

How Programming Documents

Can Lead to Collaborative Success Stories

In an ideal world, teachers would plan all collaborative efforts thoroughly with you, their library media specialist. They would discuss potential research projects before they set the topic guidelines, thus allowing you to make sure appropriate resources are available. They would encourage student reports on questions requiring real thinking, helping to avoid cut-and-paste reports plagiarized from the Internet. They would book only the classes necessary to complete the assigned work. They would book early; they would never be late. They would willingly assist you with their classes in the library media center, not even glancing in the direction of the local daily or the latest *National Geographic*. In an ideal world, you would carefully note all this activity for easy compilation into future reports.



Welcome to the Real World!

We do not live in a perfect world, but programming documents can at least bring us the best

By Colleen MacDonell

of all possible worlds in the library media center. Library programming documents can help you keep organized in the midst of ever-changing plans and can give teachers the guidance they need to fulfill their role in collaborative units.

Library programming documents clarify the notion of collaborative planning and entice teachers to try their hand at working with an “instructional partner,” as *Information Power* terms it. The amount of detail you provide in these documents will vary according to the particular audience you are targeting. Fitting strategy to audience is essential, so plan to have several versions of some programming documents, depending on the knowledge and experience that teachers and administrators have of collaborative planning.

Ideas for Programming Documents

Here’s a list of suggested programming documents. Most are suitable for handouts or e-mails; some can be placed on the library media center’s Web site. However you use them, they will kick-start your collaborative planning efforts.

1. An Invitation to Collaborative Planning (especially for new teachers)
2. A New Year of Collaborative Planning (for experienced teachers)
3. What Works (an overview of best practices, suitable to all faculty)
4. Simple Collaborative Planning Form (for first-time planners)
5. Detailed Collaborative Planning Form (for enthusiastic planners)
6. Evaluation of a Completed Library Media Center Unit (adaptable to all levels of experience)



7. Curriculum Connections (ideas to get plans under way)
8. Resources Alert! (using new resources to stimulate ideas for planning)
9. Library Calendar of Weekly Bookings (a convenient record for year-end stats)

If You Build It, Will They Come?

Once library media center programming documents are in circulation, they need to be supplemented with direct promotion. A flier inviting teachers to participate in collaborative planning is just an opener. Follow up with face to face promotion: a brief workshop, a joint presentation with a teacher who has already successfully run units in the library media center, question-and-answer sessions during a staff meeting, training sessions on in-service days, or visits to department meetings. Your documents lay out the basics; it is only through direct discussion with teachers that plans coalesce into action.

Working with teachers as instructional partners is the most important work that a library media specialist does. Even professional library media specialists with years of experience are constantly developing their understanding of how to teach children to learn on their own from information, become motivated readers, and use technology effectively. Explaining all that to colleagues may seem an impossible task. Luckily it is also unnecessary! Library media center programming documents do not have to be an A to Z guide to how collaborative units work; they merely have to get people interested enough in the process to try it. Once teachers become actively involved in collaboratively planned units, they will learn in the best way possible—by doing.

However, documents alone will never convince teachers to take part in planning. Teachers will only participate if you are proactive—this is definitely not a job for wallflowers! After sending an “Invitation to Planning” to teachers or after speaking about it during staff meetings, follow up on promising

leads. Think of that new teacher who seemed to be actively listening to your message. Find a time when he or she is usually in the teachers’ lounge and strike up a conversation. Has the teacher been thinking about upcoming units that would be well suited to library media center collaboration? Perhaps his or her ideas seem perfect for a WebQuest? Maybe it is a unit that is similar to one you have worked on before.

If the library media specialist consistently looks for opportunities to plan, teachers will eventually respond by making a booking. As they experience first-hand the power of a constructivist approach in the resource-rich environment of the library media center, they will be thankful for having been given a nudge. Teachers who may be “meaning to get around to” planning a unit can be persuaded to commit themselves.

Building Documents as Part of Collaboration

One surefire way to increase the likelihood of teachers using the forms that you have developed for planning is to involve them in the process of putting them together. New teachers should be given a chance to critique the simplified planning form before they are asked to make use of it. What seems self-evident to a veteran library media specialist might seem confusing to a beginning teacher. Likewise, those teachers with solid experience of collaboratively planned units may see the need for changes to the detailed planning form. Seeking approval gives teachers a sense of ownership in the collaborative process. Teachers also have expert knowledge of designing learning materials. Take advantage of this knowledge to improve your own designs.

Evaluation and Follow-up

Teachers and library media specialists should cooperate in evaluating both the process and the product of student work in the library media center. Library media specialists will have better chances of a thorough evaluation of how the unit plan has progressed if they take advantage of the natural

momentum that the process itself engenders. Toward the end of the project, as students are putting together their presentations, papers, or findings, take the teacher aside and have him or her fill in the evaluation form with you. This collaborative approach to evaluation will probably result in better analysis than either of you would achieve independently. Involving students in the discussion of what worked and what could be improved is an excellent way for them to study their own thinking processes.

