is important in creating a healthy relationship, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

It seems logical first to approach the school library media specialist in the school(s) you have chosen. Unfortunately, though, not all schools have a school librarian. You might encounter situations in which one school library media specialist serves an entire district, overseeing an aide in each school, or in which a school library media specialist divides her time between two (or more) buildings. Such situations limit the time school library media specialists have available to interact with a liaison from the public library. Worse still, there may be no one staffing the school library on a regular basis—or there *is* no school library. In some rural communities and lower socioeconomic areas, a school library is considered a luxury or is not deemed important enough to maintain.

The enrollment statistics of each school also come into play. In larger institutions, time constraints may limit the collaborative efforts the school library media specialists can undertake. On the other hand, one advantage of working with a large school is that each department usually has a chair (or head), who can be very helpful in distributing information to teachers in that area. An

awareness of each school's environment will aid you in the long run, and the size of the school will also help you determine just what kind of collaboration you would like to offer.

What if your library has previously been in contact with the schools in your district, but things didn't work out? Sometimes links are established only to deteriorate over time, when people leave their positions or there is no longer a specific need. In this situation, it is important to know what happened and why the collaboration failed to succeed. Approach your new collaborative effort from another angle, to help alleviate concerns that an unpleasant history will repeat itself. Be leery if people tell you a certain school is "hopeless" or "unresponsive." People's perceptions can be inaccurate or colored by their own relationships, so try again if you believe in the possibility of a partnership.

In some larger public library districts, there is a school liaison or coordinator who works cooperatively with the schools—an optimal situation.² If your public library district has such a position, utilize this person to the fullest. (If you *are* this person, use the following chapters to help you in your cooperative efforts.) If you work at a branch, find out whether someone in another building is currently building partnerships with schools before beginning your efforts. Do your homework!

Consult your own and other departments to help paint a clear picture of the services your library already provides to local schools and to get information on the connections already established. For instance:

- Many libraries offer cards to teachers and school library media specialists working at schools within their service area, even if they are not residents. Check with your circulation department to see if they already have a contact at the school(s) and a list of all the teachers.
- Some libraries have a bookmobile service. Does your bookmobile stop at any schools in the district? Ask

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bookmobile staffers who they communicate with to set up schedules for stops.

- A library's children's department often has established contacts with local schools. If you are a young adult librarian working under an adult or reference department, be sure to ask so that you complement their services rather than duplicating them.

Avoid stepping on others' toes, and honor existing contacts and partnerships. If your library turns out already to be actively engaged in some type of collaboration with the schools, see how you can assist with or expand on services already in place.

In general, if a school has a library media specialist, she is your first point of contact. Only once that relationship has been established should you begin communicating with teachers and other staff members. If no school library media specialist is available, turn to the teachers themselves or to their department heads (if these positions exist).

On the flip side, if you are a school library media specialist, you may have no idea whom to approach first at the public library—and with good reason. Unless you have had public library experience before moving to the schools, it's not readily apparent how library departments are arranged and who is in charge of what. Ponder the following points before deciding whom to contact at the public library.

Even the smallest town usually has a public library to serve the community. This is a wonderful testament to the fact that libraries are a vital part of society. However, particularly in rural areas, these libraries may be woefully understaffed and underfunded. If the public library in your area is extremely small and open only a handful of hours, or if there is no public library nearby, a meaningful partnership simply may not be possible. In situations such as this, school librarians should consider reaching out to their community college library instead. In sparsely populated regions,

the community college library often acts as the de facto public library for the towns from which it draws students.

After identifying a public library to contact, look at the size of the population it serves. A quick look at its web page may give you an indication; larger libraries usually have a page specifying the populations they are actively addressing. (If not, check out State Public Library Statistics at www.lrs.org/public/other.php). Most libraries will have at least an adult/reference department and a youth services department that directly serve the public; some larger districts will break these down further into areas such as computer services, readers' advisory, young adults, and outreach. Once you know the various areas the public library allocates resources to, you can better target the right department to contact.

