A recent graduate of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, School of Communication and Information, I was consistently reminded throughout my course of study that collaboration with other members of the school community, especially with other teachers, is a critical element to ensure instructional effectiveness and student achievement. At Rutgers, to prepare us to develop strategies to reach out to our school communities, a requirement of our school library management course was to share what we had learned about a critical or ethical school-library issue, and to demonstrate skills in preparing and presenting a workshop for the audience assigned to the topic selected. Then we had to present results to the class in our online discussions as well as through a PowerPoint presentation file with complete narration in the notes.

It was easy for me to select the topic I wanted to investigate as reading is one of the most important skills taught in schools today, and I know that one of a teacher’s main priorities with students is developing their skills for reading for comprehension and understanding. As a school librarian this is also a priority for me. A lot of research in the last few years has shown how we can all work together to benefit our students’ development in the area of reading comprehension. There are things that teachers can do in the classroom, things that I as the school librarian can do with students in the school library, and then things that classroom teachers and I can do together. In preparing for an in-service workshop, I knew I would be able to share and review some of this research, as well as many strategies and techniques that would be useful not only for students, but for teachers and for me as the school librarian, too.

Students are taught how to read at a very young age, but how well do the students understand what they are reading? Students are taught how to read the words on the paper, but do they comprehend what the words mean when used together? What can educators do to help students think critically and really understand what is being taught? Teachers and school librarians have the responsibility of encouraging students by showing them important strategies and techniques that will have them reading for comprehension and making connections to the world around them.
Again, through my investigation, I knew a significant body of research provides answers to these questions and shows how students’ academic performance improves when teachers and school librarians work together with the students. One technique that research shows to be very successful—one that I think should be used in every school—is the concept of “coteaching” in which the teacher and school librarian work together in the same environment to help students learn. If we, as school librarians and teachers, work together and “coteach” our students, they will benefit greatly, and we will be able to see constant and consistent growth as students move from grade to grade. While this article is focusing on coteaching for reading comprehension, this concept is successful when used for any subject, when it is cotaught by two professionals who have expertise with content (teacher), with process (school librarian), and with instructional design and delivery (both!).

Reading Comprehension Strategies

For the purposes of designing my workshop presentation, while I knew I wanted to provide focus on the benefits of “coteaching,” I determined that it would also be prudent to briefly explain the six strategies for comprehension that must be addressed when teaching students how to read for comprehension. Jamie McKenzie identifies these strategies as questioning, picturing, inferring, recalling prior knowledge, synthesizing, and flexing, and explains that “research into effective practice indicates that achievement of strong scores on comprehension tests is possible, but progress will require teaming across all classrooms so that students spend some time in each hour of each day acquiring, practicing and sharpening essential comprehension skills such as questioning, picturing, inferring, recalling past knowledge, synthesizing and flexing” (McKenzie 2005). McKenzie suggests that school librarians should lead this effort, and provide aid and comfort to teachers. Once the school librarian understands these strategies, he or she will be able to show teachers and other staff how to use them successfully.

So what are these strategies and how do they work? The first strategy is questioning. With this strategy, we should introduce young students to question types such as fact, thinking, and imagination questions. We
can also confront students with challenges that require question combinations and make the concepts of surprise and wonder a daily event (McKenzie 2005).

The next strategy is picturing. School librarians enjoy reading stories to younger students aloud, and having the students make connections and picture in their minds the characters and scenery. This reading aloud is a simple technique that we can bring into the classroom whenever possible to keep each student’s mind stimulated.

The next strategy is inferring. How can we show students how to read between the lines to find what is missed or implied? The teacher and school librarian need to first provide students with the chance to interpret material and create answers by considering the clues provided. We also need to lead them through the process by modeling how clues can be combined to create answers (McKenzie 2005).

