There is a way inside the circle. There is a door, and it is wide open if you just take a second look. A simple design characteristic of many systems has the unintended consequence of building parity rather than isolated dominance. What do we mean?

What systems are being used? Google Sites? Moodle? A content-management system like Blackboard? Google Classroom? Simply find out if a learning system is set up for a lesson, unit, or course—does the system allow for multiple instructors at the “ownership” level? Ownership may be extended to more than one person, and that is exactly what you want. You want to be an owner alongside the classroom teacher. Other systems might call this level instructor or other highest powerful position. Try to discover a workaround if this joint level isn’t present.

So whether a learning experience is going to be a face-to-face experience in the classroom and the library learning commons, a blended learning experience, or totally online, create a web page for that experience that creates a partnership, as explained below.

For a website in our favorite Google Sites, or one you like better, work out a joint ownership arrangement with the classroom teacher. In this example from a Google Site, both Carol and David are owners and thus have full power to build, change, add, and delete.

In the following example, Carol’s ability to change anything on the site has been dramatically reduced to just editing.

And, finally, David has reduced Carol to just a viewer with no power at all to edit or change.

For at least a half century, teacher librarians have been saying to classroom teachers, “Can we help? Can we partner? Coteach?” Along the way, the idea of “helping” has stuck in many educators’ minds, but partnering has been a more difficult concept. Seemingly countless books this author has reviewed for Teacher Librarian center on the concept that the teacher librarian, if mentioned at all, is a person in the support role but not really a person to be viewed as an equal.

We are a helpful bunch—it’s the reference librarian in all of us—but how do we make that step into parity as a colleague with invaluable expertise? We are happy to build a bibliography, create a LibGuide, or pull resources, but is “gathering” the central role that dominates the perception of who we are and what role we play?

There is so much emphasis on the classroom teacher as the “king of the classroom.” And technology often enforces that time-honored model. Almost all the content-management systems out there presume that a course, unit, or problem-based learning experience is an entity owned by the teacher, designed by the teacher, and is the sole guide of what needs to be learned, how it is to be learned, and how learning will be assessed. Even the new Google Classroom makes the assumption that the sum of learning is under the control of a single person.

The structure of an online learning experience or a blended learning experience presumes autonomy and a top-down approach to learning. After teachers are equipped with new technologies, they often transfer what they did in pretech days over to the new system. Little has changed, and critics keep yelling that technology does not make any difference. Yes, the assignments are now available 24-7, but the content has not changed. In Reuben Puentezada’s SAMr model, his lowest level is substitution, and it shows little hope of increased learning through technology. The idea that I am now working on a computer vs. paper and pencil, while interesting at first, soon loses its luster as typical boredom sets in.

So as one-to-one computing and content-management systems become ubiquitous, are teacher librarians left out of partnering and condemned to a supporting role again?

No, No, No! Don’t Let It Happen!

The trouble is that if you find yourself outside the circle of learning once again, we are right back in the same mud puddle.
Most content-management systems have such levels, but the result determines the kind of role and relationship possessed by the participants. In the first example, both partners have parity and can cocreate a learning experience; that is exactly what you want since the software now has coteaching as the basic assumption of the virtual space.

At first, this level of partnership may seem strange to a teacher or even to a tech director, but the advantages to participating adults soon become just a natural strategy of accomplishing learning experiences. It is a matter of trust.

If the software, such as Google Classroom, does not have such levels on the main site, then there is a simple workaround: put a link in the software to another site that is collaborative. Thus a collaborative Google Site’s URL is placed in the Google Classroom, and students are directed to that participatory site. It is a simple but powerful change. Furthermore, users of the various content-management systems can keep requesting that double ownership power be a part of the software.

It is reported that Google is already considering such a change to their Classroom software.

In order to see how this actually happens, we have included a real learning experience designed to be cotaught. The following example of a cotaught learning experience was created by three students at San Jose State School of Information: Gloria Maciejewski, teacher librarian, San Francisco Unified, California; Lea Porter, teacher librarian, West Fork Elementary, West Fork, Arkansas; and Maureen Sullivan, librarian, Fairmount Elementary, in San Francisco. They created this unit for fifth graders, but it could easily be used with a combination of grade levels grade five and above.

The first thing the trio did was download the Knowledge Building Center template from Google:

http://goo.gl/udftV

This template is free and can be used by anyone for a lesson or unit of instruction.

Then the trio created their site on the popular topic of immigration; it can be used as a face-to-face unit, a blended learning experience, or even a totally online experience with just a bit of tweaking.

This unit is a template on Google, so you as a reader can pull it down, rename it, and use it or change it in any way you wish. Just click the blue "Use This Template" tab in the upper right, rename it, and it is yours. Since it is a Google site, you will need a Google account to download it. Here is the opening page of this site:

http://goo.gl/RBL2gr

There are a few important things to notice about this site. Take a peek at:

The front page, designed to be a hook for students who might just respond with a spark of interest.

The lesson plan page, which gives the particulars, but notice that it has been designed so that both partners coteach from beginning through the assessment.

The culminating experience, which is very different. During a normal learning experience, students would create a product and make presentations. Not this one. They treat all they have learned along the way as background knowledge. Then they take the major poem, and in a Book2Cloud experience (Google that if you’d like more information), curate and construct around each phrase of the poem and then spend time putting it all together.

The Big Think. After the experience is over, the adults and the students reflect on what they have learned about immigration and how they learned it. And they try to figure out how they could be better learners the next time a project like this happens with their teacher and teacher librarian.

Our conclusion and “So What?” If the structure of a learning experience makes true collaboration and coteaching the expectation and “natural,” we think that one major tweak can be a major step forward: two or more heads think about what will work in this collaboration. It brings the library learning commons and the teacher librarian and the teacher together. It is so simple, but worth the try, try again, and try again experiment.