In a small town, it is fairly clear what area the local public library serves. In larger cities and suburbs, though, it can be confusing trying to determine which library covers what territory. A district library may cover two or more towns yet not serve all the students who attend schools inside those boundaries. Some schools may include students from three or more towns—and library district lines do not necessarily follow town and city boundaries, which can complicate the issue further. Larger cities may have a library system that includes a large main library and many neighborhood branch libraries, which offer programs, materials, and outreach. Before launching any partnerships, you need to know which public library or libraries are responsible for the needs of the students in your school(s). It makes little sense to pick a public library that can offer services to only a small portion of your student population.

As mentioned earlier, some public libraries designate one person to work with schools. If the library serves many schools, this liaison might be overwhelmed and eager to find partners who are willing to work proactively with him. Ask the liaison if there are other departments or librarians in the institution who might want to collaborate on better serving students and teachers.

Check with teachers in your building to see if they have had experiences with the public library; often teachers will reach out on their own. As former youth services librarian Jennifer Bromann

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writes of her own experience: “The idea for a booktalk began when the chair of the high school’s English department approached our library, seeking help for ‘Readers Are Leaders,’ a program that encourages students to read nonassigned books, one day a week, during homeroom.”³ Teachers often live in the community in which they work, so some may already be regular public library patrons who have developed a friendly relationship with staff members. Solicit their advice on who may be receptive to your offer of collaboration. This gives you invaluable firsthand knowledge and also creates another layer of connection with those teachers.

In many larger districts, school library media specialists share information with their colleagues at monthly meetings. This is a perfect time to ask colleagues about their experiences with the public library. Some fellow librarians may already have reached out—ask who they contacted and whether their attempt was successful. Let’s say you work in a middle school and find that the librarian from an elementary school in your district is holding a successful Battle of the Books in collaboration with the children’s department at the public library. You may have quite a different project in mind, but the fact that the library already has an established link with a school is a good sign and offers a relationship you can build on.

Find out if the public library offers any special advantages for school staff, such as teacher/librarian cards that enable school employees living outside the public library boundaries to receive the same (or extra) benefits as regular patrons. Some public libraries will also set aside materials on a given subject for particular classes or place books on reserve for in-library use only. Being aware of current services at the public library will help narrow your search for a willing partner and will keep you from duplicating existing efforts.

If you work in an elementary school, begin your partnership quest at the public library’s youth services department. If you work in a middle or high school, check with the youth services department and ask if it has a young adult librarian or other staff member

who works with teenagers. You might also spend much of your time working with the adult reference staff, as they are more likely to have a collection of materials that meets the needs of your students and teachers. Get all the information you can about the structure of the library and where it spends time and money.

While this book focuses mainly on interactions between librarians, collaboration can occur between any number of individuals. For example, a public librarian might work extensively with a principal, or a teacher might want to do a project with the public librarian. One young adult librarian from Illinois has done projects both with the school library media specialist and with teachers in her local school. And a school librarian might work with five different people from the public library—simply because each has a specific area of expertise. This might be especially true when working in partnership on grants or larger communitywide collaborations. Public librarians should also keep in mind that not everyone staffing a school library media center will have completed a certification program. A school library may be staffed by a teacher who was asked to start working as the school librarian, by an aide, or by a PTA mom who turned a volunteer situation into a full-time position. Just because people do not have a certificate does not mean they are not fulfilling their assigned role; working together will help both of you grow and learn.

It's All About the Timing

When I worked as a young adult librarian, there were some days I dreaded going to the mailroom. It never failed: On the days I was busiest, racing around to finish the 15 things in my planner, my director would ambush me there. She had fantastic ideas for collaborative projects with everyone from the historical society to the gardening club. While I respected our director and valued her opinions, her timing always seemed to be off, and her collaborative spirit wired into the mailroom. This, inevitably, is where she would suggest her newest plan, as I tried to show interest while backing out the door to return to my list.

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As we all know, if the timing isn't right, it isn't going to happen. Period. An awareness of your partner library's calendar is important to establishing a working relationship. Working with someone in another building whom you seldom see will create enough stress; pay attention to timing to minimize additional stress and problems.

Basic timing issues stem from the differing schedules of different types of libraries. School librarians need to remember that many public libraries are open seven days a week and stay open until 9:00 PM or later at least one night a week, depending on their staffing levels and the population they serve. Some close on Sundays during the summer, while others will remain open. Many staff members work at least some night hours (in most public libraries), along with regular or rotating weekend shifts. Knowing the work schedule of the person you are collaborating with helps alleviate frustration if she fails to return calls and emails quickly. You can meet with a public librarian after school or even on the weekend. Once you have identified a contact at the public library, find out her typical schedule and work with it as best you can.

