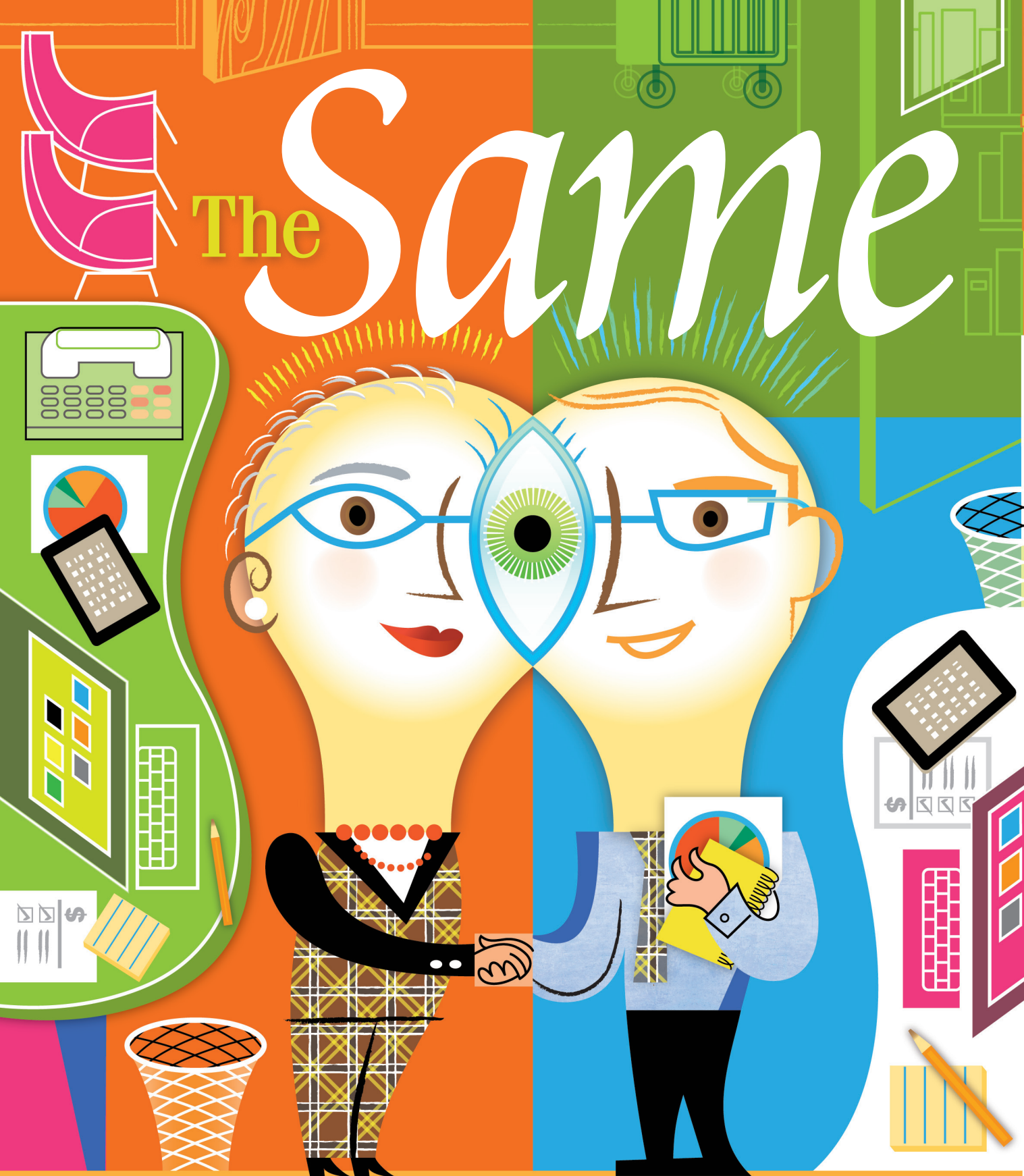



The Same




Mark Ray says that principals and librarians have more in common than you might think—and he should know



Difference



AFTER 20 WONDERFUL YEARS AS A TEACHER LIBRARIAN, I'VE GONE over to the dark side. I've become a suit—an administrator—and the very worst kind, a district IT administrator! (Cue Darth Vader's theme song.) Before you turn away in horror and disbelief, here's a quick tell-all from the Evil Empire. I'm going to share some shocking (and instructive) secrets from the Death Star of Administration, explaining why principals should be your best friends and colleagues. I'm also going to stop using *Star Wars* metaphors.



My fade to gray didn't occur overnight. I have worked as an instructional technology facilitator in Vancouver's (WA) public schools since 2008. During the first three years, I was also Skyview High School's full-time teacher librarian. Then, in 2011, my role changed: I spent half of my time in the library and the remaining half in the IT department. Depending on the day of the week, I was either "The Man" or I was working for him. And despite enjoying the opportunity to blame myself for whatever was wrong either with management or with teachers, in 2012, I was finally asked to make a choice between those two options. I think you've heard about receiving an offer you can't refuse...

By Mark Ray

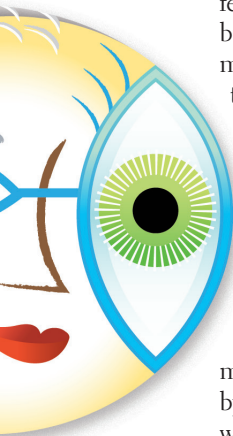
ILLUSTRATION BY JEAN TUTTLE

While I still see myself as a teacher librarian, last July, I became a real-live administrator with a spiffy title—manager of instructional technology and library services. During the last few years, I've been able to reflect on many of my own beliefs and assumptions about working with administrators. As a former teacher librarian, I'm also well aware of other perceptions that teachers have regarding management. Speaking now as a teacher—and not as a manager—I've come to realize that the reality is far more complex than a simple equation of us vs. them. Teacher librarians have far more in common with principals than we realize. I'd like to share some ways to find common ground with our friends in the corner office.

When I was in grad school, Joyce Petrie, my wise and now long-departed professor at Portland State University, explained in detail how library administration and building administration are a lot alike. She was right. Now, speaking from experience, I teach my University of Washington graduate students that school librarians often have more in common with principals than with their fellow teachers. Why is that? Like principals, we manage budgets, purchase materials, evaluate employees, and make executive decisions, ranging from selecting materials to determining instructional outcomes. Unlike

frequently great relationships with the six principals I've worked with during the last two decades. I've always seen them as allies rather than adversaries.

Before addressing the opportunities for media specialists to connect with principals, I'd like to dispel some common misconceptions. First, there's a widespread belief that building and district administrators always think the same way. More often than not, that couldn't be further from the truth. Get a principal to talk off-the-record, and you'll find out for yourself. Despite the mysterious district meetings and the inscrutable binders on their shelves, principals struggle with translating district policy into practice as much as we do. In more than one meeting, I've heard them express frustration, uncertainty, fear, and powerlessness in the face of the same issues that teachers confront. Like other educators, building administrators are concerned about daily challenges such as poverty, student readiness, literacy, fear of violence, and assessments. In addition, many district policies and programs are often created with insufficient input from or consultation with building administrators. Like many teacher librarians, principals are the ones who must explain and train faculty in the policies and practices created by managers like me.



Despite the mysterious district meetings and the inscrutable binders on their shelves, **principals struggle with translating district policy into practice** as much as we do.

many teachers, we know virtually everyone in the school by name and maintain positive working relationships with all of them. We also excel at putting a wide variety of district policies and programs into practice. Most importantly, like principals, we're often the only ones in our schools who do the jobs that we do. I often hear teacher librarians say that they feel misunderstood, isolated, and even lonely in their positions. Empathy check: Do you think principals just might feel the same way?

If it hadn't been for my many wonderful teaching colleagues, I wouldn't have been the 2012 Washington State Teacher of the Year. But it all began with my Skyview High principal, Kym Tyelyn-Carlson. Over the course of five years, our professional friendship evolved beyond library advocacy and became a two-way exchange between educators who both cared deeply about the success of our school. We discussed everything from staff socials to strategic planning. When she called me into her office in May 2011 and told me she was nominating me for teacher of the year, it was less about my librarianship than it was about her perception of me as an educator. Well beyond my library role, I had become a trusted confidante, consigliere, and colleague. Kym isn't an exception. I've enjoyed good and

And what of the conspiracy theory that administrators are "all in it together"? Ask any superintendent: they'd retire and die happy if they could only get their administrative leadership teams to plan, work, and lead based on an authentically shared set of values and priorities. Even the highest-functioning educational administrations grapple with issues of nurturing and maintaining social capital—communication, relationships, leadership, and sustainability. Just like individual schools, district programs and departments work with specific challenges, leadership models, and cultures.

