SL
MQ

SCHOOL

LIBRARY MEDIA

QUARTERLY

IN THIS ISSUE

Alternatives for Professional Renewal: A Critical Analysis
of a Collegial Assistance Network in Hawaii

An Analysis of the Time Use of Elementary School Library
Media Specialists and Factors That Influence It

Improving Access to Periodicals: A Cooperative
Collection Management Project

AA
SL

▼

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

David V. Loertscher
AASL President

## TAKE HEART, YOU ALREADY KNOW HOW!

This column is being published at a time when the AASL leadership is engaged in further definition of the new AASL; and since any thinking here on that issue will be outdated before it is printed, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss an issue I think the profession and its various state and national associations might attend to.

In the past few months, I have been rewriting one of my older works to reflect the dawn of the I-way. For all of my career, we as library media specialists have been busy creating a centralized repository of materials and information from which the entire school community could benefit as pictured in figure 1.

As we move into the world of digital information technology, however, quite a different model begins to emerge. Figure 2 illustrates that the LMC begins to become a node in a seamless integrated information system pushing access toward the classroom and the home rather than trying to crowd it into a single location. The moment a child at home gains access to the Internet, and the moment teachers and students start accessing CD-ROM products and the Internet from their classrooms, the behavior toward a centralized LMC begins to change. I know the minute I could get into the catalogs of my local public library and various academic libraries around Colorado from my computer at home, my behavior changed. All of a sudden, my trips to the public library three miles away were affected. If I want a particular title, I don't have to make the effort of driving unless I already know that the book I want is on the shelf. If it is not, I place a hold on it from my computer, and the circulation staff calls me when it is available. The turnstile counter at the library is no longer a measure of how many people visit the library.
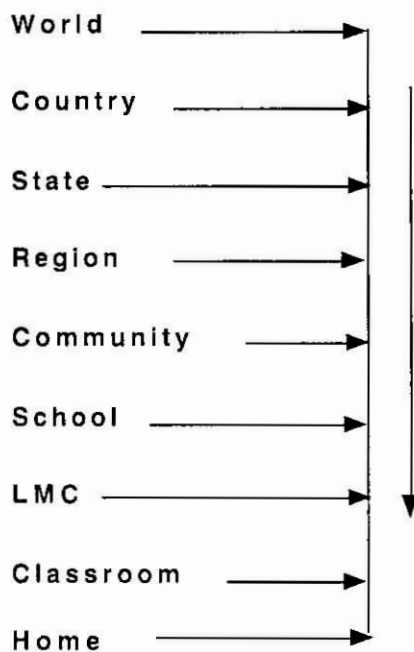
As state and national organizations, we could spend our energies protecting our comfortable turf. We could plunge more

Figure 1. A Centralized Repository of Materials and Information
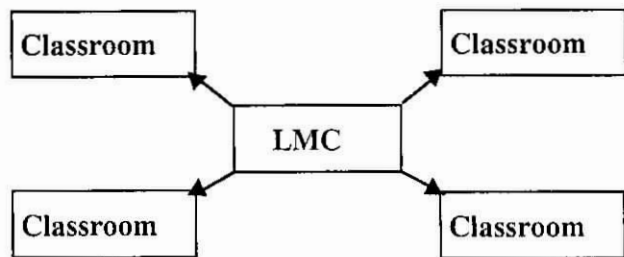
Correspondence to the 1995–96 president may be addressed to David V. Loertscher, P.O. Box 266, Castle Rock, CO 80104-0266.

Figure 2. A Seamless Integrated Information System

resources into improving our carriages while the new-fangled automobiles are starting to crowd us off the highways, but I'd rather be out in front of the pack, not the tail-end wagon eating the dust of the twenty wagons ahead.

Let me tell you about a book I am reading, *The Digital Economy: Promise and Peril in the Age of Networked Intelligence* by Don Tapscott (McGraw-Hill, 1996). The flyleaf says of Tapscott, "He is president of New Paradigm Learning Cooperation, a consulting firm which specializes in helping organizations manage the transition to the digital economy." Sounds like we have a library media specialist here (minus a warehouse, of course). Tapscott is trying to show the corporate executive what the global information society looks like and is providing guidance to companies who want to plug into the benefits. In the preface Tapscott states, "It [technology] is causing every company to think far beyond the like of reengineering to transform itself. A new enterprise is emerging—the internetworked business—which is as different from the corporation of the twentieth century as the latter was from the feudal craft shop." Ditto of technologies, schools, and LMCs.

But as the rush to get everyone wired continues to be impeded only by money, there are voices out there giving some guidance. Let me quote just one of many I have noticed lately.

In a 1995 report, *Technology for School Reform* done by IBM (ibmgives@vnet.ibm.com), the author states, "The history of school reform is littered with disillusionment over silver bullets and quick fixes that have failed to overcome the complex and deeply rooted problems in our education system. Over at least the last thirty years, technology in education, in a number of guises and offerings, has suffered the same fate," (p.5). The author realizes the real problem later in the report, "Barriers also arise once a school does begin to implement a new technology. The primary issue is professional development and support for teachers and other staff. In many schools, 'techies' are viewed with doubt by colleagues who fear that technology can only be used in a mechanistic manner, which jars their notions of humanistic pedagogy," (p.11).

Library media specialists to the rescue. I believe we have it within our power as a profession to see that technology pays rich dividends to the educational process and that the skills *we already possess* prepare us for our role. Let me mention just a few vital contributions we can make and are making:

1. **We are materials experts.** Just as we can suggest the right book for the right reader at the right time, we can suggest the best CD-ROM disk or a fascinating address on the World Wide Web.
2. **We know how to collaborate to help build solid learning experiences.** Perhaps this is the greatest contribution we can make to teachers who are mystified by the massive challenge of the networks, the number of buttons to push, and the overwhelming pile of new toys.
3. **We are idea fountains.** Because we see the constant uses and abuses of media and technology in all forms and we keep our eyes open to the professional literature, any teacher giving us a hint of "Could you help me?" gets showered with an avalanche of jewels.
4. **We are information detectives.** We used to be able to uncover, as if by magic, the answers to the most impossible questions from our reference shelf. Now we can comb the networks and perform even greater feats of magic when everyone else is lost in a fog. Better yet, we are learning how to expand the teaching of library skills toward information literacy so young people can navigate the networks more effectively and more independently.
5. **We are advocates for youth.** Because we know so many young people every day and watch them face impossible assignments, deadlines, personal problems, or just plain frustration, we have a unique perspective of what schooling is doing to and for this generation. Asked our advice, we have plenty to give.

It is quite possible to fail even with these skills if we do not shift our focus fast enough to grasp the best of the new technologies and see that they get used as effective tools. That is where all of our state and national professional organizations come in. Take a look at the programming at your state convention. Is it reflecting the shift in paradigm? Look at the exhibit areas. What types of vendors are we attracting? What of our professional journals? Are they pushing our ideas forward? Are our library media educators keeping up and preparing the next crop of visionaries? I couldn't help cheering when I read Ken Haycock's final words in his "Notebook" (*Emergency Librarian* [Nov.–Dec., 1995]: 3). He says it with just a hint of a spank to the behind, "We have the skills and abilities to provide this necessary leadership—let's just do it." ▼