Public librarians should understand that school libraries are open when their schools are, and some are also open for limited hours before and after school to accommodate students who walk to school or who lack access to a public library close to home. Many schools, especially high schools, are realizing the benefits of allowing students access to their library even when school isn't in session. Students can use library materials for recreational reading, work on homework assignments, and get help with research. The larger the school, the more likely it is to have extended hours during which you may be able to reach the school library media specialist or a library aide. On the other hand, in rural areas, where most students are bussed, not many school libraries remain open after hours. Make a quick phone call to the school office to determine the school library's hours and when it is staffed. Also check to see when the school library media specialist is present, in case he splits duties between schools.

Timing also becomes an issue with regard to large events, such as the summer reading programs in many public libraries. Summer reading creates a frenzy of activity and energy, often beginning as early as January, when initial plans are being made and contracts drawn up. Summer reading collaborations will be covered thoroughly in Chapter 3, but these programs also come into play in terms of timing for other projects. The end of the school year is generally a bad time to approach youth services librarians in public libraries about a project you are considering for the fall. They are typically in over their heads at this time of year, so the idea of planning anything new is beyond their capabilities. A particularly brave soul may sit down and give you an hour of her time—but chances are this person is an adult reference librarian! Summer *can* be a good time to talk to people in the reference department, to ask questions about the materials available for students, to ask about database classes, and to get a general feel for what the public library has to offer. Just don't be disappointed if your attempts at a partnership are brushed off during summer reading. Most likely this is not a case of your colleagues' not wanting to engage with you; it's a question of their not being able to *at that time*.

Similarly, a public librarian should not decide to contact a school library media specialist at the beginning of May and expect a speedy reply. Most school librarians are responsible for conducting inventories, not only of their books, supplies, and computers, but also of all of the school's textbooks—and, in some cases, all of the school's supplies, from desks to software. This process often involves closing down their library to inventory its contents, creating reports for their administration, and tracking down overdue or lost books, leaving little or no time to discuss possible partnerships. During May, the public librarian can offer to help by promoting her summer reading program at the school, but it is best to have this arrangement in place ahead of time.

While the beginning of the school year can be stressful for both school and public librarians—arguably more so for the school library media specialist—this is also a time when people tend to be

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fresh and optimistic. Public librarians have a successful summer reading program behind them, and school library media specialists have had time to recover from the previous school year. This is a good time to seize the day and initiate contact with your counterpart. A collaboration at the beginning of the school year can set a positive tone for the entire year, and everyone has a clean slate with which to start.

Making Contact

In our age of technological overload, simply deciding on the most appropriate way to initiate contact can be overwhelming. Of course, you already will have sussed out whom to approach and the best time to make contact. Now you need to determine which form of communication works best for both you and your recipient. Make sure to consider your own preferences—don't email someone if you never check your email, even if she prefers this form of communication. There are plenty of alternative avenues for contact.

The most immediate choice for your primary communication tool is likely to be email. Most librarians have an email account that they use on a regular basis. However, just because a school district or public library provides its employees with email accounts does not mean that they actually check their accounts. First, find out if your contact has an email account specifically for professional use. Then, find out if she actually uses and regularly checks this email—which can be a bit difficult. Wait a few days for a reply to your initial contact; don't assume she's uninterested in what you have to say. Send a follow-up email message, and if you still receive no reply, move on to another method.

The telephone is another powerful tool and can lead to some wonderfully spontaneous collaborative moments. When people begin to share stories and situations on the phone, the wheels get turning, and problems can be solved in minutes. However, many people prefer email precisely because of the immediacy of telephone communication. We all have used the expression “phone

tag,” and we despair when we need to have an answer quickly. Even worse is when you find you must rely on a third party to relay an important message. As with email, check to see if your contact has personal voicemail. Public librarians contacting school library media specialists should know that they may not have regular access to their voicemail; some schools have a single phone from which all staff must retrieve messages. However, because of the nature of library work, the school library often has its own telephone; the librarian frequently needs to place book orders and request repairs. Public libraries may not have a voicemail system, so school librarians may have to rely on leaving a message and hoping it reaches their contact. Knowing the other person’s schedule and typical work hours is even more important when you are trying to connect by telephone. Remember, too, that because you are just beginning a relationship, it will take some time to establish a connection.

