

The Media Center
Collaboration Beyond the Core

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From video production with scavenged media to current digital video, there is a strong partnership between the industrial technology department and the media program in our middle school. Our partnership coincided with the changes in two programs: The evolution from shop to industrial technology and the evolution from a print-centered library to a multi-format media program. Through the years we've planned for student success, learned, and had fun.

Collaboration wasn't a common word in our professional vocabulary when we designed scavenged media projects, but our work together illustrates collaboration "beyond the core," media specialists working with teachers who are often ignored when we talk about collaboration. By the time our Industrial Technology program evolved to Modern Communications, collaboration was a top priority in media programs everywhere. Our collaboration resulted in quality student projects that integrate technology and information literacy with content skills and encourage student success. Our "Postcard Project," for example, looks outwardly simple; students create a postcard to write home about a pretend trip to a foreign country. But the project requires many literacy skills: Travelers are required to search for information in an online encyclopedia; complete note-taking and citation forms; use Excel drawing tools, digital cameras, a photo editing tool, and word processing; apply technology ethics; and work collaboratively with others.

The instinct is often that teachers of core subjects—language arts, social studies and science—are the logical and easiest clientele to work with. That isn't always the case. Some media specialists say they have more success collaborating with some of the non-core areas than with the "traditional academics." This may be because of curricular needs and personalities. It may be because teachers in "non-core" disciplines may not have quite the demands of rigid standards or standardized testing, which many media specialists believe are factors in decreased collaboration and fewer technology-based student projects. In smaller schools, each "non-core" teacher is generally the only one teaching his or her particular subject in the school. Like the media specialist, they may not be part of a larger department or team and are often eager to work with others. National Board Certified Media Specialist Connie Williams, from California, commented, "Working with these teachers is always so much fun because the topic is usually interesting and a little off the beaten track!" Let's look at some other good stories about collaboration.

Art is a good area for collaboration. Student artwork is displayed in many media centers. Displays add to the overall ambiance of the media center in addition to showcasing student work. Art students at Winona Middle School have created almost life size sculptures of buffalo, a Native American hunter riding a horse, and King Tut's Sarcophagus. The sculptures attract attention, elicit "oohs and aahs" from visitors, and are a source of student pride. Michigan media specialist Cheryl Youse collaborated with an art teacher whose students created aliens out of paper mache to coincide with upcoming visit by a science fiction writer, who was happy to see so many science fiction projects on display.

Welcome these displays! Supporting art teachers at this level leads to more collaboration. Mary Ann Kadish at the ACS International School in England said she does a lot of work with the art teacher. “Because she doesn’t have time in class to show and discuss all the books we have selected for a particular theme, I work with the students in the library and we discuss different styles of illustrations and art, and also help with the introduction to her art lesson.” Texan Donna Cook sets up the screensavers on all the library computers to teach art. “The art teacher and I went to Webshots.com and chose screensavers under the Webshots ‘fine arts’ category,” she said. “We put five different examples of fine art on each library computer, and programmed them to randomly cycle through the five. Anyone in the library, or even just walking down the hall past the library, is exposed to a constant art show of nearly 100 different pieces of art. The art teachers think it is marvelous, and I enjoy all the art myself. It is a ‘simple thing’ that is one more way to collaborate with the classroom.” Donna also offered some tech tips. “You have to be careful with Webshots to disable its feature that loads a new picture on each day. I also disable the wallpaper feature, and I delete the sample set of set of pictures Webshots automatically loads.”

Providing art Web links on the school’s Web site is one way Martin Swist at the American School in Japan collaborates with art teachers. “Our ceramics teacher investigated a link I had sent to her about masks. [She and her class came] to the library to look through some of our ancient history books for further models.”

Music is another possibility. When a fourth grade teacher in Cheryl Youse’s school asked for help on an underground railroad/quilt unit, Cheryl found a song for the music teacher to play, taught the kids the words, and then the art teacher helped them make paper quilts in art class. She then presented books about both quilts and the Underground Railroad. Music teachers at the elementary level often work in many schools and lack time to do some of the things they would like to do. Our fifth grade music teachers appreciate our media center’s comfortable chairs and good access to computers to check their e-mail or get assistance in putting digital photos of the student musicals on the Web site.

The evolution of General Music to Music Technology at our school was ideal for collaboration. Throughout the years, I fed technology integration ideas to a general music teacher. I encouraged and complimented him as his program grew from using a couple Apple IIE music programs (Do you remember MECC’s *Music Theory*?) to proudly occupying their own music technology lab. Lyle often said how much he appreciated being brought out of the dark ages. When a new teacher took over, he asked me to update some information on the class Web site. I replied, “No, I’ll show you how.” The Music Technology Web site grew to become a gateway to student activities, assignments and notes, a student discussion, photos, and information about media center resources. You can visit Michael’s site at <http://www.rschooltoday.com/winonamiddle>. Navigate to Music Technology by selecting Staff Web Pages under the Academics tab at the top.

Kim Brosnan, LMS in Pennsylvania, wrote of plans to collaborate with her school’s general music teacher. “They currently do a composer report. Rather than write a boring report, the students do the same research they’ve been doing, but . . . create a resume for the composer/performer they are studying. This will keep them from plagiarizing and will teach them a valuable skill for the future.”

(Note: Would you like more ideas for collaborating with music teachers? Visit the *Song of America Tour and Institute*. Select the “Songs as Historical Artifacts” link at

<http://www.loc.gov/creativity/hampson/workshop/index.html> to see how you can encourage the use of primary sources in the music curriculum.)

How about Home Economics or Family and Consumer Science? Media specialists can help teach students how to read a pattern (another hook to information literacy) or utilize their special skills such as crocheting or knitting to co-teach with busy teachers. If the curriculum offers courses in child development or babysitting, the media specialist can teach storytelling, read stories, or provide resources. Connie Williams said she does some great collaboration in the Food Sciences and the independent living sections. “One big one we are planning is a session on influence of the media in terms of diet.”

Some have success with language teachers. Martin Swist said, “[Modern language teachers have afforded] the opportunity to introduce our middle school students to the book and online versions of Kodansha, a fine encyclopedia dealing with Japan and things Japanese.” Deborah Cundey Owen from Massachusetts wrote, “I was lucky enough to have our eighth-grade Spanish teacher work with me this year on an inquiry module. She assigned each student a Spanish-speaking country, and we tried to get away from the ‘bird unit’ type of research (thanks, David Loertscher!) by asking them, ‘How would you market your country to increase tourism and economic development?’” The module is available at <http://burbank.nrsd.net/librinfo/Library%20Home/Templates/Bienvenidos.dwt>. Oral history projects are another possibility for working with modern language or bilingual education teachers. Our ESL teacher in Winona, Minnesota, was the driving force behind her Hmong students’ contributions to a Web site we created about our community’s changing demographics. < <http://www.rschooltoday.com/demographics/> >

Career exploration invites collaboration at all grade levels. Jennifer Smith from San Antonio wrote, “I work closely with my Career Investigations teachers. We work on specific Websites as well as using subscription databases. I also work with the Technology Applications teachers to teach Boolean search strategies, evaluation of Web sites, search engines and subject directories, and copyright. These classes reach all the eighth graders on my campus, so I am able to ensure that consistent information and skills are reaching all students.”

Physical Education? Cheryl Youse said she does lots of video with the P.E. folks. “A couple of years ago during a construction project, the P.E. teacher was sharing my office and working on her jump rope for heart event. We ended up putting together books that featured jump roping and books about the human body that were displayed and students were encouraged to check out. I went to gym class and jumped rope; she brought them to the computer lab to research the heart.”

Principal input. Deborah Owen is fortunate to have a principal who was a librarian for quite a while. “He taught us how to integrate the library into all of the Massachusetts Frameworks. He had us read every single Framework (ELA, Foreign Languages, Math, etc.) and highlight any wording that we thought would lend it to library work. He is especially interested in getting math teachers to bring students to the library, even if it’s just for one period to estimate how many books are on each shelf. He also pushes them to consider coming in to look at graphs and charts, which are in almost all the reference books, and to look at all kinds of data that can be found in the almanacs.”

More math! The presence of labs in a media center can lead to many collaborative activities with math teachers who require their students so use Excel, do Web-based activities, create

tessellations, or explore math games. Brenda, a math teacher, described a spreadsheet activity as “my best media center experience ever! Now I can come more often.” We were especially thrilled by student response to Eye Spy Math, a photo analysis activity. Eye Spy Math requires students to view primary source photographs of buildings and objects to identify the geometric and mathematical terms represented. The PowerPoint presentation encourages critical thinking and elicits excellent student response. The complete Eye Spy Math PowerPoint is downloadable at the Library of Congress Learning Page at <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/educators/handouts/index.html>. Links to the photographs are available as a Word file.

Technology is often the hook when working with “non-core” teachers, since quite often they will not require the more traditional types of print-based or research activities. Without a technology draw, many might not ever set foot in the media center. The key to successful collaboration is providing good service, being prepared to meet diverse curricular needs, and building trust. Remember these teachers when you send out information; let them know you are thinking of them. Communication is a foundation for collaboration.

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PULLQUOTES:

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