THREE MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS AND A TEACHER-LIBRARIAN
COLLABORATING: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

by

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Abstract

Teacher-librarians play an important role in the middle school library, not only with supporting students with books and technology, but by collaborating with teachers when planning and teaching literature circles. Using narrative methods, I worked collaboratively with three teachers (one who has worked collaboratively with the teacher-librarian using literature circles previously, one who has used literature circles in their classroom with no collaboration, and one who has never used literature circles before). The purpose of this inquiry is to achieve a better understanding of the experiences of the teachers and my role as a teacher-librarian and why they collaborated with me when planning literature circles. For this qualitative research paper, I used narrative methods to explore the phenomena of collaboration and share my experiences of being a teacher-librarian through story. Some of the findings that are explored in this paper are: the importance of professional partnerships (open communication), access to resources (including texts, technology and space), and differentiated instruction (planning for the students).
Acknowledgements

Just as I finished my research in the library, I return to the middle school library that fuelled my story as a teacher-librarian. But before I continue on my journey in the library, I have a few people to thank for their guidance, support and dedication for guiding me through my years as an MA graduate student.

It is so easy to tell a story that is already written, just read the words on the page. This time, I was the writer and storyteller. OISE has provided me with fantastic learning experiences and amazing teachers through my four years. I could not have told my story without my advisor, reader, and teacher, Shelley Stagg Peterson. Thank you for your time, your eyes, your sense of humour and especially your patience, as you guided me to the final page.

Thank you to my second reader, David Booth. I read your books in my undergraduate classes, attended your workshops as a teacher, and was a student in one of your graduate classes- it has truly come full circle.

Thank you to my friends who cheered me on through the summer with texts, emails, and Facebook messages. Being attached to my computer through the summer helped keep me connected to the world. I think we can officially celebrate now.

Thank you to my school’s administrator and colleagues who shared their stories and helped keep me focused during a year that included political protests, data collecting, and trying to keep our heads above water. It all worked out in the end.

Thank you to my reader, Tyler, who was my collaborative partner in editing.

Finally, a big thank you to my mother, the woman who listened and encouraged me throughout the hot days, blackouts, insomnia, deadlines and ensuring I had nutritious food to eat along the way. Thanks Momma for feeding me in so many ways.
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Chapter One: Introduction

I don’t just want a young reader’s time or attention. I want his life. I want his senses, his imagination, his intellect, his emotions, and all the experiences he has known breathing life into the words upon the page.

(Paterson, 1982, p. 330)

There is something to be said about the power of story. As a teacher-librarian, I believe that story is one of the cogs in the machine of running a library on a daily basis. Most greetings from students on any given day in the library start with: “I need a book to read. What do you recommend?” If it is a teacher, the greeting could be: “I need help putting together a lesson to introduce a new topic to my students. Any ideas?” This begins a volley of questions and answers between myself, and the student or teacher. This dialogue turns into a story, with twists and turns through the landscape of books read before, or lessons that have worked or failed. These stories are the catalyst for this research journey into a narrative inquiry of how narratives form the purpose of collaboration and literacy programming within a middle school’s community. It came as no surprise when reading about narrative inquiry, that many of the researchers mention the importance of story when writing and researching:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or a series of places, and in social interactions with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories and experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)
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My story as a teacher-librarian is embedded within this inquiry. It began simply enough with having taught students in primary, junior and intermediate classrooms for nine years before becoming a teacher-librarian within a middle school library. When entering the library, my mind was filled with ideas for purchasing books that adolescent students would love and for working with teachers and inspiring students to read. It did not take long to discover that being a teacher-librarian was more than shelving the minds of adolescents with novel ideas. Books were not always easy to pair with adolescents and I found that teachers were constantly mining the bookshelves and my brain for inspiration on how to inspire the students to get more from their literacy programming.

Students asked me on a daily basis if I had read all the books in the library and then would recommend a book or two that they had read or would like to read. One of my favourite times of the year was when the books had been organized and re-shelved in anticipation for next year’s readers. Students would come into the library to say hello and were surprised by books in the collection, asking if they were there all year. My response was: “Some books spend the year being checked-in and checked out without me seeing it from September to June.”

My role as a teacher-librarian, avid reader and collector of children’s literature was to find the books that were not signed out frequently, the hidden books, and get them into the hands of readers. Through collaboration with classroom teachers, I was able to help students access books they might not find on their own. Literature circles not only introduced a group of students to a new book; they were able to discover even more books as their classmates shared the texts they read in their groups.

This narrative inquiry explores the teachers’ experiences in helping guide the students through literature circles via collaboration with me, the teacher-librarian. It interweaves the themes of collaboration, literature circle planning and teaching with three
different teachers, with theory and stories of my experience working with my school’s community of teachers and students. The inquiry is an opportunity to describe and interpret how collaboration could look in a middle school, especially when working with the teacher-librarian.

My research is based on a view of the role of the teacher-librarian as a vital one for overall student achievement. Researchers support my belief, showing that the development of student competence in information skills is most effective when teachers engaged in cooperative program planning and team teaching with the teacher-librarian. The most successful programs are characterized by teacher-librarian and classroom teacher collaborations in terms of teaching, learning and library use (Klinger, Lee, Stephenson, DeLuca, & Luu, 2009, p. 36). Eventually the collaboration that transpired between the teacher and teacher-librarian extended to the students, thus engaging and inspiring the students to progress, creating a learning experience that becomes relevant to student and teacher.

Teacher-librarians are information specialists who develop skills in working collaboratively with classroom teachers in planning, teaching, and evaluating students (Ontario Library Association, 1999, p. 8). The research took place in my sixth year of working as a teacher-librarian in this school’s community. The teacher participants in this study were familiar with my teaching and planning style. We developed and nurtured a level of trust over the years that made it comfortable for the teachers and myself to share our experiences with each other. The research for this paper will take an integrative approach to looking at the role of teacher-librarians and how they work with teachers and students through the process of organizing, reading, and discussing literature circles.
Once Upon a Time... And Where the Story Goes...

Most stories introduce the main character’s problems within the first few pages and the same could be said about a narrative inquiry. This story took a somewhat different approach, with me as the teacher-librarian, storyteller and inquirer, inviting three teachers to share their experiences of collaboration and literacy planning with the storytelling teacher-librarian. The chapters of the story unspool as I interweave all the stories into an interpretation of what collaboration could look like in a middle school classroom and library. The problems of this story would come in the form of questions, and wonderings of how the experiences of people and theory and ideas of education interact and work together to inspire collaboration. Asking the participants inspires some of the stories based on my research question: What is the importance of collaborating with the teacher-librarian when planning literature circles in regards to the classroom teacher’s literacy program? This research question informs my practice as a teacher-librarian: however, it also informs my research, as I understand how the worlds of the classroom teacher and the teacher-librarian compliment each other when collaborating. One thing that stood out for me was that I knew it was important to collaborate on a regular basis to help inform and support staff and students of innovative practices in education.

The purpose of this inquiry was to achieve a better understanding of the experiences of teachers and the teacher-librarian and why they may collaborate when planning literature circles. This was my story of being a middle school teacher-librarian and how the experience of collaboration with the school’s teachers defines one of my roles in the middle school library. I maintained a journal to document my journey; however, the stories of other teachers helped me write my story. They were the voices of collaboration and would accompany me through this journey. Their stories were part of
my story too. The teachers were asked to not only answer questions but to tell me about their experiences and to share their stories at regularly scheduled meetings.

To achieve this goal, I wrote about the qualities of a qualitative research paper using narrative methods, the literature involved within this research, and share the field notes that helped shape the inquiry, and then analyze the data to understand it all. Interweaving the data and the stories that formed my experiences, I hoped to showcase the process and understanding of what it means to be an active collaborator in a middle school library.

As this research narrative unfolded, three teachers told their stories of working with me as a teacher-librarian. I collected their stories, as a researcher, with hopes that their experiences would inform and inspire future collaborations in the library.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Our academic tradition has tended to keep emotion and intellect apart. For example, we have tended to disregard emotional dimensions in life-long quests of great inquirers such as Einstein, Heidegger, Galileo, and others (Conle, 2000, p.189). In this review of the literature, I intertwine my personal story with theories and research in a quest to understand my experiences as a teacher-librarian working collaboratively with teachers to plan and implement literature circles. I begin by outlining the theoretical framework underpinning literature circles and then describe literature circles, collaboration and the role of the teacher-librarian.

Over twenty-five years ago, Daniels (2002) and a group of teachers created what we now know as literature circles (p. 1). Literature circles were an opportunity for students in all grade levels to experience a book club. Literature circles continue to be popular; however, they continue to shift and change as we enter the 21st century and
Daniels and Harvey (2009) have shifted to *Inquiry Circles in Action*. The newest incarnation is to have students go beyond the text, ask questions and research to find deeper meaning (p. 203). In either incarnation, be it a literature circle or an inquiry circle, the teacher-librarian is able to collaborate with teachers as they plan to dig deeper into the text or if they want the students to build onto their knowledge by asking questions and researching them to understand the ideas and themes.

By collaborating with teachers in my school, I am sharing my experiences and resources in a way that is respectful and moves us forward into the 21st century as we learn together to integrate technology, literature and literacy learning to help and guide our technological savvy students. “Educators of today understand that when students are provided with rich learning experiences and opportunities to explore areas of interest, *they* learn better” (Ontario School Library Association, 2010, p. 3).

With guiding students in a world that is moving forward quickly, we need to also pause and take time with our learning to understand what is happening in all the texts we interact with. Students should learn that literary transactions are woven into the fabric of individual lives (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 157). These transactions enable the students to find meaning in the text as they bring their personal experiences to the stories they read in class.

**Theoretical Framework: Transactional Reader-Response Theory**

“If readers are to learn from their reading, they must begin with the visions it awakens in them and work from there” (Probst, 1990, p. 31). One of the first statements I make to students when they come into the library to participate in literature circles is that “reading *is* work.” Their job is to develop a relationship with the text, which will be different with each reading of the text. The meanings will be different for each and every reader, as texts mean different things depending on what experiences readers bring to the
text. In this way, reading a text is a transaction. Rosenblatt (1994) describes that transaction in this way:

What each reader makes of the text is, indeed for him the poem, in the sense that this is his only direct perception of it. No one else can read it for him. He may learn indirectly about others’ experiences with the text; he may come to see that his own was confused or impoverished, and he may then be stimulated to attempt to call forth from the text a better poem. But this he must do himself, and only what he himself experiences in relation to the text is—again let us underline— for him, the work. (p.105)

When Rosenblatt (1994) refers to “text” and “poem”, text is the symbolic representation of ideas and experiences in the work and poem is referring to the experience between the reader and the texts.

My research is based on a view of reading as going deeper into texts; where readers are doing more than reading for information. I want students to make personal connections and personal meaning when they read, even when their reading is what Rosenblatt (1994) defines as nonaesthetic reading: “the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue after the reading- the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (p. 23). I find that when most students read in class, they approach texts as efferent readers, looking for a way to get the information required as quickly as possible; to answer the questions. I want students to have an aesthetic experience when they read, as they gain intrinsic aesthetic values and insight into human relations (Rosenblatt, 1993).

When students arrive in the library for lessons, I have a feeling that when I ask students to “dig deeper” and find something more meaningful from the text, they wish that I had handed them a list of questions. The questions on these worksheets give
students permission to read texts superficially, going into autopilot while doing schoolwork. The list of questions seems to encourage middle-school students to look for answers that are right instead of inspiring meanings. I believe students like that feeling of being disengaged from the text because it means they can go about the work without thinking and without having to make connections.

I want students to do more than take information away from texts; to gain a deeper understanding of what the texts mean to them and of how someone else may understand the text. My goal in literature circles is to encourage students’ aesthetic response (Rosenblatt, 1994), which she defines as:

The aesthetic stance should not be confused with a simple revery or train of free associations. Perusal of a text merely leading to free fantasy would not be a reading at all in the transactional sense. The concept of transaction emphasizes the relationship with, and continuing awareness of, the text. (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 29)

The day I give the students a short story to read so we can start to dialogue about the story, I just ask them to read the text. They are always shocked. I encourage them to highlight or underline text that stands out for them and if they want, they can fill out a graphic organizer to jot down ideas to them. I ask them to not dialogue with anyone, as I share my experience of always getting my brain muddled with other peoples’ ideas and thoughts about the text before I can form my own. The next day, the students arrive and await the next task. All I ask them to do is re-read the text and see if anything has changed since the first time they read. After the second reading, they are starting to read between the lines. This excites me, as “the benefits of literature can emerge only from creative activity on the part of the reader himself” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 27).

Students need to learn that there is a time and place to read texts aesthetically and efferently. Sometimes they might read efferently in order to identify the main elements
of the text; such as, characters, plot, problems, and main ideas. Other times, the students need to draw meaning from a character’s actions based on their own personal experiences. In each case, the experiences students bring to the text should be valued.

Students should be given opportunities to infer and explore the text as they share their reading experiences with their peers, which allow them to go beyond the text to bring their personal ideas to the discussions. These are the moments teachers are always hoping to hear in their classrooms. It helps teachers get a better understanding of where their students are coming from and it encourages teachers to recognize that even when reading the same text, readers’ experiences and life events change the meaning over time.

“In responding to texts, readers are constantly shifting their stances or orientations, depending on the social relationship with the text” (Beach, 1990, p. 72).

The same is true of teachers. In my study, I ensured that teachers responded to literature because I agree with Soublis and Winkler (2004), that:

For teachers, reader response continues to run deep. The tool surpasses classroom pedagogy and theoretical practices. It reminds us that, as teachers we are agents of change and, to be successful facilitators, we too must create change in our lives.

As we continue to grow as learners, we bring our newly constructed beliefs into our teaching situations, which allow for opportunities… to flourish. (p. 13)

In the collaborative planning and implementation of literature circles in my research, students and teachers had opportunities to respond aesthetically and efferently to texts.

**Literature and Inquiry Circles**

Teachers keep files all the time. My filing cabinet is filled with files from years of teaching. Of course, I have a file named “Literature Circles.” Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups of students who have chosen to read the same story,
When I first started doing literature circles six years ago, I used the roles, and kept photocopies of all the work I’ve done. I pulled out my file folder this week and discovered I don’t use anything that is in there anymore. I tend to use the file folder I have saved on my computer. But even then, it’s only for reviewing a PowerPoint I made a couple of years ago that I have updated every year.

Literature circles provide middle school students with an opportunity to explore texts and share their ideas with peers without having to share with the whole class. Even when a teacher is reading a book aloud to a class, they may be imposing their ideas on the students without dialogue with the students. Without discussion, the teacher is confined to only his or her point of view and may not grow in understanding of text, authors, and ideas without having that point of view challenged (Day, 2002, p. 54).

Literature circles are one of the ways students are able to make transactions with the texts they read. Literature circles create an avenue for students to discuss and share their thinking about a text. It is natural and human to want to comprehend oneself and one’s friends, and the poem is an avenue by which we may seek that comprehension (Probst, 1981, p. 47).

The pedagogical practice of literature circles has evolved, with different names attached to the practice, from grand conversations (Peterson & Eeds, 2007) to book clubs (McMahon & Raphael, 1994) and many more (Daniels, 2002). There is an abundance of research, resources and materials based on literature circles. Many literacy resources recommend the use of literature circles, or any form of a book club, as a component of a reading program: Fountas and Pinnell (2006), Patterson and Swartz (2008), Literature Circles Webcast (2009), and Booth (2011).

With all these resources available, Day (2002) reminds teachers that they need to plan on giving the program plenty of attention, moving students gradually toward
independence at a pace that reflects a growing ability to discuss thoughtfully and work independently (p.31). This is something I am reminded of each year when teachers show up in the library to start literature circles without thinking of the work that needs to be done before getting started.

Students read a group-determined portion of the text (either in or outside of class time) and often when literature circles are first introduced, each group member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion. Everyone comes to the literature discussion with the notes that they have previously made that will help perform that job. According to Daniels (2002), these roles might include: Vocabulary Enricher (words and definitions), Discussion Director (asking questions), Illustrator (drawing pictures), Connector (making connections), Literary Luminary (re-reads parts of the text as a group to discuss ideas on the section selected), and Summarizer (summarizes chapters read) (Daniels, 2002, p. 103). The groups have regular meetings, with discussion roles rotating through each session.

Role sheets are usually the first document teachers look for when they are considering doing literature circles. However, Daniels encourages teachers to use reading journals, dialogue journals or written conversation when organizing thoughts about the text (Daniels, 2002, p. 15). Others, like Ferguson and Kern (2012), agree: “Much like adult book groups, discussions about the book in literature circles should be triggered by the comments of others, not pre-determined and rigidly read from a paper, such as the role sheet” (p. 27). Teachers want to use roles when they ask me to support literature circles in their classrooms because they believe that it is a simple way to ensure that the students are accountable for the work. The easiness of photocopying role sheets does not translate to the easiness of running literature circles, and it took me a few years to realize that, as well.
Much has changed in how I approach literature circles over the six years I have been in the library. A couple of summers ago, when I was in Shelley Stagg Peterson’s course, *Children’s Literature as a Foundation of Literate Behavior across the Curriculum*, we discussed whether roles in literature circle are needed to help drive the discussion of the texts. It was a challenge that made me go back to Daniels’ (2002) book, where I read that he no longer uses roles in literature circles, as he has discovered that students are able to run meetings using reading journals (p. 15). The reading journal enables the participants to share what they are thinking. When I run literature circles, students keep notes on a graphic organizer or post-it notes throughout the text. The evening following the meetings, students are expected to write a journal entry based on their experiences at the meeting, as well as reflect on something that resonates with them from the text. This year we incorporated blogs, where students were able to post their journals on-line and receive feedback from their teacher, their classmates and myself. Their journals spur further conversations at their meetings as they continue to debate the answer to a question or discuss how a character has changed through the story.

Journals allow students the opportunities to express their ideas and organize their thoughts before sharing them aloud with a peer. I have observed that when students participate in literature circles, they often refer to their notes to help them support their ideas in the literature circle discussion. I find that middle school students need that “pause” before they share their ideas as they formulate and figure out how to respond to their peers and the text. Journals are one of the ways for them to take their time to ensure they have their ideas in order before speaking aloud.

Inquiry circles are a branch of literature circles. They provide an opportunity for students to ask questions about themes, ideas and interests based on a text and research them further through investigation and working in small flexible groups (Daniels &
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Harvey, 2009, p. 12). I mention inquiry circles here because one of the teacher participants in my research read a book with her students and decided to explore inquiry circles based on the students’ questions. I have not had the opportunity to explore inquiry circles intensively; I have chosen to make a note about them here since my participant refers to them when we discuss our collaborative relationship. Inquiry circles are related to the literature circles as they encourage students to take research the themes and ideas from the text as an inquiry project.

When Daniels (2002, 2009) writes about literature circles and inquiry circles, there is no mention of the role of the teacher-librarian being a partner in the planning. I believe that teachers benefit from the collaboration and resources that teacher-librarians bring to the table and provide further information about this collaboration in the following section.

Role of the Teacher-Librarian

“School librarians are not simply teachers in a different kind of classroom: they provide a unique and increasingly important kind of knowledge facilitation beyond books and information” (Lankes, 2012, p. 9). The Ontario Ministry of Education released Partners in Action (1982), a document promoting partnerships between teachers and with the teacher-librarian to develop programming using the library as a resource centre. In that document, the role of a teacher-librarian was described as being a consultant, an instructor, a manager, an advocate, selector of learning resources and a resource teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1982, p. 12). Fast forward thirty years later, and I would like to add, based on my experience, that the role of the teacher-librarian now includes being a person who helps staff and students navigate 21st century resources and technology.
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It is important that teacher-librarians have classroom teaching experience before taking on the role. Haycock (2003) asserts that this is critical in developing a strong school library program (p. 33). My nine years as a classroom teacher have helped develop my classroom management skills, my understanding of the curriculum, and my repertoire of ways to work in grade level teams when planning lessons for the students. The experience in the classroom gives me credibility with teachers as we work together to plan and co-teach literature circles. When I collaborate with teachers and bring my experience to the table, the library becomes the catalyst to creating a Learning Commons in the school, as it integrates the new and old in a seamless physical and virtual space in which all formats can be assimilated and studied (Ontario School Library Association, 2010).

My library’s location is on the second floor of the school but the stairs do not stop people from coming to what the school’s principal refers as the hub of the school. The library is where most staff members convene for staff meetings and planning times, and where students come to read and check out books and to use the technology. According to the Ontario Library Association and People for Education (2009), my library is in a Level 3 school, because I, as the teacher-librarian, am considered an equal partner who is involved in school leadership, decision-making and purchasing of resources. I believe that my library fits with the definition of an exemplary library because it is a “centre of activity and learning” and I “commonly collaborate with other teachers in the school, and find ways to engage the community to best support children’s learning” (Klinger, Lee, Stephenson, DeLuca, & Luu, 2009, p. 3). There should be a “learning partnership” where everyone is seen as a learner (Ontario School Library Association, 2010, p. 11).

**Collaboration**
At a minimum, collaboration involves two individuals working together to accomplish something with minimal effort to maximize efficiency (Montiel-Overall, 2005). A day does not go by when I am left alone in the library. The library door opens regularly with staff and students coming in to ask a question, return a book, or to talk about a lesson. I believe all of those moments involve collaboration as I may answer the question with a recommendation of a resource or a recommendation of a next book to read or encouraging the teacher to book time with me to plan the lesson. I have worked with all the people above to ensure they come back to the library. Each time they come to the library, I hope to inspire new thoughts about new programming for the teacher, and provide options for more books to challenge and engage the students.

When collaborating with teachers, time and place must be scheduled and organized (Montiel-Overall, 2005) to ensure that what is being asked of the students makes sense and inspires them to do the work. We need to remember that they are being taken from the comfort zone of their regular classroom and working in the library where they are expected to participate, as the event of being in the library is something different and within a specific timeframe. Since it is organized and scheduled there is very little room for distraction from the work at hand.

“Collaboration is the single professional behavior of teacher-librarians that most affects student achievement” (Haycock, 2007, p. 32). Keith Curry Lance (2012) is a respected consultant who has researched the correlation between schools’ reading achievements and the role of the teacher-librarian for many years further this assertion by saying, “… students tend to perform better on reading tests where, and when, their library programs are in the hands of endorsed librarians” (p. 19). Research also states that schools with trained library staff are more likely to have a higher proportion of grade 6 students who have attained level 3 or higher on reading tests (Ontario Library
The opportunities that arise from the integrated learning opportunities (Ontario School Library Association, 2010, p. 11) are:

- Global, connected and social
- Real world, cross-curricular, and interdisciplinary
- Active, fluid and flexible
- Complex and resource-rich
- Respectful of all ideas

I believe that it is important to consider these opportunities when collaboratively planning with teachers because students in the school tend to be locally focused, meaning they are given a ride to the school in the morning and picked up after school. Even though the majority of the students in the school have parents who have come from other countries to settle in Canada, it is important that we, as educators, inform and educate the students in real-world issues to support their journey to being global 21st century citizens. The world is changing very quickly, and the role I have as the teacher-librarian is to bring the world to them thorough diverse curriculum planning with their teachers. Working with the teacher-librarian allows the students to access resources that may be limited in the classroom and at home, and provides them with an environment that encourages social interaction. The library is conducive for everyone who comes into the space to work and interact with others, and with some guidance, brings an integrative approach to expanding the students’ minds to connect to the world, the texts and to each other.

The focus of collaboration in school libraries is essential (Montiel-Overall, 2010, p. 31) to the climate of the school. For teacher and teacher-librarian collaboration to be successful, a clear understanding by classroom teachers/educators about how and why
teachers and librarians should collaborate is critical. In all the texts I came across about the work of teacher-librarians and the work they do on a daily basis, the words collaboration, partner, and resource are used so regularly that it was hard to keep track. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008; 2010) monographs have encouraged teachers to work collaboratively in small groups. Collaboration is important in a school setting, as it is important to create a community within a building with staff and students. Teacher-librarians work as collaborative teaching partners, working with classroom teachers to help students with research and literacy skills. Eventually the collaboration extends to the students as they have input, thus engaging and inspiring the students to progress, creating a learning experience that becomes relevant to student and teacher. In keeping with the recommendations of previous research, the research for this paper will take an integrative approach to looking at the role of teacher-librarians and how they work with teachers and students through the process of organizing, reading, and discussing literature circles.

**Chapter Three: Qualitative Research Methodology**

“Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). My narrative inquiry research explored relationships between teachers and teacher-librarians as we work together in a middle school library. This narrative inquiry included not only my stories and experiences but also those of three other teachers with different teaching experiences, with and without literature circles. It integrated evidence and data from previous research in the field of literature circles.
I used research methods that allowed for flexibility and captured the lived experiences of our teaching and learning in our naturalistic setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). These methods allowed me to respect the school community and the space within which my research participants work. For example, I was able to show that collaboration is not always scheduled—it can be happenstance of meeting with a teacher between classes or even a simple email exchange. That is one of the reasons I have chosen qualitative methods for this inquiry.

Unlike quantitative research methodology, which focuses on specific data points, expecting the data will be analyzed statistically, qualitative research methods require that a researcher gather data for extended periods of time, thus allowing time to explore and understand the relationship among participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2). One of the goals of my inquiry was to show how participants’ learning processes unfold. I wanted to involve all participants, including myself, to share and tell our stories to ensure a better understanding of our experiences.

Educators embrace qualitative research because they want to know more about the influence and the social context of the phenomenon being studied without being disruptive to the flow of the everyday occurrences in a school. Bogdan and Biklen’s (2007) list of qualities of qualitative research methodologies lend themselves to my narrative inquiry. They are, as listed (p. 4-8):

**Naturalistic: Allows the Researcher to Work within the School Setting**

The middle school where this inquiry takes place is made up of over 600 students and approximately 40 staff. The students come from a variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, including a range of academic ability from low to high intelligence. Students have access to many support systems, which include Special Education teachers and technology. It is an active building that uses all the spaces...
effectively and the library is a space that is used by all members of the school community. Staff and students use the library on a regular basis and it is part of the daily routine of the active school. This will be the main location for the discussion of collaboration with the teacher-librarian. Since it is the hub of the building, it allows teachers to work in a space that is familiar and inviting.

**Descriptive:** **Data are Collected in the Form of Words and Pictures instead of Numbers**

As I write my regular journals, I will keep in touch with the teachers via emails and conversations. At times, teachers may be asked to write a journal entry to share their experiences of working with me. They will describe their experiences with oral accounts and lesson plans of their encounters with collaboration. It is important to record all meetings to ensure records are consistent.

**Concern with Process Is More Important than the Outcomes or Products**

My concern is to ensure the story unfolds naturally and is the catalyst for the research. My goal is to touch base with participants via regular meetings, interviews and written documentation (which may take the form of emails), of their experiences. The process is the inquiry; the experiences and the stories that unfolded showcased the collaboration in progress.

**Inductive Analysis**

Qualitative researchers do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together. This goes hand in hand with the emphasis on process, showing that there is nothing to prove or disprove with this inquiry. I will be collecting the data through this inquiry and building my understanding of collaboration in the middle school from these observations. The goal of this inquiry is
not to prove if collaboration works or not; but to describe and interpret the process of collaboration within the context of a school library and working with the teacher-librarian.

**Meaning: Qualitative Researchers Set Up Strategies and Procedures to Enable Them to Consider Experiences from the Informants’ Perspectives**

The regular meetings, the dialogue between the participants and myself, will showcase the perspectives of all involved in this study of collaboration.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is the chosen methodology for this research, as it allows me to capture the stories and experiences of the people involved. Clandinin (2006) explains that narrative inquiry gives us a research methodology for engaging in the study of people’s experiences. Narrative inquiry encourages the researcher and participants to reflect on and understand their experiences within their contexts. The narrative inquirer asks questions that inspire conversation in a natural way.

Narrative inquiry not only examines people’s experiences, it gives voice to the researcher, and allows the researcher to tell her story. As Creswell (2007) explains: “Active collaboration with the participant is necessary, and researchers need to discuss the participant’s stories as well as be reflective about their own personal and political background, which shapes how they “restory” the account. Multiple issues arise in the collecting, analyzing, and telling of individual stories” (p. 57). My narrative research places me as the researcher, and teacher-librarian, at the centre of the narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry has an integrative style, weaving together participants’ stories and theory. It is a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling, and restorying as the research proceeds (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry has gained popularity in education because it allows the researcher to continue to ask questions
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throughout the research process. Narrative researchers take an open-ended approach to the research, and their research findings emerge as the research process evolves. Most researchers who use narrative inquiry as the methodology write their literature review during and after the research process. During the data collection, new questions and ideas arise and the researchers search for more information to support or to understand what is happening during the experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12). They describe narrative as both product and process. Writing itself becomes a “method of inquiry that moves through successive stages of self-reflection” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 10). This method helps researchers to organize data. At the same time, it allows questions to arise throughout the experience of the research and does not stifle the researcher’s creativity in capturing participants’ experiences through story.

There is a synchronicity between the researcher and the participants that allows for a natural flow in the research process. The ability to weave the research process and the experience of the research into the field notes seem to inspire and move researchers forward with their work (Conle, 2000, p. 209). This involves asking questions such as: Whose stories are going to guide this work? How is one experience more important than another? Questions should be asked, teachers should be involved, and it should allow for a learning experience for all involved.

Given the ongoing nature of narrative inquiry, researchers may find it difficult to determine when to end the research. Researchers who use narrative inquiry must also guard against a tendency to try to end the research on a positive note, as many stories do. They must maintain a critical eye when analyzing data and writing the narratives capturing the themes (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, 181). In addition, it is important to collect extensive information to ensure the participants’ stories are collected and captured in order to assure validity of the findings (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation of data sources
is, thus, important: “Triangulation seeks to validate a claim, a process or an outcome through at least two independent sources” (Newby, 2010, p. 128). To ensure triangulation, I gathered data from a number of sources, touching base with participants frequently throughout the school year via regular meetings, interviews and written documentation (which often took the form of emails) of their experiences. Validity was further assured because of teachers’ high level of commitment in the research (Conle, 2000). My research participants were invested in the research because they felt that they would benefit from participation.

When reviewing the data, I attempted to ensure that I was not projecting my ideas into other participants’ stories. However, I also “[did] not divorce myself from the research and writing of my past experiences” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 38). It was important to make my voice heard but not so loudly that it overshadowed teachers’ voices: “We think in terms of a two-part inquiry agenda. We need to listen closely to teachers and other learners and to the stories of their lives in and out of classrooms. We also need to tell our own stories as we live our own collaborative researcher/teacher lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12).

My research process honored participants’ experiences. The stories that unfolded showcased the collaboration in progress. The process supported whatever way the story unfolded, whether positively or negatively, as narrative inquiry research methods require that I highlight and value experience. The goal of my inquiry was not to prove whether collaboration is a successful professional learning practice, but to describe and interpret the process of collaboration within the context of a school library and teachers working with the teacher-librarian.

**Storying in education.** It came as no surprise, when I was reading about narrative inquiry, to find that many of the researchers within the field of narrative methodologies
emphasize the importance of story when writing and researching. As Clandinin (2006) writes: “Narrative Inquiry is an old practice that may feel new for a variety of reasons. It is a commonplace to note that human beings both live and tell stories about their living. These lived and told stories, together with talk about those stories, are ways we create meaning in our live our lives and communities” (p. 44). There is a strong feeling that to share one’s story is to show how one gets involved in education, and how far one has come in the understanding of students, and schooling. Stories give value to participants’ experience. As Connelly and Clandinin (2000) write: “Listening to participant stories of their experience of teaching and learning, we hope to write narratives of what it means to educate and be educated” (p. 12). The stories are ways to capture the words and ideas of people as they share their viewpoints and lived events with the researcher. Furthermore, through using narrative inquiry methods it is possible to support participating teachers in creating a positive sense of self within the school community. In my research, teachers appreciated the fact that their ideas were valued when discussing curriculum planning. In this way, my research embodies what Connelly and Clandinin (2000) assert is important in narrative inquiry:

It is important that the researcher listen first to the practitioner’s story, and it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story. This does not mean that the researcher is silenced in the process of the narrative inquiry. It does mean that the practitioner, who has long been silenced in the research relationship, is given the time and space to tell her or his story so that it too gains the authority and validity that the research story has long had. (p. 4)

In my research, I felt that it was important for teachers to be respected for their narratives and their ideas that they shared about their classroom teaching; the stories that capture the teachers’ and their students’ classroom lives. There are so many possibilities
for teaching literature circles and it is important to give credit to all participating teachers and what they do.

Research Methods

My description of the research methods used in my study begins with a depiction of the school context. I then outline the data collection and analysis methods.

Research context: The school, the staff and the students. West Grove Middle School\(^1\) is a middle school in a major suburban city in the Greater Toronto Area that prides itself with its focus on the arts, athletics, and academics. It is made up of grade 6, 7, and 8 classes. Also, there have been a variety of special education classes in our building, throughout the years, ranging from ICOM (Intermediate Communication) to IASD (Intermediate Autistic Spectrum Disorder) to IGLD (Intermediate General Learning Disability) classes. It is a newer school, just finishing its ninth year of being open. Students come from two feeder schools, and when students graduate, they attend two local high schools. However, in grade 8, students are given many options for high school, with focuses being available from the arts to technology to international baccalaureate. The student population fluctuates between 600 and 650 students, depending on the year and the number of students in our specialized programs.

This past school year, there were 8 grade six classrooms, 8 grade seven classrooms, and 7 grade eight classrooms with 5 special education classrooms (no longer offering the IGLD class). There is one teacher in each of the classrooms and four of the classrooms have teaching assistants who support students with needs ranging from autism to learning/physical disabilities. There are three special education teachers, with one of them supporting students who have behaviour issues and require support in and out of the

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\(^1\) West Grove Middle School is a pseudonym. The school and the participants’ names in this thesis are pseudonyms.
THREE MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS AND A TEACHER-LIBRARIAN

classroom. There are two French teachers, two music teachers, a half-time guidance
counselor, two half-time ESL teachers and a behaviour teaching assistant. The school
has also acquired a half time numeracy and literacy coach based on our Education
Quality and Accountability Office provincial achievement test scores. There is a full-
time principal, a full-time vice-principal, a full-time office manager and a full-time office
assistant. During the past year, we had some Long Term Occasional teachers, as there
were teachers on maternity leaves, some who came back during the school year, and
some who left to go on leave. One of the nice things that happened this year was that the
transitions seemed seamless as one teacher returned from leave and another one left,
ensuring that most of our Long Term Occasional teachers were able to stay on
throughout the school year.

West Grove has always been a team-focused school. Teachers work in teams of 2-
3 teachers and create programming based on their schedules as a team. Most middle
schools have teachers teaching specific subjects, such as an arts teacher, a language arts
teacher, math and science teacher, and so on. This would require students to have a
homeroom and then rotate to the subject-specific teachers, which means students could
essentially have a different teacher for each subject. Our school eliminated that system
by having the students only rotate between the 2-3 teachers who make up their team. It
allows teachers to plan in a collaborative manner but also eliminates students having to
do a lot of rotary. Classrooms are made up of mixed-ability students, which encourage
teachers to differentiate their instruction. Students are placed in teams where the
homeroom teacher teaches math and language to their own class and then the students on
the team will rotate between or among a number of classrooms for social studies
(history/geography), the arts (drama, music, visual art and dance), and science. Students
will travel out of their team’s classrooms for French, music or dance (or whatever class is
THREE MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS AND A TEACHER-LIBRARIAN
taught for their teacher’s planning time). All of the grade six classes, most of the grade
seven classes and most of the special education classes are on the first floor of the
building or in one of the four portables. On the second floor, the grade 8 classes, three
grade 7 classes and one special education class can be found.

The student population is made up of a majority of students who are South Asian
(Sikh, Hindu, Pakistani), with the rest of the population made up of Jamaican,
Trinidadian, Guyanese, Caucasian, Japanese, and Asian (Japanese and Chinese), as well
as other groups. It is truly a multi-cultural group and the students respect and look
forward to learning about each other’s cultures during the various celebrations and events
throughout the school year.

**The school library.** The principal refers to the library as the hub of the building,
as it is the place where staff and students go for materials, ranging from book resources
to technology. The library is opened 80% of the day, closed during lunch (except for
extra-curricular activities) and the teacher-librarian’s planning times and planning time
for one class (three times a 5-day cycle). It is an active building that uses all the spaces
effectively. Staff and students use the library on a regular basis and it is part of the daily
routine of the active school. Since it is the hub of the building, it allows teachers to work
in a space that is familiar and inviting. This was the main location for collaborative work
with the teacher-librarian that was the basis for this research study.

The library is also located on the second floor of the school and for the last year
and a half has benefitted from getting Wi-Fi, which is located in the office below.
Throughout the year, staff and students came frequently into the library to access and use
their wireless devices, especially after the library received iPads in December of this past
year. When walking into the library, to the left is the door to the computer lab, to the
right are the picture books and straight ahead is the library circulation desk where staff
and students sign in and sign out library materials. Behind that desk is my library office with coffee, tea, literature circle book sets, and personal resources. It may even be possible to find a workspace, if you move the piles of books I need to process or fix. Just beside the computer lab door is the printer, the e-library computer, and the staff workstation (computer, scanner and purchasing resource magazines). Back in the library, there is a large worktable beside the teacher resources section (curriculum documents and such). To divide the library’s classroom (six hexagonal tables with six chairs each) are five spinners with most of the Fiction book collection). Along the east wall, is the non-fiction book collection and in the southwest corner is a couch and magazines for the students. Under the west-facing windows is a bank of seven computers where students can come in to work independently or in small groups if their teacher is not in the lab. These computers are also used during library lessons. At the north end (which I call my teaching area), there is the teaching computer with the LCD and document camera attached, an iPad cart, and along the northern wall, graphic novels and series book sets.

**Role of the researcher (aka the teacher-librarian).** Although I worked with all teachers in the school as a teacher-librarian, working with a group of three teachers for this research study allowed me to stay focused and enabled me to collect data on a regular basis. It was easier to maintain contact with a smaller focus group. Like the participant in Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) research, when I started consolidating the data, I found it challenging to generalize the information, while at the same time stay true to the voices of the participants.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) “the narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (p. 42). As an inquirer, it is my job to tell my story as a teacher-librarian collaborating with a small group of
Three middle-school teachers and a teacher-librarian

Teachers in a middle school library. It is important to me to ensure that my story resonates with other educators, to enhance the generalizability of my research.

My experience with working with teachers in the library has been focused on encouraging teachers to reflect on their experiences and allow for change to happen. Sometimes I found that it took longer than expected—the students needed more time, or the lesson took longer to teach. Like life, narrative inquiry gives me, the researcher, some flexibility to let the story unfold naturally.

The ability to stay focused throughout this experience was one of the greatest obstacles of this research. In the introduction, I glossed over the fact that teachers and students come into the library on a daily basis, asking a multitude of questions and making many requests on any given day. It was my responsibility to continue to support the staff and students of the middle school, and at the same time, carry out the research. I set the criteria and goals at the beginning of this inquiry to ensure that the task was completed within the time allotted this school year. As with many storytellers, I digressed a little when I talk about my role in the school. In the role as researcher, seemed as if I was skimming the surface of understanding how collaboration works in a middle school; however, I had to place reasonable parameters on how much time during the school day I could devote to personal reflections and gathering data from my other participants.

**Recruiting and selecting participants.** In November (2012), I sent the first email (see Appendix A) to the staff inviting them to be a participant in my study of how I collaborate with teachers using literature circles. Within two days, I received ten responses and I sent the responders a list of the criteria that would need to be met to be a participant.

The selection criteria were made up of four components:
All participants must be middle school teachers in the same school as the
teacher-librarian;

One participant must have collaborated with the teacher-librarian before;

A second participant should be a teacher who has never collaborated with
the teacher-librarian; however, has used literature circles previously;

The third participant should be a teacher who has never used literature
circles before.

Once the original respondents read through the criteria, they responded to
me, via email, and let me know where they fit within the criteria. At that point, I
created a table and listed their names into each of the categories. The longest list
was of people who had collaborated with me before. There were five names in
that column, so I wrote each of their names on a slip of paper and placed them in a
bucket (a hat wasn’t available), and pulled a name out of the bucket. When I did
do this, I had a teacher, who was not participating in the process watch this
happen to ensure I did this fairly. Only one name was in the column: has never
collaborated with me previously, however has worked on literature circles before.
That person was automatically acclaimed.

As for the last category, I had three people who had put their names
forward; however, after close examination, only one person was truly available
for the research. One of the respondents was a Long Term Occasional Teacher
whose contract could be over at any time. The other respondent was a Special
Education teacher who supported students in the classroom; however, she did not
have a classroom of her own. In the category of not having done literature circles
before, I chose the third person, as she did have a classroom and was guaranteed
to be available throughout the entire process.
Data Collection and Analysis

Throughout the process of the research, I attempted to write regular journal entries based on my meetings with the participants and my observations of the daily life of being a teacher-librarian in a middle school. When I started writing my journals, my entries were fairly infrequent. From January until the beginning of March, the only work I had done was the initial individual interviews with the participants, the two group meetings and one or two short journal entries. It was not until I had a meeting with my advisor during the first week of March, who suggested that I try to write twenty minutes a day, that the journals were written more frequently. I was unable to write journals every day, as the research/collaboration was not happening on a daily basis with the participants. Most journals were written on Saturdays, as a reflection of what had happened during the week, in terms of what happened, future goals and ideas that came to mind. These reflections included the work that I did with the participants or my reflections/observations of the work I did through the week. Many times after transcribing the notes from interviews, I found myself writing a reflection in response to the interviews as it gave me an opportunity to reflect and think about themes or ideas that the participants talked about within their interview. I wrote 22 journal entries, not including notes in day plans, lessons or PowerPoint presentations.

Meetings were both planned and impromptu, depending on the teachers’ needs. Meetings ranged from a quick chat while standing by the photocopier to hour-long discussions after school regarding planning or any other issues in regards to teaching.

Interviews were scheduled to take place during lunch hour or after school to ensure there was enough time to discuss the questions I planned or to share experiences of the process. The questions were divided into three categories: experiences, literature circles, and literacy planning and collaboration. They were designed to help engage the
participants to talk about their experiences as classroom teachers and then about what they hoped to achieve through collaboration with the teacher librarian. I gave each of the participants a list of the questions to peruse for a few minutes before the interview started, so they would be aware of the types of questions that would be asked and know the order in which I would be asking the questions. The same questions about collaboration were asked of two non-participants to hear about their experiences of collaborating with the teacher-librarian outside of the formal research project. The two sets (before and after collaboration interview) questions are listed in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1 Interview Questions: Before and After Collaboration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part A: Experiences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long have you taught?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What grade levels have you taught?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you collaborated with the teacher-librarian before?</td>
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<tr>
<td>In what capacity?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was your experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who else have you collaborated with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want to achieve from this experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any apprehensions? If so, what are they?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Part B: Literature Circles and Reading Programming</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you know about literature circles?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why would you do literature circles with your students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When would you like to do literature circles with your students?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Part C: Collaboration and the Teacher-Librarian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think collaboration is important?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are your experiences with collaboration in a school setting?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What does collaboration look like?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why collaborate with the teacher-librarian?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>After Collaboration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you achieve from this experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about this experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was applicable to your teaching experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you use this experience when planning future lessons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part B: Literature Circles and Reading Programming</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you learn from doing literature circles with your students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has literature circles helped with your literacy programming?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you do this again? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part C: Collaboration and the Teacher-Librarian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think collaboration is important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where in the process is it most important to collaborate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What experience through this experience did collaboration show itself clearly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why collaborate with the teacher-librarian?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Artifacts.** The artifacts included teachers’ PowerPoint presentations and lesson plans. As I have worked on literature circles with teachers for six years, I have a
standard PowerPoint presentation that is the starting point for discussions with teachers. Using the original PowerPoint as a guide when I collaborate with teachers, we add and subtract ideas into the presentation, creating a lesson that is truly designed for their students. In every case, the PowerPoint is something that teachers and I work on collaboratively. Within the PowerPoint’s notes section, we type in notes, websites and any other information to remind us of the goals for the lesson and how long the lessons will take place.

The lessons. The process of creating lessons was different for all the participants. For Carol, the collaboration process was more of an opportunity to share the work she did with her students in her classroom. She approached me once for information about online resources for her students. Otherwise, she created her own lesson plans based on the book *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action* (Harvey & Daniels, 2009). During the second interview, Carol shared her process and lessons with me in order of the events in her classroom.

When working with Kayci, I shared the original PowerPoint I created for the grade eight teachers, and we created our own blueprint for her class. We used a PowerPoint to guide the teaching in the library and a Blog to post homework and assignments. This kept the students and us on track in the time we scheduled for literature circles. (See the Appendices B and C for PowerPoint and Blog posts).

Since Nanya’s goal was using technology throughout the process, we created a PowerPoint from scratch to also guide us through the process with the students, integrating components of technology, media, and reading books. (See Appendix D for PowerPoint for layout of our instruction).

The analysis started the moment I started the talking to participants. I made notes in the margins of my day planner, wrote important words that inspired questions while
interviewing the participants, and typed epiphanies in a third column when I was transcribing the meetings/interviews. The process of collating the data happened every time I read through my notes and discovered new threads and themes that were possibilities for exploring as I organized my research. Once the process began, it took more than one try to organize the information: starting with creating folders for the transcribed notes, then taking the notes and creating tables, and then coding the notes as I try to make sense of it as a teacher-librarian and a researcher. Each reading informed my inquiry as I discovered new facts and important ideas.

In this process, themes emerged among all three of the participants:

1. Desire for professional partnerships to dialogue about the work they were doing in the classroom and how to enhance that work by collaborating with me.

2. Access to resources was important for teachers and for their students, as they were able to choose books that they may not have seen before. In addition, they used technology to bridge the learning in the classroom to their understanding as a learner.

3. The importance of differentiated instruction was underscored throughout the process. It was important for the teachers to learn different ways to teach, support and guide their students as 21st century learners.

Chapter Four: Teachers’ and Teacher-Librarians’ Stories

Remember years ago when the bestselling book, *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006), became the hottest thing and people were writing down their dreams in hope they came true? I never thought much about it until I came across something I had “written down” during my undergraduate years. In an interview with the school paper, I had stated that I would
work with children and most likely be a librarian. I couldn’t believe it! What was written almost twenty years ago actually came true. My good friend has always said that what you put out to the universe will come back to you, be it good or bad. Some people call it karma. I call it the beginning of a good story.

I realized that all my journeys in education contain all the elements of a good story: characters, plot, action and usually a twist ending. My stories revolved around personal experiences and my relationships with others. They are all interwoven to make sense of my stories in education, especially the stories of being a teacher-librarian. There would be no story to tell, if I was on my own because it is others’ experiences and stories that help tell my story of being a teacher-librarian. Within my journey, three teachers shared their stories with me, and how the collaborative work we do together influences and enhances the literacy experiences of their students.

**Journeys to Becoming a Teacher-Librarian**

Fifteen years ago I was officially hired to be a teacher, a few days before the first day of school. I was hired as a grade five teacher who taught all subjects except French, Music and Physical Education. After three years of teaching grade five at the same school, I switched to a middle school. My switch to middle school was fairly seamless as I continued to be a junior teacher, teaching grade six for two years. The most interesting thing about the middle school I went to was the concept of teaching in a team of three teachers. “Teaming or, more formally, interdisciplinary team organization is a way of organizing teachers and students into small communities for teaching and learning” (Erb & Doda, 1989, p. 7). We taught most of the curriculum amongst our team of teachers, except when the students were taught Music or French, as that was how we received planning time. Working in a team allows a group of teachers to create a community of learners that is inclusive within the larger community of the school population. This
concept of working in teams is also used at the current school I work in as a teacher-librarian because the same principal is now working at my current school. I was at the school for one more year; looping with my grade six class to grade seven. At the end of that school year, I switched to yet another school for an opportunity to teach primary students. For the next three years, I taught grades two and three. After nine years, at three different schools and teaching grades two, three, five, six and seven, I applied to be the teacher-librarian at my current school. I have now completed six years as a teacher-librarian. I believe that all of my teaching experiences inform my daily events and practices in the library because without having the knowledge of class management, curriculum and the day-to-day hustle of a regular classroom, I would not be able to give advice and support classroom teachers. These experiences allow me to bridge and support what I do in the school library.

Throughout the years, I took additional qualifications courses, attended workshops, facilitated workshops and tried to find ways to be a better teacher. It wasn’t until I did Part Two of the Additional Qualification for Librarianship that I realized that I needed to go deeper into my understanding of my role as a teacher-librarian. I completed the course and applied to do my Masters of Arts at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/University of Toronto). I truly believe that each experience I have had in my teaching career has led me here. I encourage my students to ask questions, research and investigate their understanding on a daily basis. It made sense to me that I needed and wanted to do the same thing. This realization fits in with Dewey’s (1938) assertion that: “A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that will lead to growth” (p. 40).
As a graduate student, I believe that it is my responsibility to find ways to not only educate myself, but also share my newfound knowledge in a way that is conducive to learning in the library with staff and students. Although it took three years for me to figure out what my thesis was going to be about, once the topic was chosen, I knew that what I had found a way to guide me to my future goals. Using narrative methods to examine teacher and teacher-librarian collaboration allow me to draw on past experience to gain new understandings about my work as a teacher-librarian.

**Teaching and Learning with Literature Circles**

In some ways, I don’t know why I have been fascinated with doing literature circles. I have never conducted them as a classroom teacher; however, I had read about literature circles and thought it would be exciting to help teachers use literature circles with their students. Literature circles fit naturally with the way that I gain enjoyment from books:

I am a reader.

I love to talk about what I read.

I love to hear what other people have read, discover new authors, styles, and texts.

Reading and children’s literature tend to be an area in the curriculum for which teachers ask me for assistance in their planning. The most common requests I hear from teachers are: “Please help my students choose better books to read,” “Show me how to teach reading to my students,” and “Is there a book that is good for teaching (insert reading strategy here)?” Literature circles could be a way to address all these questions and help students and teachers comprehend what they were doing while reading a text. They also gave the students opportunities to try out what they learned during class
lessons in a safe, small group environment. These classroom lessons integrated with the library lessons (establishing small group expectations, reading and writing expectations and having the students choose their book as a team) ensure the students bring some of their best work to the literature circle experience in the library. I believe it is important for students to be able to put into practice the work they have done in class. Reading strategies are such an integral part of the literacy program continuum that the students are very aware of their names but have few opportunities to figure out how they use them on their own. Since one of the focuses of literature circles is working and collaborating with others in a small group, this is an opportunity for the student reader to think about their reading process and how they think and have transactions with the text. Literature circles appear to be an effective way to give all students opportunities to think beyond literal interpretations, ask and answer questions, hear multiple perspectives, make inferences, explore ideas, elaborate and evaluate (Day, 2002, p. 135).

Literature circles were an easy fit with my daily work as a teacher-librarian, as I had access to multiple book sets in the library. Most of the books are award winning or award-nominated books from the Ontario Library Association’s Forest of Reading Program that many schools and libraries across the province participate in each winter and spring. The Forest of Reading Program is a yearly event where Ontario students have access to ten to twenty books in each grade category, written by Canadian authors. The students have to read at least five of the books in either fiction, non-fiction, or both, to qualify to vote on which book they believe is the best book in that category. Adults may have selected the books for the nominations but it is the students who have the final say on which Canadian book wins. The other way I build my multiple book-sets is via our school’s annual Scholastic Book Fair. Money raised through this fundraiser is used to buy popular and current book sets for literature circles.
When I first came to use literature circles as a complement to reading and writing programs in the middle school, I remember giving students books based on reading levels; assigning the 6 common roles (Discussion Director, Literary Luminary, Illustrator, Connector, Vocabulary Enricher and Summarizer) and listing the meeting dates. From there I expected students to read and participate. Those first meetings were painful as students weren’t prepared, or did not have anything to say or even worse, did not like the book I chose. As I write this, I can feel myself cringing at some of the things that I did as I tried to get literature circles to work. If I did not persevere and move forward to get a better grasp of literature circles, I would still be stuck with the same lessons, photocopying the same charts and organizers and just going through the motions of what could be found in my file folder labeled “Literature Circles.” Reflecting on those moments, I know that I have learned from working together with teachers to create lessons that challenge and teach students to think critically and extend their learning through their experiences reading the book and working in a group.

Six years ago, I searched the Internet to find worksheets; ready-to-go without a lot of input from me that would help me teach my students. I am not going to say the first year was a failure but it reminded me of why I am an educator. As an educator, it is my duty to find ways to improve and engage students as we work through the years. It was important not to give up on literature circles, as I knew that there was some importance to them. The possibilities of dialogue and personal reflections encouraged me to continue to find ways to make them work. There was also the dialogue from the teachers, as they wanted to find ways to improve the process, and from the students who reflected that they liked talking about the book but couldn’t articulate what or how they learned from the experience. For me, I had to find a way to eliminate the worksheets, maintain the group meetings, and discover a way for students to communicate their
learning and understand what they were doing when they were reading. Literature circles would be the gateway to encompassing all of those things and it was responsibility to persevere and find a way to make them work.

Every year since becoming a teacher-librarian, I have tried to incorporate literature circles in my collaboration with teachers, sometimes with the same staff members, and sometimes, with teachers who had never used literature circles and wanted to try them out. It has been one of the ways that I introduce myself to staff at the first meeting of the year- the expectations, the lessons, and literature circles. It is hard to recruit newer teachers, as there is a lot of re-teaching and explaining that how I approach literature circles is no longer in the traditional way. I am concerned when I still see the roles and teachers expect me to teach the roles. However, I may be my own worst enemy as I offer the roles. Sometimes as a teacher-librarian you can’t offer something different. You have to entice the teachers to come to the library with something they are familiar with before changing it up.

**Collaboration and the Teacher-Librarian**

As a teacher-librarian for the past six years, I have purchased materials and maintained the school’s library collection of books, magazines, technology and other resources for staff and students. I have supported teachers on a daily basis, with either a cup of coffee, some candy, a listening ear and helping with planning for their students. Planning for the students has involved a quick two minute dialogue or a few periods over a week or two (sometimes including lunches or after school) where we discussed the goals, the curriculum, and the layout of the lessons. It depended on the lesson and what the teacher wanted from me. Sometimes teachers needed encouraging words to continue with how they were teaching the lessons and other times they needed someone to help teach the lessons, as they tried a different approach, or integrated literacy or technology
Three middle-school teachers and a teacher-librarian

into their lessons. It is a balancing act that I enjoy, as I never know what the day can bring. Some of the lessons take place in the library, but mostly, the lessons have been taught in teachers’ classrooms. Most of the lessons that have taken place in the library were co-taught, as the classroom teacher and I took turns teaching and facilitating the lessons.

This year, when supply teachers were not available, I had to advocate for my role as a teacher-librarian in the library, as there were moments when I was asked to cover classes where there was no other teacher available. Fortunately, I work with a principal who respects my role and the work I do, as well as what other teachers do in the building. She believes that it is important to maintain an open library, even though my teacher-librarian time has been cut every year. I have been a teacher-librarian who has gone from having the library open all day, every day to having the library open only four days a week due to the school board funding model. Staffing for numbers is based on a Ministry formula, which translates to: 0.5 teacher-librarian for 1-490 students; 0.8 teacher-librarian for 491-659 students; and full-time teacher librarian for 660+ students. Students in any of our special education programs that run in our school are not counted into our school population numbers.

On a daily basis, I have students coming into the library to use technology, find books, research topics, or to just talk. The same can be said for the staff. Other times throughout the day, I may teach as many as seven different classes (as the daily schedule is divided into 7 periods) and seven different lessons, ranging from Geography to Language to History to how to conduct research. I am not able to teach seven classes every day, so I encourage teachers to block double periods, if it is possible, for their classroom visits to the library where I am teaching formal lessons. For the most part I am involved in all the lessons that take place in the library. During the library
orientations, for every class, at the beginning of the school year, I introduce the students to my classroom (the library) and let them know that they will be welcomed to my classroom throughout the year for many different lessons and events.

**Getting Started**

The first thing I did was sit down with each of my participants and ask them about their teaching experiences, what they know about literature circles and their ideas about collaboration. The interviews took place during the first week of January, after the Winter Break.

**Introduction.** It is time to invite my participants to tell their stories as I have only begun to spin my story. The participants will now pick-up the threads and weave their stories within the fabric of mine. As each participant shares her story with me, I find new ways to understand my own story as a teacher-librarian. Within their stories, many of the same themes emerged: the importance of learning partnerships, the need for access to resources (from literature to technology), and the importance of differentiated instruction and collaboration in our school. Before looking at these themes more closely, I describe the teachers’ experiences as participants in the collaborative project. Both Kayci and Naya decided to follow the path of doing literature circles in the library with me. Their goals were different. Kayci wanted to see how the students read and understand the text using written reflection after each meeting and Naya’s goal was to find a way to integrate technology to enhance students’ understanding of the text they read in their literature circle groups. Over a two-month period, both teachers carried out the same cumulative tasks: students wrote and produce a book trailer using iMovie on their iPads. In the following, I present their reflections on their collaborative experiences and on using literature circles in their classrooms.
But before all that happened, I had all the participants come together (after their initial interviews) as a group to discuss the learning process of literature circles and to create an experience that would inform and support our journey together.

**Creating a community of learners.** After describing the expectations of my research, I shared a book with the group that I wanted to use as the basis of our group discussion. It would allow us to have a common ground to talk as a group and share our ideas of how we teach literacy lessons and to understand why a small group would want to read the same book. The book is: *No Crystal Stair* by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson (2012). I chose this particular book to use with my participants is because of a moment when I was standing in line to have my book signed by the author at a Horn Book at Simmons Colloquium in Boston, Massachusetts. Two people in the line-up were having a conversation, one had finished reading the book and the other was halfway through the text. They were so engaged in their conversation that I couldn’t help but be a part of it. The women were discussing the fact that they couldn’t believe that the two gentlemen in the story, one a bookstore owner and the other a preacher, were actually brothers. That being said, Ms. Nelson had just finished giving a speech about her research process and shared two video clips of the brothers, so that we, the audience could see and hear the two brothers. Even though these brothers were polar opposites, they both were very charismatic and could ignite a dialogue in just one minute of video. If the two women were as engaged, standing in a line for an author’s autograph, this book would be a perfect vehicle for dialoguing with my participants. Ms. Nelson referred to this book as a “Documentary Novel” as it had moments of truth and artifacts to support the truth but she also needed to fill in the blanks to flesh out the main characters and the supporting characters (many of them family members, a few famous people and some fictional characters).
As I introduced this book to the group at the end of the first meeting, there was some hesitation as it would be another “assignment” on top of sharing time with me. However, we supported one another and respected timelines and ensured we had something that worked for all members involved in the research. The very next day I sent an email to the participants (see Appendix E) to thank them for participating in the group meeting, list the questions and attach readings about literature circles and inquiry circles. The purpose of the attachments was to ensure that all the participants had the same information that we were all on the same page in understanding the format, theory and practice behind literature/inquiry circles. This would give us the foundation for all future discussions, be it as a group or as individuals. Also, it was important for each of the participants to read the theory behind the work we were doing instead of me telling them about it. If they chose to read it or not was up to them; however, as the teacher-librarian and researcher it was important that I gave them information about the work they were possibly going to do.

Our second and last meeting as a group happened on a snowy day in February. Staff and students were encouraged to go home as there was a possibility of a storm approaching. I went to each participant individually to ask them if they wanted to postpone the meeting; however, two out of three of the participants wanted to continue. The third participant planned to stay for a small part of the meeting, as she didn’t want to miss anything and ended up staying for the whole meeting. I asked her the following day, why she chose to stay when there was a snow storm approaching. She responded via email (F. Faraj, personal communication, February 11, 2013): “The conversation was too interesting, I didn’t want to leave the discussion. The points of view were stimulating and I would have been going crazy all night thinking about what was said once I left.” And that is important to note. The second meeting was scheduled to be a
quick meeting to discuss what they thought of the book; however, it turned into a
meeting that lasted over an hour and I had to encourage them to get on the road to head
home.

We started the meeting with a discussion of the book, the author, the characters
and what we thought about the text. Eventually the dialogue transgressed into how the
participants use texts with their students to help them understand what they are reading.
Carol discussed how she integrated reading strategies into her dialogue with students.
Naya discussed how she helped the students develop prior knowledge before reading the
text. Kayci discussed how she taught mood and figurative language displaying the e-
book on the LCD projector for students to see the text and playing the audiobook for
students to hear the text. The meeting became an opportunity for each of the participants
to share their stories of how they entice their students into the text. In terms of
collaboration, this was an important revelation for me. It was important to give the
teachers opportunities to share their work in a safe and inviting environment. Each one
of them congratulated each other on the work they did and were very excited to find
ways to implement the different ways into their own classroom teaching.

Case Study 1: Kayci (A Grade 8 Teacher)

I have worked with Kayci on a regular basis, sometimes collaborating on a lesson
and other times sharing ideas. She considers herself most comfortable teaching Math.
She thinks Language is the area where she has to learn new techniques for meeting
students’ literacy needs, helping them to use reading strategies, but how they work in
conjunction with each other to help with students’ understanding while they read. At the
beginning of the collaborative project, Kayci told me that she hoped that the
collaboration would be a professional development opportunity, as she wanted to learn
how to incorporate literature circles into her Language programming. Three years ago,
Kayci did literature circles during her first year of teaching. She asked me to work with her because she didn’t really know what they were at that time. That year was all about soaking everything in and learning all she could about literacy programming for her students. Kayci decided to work with me on the collaborative research project in order to refine and consolidate what she had learned when we collaborated in her first year of teaching.

**Before collaboration (2013): experiences.** Kayci is a young teacher, hired right out of the faculty of education to teach in our school. Her flexibility and ability to handle change has led her to have many teaching experiences in her first three years as a classroom teacher. She started as a grade seven teacher, was a grade six teacher the following year, and currently is a grade eight teacher. Her grade eight class has a mix of students, ranging from being high academic achievers who require a teaching assistant to help keep them organized and support their learning. Half of her class is in a band program, while the rest take regular music class. She also has students from the ICOM (Intermediate Communication) class integrated into her class throughout the week, depending on their needs for academic or non-academic programming. Kayci is always looking for opportunities to help her students be better learners.

Her experiences with working with me in the library have been at all grade levels. When she was a grade seven teacher, we worked on literature circles. When she was a grade six teacher, we worked on an integrated social studies project using drama. For this research project, she worked on literature circles, this time as a grade eight teacher. Kayci discovered early on in her career that having two teachers in the room helped the students adjust to a new space and helped set the stage for a experience that was different from the regular schedule. These co-teaching opportunities allowed her an opportunity to observe her students, and interact with them, but she also found that the collaborative
teaching helped her to learn new ideas on how to approach and teach lessons. She said that her previous experience with literature circles helped her to get to know her students as readers. When we worked together to plan and teach a Social Studies program, she felt that she came to a better understanding of how to help students make sense of and communicate their understanding of social studies concepts.

In her reflections on her time in the faculty of education and the collaboration she did with fellow student teachers and associate teachers, Kayci said that she had worked with peers creating units and sharing ideas on how best to teach a subject. She felt it was important to continue to work with other grade level teachers who teach the same subject area. She values the time she spends working with her grade division on TLCPs (Teaching and Learning Critical Pathways), and having time to dialogue with other teachers: “Even if it’s something that I’m thinking of doing on my own, I always share a story, passing in the hallway. And then, talk about that, and then get new ideas from what other people and what they’ve been doing.”

All that being said, Kayci was a little apprehensive about joining this project because I was recording our interviews. She overcame her apprehension, using the project as an opportunity to try and get the students to read a book that they might not have chosen on their own. Kayci had observed that her middle-school students tended to gravitate to the same books, particularly those that have been turned into popular movies or television shows. She felt that participation in the project would open their eyes and see what other novels are out there.

**Literature circles and reading programming.** When Kayci and I worked together during her first year as a teacher at the school, she grouped the students based on their reading levels and provided a book for all students to read. Students took turns trying out each of the roles proposed by Daniels (2002) throughout four to five group
meetings over the period of a month. Even though she did not want to emulate the same experience for her students this time and was looking forward to extending the work we did, when Kayci talked about what literature circles before we began the project, she highlighted literature circle roles. She said that she wanted her students to take turns being leaders, to discuss their individual responses to the literature, and to experience a sense of discovery as whole-class discussions of the books following the literature circles would, she believed, help her students realize that themes in adolescent literature are fairly universal.

Kayci felt that literature circles should take place during the second term because she wanted to spend time during the first term modeling and working with the students as a whole class. To get students ready for literature circles so they became familiar with some of the ways to go deeper into the text, she read a novel together with all students as a class in the first term, scaffolding their responses. She believed that students would be in a better position to be more independent in discussing books in small groups after the whole-class experience.

In addition to learning more about supporting her students’ deep reading of literature, Kayci gained a new awareness of herself as a teacher. She said that she sees herself as a teacher who likes to be available to her students and ensure that they are on task at all times. She felt a need to guide them through most of their work, even when they are working independently. Through her participation in the collaborative project, Kayci said that she came to realize that she needed to be more hands off, providing space for students to explore and learn independently of her.

**Collaboration and the teacher-librarian.** Collaboration is important to Kayci because, at the end of the day, she finds it hard to just reflect on her own. Describing what collaboration *isn’t* was easier for Kayci to explain than what it is. She explained
THREE MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS AND A TEACHER-LIBRARIAN

that collaboration is not: “I’ll do this and you do that, then we’ll put it together in the end. It is about talking about the ideas, working through a problem or issue, and then maybe, by the end of it you know as a partnership what to do and how to keep the momentum going for the work you want to do with the students.” In Kayci’s view, collaboration never ends; as new questions always arise and there are always new thoughts on how to improve instruction.

When I asked Kayci about why she wanted to collaborate with me, she replied that she believes that a teacher-librarian has a wealth of knowledge, especially when it comes to books, teaching experience, especially with literature circles, and knowledge of all the different students. Kayci valued the greater opportunity for students to have one-on-one time with a teacher when collaborating with me, as one of us has always been available to circulate and interact with the students. She felt that students also benefitted from working in the library, having a different setting and a greater variety of experience. Kayci also saw the collaboration with me as an opportunity to work together and create differentiated lessons for the variety of students in her class.

Kayci had stopped by the library to confirm she was booked for her first meeting for literature circles the following day. I was distracted in the library and told her not to worry, it was organized. It wasn’t until after school, after I dealt with a former student who was having some family and school issues, when I took a breath that I realized that I had brushed aside a teacher, let alone a participant in my study. Maybe brushed aside is the wrong word. This is an example of a day in the life of the library (see Figure 2 for a snapshot of a day in the library). Sometimes I get so caught up in the daily events that I don’t think about what I would be doing the next day until after the last bell has rung that day. When I looked at the schedule I realized why Kayci came to see me. Her class was scheduled for the next day and we had not sat down together to plan what she wanted.
Even though I had done literature circles since January, I was in a situation where I needed to sit with a “new” teacher to share my experiences and talk about the experiences she wanted to have with her students. Thankfully, Kayci was working in her class after school, so I met with her and we planned the first day together.

Figure 2
A Snapshot of the Library’s Day Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Original Day Plans</th>
<th>Change in Plans</th>
<th>Not in the Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>Planning Time</td>
<td>* Classes Cancelled But Library Remains Open for Students to Access Books and Technology</td>
<td>Teachers stop by to say hi throughout the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>Drama Lesson with a Grade 6 class</td>
<td>* Meeting with Grade 6, Grade 8 and Resource Teachers to plan Professional Development Day for staff (21st century learner, using iPads and APPS, flipped classrooms and the SAMR model - Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition- (Puentedura, 2006))</td>
<td>Principal stops by the planning session to see how things are going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 3</td>
<td>Literture Circle Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Naya stops by the library to share her lesson from the morning (this lesson is the first of a group of lessons to prepare students to come and work in the library with me)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>Book Exchange (not scheduled but students traditionally use this time to exchange books)</td>
<td>Meeting continued into the afternoon</td>
<td>Kayci stops by library to confirm class booked for tomorrow- plans impromptu meeting after school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting with Kayci about Literature Circles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kayci was my first participant to go through the full process with me and that moment reminded me that I needed to take time to respect the learning partnerships that have been developed in the school and not take advantage of the fact that even though I have done a lesson before, it is a new experience for each person. Staff and students are in and out of the library on a regular basis all day long, even sometimes to just say, “Hi!” Those moments are important; however, it is also important to nurture the partnerships
because it is not about me running the lesson in the library. It is about teaching and learning together.

**Experiencing collaboration with Kayci.** From start to finish, in terms of working with her class, it took Kayci and I approximately two months to organize, facilitate and teach literature circles. Working with grade eight students is always an event, so here are a few observations I made when working with her class:

Time is an issue when working with grade eight students. Especially when we scheduled classes during the first period of the day. Kayci and I re-scheduled all her classes to take place in the library later in the morning or in the afternoon to ensure all students were at school.

Her students were perfectionists and took their time to complete most tasks. We scheduled more classes and started to negotiate end times to ensure better time management.

The students were more focused on impressing the teachers. They completed their homework consistently and they did not like to make any mistakes. They did not want to be known for their mistakes but the time they took to complete the tasks. They were meticulous about the details and they wanted to do the work correctly, the first time. With this they tended to over think and over produce in their completion of work, so we integrated lessons on how to edit work to stay focused on the information that was needed instead of padding for the paper.

The students interests guided us in directions with the work that were unexpected and unplanned, so much so, I was meeting with Kayci almost daily to plan and re-adjust our planning to fit the needs of the students. This experience had Kayci, the students and I engaged throughout the process as they helped design the journey too.
At one point after her students had finished with their literature circle book meetings and were working on their cumulative projects (designing and developing the storyboards for their book trailers before returning to the library to use the iPads), I bumped into Kayci in the school office after school. It had been a week since her students had been in the library, and Kayci and I weren’t meeting as regularly and I asked her how everything was going with her students. That moment in the office is important to the collaborative process, as checking-in does not have to be scheduled but it let’s the teacher know that I am thinking about them and the work they continue to do in the classroom without me.

During the last week of school, I had an opportunity to talk with Kayci to discuss her reflection of the work we did in the library. It was the last Tuesday of the school year, on a hot (heat alert!) day and the grade eight classes had completed a grad rehearsal and a lunch celebration. Grade eight students had been handed their report cards just an hour before Kayci and I met to discuss her experiences with me in the air-conditioned library.

Kayci jumped right into the dialogue right as soon as I turned on the recorder. Apprehensions she had from the first time we met were now gone and she was ready to share what she achieved from this experience. She felt that she had used effective assessment strategies in the literature circle project; strategies that led her to feel confident about handing her report cards to her students that day. She told me: “I feel these students especially seem to be playing the game of school. How do I get an A? They’ll look at the Level 4 on a rubric and do exactly that. It was nice to go outside of that.”

Kayci told me that she often wonders, when she assesses students in reading, if she has a clear grasp of their understanding and if the marks reflect their abilities. This
experience makes her feel confident because the students had shown their understanding in many different ways, including receiving descriptive feedback on their reflections, which is one of the seven fundamental principles for improving student learning (Growing Success, 2010).

Because we had started the literature circles later in the school year than expected, Kayci had initially been worried about her students lacking enthusiasm and not being engaged in the reading. However, the students were invested in the books they chose and the work that was expected of them. Kayci observed that her use of technology had enhanced students’ engagement with texts. She attributed their engagement to being able co-create the success criteria with her and having the opportunity to explore their creativity through the culminating task of creating book trailers using the iMovie application.

Even though Kayci and I planned the assignment for the students, the students guided our teaching through their responses to the short story used to propel them into literature circles and the work they did before, during and after the experience to consolidate and share their understanding. In addition, we used blogs with the students. They posted questions and their thinking before the next day’s class. These blog entries informed our teaching, as we came to know what students were thinking and how we could help them deepen their understanding.

As a classroom teacher, this experience has helped Kayci to realize that she needs to give more space to her students to explore their understanding without having a teacher “helicopter” over them all the time; being ready to answer their questions and guide them in every step of the way. Working with me in the library had taught her to step back and refrain from prompting students throughout every minute of the lesson or the literature discussion meetings. Also, she felt that the initial use of whole-class
lessons on short stories to model critical thinking about texts gave students a common
story in the classroom that they could always relate back to when asking questions or
thinking about the texts they were reading. For Kayci, it became an overall enjoyable
experience watching the students learn and learning alongside them.

Through participating in this project, Kayci came to the realization that students do
not always need to know what other groups are talking about when discussing a text, nor
do they need to read the same text. She has learned that sometimes the learning may that
takes place within a small group does not necessarily need to be shared with the class.
The students will have achieved their learning in their group and have already
consolidated their understanding in a way that makes sense to them. Kayci gave an
example of the jigsaw cooperative learning strategy (Kagan, 1989) where each student
from a group is given an opportunity to be an expert on a topic by working with members
from different groups; who then returns to their original group, where each person takes a
turn to share their information; and then each student is assessed on all aspects of the
topic (p.14).

Learning partnerships. Since the final task was a book trailer, Kayci and I
planned lessons that integrated elements of the literature circle process with television
shows and movie trailers. We wanted students to become familiar with the process that
producers went through in creating a movie or a show. In class, the students had been
discussing how the author of the short story Priscilla and the Wimps (Peck, 1984) had
created the school’s tone in the text and I had asked them how they would approach the
text as a producer for a film. They had some difficulty trying to figure that out, so after
school, Kayci and I had an impromptu meeting to figure out how we were going to teach
them this lesson. It took us almost two hours to organize and plan the lesson, as she was
called into a meeting with a parent about a student, and another teacher came to see me
about her literacy programming. Once we sat down, we discussed the work of her students and noticed that their focus in the short story was the lack of teachers’ presence in the school when bullying was happening in the hallway. Instead of focusing on the bullying, which happened in another class discussion, we decided to have the students focus on the leaders of the school. How do teachers and principals create the school’s atmosphere? This question made us talk about television shows and movies where, depending on who was telling the story changed the tone of the story. And we wanted the students to decide as producers if they would change the narrator and how that would affect the tone of the school. This conversation was engaging for us and we realized that the students could achieve different things depending on the time offered to them.

Even though I’ve used the same story before, each class responds to the text differently. There is no set plan on how to teach the story and the students go in different directions and we have to be open to let the students explore their questions. That is why I have conversations with teachers not to use novel study packages because they are not created for every student in mind. With that being said, Kayci and I finished our meeting but continued to text one another throughout the evening to plan the lesson.

The next day, we taught the lesson to the students. Kayci and I had decided that she would teach the lesson; however, at one point in the teaching we ended up co-teaching the lesson. To me this story is more than collaboration. It is about the learning partnership that Kayci and I created to support her students through our planning. We were partners from beginning to end as we embarked on a teaching journey with her students that we planned but had been shifted from the original path.

**Collaboration.** When reflecting on the benefits of our collaborative project, Kayci said that she valued sharing ideas, asking each other questions, working together and observing the students understanding concepts. She identified a particular unit as the
most valuable part of the experience: “The mini-unit that you talked about where we explored text-based versus reader-based questions. I think that really enabled the students that by the time they came here, they knew what to look for and they knew how to make their own graphic organizers and what we meant by asking good questions. And they were able to revisit it and use it.” Kayci is referring to a lesson we discussed in December. The lesson I created was based on an idea that came about during a children’s literature course with Shelley Stagg Peterson based on the idea of using efferent and aesthetic questions to help develop questioning. This process paired with picture books would help students understand that different questions give different answers, which in turn shows that all types of questions are important when understanding a text.

For Kayci, collaboration showed up clearly when we had spent a couple of hours one night planning for her students. We talked, disagreed and then came full circle to create a lesson plan. But that’s not where collaboration was clearest. It was the next day when it took us less then five minutes to create the next lesson plan. We had created a rhythm that took some time to get to but after spending all that time together, we were able to just complete each other’s sentences and organize a lesson that reflected the work we wanted the students to do but was also based on what we wanted them to do. It was fun and effective.

Kayci never enjoyed language class as a student. When she comes to the library, she is engaging in a subject that she doesn’t consider her forte and feels she needs that extra guidance to find ways to make it engaging for her students. She believed that participating in our collaborative project helped her to teach more effectively. In particular, the integration of technology inspired and taught her different ways to get the students to show their understanding of the text.
Case Study 2: Naya (A Grade 7 Teacher)

Naya, like Kayci, graduated from a faculty of education three years ago. She has been in our school for three years and worked with me throughout the three years. For her second year in the school, I was officially her mentor. During the first two years at the school, we never even discussed using literature circles, as her first year of teaching did not include teaching a Language program. In her second year, she spent a lot of time developing a literacy program that worked for her and did not show interest in literature circles. One of our collaborative experiences was a Geography project where we took something that had already been done, made adjustments, and implemented the lesson with the students as we team taught the criteria together. She was very excited to be involved in this collaborative experience and was my most active participant, talking, emailing, and messaging me (and sometimes all three) on a daily basis before we even started teaching her class.

Before collaboration (2013): experiences. Naya did her practicum in grade seven at the school and has also taught grade seven for the first three years of her career. She was very happy with the group of students she had in her class this year. Naya, like Kayci, had a mixed class of band and non-band students who were a very supportive group, helping and working together as a cohesive group.

Since I have worked extensively with Naya, as a teacher-librarian and a mentor for three years, I tend to like to challenge her way of thinking and planning for her students. She may come to me with an idea, and fifteen minutes later, the idea has changed or she has decided to try something different. After three years of working together and building a relationship, Naya tends to come to the library on a regular basis to share what she is doing, to get some advice. We challenge and inspire each other to think of lessons that will engage students. This year, before Naya became a participant
in this project, we were having a conversation in the library about reading aloud to students. I was sharing with Naya how I used to do read aloud with my students: there was no agenda when I read the book aloud to my students. Lessons were organic in terms of the idea that students asked questions about the text and those questions guided us, as a class, in dialogues, assignments and the joy of reading. Because Naya enjoys a good challenge, she was inspired by my experience to carve time into her literacy program that allowed for read-alouds on a regular basis and used the books to help guide her students through the Language curriculum.

Naya considers collaboration to be a positive experience. She gravitates to people and colleagues that she feels have an interest in collaborating. Naya values the time that it takes to plan with colleagues. She ensures that she is always aware of an end goal, to help keep the planning on task. Unfortunately, as with Kayci, she finds that it is harder to collaborate with fellow classroom teachers, as they don’t always have the same students at the same time, teachers’ planning times rarely coincide. She found it a unique opportunity to work with me, as we could more readily spend time reflecting and thinking about the next lesson and at some point during the term, I taught her students, in another collaborative assignment with another colleague, so I know her students well. Naya explained that when collaborating with other classroom teachers, she sometimes felt that she was not always able to move forward with the work. Teachers find that when they work with me, time in the library is a precious commodity, which tends to ensure we are more on task and working towards a goal without being sidetracked by other curriculum expectations.

Even though Naya has worked with me through the years, we had never done literature circles together. This was Naya’s only apprehension—entering into collaboration where the topic was new to her. I knew what was coming, in terms of the
work, and she felt that because I knew more about literature circles that the planning would be one-sided and she would be a spectator instead of a participant in the process. That is a fear that I believe some teachers must have when starting the collaborative process with me. I think that it is a fair apprehension to have when entering a collaborative experience. She wasn’t worried about the time involved or the experience; however, I believe she was worried that she wouldn’t be able to contribute much to the planning of the literature circles. When one person knows more than the other person, the scales are less balanced and I needed to take the lead of introducing her to something that hopefully would engage and inspire her.

**Literature circles and reading programming.** Naya’s knowledge of literature circles was based on what she has heard from other teachers and seen of others. She had observed lessons in the library during her planning times and heard conversations between other colleagues and myself. Naya felt there were a variety of ways to implement them and that it took students on a different level and depth of their reading. Naya believed that it would provide students with the opportunity to have different roles and look at a novel in a variety of ways. Students would be able to think about their reading with a higher level of thinking. They could reflect on and discuss their ideas with their classmates, as opposed to reading a book on their own. One of the reasons she wanted to do literature circles with her group is that she believed it was important for her students to discuss with their peers what they read. Talking about books with others can make the readers aware of something they may have missed. When talking with peers, students would be more motivated to go back to the text to verify and clarify their understanding of what they are reading.

At the time of the first interview, Naya was very interested in getting started with literature circles with her students sooner, rather than later, as she was hoping to do them
twice throughout the year. She planned to implement literature circles in March and again in late May or June so her students would be able to have more than one opportunity to talk about books. At the same interview, she was already thinking about doing literature circles earlier in the school year, which in hindsight, shows that Naya is always thinking and planning for the future when it comes to her students.

**Collaboration and the teacher-librarian.** “Collaboration is necessary for learning. For students and teachers.” That was Naya’s response to my question about why collaboration is important. She went on to explain that people can learn independently of other people but she believed that true collaboration brought about a social emotional awareness that can’t happen on one’s own. Connection was an important part of the process and being able to share her ideas and feelings about the work was important to sharing with other collaborators. Naya actively sought collaboration with her grade seven division and team. When she worked with other teachers, she found the focus to be more about the students collaborating, as opposed to the discussing the importance of collaboration amongst the team of teachers. It was important that the relationship between the collaborators was maintained by keeping the lines of communication open. For Naya that meant even popping into the classroom, or library, on a daily basis. If that didn’t happen, she would contact her co-collaborator by phone, email, text, or sometimes a note delivered by a student. Naya talked about the having scheduled meetings. Between those meetings she hoped that there would be organic moments of sharing of the thoughts and ideas that needed to be communicated sooner than later.

Naya was told in her first year of teaching that when needing assistance in planning a lesson; she should go to the people who are experts. Naya believes the teacher-librarian is that person in the school that she should go to when planning literacy-based
lessons. Additionally, collaborating with the teacher-librarian gives her an opportunity to teach together, too.

**Experiencing collaboration with Naya.** At the end of May, it felt like my life at school was spinning faster than a revolving door. The days were moving quickly and it felt like if it were to stop, it would be hard to start up again. Naya was finishing up a read aloud with her class and I was winding down with other classes (literature circles, essay research and planning). We were having difficulty finding time to work together during the school day, I was teaching during hers and mine planning times and Naya tutors after school. Because Naya and I are friends, we are able to get together on the weekend to have lunch and plan our collaborative work. This speaks to how important it is to be flexible but also speaks to how much we value the work we do and that it is important to teaching and learning, not only for the students, but for ourselves.

I met with Naya on the second last day of the school year in the library. We were the last teachers in the building and we didn’t start our meeting until an hour after the students had gone home for the day. The rain was coming but hadn’t started yet. Naya had handed out her report cards to her students an hour earlier and before that, we had spent the last forty minutes of the day with her students, who had shared their culminating task of creating book trailers for the literature circle books.

Naya was my last participant to do the work with me in the library. We spent a Saturday in June meeting in a café in Oakville, where we hashed out her goals and ideas for what she wanted to accomplish with her students in the library in regards to literature circles. As opposed to most teachers who have goals to discover their students’ ability to read, she wanted to find a way to integrate the use of technology and observe her students reading a text to see what they would bring to the meetings from their experiences with books as a whole class in their small literature circle groups.
Throughout the school year, she read *Secret Letters from 0-10* (Morgenstern, 1998), *The Wednesday Wars* (Schmidt, 2007) and *The Heaven Shop* (Ellis, 2004). Naya engaged the students in activities and research before, during and after reading the texts. She is hoping that the work they did with literacy transfers over to the work they do with the literature circles.

Naya felt she achieved a couple of things from this experience. She felt that her first goal, getting technology into the hands of her students, had been achieved. Her students had used it effectively and respected the role of it in their learning. When using the technology she was impressed that I have embraced a problem-solving model that allows the students to watch a short (under five minutes) video that shows them how to use an APP on the iPad. It allows for the students to try things out and figure out how the technology can work best for them. The second thing was how the students consolidated their learning from reading a book as a class by transferring their knowledge of how to read a text for deeper meaning and bringing that knowledge to their meetings.

Grouping students was something Naya wanted to try out in a way that didn’t group them academically because her students tended to group themselves academically on their own. We drew on my experience with another teacher this year, where the teacher’s concerns were that the students’ showed lack of initiative and had difficulty completing their homework in a timely manner or at all. Drawing on my experience with that particular teacher, I now was offering two possible ways of grouping the students: by the goals they had set for themselves as learners.

“Whenever you have success, you want to do it again.” Naya was pleased with the overall experience: the way we set up the tasks, how each student had individual texts and access to the same resources. Naya was amazed by how the organized her students
were and by the pride they put into being prepared for all group meetings: “Regardless if I reminded them or not, they came to school every morning for those three weeks and put the green duotang on the corner of their desk. They wanted it there. They weren’t forgetting it. They wanted to do Language. They were excited to talk about their novels.”

She enjoyed seeing students have their moment to shine in their learning. The students were engaged and were asking for more opportunities to look at movie trailers. They started to appreciate the critical lens of looking at how producers and editors put their work out for the world to see and marketing it to a specific audience. Naya recognized that she is a teacher who likes to control certain aspects of her teaching environment. Participating in our collaborative project gave her time to step back and observe on a more regular basis in the classroom. She learned to observe her students’ conversations and allow them to explore their comprehension at their own pace. For her, it was amazing to see the students engage with each other in respectful ways, taking turns to share their ideas and finding it almost an intrusion when a teacher joined their conversation, whether it was discussing their book or working on their trailer. Of course, there usually is one group that needs more support than others; however, she appreciated the fact that there was another teacher in the room to help facilitate the lessons. Naya said that coming to the library gave students (and herself) variety. It stoked the fire within her to create exciting literacy lessons for students.

**Learning partnership.** Naya and I put our time into planning this experience for her students in a short amount of time; however, there was never a moment when it felt rushed. We taught everything as a team and we kept the lines of communication open throughout the whole experience. Since I was closing the library for inventory and year-end clean up, Naya taught some of the lessons in her classroom and prepared her students
for the lessons we co-taught together in the library. At one point, Naya said it was
amazing that the students were emulating the same thing we were doing as collaborators:
discussing their work, sharing their ideas, and inspiring each other to find new things.
The conversations that we had created an experience that was unique for the students and
for ourselves, as opposed to me being the presenter of a pre-fabricated lesson. We were
all in the moment of a true collaborative learning partnership.

**Collaboration.** Naya personally enjoyed this experience. It was something where
she had fun, as a teacher and on a personal level. In addition, Naya found that working
with someone else, doing the background work and planning, really helped her to create
amazing teaching experiences. “Students deserve to have the best opportunities we can
provide them. And you can’t provide them solely on your own. Two minds are better
than one. It’s as simple as that.”

Naya found the work we did before teaching the students was the most important
part of the collaboration: the conversation, the relationship, the expectations, and the
planning. The students appreciated the fact that we put the work into their assignment
and they wanted to do the work too.

**Case Study 3: Carol (An Intermediate Communication- ICOM, Teacher)**

Carol was one of the first teachers I met when I first arrived at the school. She is a
quiet and reflective person who voices her opinions and ideas after she has carefully read
and understood the information. She asks questions to verify and ensure she has full
understanding before voicing opinions. This is her second career. She became a teacher
fifteen years ago after being a social worker for years. Even though I have talked with
Carol and shared resources with her, we had not worked together until last year when we
worked on a school wide, month long TLCP (Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways).
That short experience, the cycle was done within six weeks, shows me that Carol has a
commitment to working with people in a way that informs and supports her classroom practices as a teacher. Carol said that she wanted to participate in the collaborative project because it presented her with an opportunity to work and learn with someone she respects.

**Before collaboration (2013): experiences.** Carol has taught many grades, including kindergarten, grades one, two, four and six. For the last few years she has taught ICOM (Intermediate Communication). An ICOM class consists of students in grades six, seven and eight who have difficulty with reading and writing but have average to high intelligence. The purpose of her program is to help students learn skills and strategies needed to transition back into a regular streamed classroom. Carol has been a teacher at the school since before it officially opened in its current location, as she is one of the original staff members hired to help open this school over nine years ago. When she first came to the school, she was hired as a classroom teacher, teaching grade six with a team of teachers. Five years ago, the opportunity arose to teach an ICOM class. She really wanted to work with special education students and help them become better readers who could understand what they read. Carol is a hard worker who is always attending workshops and educating herself on the best ways to help her students and make her teaching rich and engaging for her students.

Carol enjoys working with other teachers, sharing her experiences and learning new ideas. Her previous work with a teacher-librarian had been over twelve years ago! During her second and third year of teaching, she had been on a reading-strategies committee with the teacher-librarian and two other staff members. Carol considered if to be a positive working experience, as she and her fellow committee members shared what they learned about being better literacy teachers with colleagues. As excited, as the committee members were to learn and share, some of their colleagues were disinterested
in the learning. Because these colleagues had no choice in participating, it was not a positive experience for all. All schools in the board were supposed to participate and some teachers chose not to participate at all. It was Carol’s first taste of teachers not really being interested in learning.

Not that a negative experience stopped someone like Carol. She has learned to collaborate with other teachers at many grade levels. Because she worked with a special education class, Carol did not have the opportunity to engage in the process of inquiry into Language and Math that homeroom teachers have in the school. That was the first time I had heard Carol mention that she regrets that she is not on a team with more staff and students.

Carol had no apprehensions about participating in this project, which was not surprising as Carol is an advocate for learning and loves to learn and be involved in new things.

**Literature circles and reading programming.** In the first interview, Carol defined a literature circle as an inquiry-based process that is managed differently depending on the goal of the assignment. She then went on to describe how traditional literature circles involve assigning roles to various students and assigning tasks as the teacher leads it. Again, she brings up the statement that the activity was very “laid on.” She explained that the teacher had told the students what to do, and had not invited any input from them. The activity was laid on because students were required to follow a regimented routine that would not allow for “colouring outside of the lines.” Carol found that literature circles had value for the students who were invested in learning and reading but it was not engaging for the rest of the students who were not so highly motivated. She had used literature circles before my research began, but joined my collaborative team because she was interested in the newest form of literature circles, and
in collaborative-based inquiry. She believed that literature circles give students more power in choosing what they are researching. They ask their own questions and learned about topics that they find more interesting. Then, as a group, students develop a consensus about what they wanted out of the group. Carol found the students leading the process were learning more than in the traditional literature format of students reading the same book and completing role tasks.

Carol’s eight students had read the novel *Slake’s Limbo* (Holman, 1974) and throughout the reading, she modelled and discussed reading strategies (determining big ideas and questioning) with her students. At the end of the reading the students were able to ask questions based on the main ideas (themes) they read about in the novel. At the time of the first interview, Carol had just finished reading the book with her students and was ready to go forth with the collaborative inquiry with her students.

**Collaboration and the teacher-librarian.** Carol defined collaboration as communicating with at least one other person. It involved listening to others’ points of view, expressing their own ideas, reflecting on what everyone had to say, and then presenting the information in some form. She believed that collaboration is a cyclical process. Carol believed that collaboration among teachers was important because: “We collaborate because we don’t live in isolation.” She continued to explain that she could only learn so much when reading and practicing the ideas learned on her own. Teachers want to talk to someone about what they have read and practiced, and also to gain experience from others. Collaboration gives the teacher permission to go back and try a teaching practice again after talking about it with colleagues. It also gave her time to think and reflect on all the experiences in relation to her own. Carol believed that teacher collaboration provided a model for students in their collaboration with each other, and that being able to collaborate is a lifetime skill. Being able to collaborate will be
important throughout students’ lives as they educate themselves and enter the workforce. Students have to learn to listen, to form opinions and talk about them, and to reflect on their experiences to be able to communicate others.

**Experiencing collaboration with Carol.** Carol and I did not work together in the same way that I worked with Kayci and Naya. Carol shared her classroom stories and asked for support or a listening ear to help her understand and consolidate her understanding as a teacher. When I collaborated with Carol, I felt that I was more of a support system, listening to what she is doing with her students, sharing personal thoughts and ideas, and giving some suggestions.

Carol was an active participant in our group meetings, sharing her insights and listening to everyone’s experiences in a supportive way. For Carol, being a participant validated her work as a classroom teacher and to share her story as she extends past the literature circles into inquiry circles. In our last collaborative group meeting, Carol shared the work she and her students did around the social issues of being homeless in an urban city. She mirrored the collaborative work her students did as inquirers with the work we did with sharing our stories of collaborating in the library.

**Learning partnerships.** Carol creates learning partnerships with her students in developing the inquiries with the students instead of following a teacher-made lesson. She helps guide them as they use technology and research themes that were not always search-engine friendly when using the Internet. Her students were engaged throughout because they were invested in their learning. At times Carol found it to be scary because she was not used to having the students guide her daily lesson planning, instead of how she had planned in the past- weeks or days in advance.

Carol used this experience as a way to inform herself of the work other teachers in the school were interpreting literacy learning. This connection lead to a learning
partnered with her where she was engaged in professional dialogue about how to teach components of a literacy program as well as discuss our learning as readers and teachers. 

**Collaboration.** In terms of collaboration, Carol shared her experiences in the classroom with me to inform me of her students’ work. That way, when they came to the library to research or look for books I was able to help them. It is important for this type of collaboration, especially with students who are in a special education class like ICOM. It makes the students experience in the library meaningful, as they know that I have communicated with their teacher and it ensures that we are all on the same page. Carol referred to this moment as important to collaboration because I helped her investigate research sources specific to the needs of each individual student.

**Experiences with Other Teachers in My School**

My participants’ stories of experiencing learning partnerships and collaborations with me have helped piece together my story that expands beyond the walls of the school’s library. As I flipped through my day plans from the school year, I realized I had worked with seven other teachers outside of the project, specifically on literature circles. (I am not including the teachers who I helped select texts for their students for literature circles in their classrooms.) I thought it would be important to talk to a couple of teachers who were not participating formally in the collaborative inquiry projects about collaborating with me in the library. I sat down with the two teachers on the last day of school, in the library, to ask them a few questions on collaboration and why they come to the library.

Gemma is a grade 8 teacher who was at the school when it opened nine years ago and Bethany is newer to the staff, coming from another school. She has worked at the school for three years. Both have them have worked with me in the library on numerous
occasions, mostly on literacy planning, although Bethany and I have worked together on geography, as well.

I started the conversation with the two teachers with: why collaboration? Their responses were very similar. Gemma spoke about the fact that she wants to share ideas with other people, hear what others have to say and get feedback about the work that she is doing in her classroom. Bethany added that she collaborates to draw on other people’s strengths. Both teachers said that collaborative experiences allow them to reflect on their teaching practice and take new ideas back to their classroom to use.

The two teachers believe that the experience in collaboration enhances their confidence in what they do in the classroom. One of the reasons I wanted to talk to Bethany about her experiences in collaborating with me is because she rarely comes back for the same lesson twice. In addition to co-planning with me, she likes to observe the work I do in the library, and taking ideas back to her classroom. Sometimes, Bethany also engages herself in the library lessons so that she sees the lesson as a student.

To Bethany, planning the lesson, finding resources and deciding on how to integrate technology, together with the discussion about assessment and our observations of students’ learning that follows the teaching, are the most valuable parts of the collaborative experience with me.

Both teachers pointed to the resource rich space that I work in as one of the benefits of their collaboration with me. They also said that they feel I have my finger on the pulse of what’s new to the board, the school, and education because most information comes to me via email or my conversations with other teacher-librarians. I believe that it may seem to the teachers that I know everything because I have many dialogues throughout the day that allow me to share the knowledge with more people on a bigger
Conclusion

All of these stories have helped me in my journey to understand my role as a teacher-librarian and the collaboration that occurs on a daily basis, not only in the library, but also in the whole school. Learning partnerships are important to maintain, to ensure that teachers do not isolate themselves in their classrooms or feel that finding lessons on the World Wide Web is a way to integrate technology into your programming. Learning partnerships give meaning to the work we do every day in a school and it is important to develop relationships with staff and students.

When learning partnerships form, a collaborative team is formed. As a teacher-librarian, it is important for me to build and maintain the relationships and listen to the lessons as they develop into a story. From meeting a teacher in the photocopy room, sharing a story over a cup of coffee, or spending a couple of hours planning a forty-minute lesson via email and text messaging, stories emerge from these experiences for me spin into tale that informs the work I do as a teacher-librarian.

Chapter Five: Final Thoughts And Implications

Looking back on my research experience, I remember that the first time I brought the participants together as a group, I did most of the talking. I had interviewed all the participants individually but this was the moment I brought them all together to share my research question and to review their and my understanding of literature circles, as that would be the starting point for the collaboration. I was excited to work with the teachers who volunteered their time to participate in the research but would I be able to tell their stories truthfully and without bias?
THREE MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS AND A TEACHER-LIBRARIAN

That meeting was just the icebreaker, as the three teachers grabbed a hold of this experience and shared their stories, from the trials and tribulations of planning with the force of time and weather, sometimes being against us. We found our way to plan, teach, and facilitate lessons that engaged the students in ways that surprised and informed all of us. Not only did we get students to read and make transactions with the text, the students wrote reflections after their meetings, created book trailers, presented research and interpreted literature circles/inquiry circles in ways we could not have imagined.

Choose Your Own Adventure: Whose Story Tells My Story Best?

We need to listen closely to teachers and other learners and to the stories of their lives in and out of classrooms. We also need to tell our own stories as we live our own collaborative researcher/teacher lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12). It was my story as a teacher-librarian that was being told through this narrative inquiry. I collected stories from the teachers in my school to tell my story but what about theirs? Each of my participants had different stories to tell, even though themes emerged that wove them together, there is something to be said about each of the individual stories.

Kayci’s story was a mystery, as we had no idea where the students would go with the work. Would her students be able to communicate their understanding of reading a text when working in literature circles without the prompting of a teacher throughout the experience? She had the most eclectic group of students, as they spanned a wide range of academic abilities, let alone their individual personalities, and the added personality of a group of students who had been together for three years. Her students knew how to portray the image of academically driven students; however, they were always looking for confirmation that they were correct with their responses to questions. Kayci and I used the time to break down the walls her students had built play the role of being the perfect academic student, so they could make transactions with the texts they read to
develop their own understandings. I spent the most time with Kayci, working with the students as they worked with the text and learned how to express their understanding through written reflections before transferring their knowledge to creating a book trailer for their novels.

Naya’s story was a fast-paced action-drama as the timeline put us at completing literature circles in less than a month. Would her students take what they learned about reading texts throughout the year’s read alouds and develop their own voices in transacting with the text, without prompting from the teacher? Since the timeline was shortened, the goals were different in the fact that the students would use a text to help them develop a book trailer to sell their text. The students stayed on task and were focused on understanding the creation of a videotext of their novels. The lessons were split between the library and the classroom, so the collaboration with Naya was more of a share and tell, where we taught some lessons together and other days, she would tell me about the process in her classroom.

Carol’s story was set in a far-away kingdom. It was a collaboration where she communicated with me on a more casual basis or asked for guidance when it was time for the students to use on-line resources for their inquiries. As I reflect on this experience, it took me a while to get over my frustration of the collaboration not being the same as the other two, however, I now recognize that this experience is very important to my story of being a teacher-librarian.

These stories are so different from one another, however, woven through all these adventures are themes that when sewn together provide me with a story to tell about my role as a middle school teacher-librarian.

What I Have Learned about Research and Collaboration
Connelly and Clandinin (2000) wrote about a researcher who had to decide between using themes and generalizing the ideas from his research. The researcher did not want to lose the essence of the text by generalizing the ideas that came through in themes; however, it was a struggle for him to decide on what was the best course of action. Using themes would align himself to other research in his field of study and the other would stay true to the stories the participants told. This is a dilemma that faces researchers as they look at the data they have collected and make decisions on how to stay true to the participants' stories or maintain the style of narrative research methods by using themes. For me, I organized my data into themes to focus the research on the findings and to help future readers discover threads that wove this story together.

I was initially nervous that since the participating teachers came from different places in their collaboration with me, my story would become disjointed and without a cohesive flow. Even though all the stories were different, themes started to emerge in the text that ensured that these stories were not only important to write but to share as it affirms the importance of collaboration in a middle school.

Each of my participants’ experiences adds another chapter to my story. As I find ways to understand what my story is as a teacher-librarian, new insights come to the surface, as each participant shares their story with me. My findings are based on each of their stories and how their stories come together to help tell mine. Across their stories, two interconnected themes emerged: (1) the importance of learning partnerships between teachers and teacher-librarians, and (2) the importance of being flexible to the needs of teachers and students, as the same topic can look very different from one class to the next. Earlier this year I was updating my resume and writing a cover letter. The cover letter referenced the collaboration I do with staff and students; how I use technology to support staff and the 21st century learner, and the engagement that occurs within the
Those ideas emerged as themes in my data collection, as the participants discussed them throughout the planning and interview process, and they became the apparent themes of my research.

The transformation from my first year as a teacher-librarian to the present year has been phenomenal, in terms of reflecting on my understanding, my teaching, my use of technology, and most importantly, how I work with my colleagues. This year, the use of technology also transformed the way students interacted with each other, using iPads to communicate and develop ideas, and using the Internet to inform and answer questions. The world is changing daily and the students have changed so much in my 15 years of teaching. Technology has made it possible for us to communicate all the time, via text, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, wikis and many other social media platforms. All these platforms were not created for people to wade through the technological waters on their own. Working with the teacher-librarian allows opportunities to try things out without feeling as if you need to be the expert.

**Learning Partnerships and Engaging Students through Technology**

My role as a teacher-librarian helped create an environment for collaboration in teacher’ hectic day-to-day schedule; one that is bogged down with curriculum seven periods a day. That type of schedule could make anyone’s head spin. Working with another teacher makes everything slow down to normal and affords teachers some time, flexibility and a partner to help design and teach engaging lessons. Threaded throughout the day plans and the reflections is the fact that I make sure that my space and time are available to staff and students. Staff and students are in and out of the library on a regular basis all day long. Even an informal interaction, such as someone entering the library to say hello helps to nurture the partnership.
Learning partnerships are a way to “switch the teaching to learning” (“Together for,” 2010, p. 7) and help develop a climate of inclusion for all involved. There was a moment in June when Kayci’s students had finished with literature circles and were working on their storyboards for their book trailers. I had worked with Naya’s class during the day, watching movie trailers and discussing with the students the components that make up movie trailers: use of music to set the tone, words/graphics that set the theme, and scenes that left the viewer wanting more.

Through the discussion with Kayci, I shared my experience of the lesson from the day and Kayci and I designed a lesson that would support and move her students forward successfully as they looked at the text they would use in their book trailers to sell their story. Kayci and I had not planned to meet that day but she needed some inspiration to help her students. She most likely would have designed a lesson on her own if I was unavailable but moments like that help us “switch the teaching to learning.”

What Would My Future Collaborations Look Like?

During one of my interviews with one of the participants, we discussed the idea of collaboration being a lifetime skill. It was at that time that I realized that it is more than meeting face-to-face and small groups. It also includes writing a note back and forth, or communicating online. It is now a part of everything we do as teachers. Every day I send an email to one teacher, a group of teachers, or the whole school to share new materials in the library or online resources that may be applicable to teaching and learning in the classroom. This may start a dialogue between me and a teacher in regards to planning or teaching and the conversation could go further as teachers discuss how they may use it with their team members or grade division. This moves ideas and education forward in new and exciting ways to think differently or at least reflect on what is going on.
I believe there are five important components to establishing an active Learning Commons in the school library. They are: inviting, goal-setting, scheduling, communicating and achieving goals. My thinking about how these components might play out is as follows:

**The invitation.** I am inspired by the idea of having professional book clubs within the school to have a common language and a group that works together. My collaborative work with teachers may be the catalyst for collaboration across the grades, as I know that Naya has been inspired to collaborate with teachers outside of her team next year. In our final interview, she was already inviting me to a literary event that she hoped to achieve in the fall with a group of teachers across the grade levels.

**Goal setting.** Conversations will be started with helping the teachers set goals for themselves and for their students, as it is important to talk about what the teachers expect to achieve from the collaboration. I think that was one of my first issues with adjusting to the role of being a teacher-librarian. I was so excited to work with staff and students and share my love of reading, but soon had to realize that the role was not about my work and what I wanted. Instead, it was important to focus on what the teacher and students wanted from the library.

**Scheduling.** Scheduling includes and is not limited to working in the library. There will be times when the scheduling is about the work that the students will be doing in the classroom and they will have access to resources in the library. Literature circles do not have to be run in the library. All, some or none of the lessons can occur in the library depending on the teachers’ requests. I will need to assess the situation to find out if the teacher requires help in the presentation of the information or in developing a schedule to use in their classroom, for example.
Communicating. Checking in with the teacher is one of the simplest ways to discover how well the lessons are going and if the teacher needs any support in teaching the lessons. When Carol and I sat down to discuss our collaborative process, she referred to the moment when her students felt confident coming to the library to do work because they knew that I had communicated with their teacher. Even though they would have to communicate their questions, they knew that I was aware of the work they were doing and could offer support that could help guide them in the right direction. Time would not be wasted in explaining the entire lesson.

Achieving goals. The first words I write on my whiteboard when a class enters the library are the goals. With the students’ help, we develop the work expectations. To achieve goals, it is important for everyone to know where they are going. It will be an adventure with texts, and now technology, to get there.

Limitations

One of the major limitations with this research was the inability to collect students’ work. Although every one of the participants referred to her students’ accomplishments in their written responses, their group work, and their ability to complete the final tasks, I was unable to triangulate the interview and focus group data with student work.

It was also a politically charged school year with the introduction of Bill 115 by the Ontario government. This year, teachers were without a contract and began an uphill battle with the Ministry of Education. Throughout the year, there were job actions of work-to-rule, a political day of protest and the removal of extra-curricular activities. At one point I called my Union Local to ask about the implications of this tumultuous issue on my research. The union representative said there should be none because it had nothing to do with the political situation and that I could go forward with my research.
Until I received that confirmation, I did not know whether the work I wanted to do as research to inform my teaching might be considered an extra-curricular activity that was frowned upon by my union. Following this clarification, the group of teachers who had agreed to participate in the research was happy to move forward with the research. Only ten people came forward to participate in the research; however, and there is a part of me that questions whether more people would have been interested in the research if we were not in such a divisive year.

**Where Would I Go Next as a Researcher?**

One of the hardest things I found about being a researcher was the need to stay focused on one research question and not follow up on paths that opened up in the process of working with participants. I became interested in assessment and the role of the teacher-librarian as the research progressed and was wishing that I had collected the students’ reflections on their experiences of working in the library. Other research questions came to mind that I would like to pursue in future research. These include:

- What is the effect of the library on the school community when it is closed once a week?
- How does the collaboration of teachers and the teacher-librarian support student learning?

These questions linger in the back of my mind and as I enter a new school year, new questions are forming and the possibility of future research can be seen in the distance.

I think the one thing I need to keep in the back of my mind from this experience is that I will always have questions and I will always be informing and teaching myself new things. There is an expectation that I should stay “in the know” about upcoming
technological and media advances in this 21st century. At the beginning of the year, I was using a desktop computer plugged into the Internet and by the end of the year, Wi-Fi was up and running in my library and I was asking students to BYOD (Bring Your Own Device). In spite of all of this, as fast as technology changes, I need to also remind staff and students that sometimes the answer is on the page of an old-fashioned book.

Conclusions

In a middle school where teachers work in teams (2-4 teachers on a team) and a division (the teams in a grade level come together to make a team of 6-12 teachers), I am the only teacher-librarian. My team is the school, the staff and students who plan, work and support the lessons that occur in the library. As with any relationship, it is fraught with joy, frustration, great communication and arguments. I can be my harshest critic when a lesson does not go well or students are not inspired to do the work or a teacher expects me to whip together a lesson that is effective and will teach everything that needs to be taught in forty minutes or less. Those are the dark and frustrating plot twists that occur at various times throughout the school year. The story I told happens to be one of adventure, discovery and for the most part, happy endings.

My story is an invitation to teachers to come into the library to plan and/or to book time with me. It is an opportunity for all involved to learn about the benefits of collaborating with the teacher-librarian, be it the event happens in the library or back in the classroom. The library encourages opportunities of collaboration and co-teaching. We are not only standing together teaching side-by-side but weaving ourselves into the fabric of the students’ learning as we work together to discover and explore text, technology and whatever else the lesson entails.
References


THREE MIDDLE-SCHOOL TEACHERS AND A TEACHER-LIBRARIAN


Toronto: Author.


Peterson, S., & Swartz, L. *Good books matter: How to choose and use children's literature to help students grow as readers.* Markham, Ont.: Pembroke Publishers.


http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/CBS_Collaborative_Teacher_Inquiry.pdf

Appendix A

Email for Recruitment of Participants

Hey there!

As many of you know, I am currently working on my inquiry as part of my requirements to complete my MA at OISE.

The purpose of this inquiry is to achieve a better understanding the experiences of teachers’ and the teacher-librarian and why they may collaborate when planning literature circles.

I am looking for three participants to work with me. Here are some possible benefits for working on this particular project: working with me and a small group of teachers in planning literature circles; co-teaching part of your literacy program; and choosing books that will (hopefully) inspire your students to read and think critically about their reading.

Let me know if you are interested.

If you have any questions, contact me via email or come and see me in the library.

Thanks,

Fatma
### Appendix B

**Grade 8 PowerPoint Introduction to Literature Circles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slide Title</th>
<th>Student Notes (on slide)</th>
<th>Teacher Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 1: Literature Circles: A Way of Thinking, Understanding What You Read</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students will start with reading story, as it will be a conversation point from the beginning. The students will be receiving other articles and items to help support and expand their thinking about the reading. This is to be experiential-learning from experiences…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 2: What you Need For Today</strong></td>
<td>Copy of story: “Pricilla and the Wimps” by Richard Peck</td>
<td>Have blank paper/graphic organizer, pencils, highlighters, copies of story available. Before students share any ideas from their thinking…share what literature circles are next…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 3: What are Literature Circles?</strong></td>
<td>Work in small groups based on the chosen book</td>
<td>Repost assignment to class blog. Post at least two of your notes from the reading today. Don’t forget to support your work with examples from the text or other connections that you’ve made. Homework: Post to Padlet. And then go to blog, watch two videos and then respond to questions on the blog. The two videos are examples of book club meetings: Christopher Paul Curtis (on Today show) and Sidney Poitier (on Oprah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 4: What can you say about Priscilla and the Wimps?</strong></td>
<td>Post a couple of thoughts onto the PADLET found on MY CLASS SITE – this will be where we can read your thoughts and questions about the story. Your Class Blog will have homework that MUST be completed this evening for tomorrow’s class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 5: Six Important Words</strong></td>
<td>What makes these book meetings effective?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 6: What are the attributes of a literature circle meeting (book club)? Haiku Deck- using ipads</strong></td>
<td>What are the attributes of a literature circle meeting (book club)? Haiku Deck- using iPads</td>
<td>Double period- brainstorming what groups look like Watch one of the video examples of what a book club meeting looks like. - Brainstorm using haiku deck (and then watch a second video to see if you would add or change anything)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 7: So what?</strong></td>
<td>Why do all this work before getting to literature circles? Why is it important to go outside of the text? How do you make sure your ideas are clear?</td>
<td>Do we want to post these to the blog? So What? (Tovani, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slide 8: The Meeting: Discussing “Priscilla and the Wimps” by Richard Peck</strong></td>
<td>Review group expectations* from Haiku Deck (collated and posted on blog site)</td>
<td>Have the students write and post a reflection about the meeting: what did you learn; what did you like about meeting; What could you do better next time?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Notes:**
- Students will start with reading story, as it will be a conversation point from the beginning. The students will be receiving other articles and items to help support and expand their thinking about the reading. This is to be experiential-learning from experiences...
- Have blank paper/graphic organizer, pencils, highlighters, copies of story available. Before students share any ideas from their thinking…share what literature circles are next...
- Repost assignment to class blog. Post at least two of your notes from the reading today. Don’t forget to support your work with examples from the text or other connections that you’ve made.
- Homework: Post to Padlet. And then go to blog, watch two videos and then respond to questions on the blog. The two videos are examples of book club meetings: Christopher Paul Curtis (on Today show) and Sidney Poitier (on Oprah)
- Double period- brainstorming what groups look like Watch one of the video examples of what a book club meeting looks like. - Brainstorm using haiku deck (and then watch a second video to see if you would add or change anything)
- Do we want to post these to the blog? So What? (Tovani, 2011)
- Have the students write and post a reflection about the meeting: what did you learn; what did you like about meeting; What could you do better next time?
Appendix C
Example of Blog Posts for Kayci’s Class

**Homework for April 30, 2013 (Due May 1st)**
After reading “Priscilla and the Wimps” by Richard Peck, post your ideas, thoughts and questions (you only need to post 2) on the PADLET. Use your notes from the graphic organizer to help with your post. Don’t forget to post your name or your teacher will delete your work.
You will watch 2 short videos that show book club meeting in progress. You will need to create a blog post and answer the following questions:

**What makes these book meetings effective?**

**How do the participants interact with one another?**

**How do they show collaboration?**

The videos are:

Christopher Paul Curtis Book Club Meeting

Sidney Poitier Book Club Meeting

**Homework for May 2, 2013**
Priscilla and the Wimps - 5, 4, 3, 2, 1… Action (due May 6th)
You are now the director of the movie or a TV show version of “Priscilla and the Wimps”. You need to put together your plan for getting money for your project.