The good old U.S. Postal Service might be the best option for initial contact. With this method, the receiver has time to review material at leisure and can take time to reflect seriously on the possibility of an alliance; no one is waiting by the phone or computer for a return message. Sending out targeted mailings can also help establish a relationship without any expectations. As a young adult librarian, I created a monthly newsletter detailing young adult and adult programs and noteworthy items added to the collection. This publication was distributed in-house to our patrons, but I also included it in packets sent to each middle and high school in our district. I added memos addressed to the English and social studies teachers and the school library media specialists, listing events they might want to share with their students, services I could provide to the school, and materials the public library had ready for them to use. At the end of each letter, I specifically invited teachers and school librarians to contact me with any questions or concerns and included my work number and email address.

I cannot say I spoke personally to all of these teachers during my tenure at the public library. Yet teachers and school librarians

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would reach out to me when they had a need—simply because I had already established a communication route. My faithful correspondence showed my interest in assisting them with their work. Using this basic form of communication, I was able to reach several hundred people each month throughout the school year.

Consider sending a quick email or snail mail note each month to the person you would like to collaborate with. Let him know about the projects you have planned. Ask for his advice, or just keep him informed. The more information each library has about the other, the better your channels of communication. Make these notes a regular part of your monthly routine, and before you know it, you will establish a working relationship that's conducive to more elaborate collaborative projects.

You have probably already used one or more of these conventional methods to some extent to communicate with another library. If you just want to see whether anyone is interested in working with you, trying different avenues may help. Use other technological methods to make contact, such as becoming active on lists where school library media specialists and public librarians post and interact, such as LM_NET and YALSA-BK. Try starting a website or wiki for your library or department, and see what happens. Many public libraries maintain MySpace pages where youth and other librarians can interact with them. Create your own podcast or blog with information about books, materials, and concerns. Invite comments—you may be surprised by the number of people out in cyberspace who are listening to what you have to say. Use a website like evite (www.evite.com) to send out invitations to a special tea for all the school library media specialists in your public library district, or invite local public librarians in to see your library media center. The web offers so many possibilities for meeting and interacting with colleagues. (Detailed information on using technology in collaboration and partnerships can be found in Chapter 6.)

Realistic Expectations

Just as on a first date it is wise to avoid discussions of religion, politics, or when you'd like to get married, it is prudent to approach any new possible partnership with minimal expectations. While you may see a great variety of ways to work with another librarian, start by letting her talk about the types of partnerships and assistance she actually needs. A public librarian may be prepared to booktalk seven days a week (forgetting schools are only in session five), while the school library media specialist may have no current need for booktalks but instead needs a better understanding of how to request ILL materials. Try not to assume that what you want to offer is what the other library desires.

If you are a public librarian and are establishing contact with a school library media specialist or other school representative, start out on a positive note by asking about the kinds of services the school library currently offers its students. Be specific, so you get a better grasp of what resources the school has access to and what its needs may be. Learn about the cultural makeup of the school, as well as the socioeconomic background of its students. You may already have an idea, since these are the same youth who come to the public library. However, if your library serves a large community, or is in a remote location where transportation becomes an issue, you might not have this pertinent information. Next, ask what the school library may be lacking that the school library media specialist would like to change. It is important first to get a handle on your potential partner's perspective and needs, in order to build a relationship based on mutual assistance. Typically, getting this information will not be hard. Most librarians dream of what their library would look like without budgetary, administrative, and space restrictions.

School librarians might find approaching their local public librarians a more difficult proposition, if they are thinking only in terms of what the school library can offer the public library. It is important to find out what services the library currently

What Should We Talk About?

Here are some general questions to help you identify the other library's needs.

Questions a public librarian can ask a school library media specialist:

- How many students do you see in a typical day?
- What variation do you see in reading abilities among students in your building?
- Do you see many students with learning disabilities?
- What is your library's most pressing need in terms of materials/books/technology?
- What kind of budget do you have to work with?
- What kind of staffing do you have?
- What hours is your library open?
- Are there services you would like to implement but are unable to because of limited time/money/space/cooperation?

