

Making time for book exchanges by Cheryl Dinnin

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Cutbacks in school libraries have resulted in reduction in staff – both teacher-librarians and technical/ clerical staff. Some teacher-librarians have had their time cut by half or more, while others have had their time eliminated altogether. This crisis in staffing, which impacts so directly on the students and staff, has forced teacher-librarians to cope with aspects of their role that previously were a given and now are a luxury.

One such aspect is book exchanges. We know that class book exchanges can be a good opportunity for the teacher-librarian to read aloud from new books, to book-talk new novels, to discuss authors and literature, as well as to provide guidance and time for students to find new material for pleasure reading. These can be teachable moments near the shelves as skills needed to locate books are reinforced, or at the OPAC as searching techniques are taught in the context of an individual student's needs.

There are several possibilities for accommodating book exchanges for students, while keeping as many periods as possible in the teacher-librarian's reduced schedule flexible for cooperatively-planned curriculum. Here is a sampling of ideas that work for some of the teacher-librarians in my district:

1. Teach those classroom teachers who want to run their own class book exchanges how to do so. These teachers book and run these exchanges on days or in periods when the teacher-librarian is not in the library. This way, those students get a regular book exchange and the teacher-librarian's flexible schedule isn't compromised.

2. Train student helpers to use the circulation program to check books in and out while the teacher-librarian is available to match students with appropriate books. One teacher-librarian calls these students who look after the circulation desk "Zappers!"

3. Allow the students to come into the library in small numbers from any classroom at times when the teacher-librarian is in the library. All students can be taught how to use the self-checkout feature of the circulation

program or to record what they borrow in a manner practised by the library. If these students can be independent, quiet borrowers, they won't disturb the teacher-librarian while s/he is teaching and they will be able to borrow new materials as needed. Some classroom teachers may want to issue library "passes" to these students when they use the library independently in this way.

4. Offer a regular set time each morning or at the end of the day for any students, from any class, who need new reading materials. Perhaps open the library for the first half-hour on specific days of the week or cycle to specific grades or divisions; for example, Days 1, 3, 5 for Primary grades or Mondays and Fridays for Intermediate grades.

5. Suggest that teachers who want to cover their own class book exchanges when the teacher-librarian is not in the library, but who are uncomfortable with being responsible for the circulation aspect, might buddy up with another teacher who is comfortable using the circulation program. These could be two classes that are reading buddies so that time for book exchanges is built into this period once a cycle.

6. Use parent volunteers in any capacity that facilitates book exchanges without compromising the teacher-librarian's schedule.

7. Book a period once a month for a whole class book exchange with enough time for book-talks or reading aloud. This will help to encourage those individuals who don't come to the library often for pleasure reading books and will give the teacher-librarian a regular, albeit infrequent, reading contact with all students. This period can be slow-paced and leisurely, with time for browsing, listening, and reading.

Whatever method you use, your main goal is to promote the reading of quality books while keeping your limited schedule as flexible as possible for the teaching of information studies. If you have other strategies that work in your school, please write to the Teaching Librarian <tl@accessola.com> to share your ideas. ■