Curriculum Partner: Redefining the Role of the Library Media Specialist

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Kearney uses theory and research about the desired role of the school library media center, as well as the practical experiences of media specialists, to provide context for her discussion of what an effective media specialist should do—and how to build a school environment that supports this role.

A particularly helpful chapter for principals focuses on the media specialist’s partnership with the principal. Although written from the perspective of the media specialist, it provides clear guidelines of ways in which a principal can support both the media center and the media specialist as central to the school’s instructional mission. For example, a principal can provide such support by:

- Spending time with teachers to discuss the importance of the media center and ways in which it can be used to support the instructional program;
- Including the media specialist in grade-level and departmental planning meetings on a regular basis; and
- Supporting flexible scheduling in elementary library media centers by providing alternative coverage for teachers’ planning periods.

Kearney also discusses the curriculum role of the media specialist and the importance of collaborative planning between teachers and the media specialist. She provides useful examples of the strategies some media specialists have used to strengthen teachers’ perceptions of them as partners in the instructional process. For example, one media specialist talks of her development of a “pathfinder”—a listing of potential databases, books, and Internet sites that can support a unit or lesson—a resource possible only if the teacher meets with the media specialist while planning the unit.

Another section of the book focuses on the staff development needs of the media specialist and what training he or she can provide for other school staff. For example, one media specialist talks about her principal’s request that she lead a session on strategies teachers might use to teach decoding skills.

Finally, Kearney’s text provides an excellent conceptual base for defining the goals and objectives of an effective media center as well as practical suggestions for redefining the place of the media center and the media specialist within the school community in order to better support student learning.