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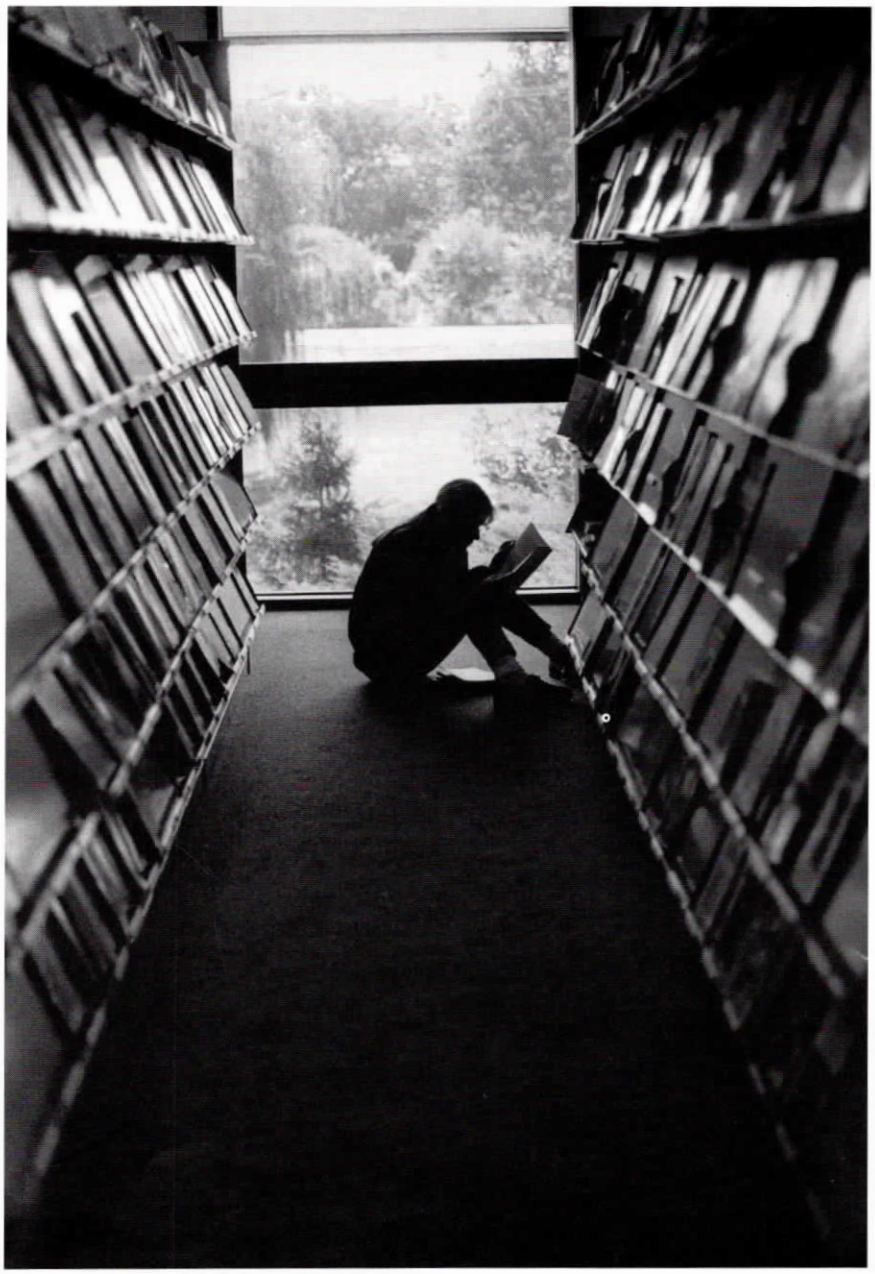

FOCUS: COLLABORATION

School Library Media Centers — A Missing Piece

Reinventing California School Libraries: Start Now!

California Public School Library Protection Fund Grants: Five Thousand Dollars — and a Lot More!

Connections

FEATURES

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CALIFORNIA SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
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Learning through Books, Media and Technology

Reinventing California School Libraries: Start Now!