Follow-up discussion is also necessary to promote the use of curriculum connections and new library media center resources. About a week after these documents have been sent out, teachers should be consulted. Approaching them with the documents in hand will help to refresh their memories. Do not depend on the teachers to have read through the entire document or to have reflected on it to the point where they are ready to plan. Bouncing ideas back and forth will help to bring the suggestions to life. If you sense that the teacher is becoming convinced that a particular plan would fit his or her upcoming curriculum needs, it is time to fill out a planning request and make a booking. Even if initial plans need to be rescheduled later on, the existence of a written plan will have firmly established the project as a part of that teacher’s curriculum.

Start Spreading the News!

As teachers become accustomed to organizing and executing work in the library media center, they will inevitably plan more collaborative lessons. As the library media center becomes busier, conflicts in scheduling will arise. Your online forms will be easier to promote as competition for time in the library media center increases. Whenever teachers make enquiries about bookings, lead them to the online calendar if there is a computer handy. Mention the Web page option every now and then in staff meetings and include a reference to the Web page on related forms. Once teachers discover how convenient and accessible it is, the Web page calendar will promote itself.

Success begets success. When teachers see their students engaged in active learning made possible by a collaborative plan, they will be able to imagine similar activities for upcoming units. Innovation breeds excitement and this, in turn, generates positive comments and requests for similar activities. When teachers are excited about their work, they spread the news. Share a teacher's success with others in staff room discussions and then acknowledge it formally in staff meeting reports. Public praise is obviously gratifying to those who receive it, and raising the visibility of one teacher's good work encourages a culture of recognition and positive feedback. In addition, public recognition raises the visibility of collaborative planning with those teachers you are still trying to reach.

Establishing an effective library media center program may take years. Principals are in a position to speed up this process by requiring teachers to include library research and collaborative projects as part of their teaching and by showing support for the library media center program. Library media specialists can promote good practices and increase the visibility of their program, but only an administrator can institutionalize this kind of change.

Teachers whose students achieve real learning in the library media center should be encouraged to display the results to other students and colleagues. Hallway displays of posters, presentation of work to other classes, publication of work in print or online, and stories about their success in school newsletters are all ways of promoting collaborative planning with those teachers who remain on the periphery. Visual displays of student work communicate powerfully to teachers, administrators, parents, and visitors to the school. During open houses or other events that draw large crowds to the school building, the products of student learning in the library media center should be part of what people see.

The Magical Process of Learning Library media specialists and

experienced teachers know that the product is easy to put on display, but that the process is often invisible to those who do not see it firsthand as it unfolds. The learning process as it happens in the library media center is hard to communicate because it is complex and varies from child to child. While specific information literacy goals can be quoted as achievements, the process of constructivist learning is harder to describe. Yet there are instances throughout the research process where confusion is dispelled and frustration is replaced by growing confidence. They are a natural part of this process when experienced teachers and library media specialists are there to facilitate.

Carol C. Kuhlthau has done a lot to show educators how library media specialists can lead students to construct their own meaning from information sources. She has developed the notion of "zones of intervention," based on the work of the psychologist Lev Vygotsky. For library media specialists, a zone of intervention occurs when "a user can do with guidance and assistance what he or she could not do alone" (712). At these moments students need coaching from a knowledgeable guide if they are to move forward in their learning process. Intervention from teachers outside of this zone is ineffective and bothersome to students. The real challenge of the constructivist approach to learning lies in identifying crucial moments when children need coaching. This requires sensitivity and continual engagement with learners, as Kuhlthau acknowledges, "While transmission learning may rely on textbooks and packaged materials, guiding the process of construction calls for expertise that only skillful sensitive professionals can provide" (711).

This is what defines the magic of learning as it is facilitated by the collaboration of teaching partners in the library media center. Library media specialists are uniquely prepared to make this happen. They have the competencies and experience to be effective coaches throughout the learning process.

Current trends in education are directing teachers to abandon transmission of facts in favor of active engagement with information and ideas. Library media specialists can play a central role in assisting with this transition. As Barbara Stripling has written, this focus on learning gives library media specialists "pivotal roles in creating a culture in the schools that is learner centered" (631). Through their work with classroom teachers, they can help to inculcate the attitudes and practices of constructivist educators. Teachers who have been teaching from the textbook for years will discover a better, more dynamic approach to learning through collaborative work in the library.

Schools that have a culture of learning are places where being a student is a source of satisfaction and joy because real learning is a pleasure. Good schools become great schools when the focus of education is not on right or wrong answers on tests, but the ability to think and judge for oneself. Students and teachers alike can discover the power of a free and engaged intellect. This will transform their idea of education from something that happens only in schools to something that is a natural and necessary part of living in the real world. ■

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