

The Media Center: The Many Faces of Collaboration

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It appears that many media specialists are unnecessarily berating themselves these days because they think they aren't collaborating with classroom teachers enough. Even media specialists with good, vibrant, model programs criticize themselves because they feel they aren't involved enough in curriculum planning, doing enough co-teaching or actively involved in project assessment. One media specialist wasted a lot of emotional time feeling angry about being left out of a curriculum writing for a course undergoing revision. Another who is considered a leader in his district says conversations with the curriculum director seeking more direct involvement in writing curriculum fall on deaf ears. Many media specialists believe they are much more valued for their staff development and technology supports role than their curricular support role.

Collaboration is integral to every aspect of the media program and every aspect of the media specialist's role (AASL and AECT, *Information Power* p. 49) Media programs and media specialists do not operate in isolation. Unless your media center functions solely as a warehouse and few classes or teachers ever utilize the media center, it is quite likely that you are doing more than you give yourself credit for. Let's stop berating ourselves for not attaining the ideal model of collaboration. Let's stop thinking of collaboration as only those activities that are direct planning and teaching curricular activities with teachers. It is time to view collaboration in expanded ways and celebrate the varied aspects of our multi-faceted roles.

Service and support have acquired a bad name; some media specialists view it as non-professional and we are eager to tell people we are teachers. Good service and support are worth celebrating; they are the daily and practical side of collaboration and part of successful programs, students and successful schools. They are very important to teachers who want to use media/technology resources. Media specialists will lose all credibility and all opportunities for collaboration without first providing efficient, quick and competent service. Installing software, preparing instructions for using software, providing resources for a classroom, helping a teacher make a web page, duplicating tapes, or preparing a webliography are all services and support that teachers appreciate. My husband, a former science teacher, worked two years as a teacher paraprofessional providing support for 15 teachers. He applied his teacher perspective to help teachers with assorted tasks ranging from purely clerical jobs to curricular support. He often helped make the connection between the classroom and the media program. He once took an extra special book on tour to the science teachers and often helped me find the ideal web site. His contributions were greatly appreciated and vastly missed. Mealtime stories of his daily adventures were reminder of how much teachers appreciate it when we do things for them. One morning he inspired me to visit to a group of allied arts teachers and

inquire about their needs. They were happy to see me and surprised by my immediate response; I simply took a small group of carefully selected books to her classroom. Another was thrilled with the web sites I located for her. Both said they didn't want to bother me, but a few minutes of my time resulted in huge amounts of appreciation. Services and support like these are part of relationship building, a significant part of our jobs and another facet of collaboration. Relationship building may include walking around the school to touch base with people, inviting teachers to display student work in the media center, inviting students to display their collectables providing spaces for a student, staff or community groups to meet. These all help build positive relationships. Conversely, working in isolation, not getting out and about not taking care of staff needs efficiently and expediently are detrimental to staff/program relationships.

Our tech support role is a conundrum. We complain that it takes too much of our time. However, tech support builds bridges. One media specialist suggested making a list of the type of support we are asked to provide."I would sort it into a few different categories: Basic Nuts and Bolts, Application Support, and Curriculum Technology Support." Her little survey revealed that most spend time providing application support. There is often a fine line between application and curricular support. For example, if a teacher asks how to do something with Kidspiration it is application support; but if you help the teacher use Kidspiration with students or plan a lesson it is curriculum support. Teachers won't use technology and we can't provide curricular support if the technology doesn't work.

Tech support can lead to technology staff development, one of our most important roles and a type of collaboration that should never be under-valued or discounted. Through staff development we introduce new ideas, and influence teaching and learning, classroom practices and the media technology program and ultimately student learning. Whether Itis one on-one, small group, or formal staff development it is collaboration in action.

Facilitating experiences is a collaborative process to celebrate. We help schedule resources and spaces to best take advantage of what each offers. We arrange for special events or guest speakers. We may introduce a new way of doing something or develop a quick start guide so that students can work with a technology. Our organizational and resource providing skills become part of the successes of teachers and students. Unfortunately, these behind the scenes contributions are often unseen or unrecognized. We can bring our contributions to the forefront through newsletters, school web sites or just plain telling people what we do. An elementary media specialist posts the weekly media center and lab schedule on a white board in the staff planning area; she includes a note indicating her role in the projects. One of our teachers hosts an open house for parents to showcase student multimedia. I created a PowerPoint presentation called "Behind the Scenes" to explain teacher/media specialist planning, scheduling, resource providing, information literacy instruction, and student work. The slide show is a vehicle to help make sure media specialist and media program contributions do not get lost in the celebration of student work. A media specialist had an ideal experience with VIP visitors. When they walked into the Media Center my principal said "I want our media specialist to show you all of the collaborative activities and technology projects she has going on."

The visitors stayed at least 30 minutes, had lots of questions, and were really impressed. Her contributions were not lost in the work of others.

Routine and special program activities are collaborative by nature and should not be discounted. These include:

Reading activities such as book character days, Read across America day, literature festivals, Teen Read Week, Author or storyteller visits, Book talks and Book fairs and Family Reading Nights are very collaborative, involving partnerships with a large number of adults.

Materials production is unique form to our jobs. One media specialist calls herself the "production queen" and never turns down an opportunity to help a teacher use the digital camera, laminator or copy machine. As a new media specialist in her building she is building relationships and opening the door to a future level collaboration she hopes to attain. Many media centers have video broadcast facilities. Helping students and staff complete a daily or weekly broadcast is collaborative.

Supplying and helping staff use the special equipment such as digital cameras, video cameras, video projectors go a long ways. The teachers using them may not be the teachers whose students make use of the media center for research projects, but they are part of the educational team. Our support of the choir teacher is taping the school musical is equally important to curricular support.

Meetings, Meetings, Meetings. They seem to take more of a media specialists' time than in the past and are another form of collaboration. Time spent with the technology committee, the software selection committee, or attending departmental and grade level meetings is time well spent.

Teacher success is a reward for doing a good job. If we've been successful the teacher may no longer need us, or may need us just now and then during the course of a unit. If we collaborated in multiple ways with teachers during their initial work with a project they might no longer need us. They are able to work independently, needing our assistance only for a little. This is perhaps our reward for all we do along the way towards their success. If collaboration takes us to this we've truly been successful. Our role can than be to provide ideas and assistance to help the project move forward as curriculum, resources, students and technologies change.

Make your list. What do you do everyday that is collaborative? Make a diary now and then of all you do. Tuck it away to be looked at a time when you are full of criticism. Quite likely you will feel good about your collaborative efforts.

Worth reading

Oldford, Rhona, "Teacher-Librarianship and Change: Why Institutionalization has Failed," *Teacher Librarian*, February 2002

HYPERLINK "http://www.teacherlibrarian.com/tlmag/v_29/v_29_3_feature.html"
http://www.teacherlibrarian.com/tlmag/v_29/v_29_3_feature.html

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