In my opinion, the next strategy, recalling prior knowledge, is the most important when teaching students to comprehend what they are reading. With this strategy, students already have some knowledge about the topic, and are guided and encouraged to draw on that knowledge so they can build on it for a better understanding. “Much of what we already know lies hidden where it will do us little good when wrestling with a difficult comprehension passage, yet proficient readers are skilled at tapping into and reawakening these sources to cast light on whatever passages they are considering” (McKenzie 2005).

Synthesizing is the next strategy where we teach students to “mix, match, combine, and weave ideas into something new” (McKenzie 2005). This strategy is about problem solving and creating ways for students to practice and use their problem-solving skills—skills that will be very important throughout their lives.

The last strategy is flexing, which McKenzie explains is a “term that captures what others mean by metacognition and strategic choice. The proficient reader knows how to shift gears, change directions, try something different and run through a host of strategies until meaning evolves” (McKenzie 2005).

Some of these strategies are a lot harder to tackle than others, but all are equally important when helping students understand what is being taught.

Coteaching Reading Comprehension Strategies

In my workshop presentation, once I had made the evidence-based case for the use of best strategies, I needed to make a case for how we—teacher and school librarian—can move forward to ensure that these strategies are successfully implemented by all students. At this point I had an opportunity to segue to the need to incorporate coteaching and to discuss its rationale. While there are many different approaches to coteaching and many ways that students reap the benefits, the practice can be seen by teachers as time-consuming. School librarians need to recognize how stressed teachers are with everything that they have to get done during the school day, and while we are also under pressure, it is essential that we take the lead in adding coteaching to our colleagues’ practices. We can create lessons to be taught by the school librarian and the classroom teacher, either together or separately (teacher in the classroom and librarian in the school library), connecting with each other’s instructional objectives.

Again, teachers and school librarians can collaborate in numerous ways, but I presented for consideration three strategies because they are not only effective, but also easy to prepare and implement—a plus given the time constraints on teachers and school librarians.

· The first technique is called “one teaching/one supporting” and is exactly what it sounds like. One of the two will teach the lesson while the other will walk around the classroom and assist the students (Moreillon 2008). This technique helps keep the lesson moving forward while the supporter helps students who need further clarification on a certain aspect of the lesson.

· The next technique is called ”parallel teaching.” The classroom teacher and school librarian each teach half of the students at the same time (Moreillon 2008). I like this technique because with many school districts facing budget woes, classrooms have larger numbers of students, and it is increasingly difficult to have one-on-one time with every student when needed. Parallel teaching allows for more interaction between the adult teaching the lesson and the students.

· The last technique is “team teaching” in which the classroom teacher and the school librarian share the responsibility of teaching the entire class start to finish (Moreillon 2008). Both the teacher and the school librarian are responsible for portions of the lesson, and they work together to make the lesson complete.

These are just a few examples of ways of encouraging coteaching by presenting the research and sharing
School librarians are here to help students with reading comprehension, and this evidence of students’ improvement in reading comprehension shows everyone in the school, including the teachers, principal, and other staff members, one of the many reasons why the school librarian is so important. Many positive outcomes have resulted when school librarians work with teachers to teach students. Here are a few examples of what people have said when we all work together: “Students’ final products showed improved ability to analyze and synthesize information.” “Students’ research reports showed improved ability to draw conclusions and state implications of their findings.” “83% of one class showed ability in thoughtfully analyzing and evaluating major alternative points of view.” “Following instructional interventions that focused on establishing the quality of websites, 100% of the students’ bibliographies showed use of high quality sites” (Todd 2008, 43).

I hope that every teacher and school librarian reading this article will think about coteaching, as well as consider the reading comprehension strategies as noted by Jamie McKenzie and how to incorporate these strategies to benefit student learning. I concluded my in-service presentation with an activity for teachers to think about questions similar to these: “What lessons do you currently teach to your students that would benefit from working together with another teacher or the school librarian?” “Would you consider team teaching with your coworkers?”

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Works Cited:


