

Bridging the Information Gap: The Role of the librarian and the Role of the Computer Director

The library is the center for information services which directly supports the school and its goals. "Educators who are interested in using technology to promote serious school change should focus first on the library media center...a place to spark teachers and students in the constant, furious construction of knowledge...not as some kind of mechanical switchboard for routing, regulating, and controlling media pipelines."¹

The American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology's *Information Power: Guidelines for School Media Programs* (1988) said that " the mission of the library media program is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information."²

Does this mission of the school library and its school librarian conflict with that of the Director of Computer Services? Do their areas of responsibilities converge? How do we ensure that their relationship is a collaborative one?

According to *Information Power*, Librarians "must be responsible for assessing and promoting effective use of instructional technologies. They must play a leading role in the school's technology planning team because they are educated to evaluate, select, and manage the technologies that make information and ideas available in a wide variety of formats."³

What do librarians in school library media centers do? We consider the following to be among the most important roles of school librarians.

LIBRARIANS are managers who oversee the development of library collections. They

- examine and identify resources that may be helpful in supporting teachers and their curriculum,

- secure equipment, materials, and services required to support student learning,
- evaluate, select, and manage the technologies that make information and ideas available in a wide variety of formats

LIBRARIANS are teachers who

- encourage in students a love of reading
- prepare students to be independent learners in an age of rapid technological change
- teach students the process of gathering information in an up-to-date library with ample printed materials and electronic resources.

LIBRARIANS are teachers who show students

- that the process of gathering information is as important as the information itself,
- how to think creatively while exploring ideas for topics,
- how to judge when their research topic needs to be narrowed or broadened,
- how to organize a research notebook or create a file of bibliographical references,
- how to create a comprehensive search strategy that moves students logically through varied resources such as reference books, on-line catalogs, CD-ROM indexes and databases,
- how to handle and evaluate the information they've acquired and the sources they've used.

LIBRARIANS are information specialists who show students

- how to use computers as another tool for information retrieval
- how to progress through specific computer databases to retrieve the information they need
- how to come up with synonyms and keywords for a search,
- how to use terms to combine or exclude elements from a search,

- how to use the Internet by sending and receiving electronic mail, to telnet to a remote host, and to download files.⁴

LIBRARIANS teach students about academic honesty within the context of the new technology. With the ease of transferring information from a database to a disk or onto the printed page, there must be ongoing discussion of how to credit sources to avoid plagiarizing them.

The Director of Computer Services, like the School Librarian, is in charge of a resource which meets the needs of students and staff. Like the Librarian this Director usually has both teaching and administrative responsibilities. The Director provides the equipment and materials and devises programs of instruction so that students learn to use computers both for formal learning and for their own journeys of discovery.

The roles and responsibilities of the Librarian and Computer Director converge in teaching the general competencies that students must have to use the new technology effectively:

- word processing skills such as typing, editing, and page layout,
- file management skills such as using directories, backing up important files, reducing clutter,
- computer communications skills such as transferring files and using networks,
- research skills in acquiring information from databases and through telnet resources.

While the Computer Director is most responsible for teaching word processing and file management skills, both work with students to acquire communications skills, and the Librarian is most responsible for teaching research skills. Both teach students how to become independent learners.

As electronic resources are increasingly considered necessary in school libraries, librarians now spend more time teaching the use of the computer and other technological skills. A recent study of school libraries showed that, with the increased emphasis on CD-ROM databases, librarians need

to do more instruction in their use, particularly more one-on-one work with students. Librarians now have to teach search strategies which include Boolean logic and Venn diagrams.⁵

Although the Librarian teaches certain mechanics of information retrieval and organization, the Librarian's main goal is to promote effective acquisition and evaluation of information. The Computer Director's goals are to keep up with various technological advances and to teach basic computer literacy, including project presentation skills.

Because there'll be overlapping areas of responsibility between the Librarian and Computer Director, each should recognize and respect the other's expertise and learn to work together toward the common goals of the school. While the Computer Director concentrates on the platforms used to install and implement the resources, the Librarian focuses on strengthening the program of information retrieval. Both should work with classroom teachers to insure a systematic process for acquiring computer equipment and instructional materials. Both must be highly skilled in planning, evaluating sources, and making appropriate purchases. Both should maintain regular communication with each other in areas of common concern.

1. D'Ignazo, Fred, "The Active Media Center," *The Computing Teacher*, March 1994, p. 37.
2. American Association of School Librarians and Association for Education Communication and Technology, *Information Power: Guidelines for School Media Programs*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1988. p.1
3. Ibid p.38
4. Doyle, Christina, "Information-Literate Use of Telecommunications," *CMLEA Journal*, Spring 1994, pp.17-20.
5. Truett, Carol, "CD-ROM, Videodiscs, and New Ways of Teaching Information and Research Skills," *The Computing Teacher*, March 1994, pp.42-43.