

CLEAR Collaboration Goals

By Nikki Curtis

The educational benefits of collaboration between school librarians and the broader school community is supported by a multitude of research, as are the benefits of collaboration in education in general. A 2015 report, *The Shared Work of Learning: Lifting Educational Achievement through Collaboration* (Mitchell Institute) found that "collaboration – the sharing of effort, knowledge and resources in the pursuit of shared goals – plays a central and partially hidden role in the achievement of student learning outcomes".

It's not a new concept but it definitely is a prevalent one. In the 2017 Softlink School Library Survey we framed a specific question around the topic. Respondents were asked 'How do you currently collaborate, or what ideas do you have for greater collaboration between the library and the rest of the school?'. The breadth and ingenuity of the responses was truly inspiring and are included in the feature document, *School Libraries Share: Ideas for school-wide collaboration*. School library professionals have found themselves responding to change, driven by fast-paced technology environments. Even more challenging, they have had to navigate their way through these changes with limited resources, and limited understanding of the growing need for their specialist information literacy skills, amongst others.

Softlink has conducted School Library Surveys in Australia since 2010, with the first survey providing a response to the Australian Federal Government's 'Inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools'. Softlink has continued to survey schools annually, more recently extending the scope to include New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The surveys provide a critical reference point for understanding changes, impacts and trends over time. Open comments fields provide an opportunity for respondents to share ideas, reflections, insights and challenges, presenting a diverse, ground up perspective into the workings of a 21st century school library.

The concepts of fast-paced change and collaboration lead into an interesting goal-setting framework developed by Adam Kreek, a two-time Olympian, Management Consultant, and Executive Coach. The CLEAR (Collaborative, Limited, Emotional, Appreciable, Refined) framework provides an alternative to the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal framework and, similar to Scrum and other agile approaches, provides a methodology for achieving outcomes in fast-paced change environments.

The incredible thing about the responses to the collaboration question in the 2017 School Library Surveys is how much they align with the different steps in the CLEAR goals framework. This article structures a selection of these responses within the CLEAR goals framework. The ideas and feedback demonstrate the many ways in which school library professionals globally are mobilising and collaborating to improve educational outcomes at their schools.

Collaborative

New ideas, improved scale, shared expertise, necessity to clearly articulate perspectives leading to improved self-understanding . . . and the list goes on. Collaboration can significantly improve whole of organisation effectiveness so it's no surprise that Kreek places it at the top of his framework, stating that goals should encourage collaboration and teamwork.

The 2017 survey respondent examples featured in this section demonstrate some of the strategies school library professionals are using to improve collaboration in their schools:

Stay connected to teachers by being involved in what they're teaching. Know the curriculum. Speak the same language. Be involved with curriculum committees. AU

I attend meetings, am on various leadership teams, and make sure teachers know that I teach information literacy that is relevant and integrated into other learning. NZ

Since starting in my current role I have organised meetings with all HODs to establish what they want to get out of the library. UK

Where possible I join staff at Connect Meetings and demonstrate a different resource. I always put my hand up to give PD at staff meetings, I join KLA meetings when I can, and conduct one-on-one training as required. AU

I engage in regular and frequent informal and formal meetings with Heads of Departments, finance and other key staff to ensure appropriate resourcing of the curriculum and to maintain a presence with school decision makers. AU.

Limited

Setting up processes and understanding scope can mean the difference between getting things done or getting lost in the quagmire of a complex project or challenge. Kreek states that goals should be limited in both scope and duration.

The 2017 survey respondent examples featured in this section demonstrate some of the processes and specifically scoped actions, big and small, school library professionals are using in their schools.

I work with classroom teachers by meeting with them at the end of each term to discuss their units of work for the coming term. I then align relevant Information Literacy outcomes with their Inquiry unit of work. AU

I put new books in the staffroom every Friday for them to borrow. NZ

I have a library blog and send weekly updates to teachers about what is happening in the library. AU

I run research and referencing lessons for Year 9, Year 10 and Sixth Form, and have integrated these with lessons taken by teachers and the EPQ. UK

Promote, Promote, Promote! Start with your school calendar. Get key events e.g. Library Lovers Day, Library and Information Services Week, Book Week etc. and put important dates for next year into your calendar.

Run competitions for staff. Create events in your library e.g. Pop Up Book Shop before the holidays. Offer your library as a venue for guest speakers, year assemblies etc. AU

Emotional

There's definitely no shortage of passion when it comes to school library professionals and their unique professional skills. Kreek states that goals should form an emotional connection with people, tapping into their energy and passion.

The 2017 survey respondent examples featured in this section demonstrate the many ways in which school library professionals are using their skills and passion to improve research outcomes and fuel a love of reading.

I coordinate research strategies with linguistic features and concepts specific to the register of each written genre and register/tenor in each learning area that includes Technology and the Arts. This is essential to STEM. AU

I work closely with the Head of English and the Head of Support for Learning to develop strategies to support reading for enjoyment. UK

I approach staff and offer expert guidance when students are researching for assessment, look at syllabi and offer suggestions and resources. AU

I organise guest speakers to speak about the different topics being taught, select books under a topic, and teach research skills (especially with the database access) to staff and students. I am also helping teach a zine class to generate our own collection of zines and to hold a zine fest. NZ

Appreciable

As the saying goes, Rome was not built in a day. Kreek states that large goals should be broken down into smaller goals while keeping the overall objective, or long-term gain, in mind.

The 2017 survey respondent examples featured in this section demonstrate the many ways in which school library professionals are using their skills and passion to improve research outcomes and fuel a love of reading.

Generally I will take a lead role, look at staff programs and discuss where I can add value to them through research, technology, Digital Citizen programs etc. AU

I attend all collaborative planning meetings with teaching teams to plan resources for upcoming inquiry units and other classroom or school-wide initiatives. NZ

I am constantly devising ways to promote wider reading with students, parents, subject leaders and staff through resources, info, quizzes, author visits etc. UK

I email staff at the end of the term asking what topics they will be covering in the next term. I then get all their resources ready for them. AU

I try to communicate with staff and offer our services. I contact them each term to find out what topics they will be studying so that I can ensure we have resources. I also offer curated content. NZ

Refinable

School library professionals are no stranger to change. While change brings new opportunities, agility is often required to manage it. Kreek states that while objectives should be steadfast, we need to be open to refine and modify goals as new situations or information arises.

The 2017 survey respondent examples featured in this section demonstrate the level at which school library professionals are exercising their flexibility and responsiveness.

I am now on the Curriculum Leadership Team so am able to be more responsive to resourcing needs. AU

I make sure I am up-to-date on what various faculties are teaching, or about to teach, and find resources that would help them and their students. AU

Because I see each teacher weekly, I spend a good amount of time working with them in developing strategies. NZ

Our high school is moving to include more integrated cross-curricular timetabling with greater project-based learning activities. It is envisaged that collaborative teaching will play a greater role in this format. I currently team-teach: Information Literacy, Research skills, Plagiarism, and Referencing. AU

We attend curriculum meetings, faculty meetings, and administration and planning meetings. We have actively sought direction from the school administration to understand their vision for us, to advise them on best practice, and to then supply the environment and resources to fulfil these needs. AU

Bridging the Gap

This great quote by Odin L. Jurkowski's (2017) really sums it up: "We bring with us a set of skills as both teacher and librarian, technologist and technician, which we can use to bridge the gap between everyone in our

schools".

School library professionals provide a wealth of specialised knowledge that, where properly leveraged, can improve student learning outcomes and school performance.

A Northern Ireland study, presented in *School Library Staff Perspectives on Teacher Information Literacy and Collaboration* (McKeever et al. 2017), found "an understanding of information literacy (IL) and the provision of information literacy skills instruction" a key role for school librarians while at the same time exploring teachers knowledge and/or awareness of the concept. The majority of librarians who participated in the study did not believe teachers knew the phrase 'IL' or that these skills had a name.

Along with information literacy, school library professionals are in a unique position to provide expertise advice on curriculum resourcing.

A US study, *Building Connections through Teacher Librarian Collaboration* (Baker et al., 2017), describes how "school librarians provide expertise in curriculum content and pedagogical strategies for integrating technologies into curriculum".

Additional feedback from the 2017 Softlink survey's included things respondents would like to do to improve collaboration in their schools. Many of the responses align directly with these specific skill sets, with three featured below:

I would like to work with other staff to develop a school-wide inquiry and information literacy plan. NZ

I would like to incorporate research skills and info skills lessons into teaching across all subject departments (not just English!). UK

I want to provide academic support services and embed them into teaching and learning programs. AU

The Mitchell Institute report (2015) suggests that "embracing and harnessing collaboration could create the next wave of big gains in education". Greater collaboration between school library professionals and teachers could and should be a major part of that wave.

School Libraries Share: Ideas for School-Wide Collaboration



The *School Libraries Share: Ideas for School-Wide Collaboration* feature document includes respondent comments from two surveys, including the 2017 Australia and New Zealand School Library Survey and the 2017 Softlink United Kingdom School Library Survey.

Comments are structured into six themes: Being proactive, Sharing expertise, Being connected, Resourcing the curriculum, Supporting learning, and What I would change. While the feedback is anonymous, country attribution is applied.

The *School Libraries Share: Ideas for School-Wide Collaboration* feature document is available from the [Softlink website](#) Resources page.

The 2017 Softlink Australian and New Zealand School Library Survey

The 2017 Softlink Australian and New Zealand School Library Survey Report presents findings into school library budgets, staffing, library services, and trends. The report is available from the [Softlink website](#) Resources page.

References

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