

Chapter 9

School Librarians and Music Educators: Unique Interdisciplinary Partnerships

Lucy Santos Green

Georgia Southern University, USA

Brad Green

Tattnall County Schools, USA

ABSTRACT

The National Association for Music Education has recognized the vital role technology plays in the 21st century P-12 music classroom. Its standards for technology integration in the music classroom emphasize that technology integration choices should be made by people who clearly understand the musical needs of the children (NAfME, 2011). School librarians are instructional leaders who specialize in developing 21st century, technology-infused learning opportunities in collaboration with teachers across the academic discipline spectrum. Through the development of an interdisciplinary partnership, librarians can provide the technological expertise and training required for fine-arts educators to effectively integrate technology in the music classroom. In turn, music educators' focuses of advocacy, marketing, program planning, and creativity are highly-developed skill sets and resources the media specialists can benefit from. This chapter briefly covers research on interdisciplinary partnerships and identifies the strengths each of these professionals offer from their respective disciplines. Instructional and professional partnerships, cross-curricular collaboration, common instructional foci, and shared concerns are discussed.

INTRODUCTION: AN OPPORTUNITY IDENTIFIED

The National Association for Music Education has recognized the vital role technology plays in the 21st century P-12 music classroom. Its standards for technology integration in the music classroom

emphasize that technology integration choices should be made by people who clearly understand the musical needs of the children (NAfME, 2011). Proactive changes in the approach to technology integration in the music education classroom are evident in such professional events as the recently held Music, Education and Technology Online

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Summit, which discussed the use of technology to reach non-traditional P-12 music students (METOS, 2011). This growing interest in technology integration on the part of k-12 music educators provides the school librarian with an opportunity to build a strong, mutually beneficial interdisciplinary partnership with his or her music teacher. Librarians can provide the technological expertise and training required for fine-arts educators to effectively integrate technology in the music classroom. In turn, music educator focus on advocacy, marketing, program planning, and creativity are highly-developed skill sets and resources that can benefit school library programs. This chapter will highlight the benefits for both school librarians and music educators who choose to enter into this unique instructional partnership.

DEFINING INTERDISCIPLINARY PARTNERSHIPS

Interdisciplinary partnerships occur when different disciplines enter into a relationship to address a common problem or to meet a common set of goals. Interdisciplinary partnerships foster innovative and creative approaches to problem solving because these partnerships bring together skills and resources that exist within the domain of different disciplines (Stumpf & Clark, 1999). By cultivating multiple perspectives, interdisciplinary partners are able to analyze issues and instructional objectives in more depth, increasing the likelihood that programs and/or solutions will be used to benefit a broader student base (Suarez-Balcazar, Hellwig, Kouba, Redmond, Martinez, Block, Kohrman, & Peterman, 2006).

The term, *interdisciplinary partnership*, implies a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship that is nurtured to meet both professional and educational goals. When entering into an interdisciplinary partnership, school librarians and music educators work together throughout the year not only to meet student educational needs, but to promote professional development and the

growth of both the school library media and the music education program. Even so, it is important to understand that interdisciplinary partnerships and collaboration are not interchangeable terms. Instead, collaboration is one component of the overall scope of the partnership.

COLLABORATION WITHIN INTERDISCIPLINARY PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration, in this chapter, is defined in terms of teaching structures: *parallel teaching*, *station teaching*, *alternative teaching*, and *teaming* among others (Downing, 2006). It is partnering with a teacher to “teach information literacy skills in the context of content area curriculum” (Church, 2008). Schultz-Jones, in a study on social networks and collaboration, found that “the highest level of collaboration, designing course content, and teaching alongside teachers, is not dependent on a high level of frequent and possibly informal interaction” (2009, p. 24). In other words, collaboration can happen outside of an interdisciplinary partnership.

However, this same study found that the frequency of collaboration increases when school librarians foster interdisciplinary partnerships by “cultivating a network of willing participants...a better strategy than focusing on a subject area as a strategic group” (p. 24). Therefore, a clearer vision of collaboration as merely part – instead of the definition – of an interdisciplinary partnership can lead to new and diverse ways to expand current library curriculum and program practices (Gunawardena, Weber & Agosto, 2010).

Not as Unlikely as it Seems

A partnership between the discipline of librarianship and the discipline of music education is not as unlikely or uncommon as it seems. The Music Library Association, founded in 1931, supports and promotes music librarianship; a profession in which librarians take on traditional library

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