Questions a school library media specialist can ask a public librarian:

- What hours/days are most popular for children and teens to visit the public library?
- Is there a designated area for children? For teens?
- How many programs are offered for children in a typical month? For teens?
- What kinds of programs do you offer young people?
- How do you promote your programs?
- Can students get their own library card? Are there any restrictions?
- Do you have computers for student use?
- Do you subscribe to any databases targeted for student homework help or assignments?
- Are there any discipline problems with children/teens in the library?

offers children and teens and what else the public librarian would like to provide. Keep in mind that the public library is run by numbers: tax numbers and budget numbers, but also numbers of materials circulated, numbers of program attendees, numbers of programs offered, and numbers of card holders. If you can assist in increasing any of these numbers, you will earn the eternal gratitude of the public librarian. Remember that you have a captive audience: Students regularly come into the school library for scheduled instruction or library periods, whereas public librarians must wait for children and teens to decide to come to them. By understanding this basic premise, you can figure out ways to assist each other.

In the end, it is important to be aware of the time you can realistically devote to collaboration and try not to exceed that limit in the early stages of your partnership. You can easily be swept away in the euphoria of finding someone else with plans—someone who actually wants to do something about them. Until you have established a good working relationship, be wary of investing too much energy in any one project. Maintain realistic expectations of each other; build slowly and progressively.

Your Place or Mine?

The time will come when phone calls, emails, and list postings are not enough. Or perhaps you both agree it would be better to meet in person to get things started. You might begin with just a friendly meeting, without any grand collaboration agenda. In fact, this is how some partnerships are set in motion—as was the case with two librarians from Anoka County, Minnesota. “It was just a get-to-know-you lunch. Yet unbeknownst to us, as we sipped soup and ordered sandwiches, we were laying the groundwork for a long, fruitful partnership.”⁴ Sometimes personal friendships lead to the first steps of collaboration.

If you are the one who initiated the conversation about collaboration, be willing to go to the other person’s institution to meet face-to-face. You may have to give up your own free time. For

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example, on the way home from school, a school library media specialist might stop in to visit a public librarian, or a public librarian might visit the school librarian before work. These are trade-offs; you don't always need to meet at the other library, but be willing to make the extra effort to get the ball rolling.

How often you meet, and under what circumstances, depends on your situation and schedule. It is always fun to get out of the office routine and meet for lunch or coffee at a restaurant, as the Anoka County librarians did. Sometimes it is beneficial to see the space in which the other librarian serves children and teens. If you are invited to join a regular staff meeting at the other library, you will have a chance to meet other librarians and staff who may impact your collaborative efforts. Any chance you have to be present at an internal meeting at the other library will be extremely instructive for everyone.

Always respect the other person's time, and go into each meeting with a plan for what you want to accomplish. Be open to establishing a personal friendship with the other librarian; this makes working together more satisfying in the long run.

Rejection

We have all felt the sting of putting ourselves "out there" in our personal or professional lives, only to have our efforts rejected. This can be a disheartening experience, and you may feel so despondent as to think there is no reason to try again. (Of course, this reaction will likely pass as time goes on!)

Remember that when you approach people about collaboration, they bring all their own past experiences to the table, both positive and negative. You have no control over what has happened in their past and can only reassure them by pointing out the differences in this situation. Even so, realize that some people will not be enthusiastic about working collaboratively, and you must be prepared for the possible failure of your attempts to reach out.

Is My Email Working?

This is probably the worst-case scenario: You sent out your hopeful email, then sent a postcard, left a friendly letter in a mailbox, and even left a phone message (or two, or three, or four ...). Okay, so you've lost count of how many times and ways you have tried to connect with your contact at the other library. And nothing. No call, no bounced-back email, no returned letter saying "addressee unknown." What do you do if you get no response? Move on. Try not to dwell on it. Who knows, perhaps that person never figured out how to work the phone system, or the email, or the ... mailbox? In any case, if you have tried repeatedly to get in contact with someone, to no avail, it is probably safe to say she is not interested.

Learn from this experience. Go back and read over your messages: Were you asking what you could help with, or were you telling the other librarian what you thought she needed from you? Then, write it off as a learning experience. You can still try contacting this person on occasion in the future, but don't belabor the point. Instead, focus on whom you might contact instead. You might discover a willing partner in the reference librarian or the new social studies teacher. (And through your new contact, you just might wind up getting in touch with the person you were seeking to connect with in the first place.)