Are there bad principals? Yes. And bad teachers? Of course. Are there tyrannical administrators and administrations? Yes, probably. Do administrators circle the wagons when challenged? Yes, in the same way that teachers and librarians do when they're threatened. Do administrators meet in secret to devise evil plans? Unlikely. I have found that most district conspiracy theories are often conflated with honest mistakes, incomplete planning, imperfect implementations, and/or poor communication. Speaking for my district, our leadership team cares deeply about students and it respects and values teachers and staff. We work very hard to get it right. Sometimes we do. Sometimes we could have done better.



When teacher librarians see innovation, creativity, and greatness in the classroom, they should share those stories with the principal. Principals appreciate the ability to see and value success in others.

This is where teacher librarians come in. By cultivating strong relationships with principals and even district administrators, we can strengthen library programs, not to mention improve schools and districts. I am wearing a suit because of relationships with both teachers and administrators, built on shared work, planning, and success. Here is a quick list of ways to create those relationships, even when you'd think it might be impossible.

Seek out win-win opportunities. Identify what keeps principals up at night and then offer to help. Right now, three big trains are barreling down the tracks—Common Core, new teacher and principal evaluation systems, and 21st-century student skills. In addition to running a school, principals are accountable for these vaguely defined and game-changing reforms. Choose one, learn as much as you can about it, and then offer to help your boss. Join them on district or regional teams. Offer to provide leadership in your building. You're likely to be surprised at just how enthusiastically they say yes.

Give before you receive. Teacher librarians often conceive their relationships with principals as quid pro quo, beginning with the question "What will you do for me?" rather than, "What can I do for you?" Pay it forward with the goal of building trust, rapport, and a valuable relationship. Many years ago, I took up an offer by our former chief information officer to lead our district's library automation project. I had a vested interest in the job being done right, and she wanted the implementation to go smoothly. Thanks to our partnership, the project was a success. A few years later, she asked me to join her team as an instructional technology facilitator.

Bridge the gap. Because of our hybrid roles, teacher librarians can effectively bridge the artificial divide between teachers and administration, and promote communication, collaboration, and advocacy between and across various roles and functions. In the same way that my recent leadership role blurs the definition of "The Man," teacher librarians can provide unique building and even district leadership. Teachers often grapple with crossing a line by appearing too supportive of administration. As a teacher librarian, I never saw a line because my job was different. I necessarily had to see things from a systems perspective that included not only building administration and teachers, but also district interests. That's why some of our teacher librarians currently lead a district task force to develop a digital citizenship program. They are working with administrators to develop a systemic digital content strategy, and they're participating in state and district groups connected to the Common Core. Like principals, the

best teacher librarians see the big picture and can build partnerships that ensure success.

Identify successes. Most teachers hesitate to call attention to their work or to be praised for it. But principals always want to be able to share good work with parents, peers, and their bosses. When teacher librarians see innovation, creativity, and greatness in the classroom, they should share those stories with the principal. Principals appreciate the ability to see and value success in others. More importantly, they value hearing about good things beyond the library program. In addition to building rapport with your principal, everyone wins. Teachers get the recognition they deserve. The principal better understands the great work that's going on. And the school may well get some praise at the district's next meeting. As a proponent of creativity in the classroom, I made it a point to highlight innovative teachers who dared to emulate Apple and its slogan "think different." More often than not, Kym would nod in agreement. In those moments, we were of one mind, not about libraries, but about great teaching.

My friends and colleagues keep checking up on me and asking how I like my new job. I tell them it tastes like chicken. To me, the only significant difference between what I'm doing now and what I've done for years as a teacher librarian and an instructional technology facilitator is that there's a different title below my name. Sad as it might seem, that changes a lot in my relationships with others, both among teachers and administrators. To many teachers, I've gone over to the dark side. To some administrators, I'm now part of the club. But here's the reality—there's no dark side; and there's no key to the executive washroom. Thankfully, my teacher librarian colleagues still see me (and themselves) for what we are—occasionally lonely, frequently misunderstood, and loving the jobs that we do. Just like principals.

Mark Ray (Mark.Ray@vansd.org) is the manager of instructional technology and library services at the Vancouver (WA) Public Schools.

On Your Mark...

Get set. Go! *SLJ* will soon be launching "Pivot Points," a new column by school administrator and former longtime teacher librarian Mark Ray. The column, which will appear six times a year, will highlight the latest leadership opportunities for media specialists—especially those possibilities that go beyond the traditional roles of school libraries and librarians.