DAVID V. LOERTSCHER

It has been 20 years since Proposition 13 sent California school libraries spiraling into decline. Now that the economy is improving, there is just a ray of hope that there might be an opportunity to rebuild. But the question is: rebuild what? What we remember? A model of our "glory days," whatever we think that was?

No. We cannot reconstruct the past! Duplicating the ideals of 20 years ago would be like building a grass shack in the middle of a modern city — a unique artifact of antiquity. Now is the time to rethink everything school libraries do and stand for. If the library is a parking spot for children on a weekly visit, it is time to stop. Stop! If the librarian is in the habit of letting teachers sign up for blocks of research time not knowing the purpose of the visit, it is time to stop. If the library has become progressively more isolated and the excitement is really elsewhere in the school, then stop what you are doing. Now!

California is in the midst of two great educational challenges. Parents are demanding that their children learn to both read and use technology. Since I have been in the state, however, I have not seen a ground swell of interest that says rebuilding school libraries will address either issue. There are a growing number of fine voices in support of school libraries, but still not enough.

Recently, I visited a school district where the librarians were in a planning mode. They had successfully just finished a five-year plan/commitment to the school board and were ready to create another plan. I thought it wonderful that they had kept their commitment and that the board knew it. They had a proven track record.

I wish every school or district in the state would reconceptualize the role of the library in terms of creating better learning environments. Start with "what is hot." What do people care about? I think that building basic literacy and enhancing learning through technologies are probably good areas to think about.

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Building a Vision

One good question to start with in any school is this: What should our students know and be able to do as a part of the information society? Or, what information and technology skills would enhance the district social studies (science, math, etc.) initiative? Of a possible long laundry list of student characteristics, I would propose that a "revisioned" library could contribute significantly in three areas: basic literacy, technology literacy, and information literacy. What does that mean? Could we make it clear to the community? Consider the following:

The best way to exploit what technology has to offer is to build a repertoire of what works.

What Every Successful Student Needs to Be in a High-Tech Information Society

Basic Literacy

1. An avid and capable reader

Technology Literacy

1. A skilled user of technology tools
2. An enhanced learner

Information Literacy

1. An organized investigator
2. A critical thinker
3. A creative thinker
4. An effective communicator
5. A responsible information user

I could spend time justifying this model student (that is another article), but I do think the school community

Table 1: **Information System**

Hardware Support	*Resources*	*Human/Space Support*
Equipment	Internet sites	Network central (library)
Networking (schoolwide)	CD-ROM	Human interface (consulting, coaching, guiding
Software	Video/television	Space for individuals, small groups, and large groups throughout the learning plaza
Technical support	Print resources	Advice for connections from home
Repair, replacement, and upgrading	Multimedia	

needs to think about such matters as a group. The American Association of School Librarians is currently producing a new set of national standards outlining what that organization considers basic.[1] There are many other significant state and national documents that describe characteristics of students likely to be successful in the information society.[2]

Building the Student

The major question is, How could a school deliver a student prepared to cope in an information world? I would propose a five-pronged attack to build the type of student envisioned:

1. Build the information infrastructure in every school and district. Create a total school information technology environment. Simultaneously decentralize and centralize technology in all its forms from Internet to multimedia and traditional print resources. This infusion spreads access to information and materials into every classroom, while enjoying the advantage of a centralized learning place, or "Network Central," staffed by information coaches, technicians, and clerical support. In this scenario, the entire school becomes a gigantic learning plaza or network. Network Central (the old library) becomes the foundation of a seamless, integrated information system governed by a comprehensive information technology plan (see table 1). Another view of this network shows the information being delivered from various levels and agencies closer and closer to the student (see figure 1).

Such an infrastructure might be constructed in successive stages as the entire school community seeks funding through various grants and local initiatives. All teachers, Network Central staff, and administration would work collectively to build a cohesive information infrastructure. However, the following four prongs of attack would develop simultaneously with infrastructure development. The speed at which technology evolves requires a continuous program of improvement over an extended period rather than a one-shot, quick fix, or one-time expenditure model.

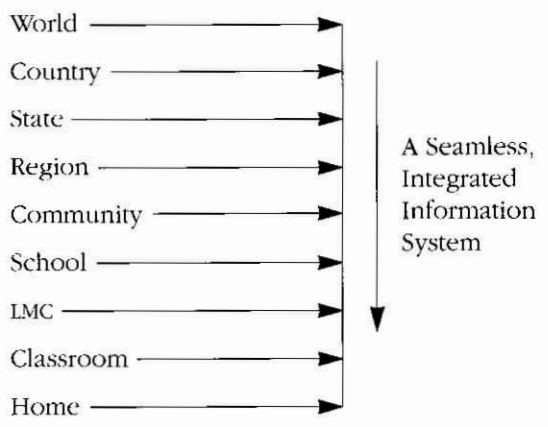
Good information infrastructures are expensive, but no more expensive than those sold to every home by the major cable television companies and Internet providers. Taxpayers and parents must understand, however, that schools cannot provide access to technology any cheaper than the corporate world can.

2. Build basic literacy through a collaboration of information coaches (former librarians), teachers, and administrators. This will ensure that (a) access to books increases exponentially throughout the school, (b) the amount young people actually read increases exponentially, and (c) reading promotion occurs on multiple levels: sustained silent reading; reading aloud by parents, teachers, and other students; and requiring more reading in all content areas (historical fiction and biography in the social studies, science nonfiction and science fiction in science, etc.).

The necessity of building a strong reading program in an information world is more critical today than ever before. Systems such as the Internet do not discriminate by ethnicity or social status, but they do require excellent basic literacy skills; otherwise, another uncrossable gulf opens to divide the haves from the have-nots.

There is no one right way to teach reading. All methods are successful with a certain group of learners, and all have dropouts or students who are slow to master the skill. Together, Network Central staff coordinate plans with every teacher to compensate for and strengthen the reading pro-

Figure 1: **Information Delivery**



1. Watch *School Library Media Quarterly* and *Connections*, both published by AASL, for announcements of progress. The complete national standards are scheduled for publication some time in 1998.
2. One particularly good publication is California School Library Association. *From Library Skills to Information Literacy: a Handbook for the 21st Century*. 2nd Ed., Hi Willow Research and Publishing, 1997.

gram regardless of grade level. This additional intervention is particularly useful to English learners and reading dropouts.[3]

3. Ensure that every student and teacher is a skilled user of technology tools. Teach the needed cross-platform skills both through direct teaching and through integration of tool skills as students need them in project work:

- Equipment operation and care
- Word processing, database and spreadsheet construction
- Layout and graphic design for presentations and communication in print, video, and multimedia formats
- Internet and information system searching and use

Such a program is a shared responsibility of Network Central staff, knowledgeable teachers, and schoolwide and district/regional classes and workshops.

The days of teaching typing to a few high school student are over. Every student needs to be comfortable operating a variety of technologies just as they learn to drive any model of automobile with just a few moments of orientation. Such skills cannot be the responsibility of a single person — a computer teacher or another specialist. Neither can all tool skill instruction be centralized into a single computer literacy or information literacy course. Everyone in the educational community works together: students helping students, faculty guiding students, students helping teachers, and specialists doing direct and integrated teaching.

Did the time spent creating projects [with elaborate web page graphics or the number of citations in a report] enhance content learning or just technological expertise?

The organizational plan to teach technology tool skills is designed by the school technology committee as one feature of the entire educational program. Information coaches may take both a leadership and a supportive role, but cannot do the job alone.

4. Impact how students learn and how teachers teach. Identify and reidentify regularly the top 10 ways information technologies are likely to enhance learning and integrate these into teaching strategies and lesson design. Use the talents of creative teachers and the information coaching staff of Network Central to build successful collaborative experiences. The goal is to encourage motivated learners, whatever their learning style. When students integrate technology into their learning activities and projects, reward substance over flashiness, content and thinking over cut-and-clip mentality, and deep learning over surface learning.

In today's high-tech world, students who excel in technology have good career opportunities in designing computer systems, managing information systems, becoming web masters, and myriad other occupations. In the world of print, they might become authors, illustrators, editors, publishers, layout artists, or journalists to name a few. But the major use of technology in the school is really as a tool to enhance learning. There is little chance this will happen unless everyone focuses on what students know and are able to do, not how many computers or T1 lines are available. Putting the information infrastructure in place is only the first step in a long-range technology plan.

There is no body of research that says learning through technology will automatically elevate academic achievement, but there are lots of hints. The best way to exploit what technology has to offer is to build a repertoire of what works. The Network Central staff serves as a catalyst in this regard. Good ideas are captured, tested, and modified as experience across a faculty and a student body grows.

Most of an information professional's time should be spent collaborating with teachers to create effective learning experiences that integrate technology into teaching and learning. Network Central professionals watch and experience projects at various grade levels and develop a repertoire of what works and what does not work. These knowledgeable professionals should lead a program of professional development designed to improve teaching and learning.

So often, students learn to dress up presentations using technology so that the audience is impressed with the technology rather than the content. Constant attention must be paid to the amount of thinking and substance of presentations. We might be impressed with elaborate web page graphics or the number of citations in a report, but what has the student learned beyond the technology tool skills? Did the time spent creating projects enhance content learning or just technological expertise?

5. Use information literacy principles to enhance the way teachers teach and students learn. Successful programs happen when information coaches and teachers

- Internalize an information literacy model as a part of joint professional development.
- Understand how to fit information literacy into both traditional and constructivist ideas of lesson design.
- Prepare to teach an information literacy model both through direct teaching and as mini-lessons integrated into regular instruction. The goal is to equip every student with an adaptation of the model that fits the student's own learning style.
- Reflect together about what happens as students encounter an information-rich environment. This reflection needs to happen with other colleagues across the school system, the state, and through networking. How are students beginning to cope with information complexity? What techniques and strategies seem to work

3. See the work of Stephen Krashen, especially his book *The Power of Reading*, published by Libraries Unlimited in 1993.

well? What practices should be discarded? What benchmarks have been achieved?

There are many information literacy models in the professional literature. Each covers aspects of teaching students to be good investigators, critical thinkers, creative thinkers, good communicators, and responsible information users. These models are best applied when the Network Central professionals and teachers design a model that best fits in with the goals of their own school. At that point, they can create a plan to integrate these skills into the rest of the curriculum.

But as the information pool deepens and becomes more complex, students encounter new problems and challenges, experiencing the same frustration many adults feel with information overload. Thus, the faculty and information professionals must reflect together on what happens over time to learners and learner behavior. The information literacy initiative in each school must evolve constantly.

Realistic Costs and Personnel

In the face of rising educational costs and personnel concerns, consider the following four major tenets:

1. Many communities have had a difficult time supporting simple book-oriented libraries. If one thinks a library is expensive to equip, staff, and maintain, then a high-tech school learning plaza is infinitely more expensive. If we equipped every classroom with a one-time expenditure of a Commodore 64 and declared our school a technological success, we would be laughed off the street. Likewise, if we have a series of three net days with the president and vice president helping, are we done when the wires are pulled?

Bill Gates of Microsoft has recently set a realistic standard for financing the connection to the information world. He promises to connect every home to the Internet for a mere $20 a month. Television cable companies charge more than that. If $20 a month is sufficient for the home, then $20 a month will do it for each child in school. That equals $240 per child per year. Few California schools spend more than $1 per month per student. The good thing is the $20 figure would keep the information infrastructure current, provide an ample supply of fresh and exciting books to support the reading program, and supply the network access to support world-class education.

- *Building an information infrastructure with the needed information resources requires the same outlay at school as at home: $20 per month per student.*

2. Some critics have said that in the age of technology, we no longer need libraries. They are probably right if they think that the libraries of today are like the libraries they remember as children. We no longer need a few ragtag books and magazines in a central space guided by a strict disciplinarian. Libraries that have kept pace with the needs of their patrons have emerged far beyond their historical roots. Like the medical profession, they have closed the door on selling patent medicines from the backs of wagons.

- *Information Network Central is the nerve center of the school and combines the best features of the old library but expands into a schoolwide information infrastructure having both decentralized and centralized elements. It is not just a bunch of networked computers. It is a centralized/decentralized network of every print, audio, video, multimedia, and computer technology now invented or that ever will be invented.*

3. What kind of professional does it take to provide the human interface required to transform information technology into an effective learning tool in the organization? Certainly, it requires more than a librarian interested only in children's literature. And equally, it requires more than a technowiz. Neither person provides the needed vision or leadership.

- *The information network specialist, the information coach, or simply the cybrarian (whatever the title) is the premier leader of the restructured Information Network Central and combines the best knowledge of the former librarian with technological expertise. This person not only has a vision of enhanced learning through technology but has the leadership skills to collaboratively guide and shape what happens in a high-tech school.*

4. To expect that a single person can be hired in the school to create the information infrastructure, keep it modernized and in repair, see that it contributes substantially to learning, teaches every student to use the technology tools, and promotes information literacy is unrealistic and sure to burn out any professional willing to play super technogenius. It takes a cadre of people, including the current teaching staff and students themselves, bonded together in a learning adventure. But, as with every other business and governmental organization, there are certain indispensable support staff required to keep the superstructure operating.

- *Support staff for the entire information complex requires technical, clerical, paraprofessional, and professional expertise.*

What You Can Do

You should have realized by now that others in the educational community don't work to achieve your vision. They work to achieve their own vision. An effective medical doctor works to alleviate the ills of the patient — not the other way around. As a professional, you as librarian, library media teacher, information coach, or cybrarian work to elevate every teacher and student in the school and to advance the agenda of the school as a whole.

I think we all have to start with ourselves. What an exciting time it is in the information technology world! There never has been a richer body of children's and young adult literature, better and more convenient access to periodicals and indexing, better computing and networking devices, better access to information in every form. I'm always frustrated that I can't seem to learn it all — and I want to learn it all! How many of us remember the first Apple computers and learning to word process for the first time? We've come a long way, but there is a long way to go. I have stopped trying to convince my students that I know everything, and I find them jump-starting me on technology tools and information tactics that save me a tremendous amount of time. I teach you, you teach me, and we teach each other.

Furthermore, in some research I did recently in a very large urban school district, the question was, What is

the number one predictive factor of a quality library media program? The data were quite clear; it was the vision of the principal. There are only two choices — either work for a principal who already has a vision or convert one.

Finally, as you experiment, create initiatives, test, try, reject, and build, please network constantly with others in the profession.

What CSLA Could Do

In several areas of the country, the state technology conferences that attract librarians, teachers, and administrators have had a major negative impact on the state school library organization. Here are just a few suggestion as to how CSLA might help everyone leapfrog forward.

- Begin with a major leadership retreat including CSLA leadership and powerful thinkers in California education. The task: create a model of the information age student and the organizational structure to bring that dream to reality. The model of this paper could be used as a starting point in addition to models from AASL, CSLA, and other sources.
- Devote an entire annual conference or major retreat with follow-up section meetings to presenting and reflecting upon the model. This might be a cooperative activity of CTC, ECTL, CTAP, or the superintendent of public instruction. Such a retreat might offer professional development credits and partial travel compensation for participants from schools.
- Develop a network of exemplary sites of experimenters and implementers that could be visited and studied.
- Load on a web site model plans, documents, and online consultation in each of the five areas suggested in this article.
- Conduct massive workshops using *From Library Skills to Information Literacy*, second edition, beginning with a trainer of trainers inservice complete with training package.
- Extend the training through conference within a conference for the next three CSLA annual conferences. •

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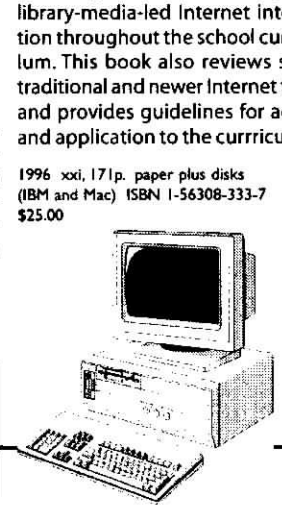

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