

**The Media Center:  
The Evolution of Teacher**

by

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**Barb's thoughts** for this column came to me via an email attachment, a big step for a career teacher from a traditional background. Yet, Barb, who energetically pops into the media center several times a week represents those teachers who have "made the switch," evolving from a traditional teacher in a self-contained classroom to one who routinely provides media/technology based learning experiences for her sixth grade social studies and language arts students.

Barb was not always eager to integrate technology in her curriculum. She transferred to the middle school after 18 years in an elementary classroom, "ready for a professional change." In her "early days" at Winona Middle School she relied on almanacs and other traditional resources reflecting her traditional background in elementary education and library science. She reminisces fondly about the library media skills lessons that were part of earlier curriculums and would still like to see more teaching of the traditional research foundations. As a licensed elementary teacher and school librarian she "wanted [her] social studies students to develop and use the research tools available to them" considered "it exciting to come into a building situation where students could freely use the media center." Together we introduced students to the Readers Guide to Periodic Literature and Current Biography, the traditional print research tools of the time. But, "needless to say, times are a changing" and Barb began to change, too even though she was still using her Smith Corona electric typewriter and wasn't "at all convinced that change would occur." Now Barb is the teacher who encourages her team members to take advantage of the possibilities.

**But, "through very patient co-workers,** some self-learning and many Winona School District computer classes," Barb "made huge advances" because of her willingness to try something new. As a member of middle school teaching team where team members were moving forward every year, she knew she have to be the one to change. She took advantage of our staff development classes including one tailor made to help members of her teaching team become comfortable with computer basics. Those first attempts to integrate technology into the curriculum were not always smooth; in fact they were chaotic! Barb knew that the switch to resource based, active learning also meant "loosing control. " This career teacher hung in there and is now offering solid technology based learning activities for her students.

**So what's happening with Barb's students?** At times it seems they live in the media center. With this school year only half over they have experienced electronic research utilizing the "traditional" electronic catalog, online magazines, and online encyclopedias. They've researched "famous Minnesotans" using online magazines, the Internet, and yes, even traditional biographical tools and books. Instead of "reports" they create Hyperstudio presentations which they in turn present to their classmates adult style in our distance learning classroom. Barb's students have studied our community's history and cultural diversity using locally developed web sites. They've explored Minnesota tourism using a wide range of web sites. I knew we were on a roll the day I heard Barb reciting URLs to her class. And, we still team for some more traditional literature based activities and book talks. "I am still a purist in the the belief that nothing can replace a "good book". My firm belief is that computers are another tool in our long list of sources to use. There has to be a happy medium.....times are a changing.....Change is good but we have to still stay grounded.. As more and more research

comes forward, we can't rely completely on one source or format. It has not been proven that "computer learning" advances students' ability any further than traditional book learners who do not have access to technology.

**Along the path of change** Barb completed a Master's Degree in Education which "I would have never been able to accomplish this without my computer skills." Part of her "grad work dealt with using the theory of Multiple Intelligence and School-to-Work/Career Education," areas of study correlating with the integration of real life technology into education. This class work had an impact on her teaching as she came to realize that kids have their own level and learn in different ways. "I got off the idea that everybody had to be doing the same thing. With students having their own particular strengths, it is important for them to understand how they internalize their own learning." Instead of feeling out of she control because students were not all doing the same activities she learned the chaotic atmosphere is acceptable as long as it is constructive, productive learning. "The activity doesn't bother me when we're in the media center since we have a lot of space. It's different than being in a classroom." Barb knows she can learn a lot from students. "Each fall more and more computer literate students moved into our sixth grade; each year I would learn more and more from them."

Barb believes "computers can take the stress out of research by making the information more visual and readable on a student's own reading level. Both special education and regular education students will benefit in clearly composing a project by using their word processing skills and spell check. With the constantly changing [educational] standards computers will play a large part in completing their final products. And, if students aren't information literate where are they going to be? . . . . My biggest challenge right now is to inform my students that an acceptable project is not a poster with computer pictures stapled to it.....Just as..... a few years back, copying a report out of an encyclopedia was not an acceptable project. "

**Another challenge** is the nightmare of scheduling; teaching in a school where the media center and labs are heavily used, Barb has learned to plan ahead and also be flexible, willing to take whatever is available. And, since we never know how long project will take it's very important that we both are willing to monitor and adjust as we need to.

**Media specialist/teacher planning** has occurred along the way. Much is the informal, "oh by the way" approach. Other times there are brief, but "formal" planning times. And, we've worked on structured curriculum writing teams developing materials to implement an integrated information technology component which is part of the Minnesota Graduation Standards. She would love to see more opportunities for all the social studies teachers to spend a chunk of time with me so we explore resources, become more acquainted with technology and plan together. As always, time is more most limiting factor.

For this "wanna be media specialist "times are a changing and . . . for the better. A personal "high 5" has been seeing the students use the computer both as a research tool and to produce a given product. Instructional management is better, too, "I don't know how I ever did lesson planning or grades without my computer."

**The numerous and excellent opportunities** Barb provides her students are certainly replicated in countless media centers and classrooms. But, as a career media specialist working with a career teacher it is exciting and rewarding to see the enthusiasm and energy and positive change. Like many teachers who infuse technology in their curriculum, her success is due to a collegial atmosphere and a desire for professional growth. She has learned that technology can add excitement to the teaching and learning experience.

In the fall of 2000 we will move into a new middle school and Barb's classroom will be close to the media center. She, her teaching team members, and students will also have access to even more classroom information technology. She hopes she will be able to teach language arts and social studies in one block of time. "With all of our technological advances, we would be able to relate what we study in social studies with the wide array of literature that we have available to us. This would be my dream teaching . " We're excited about the wonderful opportunities in our future.

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