**Setting and location** - describe year (50’s, 60’s, 70’s, etc…), season (time of the school year), and what type of school it would be *maybe add an image of what it would look like* 
**Actors** (you would like to cast and why) *You can focus on just casting Priscilla, Monk Clutter, and the narrator*
**Wardrobe** (clothing one of the characters would wear)
**Music** (give sample lyrics or a link to the music)
**Rating** (what movie rating or what channel would this show on)

Choose a scene from the text (include page and paragraph numbers), and then write … a short example of what the script would look like

This is a photo of the white board notes taken during class. I’ve learned to take pictures of the board and post online- as a reminder to students and to no re-type as students remember the board the way they saw it in class.
First Reflection for Literature Circles - posted May 15th - reflection due May 16th

Remember to create a new post (Reflection #1 - Your Name) if you would rather the teachers your post without sharing it with the class, please include *PRIVATE in your title.

Questions created during meeting #1: Students would create questions as a group based on their literature circle discussions

Skybreaker What role might the unknown girl (on the front cover) play in this story? What is the significance of the reflection on her glasses?

Daniel's Story Were the Jews the only group persecuted during the Holocaust? If so, why were they the ones and how many of them died? If not, who else was targeted and why?

The Bite of the Mango What motivates the rebels to act the way they do? What might have caused them to become the people who they are in the book?

Branded What is the connection between the topic of school uniforms and the title (Branded)/cover photo (one red shirt next to all the white ones)? How do they relate to the story of this novel?

Elijah of Buxton Why is Mr. . Travis’ lesson on “familiarity breeds contempt” so important? How might it impact (or connect with) the rest of the story?

Griff Carver What role did (or will) the teachers play in the bullying incident with the BMX bikers? Why is this important to the story?

Expectations for your reflection

Write a summary of the first part of the book. It should be 3-5 sentences. (What happened?)

the question from the cue card using examples from the meeting and the text to support your answer. (see above for questions)

teme, reading strategy, from your think sheet and write it out in paragraph form using examples from the text. Don’t forget to explain why this is important to your understanding. (the ‘so what’?)

5 sentences about what you learned from this first literature circle meeting. (It may be in reference to how your group worked together, what you talked about, and how you are going to make your next meeting more successful).

Example reflection by Ms. . Faraj

My group read the first part of Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis. Bud is an orphan who decides to run away from a foster home in search of a musician. He has a bunch of flyers in his little suitcase and he misses his mom. Bud believes he has met a vampire, even though deep down he knows it’s not true. One of the questions my group asked was: “Why does he want people to call him Bud, not Buddy?” We thought that Bud sounded cooler than Buddy. He’s becoming a teenager and who wants to have a name that sounds like a dog’s name? I think he wants people to think he’s older than he is. When someone calls you Buddy it sounds like he’s a little kid and Bud sounds more mature. Also, his mom died and that’s the name she gave him and it’s special to him because he wants people to call him the name his mother gave him, in respect to her. A theme that shows up in a lot of YA books is vampires. What is it with vampires in books? It seems that lots of books have vampires. Twilight is a prime example. Stephanie Meyer used vampires in a romantic way but in this book, the author chose to use vampires because Bud was terrified of them. I always think it’s stupid when vampires show up in stories but in Bud’s case it makes sense. The man is carrying containers of blood. Maybe he is a vampire. I think
the man may be a doctor though. Some people need blood to survive if they are in surgery and they need a blood transfusion. This man is either a doctor or a deliveryman. That makes more sense than a vampire. Vampires aren’t real but in this story I liked how the author uses the vampire theme to build suspense and also makes me giggle. I still don’t like vampires. I hope in our next meeting that someone finds some maps of Michigan. I want to find out where Bud is in the story. I can picture it but I want to see it. You know, I’m not going to wait to see what somebody else does, I think I might look it up and bring a link or a map to the next meeting. That’s how I can make the meeting more successful not only for myself but my group.

**Second Reflection for Literature Circles- posted May 17h- due May 21st (long weekend)**

**Questions created during meeting #2**

**Skybreaker** Is Matt Cruise going to get a fair share of the treasure or is Mr. Slater going to betray them all?

**Daniel’s Story** Because of what happened to Daniel and Fredrich’s family members, will they make it through the holocaust?

**The Bite of the Mango** When Mariatu has the baby, will she give it up for adoption?

Why did no one believe Mariatu when she told them about the rape?

**Branded** Why don’t they cooperate with the principal?

**Elijah of Buxton** Why did Preacher kidnap Mawee? How will this effect the plot?

**Griff Carver** Why would Berton lie about his rash?

**Expectations for your reflection**: Reposted from previous post

**CHALLENGE**

Contact the author (or publishing company for your book). Email works but there are other social media outlets too! (Copy and paste your email into a post AND if you get a response, post that too!)

Good luck and happy posting!!!

**Questions created during meeting #3**

**Skybreaker** Why is Mr. Slater in such a rush to find the gold?

**Daniel’s Story** Will Daniel and his family escape from Poland along with other people? How might they escape?

**The Bite of the Mango** Will Mariatu get prosthetic hands to help her in life?
**Branded** Will Mr. Roberts find out their plan?

**Elijah of Buxton** Do you think that the preacher will betray Mr. Highgate and Mr. Leroy with the money?

**Griff Carter** Why do authors put diaries in books?

Blog Posted May 21st- homework due May 23rd

**Expectations for your reflection** (Re-posted from previous posts.)

**CHALLENGE…**

Contact the author (or publishing company for your book). Email works but there are other social media outlets too! (Copy and paste your email into a post AND if you get a response, post that too!)

**Good luck and happy posting!**

Remember, we are giving you an extra night to complete your reflections so put a lot of thought into them. Also focus on how you organize your ideas. If you have any questions feel free to ask tomorrow in class.

**Final Reflection due Wednesday May 29th (posted May 27th)**

**Hello all!**

You did it! You have reached your last reflection. This is your final opportunity to organize and put your thoughts to paper. You are expected to write a final reflection that is organized, shows your understanding and allows you to share your thinking. This reflection is due on Wednesday, May 29th.

**SUMMARY**: Write a summary of the final section of the book. It should be 2-5 sentences. (What happened?)

**QUESTION**: Take the question from the cue cards (the questions are listed below) and use it to develop a paragraph. Answer the question and then use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

**THINK SHEET**: a theme, reading strategy, etc. from your think sheet and write it out in paragraph form using examples from the text. Don’t forget to explain why this is important to your understanding (so what?) *REMEMBER, you can always add to your think sheet. Examples of questions you can answer for this paragraph: If you could change the cover of the book, how would you change it? If the ending disappointed you, how would you end the story? OR- what do you expect to happen if the book had a sequel?

**PERSONAL GROWTH**: Write 3-5 sentences about what you learned from doing literature circles. (It may be in reference to how your group worked together, what you talked about, and how and if you made the meetings successful). Give a specific example from your discussion.

**OVERALL THINKING**: Final Paragraph: Why is your book good for the YA (Young Adult) audience? What message/theme makes it important?
Possible themes: freedom, loss, survival, genocide, hope, slavery, despair, adventure, betrayal, love, jealousy, human (children’s) rights

Messages (examples): Don’t be afraid, persevere. Stand up for your rights. Despite dark situations, there’s always hope, just look for it. Never give up. Losing something can make you gain something, that’s more important in the end. Strive to do your best.

Remember to look at your feedback that we have spent time giving you. This feedback is important to helping you do a better reflection.

THE QUESTIONS:

Elijah of Buxton: What is going to happen to the enslaved family? Why did Ms. Chloe take the gun and what is she going to do with it?

Griff Carver Hallway Patrol: What does the picture at the back of the book mean?

Skybreaker: What happened after they touched down on the ground?

The Bite of the Mango: When Mariatu read Romeo and Juliet, why did Mariatu think of Musa and herself?

Branded: Why did Mr. Roberts order the uniforms even though he knew it was made by child labour?

Daniel’s Story: Why is it that towards the end of the book, the storyline became so unrealistic?
## Appendix D

### Grade 7 PowerPoint Introduction to Literature Circles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slide Title</th>
<th>Student Notes (on slide)</th>
<th>Teacher Notes</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Slide 1: Before We Begin</td>
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<td>Students will start with reading story, as it will be a conversation point from the beginning. The students will be receiving other articles and items to help support and expand their thinking about the reading. This is to be experiential- learning from experiences…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 2: You answered these questions while you watched two short videos…</td>
<td>What makes these book meetings effective? How do the participants interact with one another? How do they show collaboration? Why is it important to work in a group?</td>
<td>The two videos are examples of book club meetings: Christopher Paul Curtis (on Today show) and Sidney Poitier (on Oprah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 3: 6 Important Words</td>
<td>Working in your group of three, lay out all your post it notes Discuss with your group which 6 words are the most important to how a group should work when discussing a book and sharing ideas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 4: What are the attributes of a literature circle meeting (book club)? Haiku Deck- using iPads</td>
<td>What are the attributes of a literature circle meeting (book club)? Haiku Deck- using iPads</td>
<td>Double period- brainstorming what groups look like Watch one of the video examples of what a book club meeting looks like Brainstorm using haiku deck (and then watch a second video to see if you would add or change anything)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 5: Media Literacy Circles (A Different Kind of Book Club)</td>
<td>A Way of Thinking, Understanding and Talking about What You Read</td>
<td>Goals: using technology and getting the students to work in smaller groups, collaboratively using literature and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 6: What is media literacy?</td>
<td>Media Literacy is the ability to interpret and create personal meaning from the thousands of verbal and visual symbols we take in through TV, radio, computers, newspapers, magazines, and advertising. Center for Media Literacy <a href="http://www.medialit.org">www.medialit.org</a></td>
<td>Definition taken from: <a href="http://www.medialit.org">http://www.medialit.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 7: Reading Media</td>
<td>Discuss with students: title, audience, text, and production</td>
<td>Image Source: <a href="http://themedialiterateteacher.weebly.com/media-triangle.html">http://themedialiterateteacher.weebly.com/media-triangle.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 8: To Sir, With Love</td>
<td>Read summary of story by E.R. Braithwaite 1959 autobiographical novel by E. R. Braithwaite set in the East End of London To Sir, With Love Movie Trailer</td>
<td>Summary Source: Before coming to the library, students read the summary of the story and discussed questions and ideas with teacher. Then they watched the trailer for the movie and completed a media triangle info graph (graphic organizer) as a class based on the media triangle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slide 9: More time with Book Trailers</td>
<td>Create a media triangle info graph for the trailer your group has been given (all trailers are for movies based on previously written books) You have 15 minutes There will be a gallery walk to share your work</td>
<td>Students spent time looking at the trailer for To Sir, With Love (starring Sidney Poitier) yesterday</td>
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<td>Slide 10: Class Expectations</td>
<td>Before we finalize the expectations for media literacy circles, the final groups will share their haiku decks. Anything missing?</td>
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<td>Slide 11: While You Are Reading…</td>
<td>Reading Strategies *Practice with The Heaven Shop *Inferring *Predicting *Making Connections *Visualizing *Synthesizing *Determining Important Ideas *Asking Questions Anything else?</td>
<td>The last read aloud in class was The Heaven Shop by Deborah Ellis. The dialogue in class is based on students jotting down their thoughts and ideas from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 12: So what are literature circles?</td>
<td>Work in small groups based on the chosen book Different groups read different books Meet on a regular schedule to discuss reading Participate in small group discussions Write two reflections (during the process) to show your understanding</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Slide 13: Organization</td>
<td>Time line (calendar) 2 reflections (Your teacher will talk to this on Monday) Think sheet (based on The Heaven Shop) *graphic organizer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide 14: How do you choose a book?</td>
<td>After this conversation, you will be put into your literature circle groups to choose a novel, as a group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Email to Participants (After the First Meeting)

Sent to Participants:
January 21, 2013 3:27 PM

A few things...

Three Attachments:
Small Group Inquiry Model- see attachment for chart I shared with the group
Comprehension and Collaboration- a copy of chapter 10 from the book *Comprehension and Collaboration-Inquiry Circles in Action (2009)* by Stephanie Harvey & Harvey Daniels (without the last few pages- as they are about Writing Circles- if you would like to read the last few pages- please come and see me)
A Literature Circles PowerPoint- this is the PowerPoint I shared with Grade 8 classes (who worked on literature circles with me in the library). This is how I introduced Literature Circles to the groups. I don't have any teacher notes attached so you may need to ask some questions for clarification.

Discussion Points and Questions (to ponder as you read, think and reflect on the group meeting)...

1. Think about what you do when you're reading a text. How do you track your thinking and your questions? How do you teach this skill to your students?
2. There are many roles in lit circles: discussion director, summarizer, illustrator, literary luminary, connector and vocabulary enricher. I still share these roles with students but I also say there are many other things that can happen with the text without using the confines of the roles. Review the roles (they're listed in the slide show with definitions). What would you add? What would you delete? Would you use the roles with your students?
3. How do you teach your students to think about their reading (via our discussion there's lots of things happening in our classrooms to support and help our students with reading). Choose one of the lessons you do with your students to help guide them through the reading of a text and bring it to the next meeting to share.

I'm going to leave it to three items. I will list the rest of the conversation points from our discussion in the agenda for the next meeting.

Finally, our next group meeting is Tuesday, February 5th after school in the library.

Thank you all for coming to the meeting.

Thanks Kayci for the delicious gluten free brownies... who knew? ;)

Carol- Can you please share the book with the Kayci and Naya so they can review the chapter on teaching reading comprehension strategies?

Feel free to email me or book time to come and sit and talk about your thinking process or just to share your ideas.

I look forward to our next group meeting.

Take care and hope you were able to accomplish a lot of work today,

Fatma
Appendix F
List of Websites and iPad Apps Used During Literature Circles

Padlet (previously known as Wallwisher). An online “blackboard” where students and teachers can post questions, thoughts and ideas in response to a text.

Kidblog.org. A teacher created blog. This blog is only available to students signed into the class. It is a space for teachers to post assignments and reminders of the work done in class for students to access at home and/or at school. Students can also post questions and create blog posts for their classmates.

Al Roker’s Book Club for Kids. Al Roker (weather forecaster for the Today show) runs a kids book club where he invites authors and children to come together to ask questions and share ideas about the authors’ books. Videos of the book club meetings are available on this website- which can be used as a discussion starter for how to run a book club.

Haiku Deck. A presentation App which students used to share their ideas for working effectively in small groups.

iMovie. This app has two features: New Project or New Trailer. For this assignment, students used New Trailer to use ready-made templates to create a short book trailer for their group’s novel. New Trailers has a ready-made storyboard, music and style which students used to input their information and images.

QR code. This was a fast and effective way to get students to pre-determined websites when working on assignments in class (Padlet, Kidblog or YouTube videos to show them how an app worked). The QR code was posted somewhere in the class for students to access at anytime.
Appendix G
List of Texts Used Before, During and After Literature Circles


