
By Angela Gess

Have you ever had a teacher say, "I'd love to bring my classes to the library more often, but we just don't have enough time because we have to prepare for our state standardized tests?" This response stems from a misconception about the role of library media centers and library media specialists. In some school environments, the library media center is viewed as a place for students to "waste" time reading fiction books, and the library media specialist as merely a babysitter who provides teachers with much needed planning time. This misconception by teachers and administrators must be changed. In light of the Information Power information literacy standards and the new 21st Century Learner standards, it is the role of the library media specialist to aide teachers and students in the preparation for standardized tests while teaching them crucial information literacy skills. This can be done through collaboration with the right teacher, on the right topic, at the right time.

THE FOUNDATION FOR COLLABORATION

Collaboration between the school library media specialist and classroom teachers is an excellent way to prepare students for a high level of achievement on state assessments. Collaboration, however, can be unsuccessful if proper planning does not occur. Successful collaboration occurs when planned with the Information Power and AASL standards in mind. The goal of any collaborative unit should be aligned with the Information Power mission statement in that students are effective users of ideas and information. Keith Curry Lance confirms this in the article, "Proof of the Power: Quality Library Media Programs Affect Academic Achievement." Lance states, "...the level of development of the library media program was a predictor of student performance, and data on staffing levels correlated with test scores." He also states, "Levels of student performance were also related...to the extent to which library media staff engaged in particular activities related to the teaching of information literacy and to the exercise of leadership, collaboration, and technology."

The misconception that the library media specialist cannot help students prepare for standardized assessments must be eradicated. This can be done by examining data on the correlation between certified school library media specialists and higher test scores. According to the article, "School Libraries Do Make a Difference," published in School Libraries Work by the California School Library Association, schools in Colorado and Oregon where there were collaborative media teachers had "...the best statewide high school reading/language scores." Also, students had "...21% higher elementary test scores." These statistics are just a few that have been published recently demonstrating the importance of utilizing the library media center and its certified media specialist. The key is having a media specialist who collaborates with teachers to further learning. Collaboration, when done conscientiously and often, is invaluable.

OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

The first step in any good collaboration is finding the "right" teacher. The "right" teacher is eager to collaborate, values your role as the library media specialist, sees the need for integrating technology into the curriculum, and understands that both the library media specialist and the collection can aide in the preparation for standards of learning assessments.

Recently, I participated in a collaboration unit with the sixth grade science teacher at my school. She and I put a great deal of time and effort into preparing a unit that addressed the state assessment standards on the topic of weather. The unit was successful for several reasons; but mainly because we both believed in the collaboration, and we both knew our goal: to focus on how and what the students were learning that would prepare them for the state standards of learning test.

The second step in any successful collaboration is choosing the "right" topic. The right topic is one that lends itself to a connection with the "standards" in the library media field, and that allows for the integration of technology. The right topic is one that is fundamental for students to master in order to obtain a high level of achievement on state assessment tests. While our unit was on weather, we focused on several Information Power information literacy standards and AASL standards for the 21st century learner.

The following information literacy standards were addressed in the collaborative unit:

- **Standard 1**: The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.
- **Standard 2**: The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.
- **Standard 3**: The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.

Likewise, the following AASL standards were a focus of this collaborative unit:

- **1.1.1** - Follow an inquiry-based process in seeking knowledge in curricular subjects, and make the real-world connection for using this process in one's own life.
- **1.1.2** - Use prior and background knowledge as a context for new learning.
- **1.1.4** - Find, evaluate, and select appropriate sources to answer questions.
- **1.1.6** - Read, view, and listen for information presented in any format (e.g., textual, visual, media, digital) in order to make inferences and gather meaning.
- **1.1.7** - Make sense of information gathered from diverse sources by identifying misconceptions, main and supporting ideas, conflicting information, and point of view or bias.
- **1.1.8** - Demonstrate mastery of technology tools for accessing information and pursuing inquiry.
- **1.1.9** - Collaborate with others to broaden and deepen understanding.

THEN THE RIGHT TIME

The third step in any successful collaboration unit is finding the "right" time to integrate the unit. The right time is going to be different for each unit. Sometimes, it is best to do a collaborative unit as an introduction. Other times, it may be best to use the collaborative unit in the middle of inquiry. My collaborative partner and I found that it would be best to do the unit as a conclusion to her classes' study of the weather. We believed that this would afford the students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the Information Power and AASL standards.

The collaborative unit on weather began with a two-day review of weather terminology by the science teacher. There was also a focus on how to read and...
forecast the weather. During the next two days of the unit, the collaboration came into play. The science teacher and I worked together to create a webquest integrating information in several formats (AASL 1.1.6). The webquest allowed students to utilize our mobile laptop lab to research the topic of weather, thus integrating technology into the unit (AASL 1.1.1, 1.1.8). The students were guided through the research process with a webquest and graphic organizer, but were required to access and evaluate information gathered from diverse sources in order to make sense of it and apply it to their science curriculum (AASL 1.1.4, 1.1.7, Information Power standards 1 and 2). This accessing and evaluating of information was essential in preparing the students for the state assessment test.

Without my collaboration with the science teacher, the students were less likely to be exposed to the information in so many formats. According to Debra Lau Whelan in the article “Study: Higher Test Scores Linked to Certified Media Specialists,” in regard to the importance of library media specialists, “…preliminary results show that certified librarians are also more likely to provide students with materials that present more diverse points of view and that better support the curriculum than noncertified librarians.” This was demonstrated in my collaboration unit with the science teacher.

SECONDARY EFFECTS

This unit addressed several other Information Power information literacy and AASL standards. For example, Information Power standard 3: The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively, was addressed in the final two assignments of the collaborative unit. The first, when students were asked to apply their background knowledge (AASL 1.1.2) to imagine that they were forecasters and to determine where a family would like to live based on their preferences about the weather. Also, in the final assignment where they were to “create” a forecast for their favorite city or town using the Microsoft PowerPoint program. The students could collaborate during these assignments, which led to a greater understanding of the topics (AASL 1.1.9).

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION

It is important when planning to remember that if you do not take into account students with special needs, you are unable to ensure the success of all students. In this collaboration unit, we knew the demographics of our classes and planned accordingly. For instance, we had one class that included 13 students with special needs. We were fortunate to have a special education teacher in the room with us, who helped to facilitate learning by walking the students through the webquest inquiry on the Smart Board, reading the information aloud, and paraphrasing it for those students who may have had difficulty with the reading level of the information. When thinking about our state assessment scores, they encompass all students, including those with special needs, so we must not forget to plan for them as well.

At the end of each collaborative unit, an assessment tool determines the success of the unit. Include all who participated in the collaboration planning in the creation and implementation of this assessment. Determine if you met all the standards laid out in the collaboration planning and if students achieved success in the subject matter. The collaboration planners should be able to determine if the students were successful in obtaining knowledge and preparing for the state standardized test. For the collaboration unit on weather, we used a graphic organizer and a rubric to assess the students’ success.

Collaboration between certified media specialists and classroom teachers can help prepare students for success on state assessment tests. Taking classes to the library should no longer be considered “free planning time” for teachers, but rather as an opportunity to improve information literacy skills while furthering an understanding of the state’s standards of learning. The certified media specialist should be viewed as a partner in the planning and implementation of lessons dealing with classroom curriculums because of his/her ability to incorporate the Information Power literacy standards and the AASL standards for the 21st century learner. Collaboration benefits all members of the learning community when done correctly. Collaboration works when it is done with the right teacher, focuses on the right topic, and is implemented at the right time. 

WORKS CITED


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