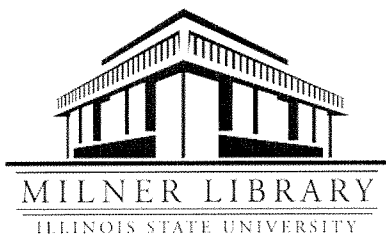


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Collaboration: It Really Does Work!

A Teacher's Perspective

As a teacher after the "No Child Left Behind" program has been established, I feel a little overwhelmed with all of the pre-testing, quizzing, testing, writing portfolios, projects, post-testing, and state and nationally mandated tests. On top of the weeks lost to testing, we have a very rigid curriculum in which to teach an abundance of objectives in a little amount of time. How can teachers help students not just learn, but understand what we teach in so short of a time span? One strategy that I found to work very well is collaboration between a classroom teacher and a library media specialist.

Team Building

Sixth grade students are often required to write an in-depth research paper with a thesis statement, supporting details, note cards, and a bibliography. This assignment is often stressful and overwhelming for all involved: teachers, parents, and students.

The research objective in the state curriculum may be vague about topics and the how-to steps to get to the end result. Normally, it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to comprehend the curriculum and construct a project to teach the skills that enable the students to complete the task. However, many classroom teachers are not trained in the area of information skills and research.

This year I tried something new to alleviate the stress on myself and benefit my coworkers. First, I thought of what associates I could



By Jennifer L. Youssef

collaborate with on this project. I worked with a sixth grade English teacher who is new to the grade level and has never completed the research paper. A sixth grade social studies teacher, also the curriculum leader for the grade and department chair, worked with me to determine a list of appropriate topics. Also, I worked with our school's library media specialist for her expertise in helping to guide me in the collaboration. I explained my goal for the collaboration to the

cooperating teachers and asked for any input. After our initial meetings, we had a plan. The social studies teacher helped identify famous historical people in the curriculum (figures who would be included on the state-wide assessment test in May). The English teacher and I worked together to identify the steps and goals we wanted the students to accomplish with their research paper. The library media specialist and I worked together to strategize what information skills they needed to learn to research their famous person in history. Second, I contacted the local public library and explained the research project so they would be able to help students. The local librarian was also sent a copy of the project with a name and contact number for any questions. The local librarian was very receptive and extremely appreciative with our conversation.

Let the Collaboration Begin!

With a plan in hand, we were ready to collaborate. Upon briefly explaining to the students in a letter to their parents the requirements on the paper, we began the process of instructing the students in research. The role of the classroom teacher was to teach the students the lessons on how to write a thesis statement and supporting details prior to researching in the library media center. The students are not required to know everything or even anything about their topic, but

“Working collaboratively with other classroom teachers and the library media specialist can transform a tedious assignment into an exciting, memorable project.”

they need to think about a thesis statement and three supporting details as they are acquiring new information. The library media specialist and I worked together and produced several PowerPoint presentations on paraphrasing, Big6™, research, taking notes, plagiarism, citations, online subscriptions, and CD-ROMs. We incorporated worksheets, such as graphic organizers, and several Kagan strategies to ensure that the students practiced the skills. Following three days of PowerPoint mini-lessons, the students selected a famous person in American history and began their guided research with the assistance of the library media specialist and the classroom teacher. We were very excited to see that the students applied content from the mini-lessons in the library media center. As the students were researching, we reminded them to think about their thesis statement and three

supporting details, and to look for pertinent information. After four days of dedicated research and time in the library media center, we noticed a considerable difference between the previous years of researching, without the collaboration between classroom teacher and library media specialist, and this school year. The students were very eager to take their research and form a paper detailing the facts about their famous person in American history.

Back to the Classroom

As we moved from the library media center back into the classroom, we focused on writing a thorough research paper. The English teacher and I worked with each student to compose a thesis statement and three supporting details. Many students surprised us because their thesis statements and supporting details were so well written. Most of the students did not require as much one-on-one conferencing as previous years. After we determined if they acquired enough information on each detail, we focused on writing a bibliography. This task was a little more difficult for the students to grasp, especially with Internet sites, but we were elated that the majority of the students retained what they learned from the minilesson and cited their sources effectively. It only required one class block time to complete the lesson. In previous years, it has taken two or more class blocks because many students forgot to write down information, such as author or contributor, article title, publisher, publication city, publication date, and page numbers, from encyclopedias. I attribute the success this time to the collaboration between the library media specialist and the classroom teacher working so well together and providing meaningful minilessons on citations.

Next, the English teacher and I provided a step-by-step outline for the students to fill in, along with a completed example outline to

demonstrate the process. It showed the thesis statement and three supporting details, and adding detail sentences under each of the three supporting details. From the outline, the students were able to write a rough draft. After reviewing the outline handout with the students, they had a very clear idea of what to include. Finally, the students wrote their research paper from their guided outline. To complete the project, each student typed the handwritten research paper on an AlphaSmart® (small replica of a computer keyboard with a tiny screen to view as you are typing). After checking their paper on the computer, they printed it out with a title page, table of contents, and correctly written bibliography, and placed it in a folder ready to be graded. In the end, the students were so proud of their research papers. They couldn't wait to see the grade they received and placed the papers in their writing portfolio as one of their best works ever.

Collaboration Works!

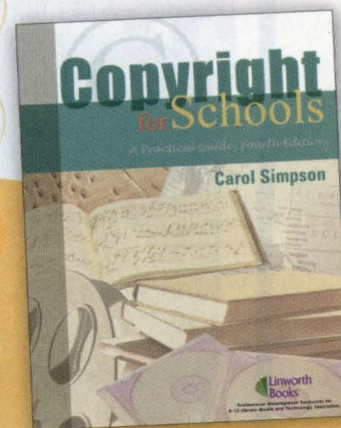
Working collaboratively with other classroom teachers and the library media specialist can transform a tedious assignment into an exciting, memorable project. Not only did the students learn a new skill, but all who were involved learned something new, too. Learning can be fun, especially when everyone joins together and helps out one another. As a result of the collaboration on the research paper, the other five English teachers on the grade level have met with us and signed up with the library media specialist to start their research papers. Yeah for collaboration! ■

Jennifer L. Youssef is a grade 6 social studies and English teacher at Corporate Landing Middle School in Virginia Beach, Virginia. She has a Master's Degree in Elementary/Middle School Education from Old Dominion University and is seeking a license endorsement as a library media specialist.

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