It's Not You, It's Me

An offer of collaboration may be met with wariness, skepticism, or even open hostility. This kind of response can throw you off base and leave you feeling unsure how to proceed. The person you contact may dismiss your idea with: "I've tried that, and it didn't work." End of story. In our profession, people sometimes stay in their positions for decades. Some may feel they have seen it all, or they may have been in their jobs for so long that they no longer have the energy or desire to try something inventive. Collaboration takes both time and motivation, and you may run into someone who is simply less enthusiastic about entering into a partnership.

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While this can be frustrating, remember that you might have to deal with this person for a number of years. As a young adult librarian, I was able to begin working immediately with one school library media specialist, while it took me about four years to build a relationship with another one. Each person is different, and you must treat each with respect and an understanding of their position. Perhaps the children's librarian at your local public library has no interest in doing a presentation to your teachers about its databases. Or maybe the school library media specialist has no time to create a schedule for your booktalks. If they see that you are truly looking out for *their* best interests, as well as your own, they will be more willing to work with you in the future. A little goodwill goes a long way.

I'll Call You

Everything seems to be going along so well. You've made contact; the person was excited and ready to tackle all the collaborative projects you mentioned. She even offered some suggestions about when and where to get the ball rolling. So, smug and satisfied, you began plans for your grand joint adventure in serving your community's youth. But now, a week or two have gone by. Your deadline to chat has passed, and you've had no contact with your partner. In fact, you even left a few messages, with no response. This is puzzling because this person was so enthusiastic about your endeavors.

What could possibly have gone wrong? Frankly, it could have been anything. Did the person just feign enthusiasm to get you off the phone? Has he been preoccupied with something happening at his workplace? Did his supervisor change his duties? He may have been truly excited at first, but then the idea of all the work involved began to weigh heavily on his mind. Perhaps it was too much, too soon. In this case, the best thing to do is lay low for a bit. And when you do resurface, do not mention how you were let down. Offer to help the other librarian with a project or just to meet to chat over coffee. Sometimes just removing expectations can be a relief and allow you to proceed toward a collaborative partnership.

Courting Time—Learning the Art of Wooing!

If you encounter someone who seems to have been burned by the collaboration process one too many times, you may consider just offering to assist. Helping another person out now might just help you in the long run.

A school library media specialist can:

- Ask for copies of flyers about upcoming programs to post in the school library.
- Offer space to publicize library activities in the school newspaper/newsletter.
- Discuss how the school can help with discipline problems at the public library.
- Encourage teachers to accept extra credit for student attendance at public library programs.
- Alert the public library of any major school projects on the horizon.
- Put in an appearance at the public library board meeting and talk about how helpful their staff is to the school(s).

A public librarian can:

- Volunteer to help catalog/shelve/process/weed materials if the school library is understaffed.
- Call weekly or monthly to see if students are undertaking any large projects for which materials should be set aside.
- Offer assistance at book fairs, reading nights, and curriculum nights.
- Provide information on relevant databases students can access, either remotely or on-site.
- Speak at a school board meeting on the importance to the community of having strong school libraries.

Starting Over

It can be difficult to find that something you spent so much time researching and developing can fizzle—or never take shape in the first place. This, though, is all part of the process of creating partnerships. Realize from the start that not all collaborative situations will be fruitful or will meet your expectations. In any case, you learn something with each effort. Once the dust has settled, it is time to venture forth once again. Don't become reluctant to reach out.

Remember, work on your relationships with other people by finding out where they need assistance. Learn the operating culture of their library, find out whom to talk to, and know their schedules. Establishing collaborative relationships that enable you to expand your services to youth will take time and effort on everyone's part.

Endnotes

1. Kathleen Baxter and Susan M. Haggberg, "Ladies Who Lunch: Despite Their Minnesota Guilt, a School and Public Librarian Get to Know Each Other," *School Library Journal* 46:9 (2000): 33.
2. Jami Jones, "Come Together," *School Library Journal* 50:3 (2004): 45.
3. Jennifer Bromann, "The Toughest Audience on Earth," *School Library Journal* 45:10 (1999): 60.
4. Baxter and Haggberg, 33.