

**Information Skills Toolkit:
Collaborative Integrated Instruction for the Middle Grades**

by Debra Kay Logan

Reviewed by

Bill Henske

Clark Middle School, 8th Grade Science
East St. Louis District, #189

Middle school effectiveness is often a direct result of school-wide collaboration. From the implementation of a common vision and mission to the integration of curriculum, success for middle level students depends on the unity and cooperation of all teachers, administrators and staff.

All too often we overlook the potential contributions to instructional delivery and academic achievement of our non-classroom staff. Librarians, technology support persons, security staff, food service workers, and custodians are all integral parts of an effective middle school. These dedicated individuals are frequently left out of the vision of high performance and expectations.

In many situations, core team teachers yield exclusive instructional control, unfortunately insulating the classroom from useful connections, contributions, and involvement from these dedicated individuals. In *Information Skills Toolkit*, Debra Kay Logan offers media specialists an assertive mechanism for incorporating their invaluable skills and resources into classroom instruction. The assemblage of project-based lessons included in the book integrates information skills in to the content areas.

One of the difficulties developing middle schools experience is the collaboration and curriculum planning process. One reason for the struggle is that no collaborative curriculum is the same, either from team to team or year to year. The product of the process is ephemeral, tailored to the unique situations of the team. For experienced teachers, exactly what an integrated

curriculum is can be difficult to describe. This book's strength is its value as a narrative of the collaborative process, from the perspective of a media specialist.

The first chapter covers the requisite "basic skills" lessons that are to form the foundation of student research skills. As with many lesson collections of this type, *Information Skills Toolkit* is not a sequential path to skills mastery or an instructional module, but rather a mini-library of interesting and high-interest lessons for teachers wanting to increase their students' information skills. The lessons are thoroughly developed and would surely be a great addition to the instructional repertoire of any librarian or technology specialist.

Subsequent chapters are arranged by content area. Each chapter contains lessons integrating information skills with the content. Some content areas are more favored here than others, with social studies, language arts, and science receiving the bulk of attention. The projects themselves are nothing new (under the sun), including biographies, books, reports, dioramas, and etc. Much of the content instruction consists of lower order thinking, fact collecting, and regurgitating. The lessons are most suitable for the earliest stages of a unit of instruction, perhaps as introductory pieces. Like the first chapter, the subject area chapters are collections of a wide swath of content.

Among the most useful pieces of the book are, no doubt, the appendices. Logan has provided some real-life tools for the hard-working media specialist. These include helpful tips, public relations flyers, outreach materials, and planning sheets geared towards achieving the goal of integrating the information skills across the content areas. *Information Skills Toolkit* could be an important tool for empowering those in media and technology to work effectively as teaching partners. As schools struggle to meet the rapidly changing needs of young adolescents it is imperative that efforts are productive and meaningful. Making collaboration work takes work, but with the right organization and resources it can happen.

*Information Skills Toolkit: Collaborative Integrated Instruction for
the Middle Grades*

By Debra Kay Logan

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