
Library Networking: A School Library Perspective

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Networking, access, cataloging standards, AACR2, and OCLC—how and why do these relate to school library/media centers? To answer that question, one must consider the role of the school library and its needs in relation to the network.

The library media center has two salient functions. It provides an organized body of resources to support the school's curriculum and instruction, and it has an instructional role for its students, faculty, and staff. To accomplish these functions effectively, all of the more permanent media resources of the school should be cataloged for easy access with a master catalog of the collection as the point of entry for users.

The establishment and maintenance of the catalog consume precious time. With several systems networked, a central ordering and processing task could be more efficient. The Greensboro City School System has a central processing service for its schools. The system, a member of OCLC, not only purchases, processes, and distributes to each school prepared library materials but also receives catalog cards as a by-product of the membership and use of the OCLC data base. Using the terminal, the central staff can also locate the system's total holdings and determine which schools house a specific title or the number of copies of a title available.

Access to these services and to a machine-readable data base could have great benefits not only at the individual schools but also at the system level when there is a need to share resources and to reorganize collections. These procedures could then be planned with complete, accurate data and completed with dispatch.

Three important features of this system need to be noted. First, the volume of services of the processing center needs to be extensive enough to warrant the cost. The result, of course, is that records will then be in a standard format acceptable for inclusion in a network and for electronic search and sharing.

The competency goals and performance indicators of the Department of Public Instruction state that students should be introduced to resources beyond the school level, which may include the public library, on-line research services, academic libraries, or other community resources. To complete this task successfully, the school library needs to have some method for communicating easily with other school libraries and the larger world of public, university, and special libraries. A pilot Zone of Cooperation project, called CLONE, offers a networking model for providing student awareness of the community library resources available to them. The participating members (Edgecombe Technical College Library, North Carolina Wesleyan College Library, Braswell Memorial Library, Edgecombe County Memorial Library) plan to provide microfiche copies of their COM catalog to the high schools in the area.

The removal of time-consuming technical chores frees the media professional to assist in the greater use of all resources, both in-house and outside. If entering a statewide network that recognizes these concerns and that maps strategies for levels of participation can help school libraries, such a move should be considered.

When considering a network, whether it be local among school, public, and community college libraries, or regional among public, special, academic, and school libraries, public schools have three desirable assets of numbers, print and nonprint collections, and equipment.

First, the 1983 Annual PPAR Report records 2,014 school libraries in North Carolina with approximately seventeen hundred full-time media personnel backed by strong state-level support for them in the Department of Public Instruction, Educational Media and Technology Area. By providing access for all citizens, school libraries offer an entry point to many resources. This fact does not negate the primary intent for these materials, to support the instructional program, but rather enhances their value.

The second asset of school libraries is the availability of resources of both print and non-

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print resources, as well as the equipment for using films, videotape, and other audiovisual media. Since educators recognize students' different learning styles, school collections of audiovisual materials reflect the need for a greater variety of media than do other types of libraries. With the increased emphasis on literacy, these resources have educational value for both students and adults.

Finally, if the experience of the staff at the Media Evaluation Center of the Department of Public Instruction is accurate, many schools and school libraries are developing microcomputer courseware collections, another significant medium for accommodating learning styles. The microcomputer may be the technology needed to meet the networking goals.

Conclusion

In her doctoral dissertation, "The Role of the School Library Media Program in a Multitype Library Network," Barbara Immroth states that "the actual experience of the participants in Colorado demonstrated the ability of a multitype library network to successfully include schools."¹ To be a part of the total library picture in North Carolina's network, what preparations should school libraries make now and in the future?

Short-range plans. Establish working relationships with building level administration, faculty, and students to share knowledge of networking potential.

Establish human networks locally, regionally, and statewide to share ideas and expertise with other professional librarians.

Encourage system-level interaction with those who have media responsibilities.

Be cognizant of the process and its implications for the school library in particular.

Read and review the relevant, related literature regularly.

Work with the North Carolina Association of School Librarians to review the issues and help plan directions, in-service training, and support.

Explore the opportunities to network on many different levels within all types of situations. Remember that networking can be a cooperative venture that may or may not involve resource exchange.

Define the local benefits and drawbacks realistically. Studies in Connecticut have shown that

projected drawbacks due to lack of staff time or governance did not materialize in pilot projects.²

Be realistic about costs. For example, would system-level processing be a cost effective product of belonging to the OCLC system? Also consider grouping together all the libraries in an area for materials processing as a cost-cutting measure.

Encourage staff members to learn all they can from reading, from conference attendance, from a video course, and from on-site visits. A knowledge of AACR2, MARC format, telecommunications, and automation are all good starting points.

Long-range plans. Consider how your school library's materials and human resources can become a part of a network. Consider the collection. Is the shelflist in order? Should specific plans for weeding be detailed? Consider plans for training teachers and students in telecommunications and research using printed indexes and expanding to on-line catalog. Be aware of how any automated procedure begun now may need to interface later. For instance, include ISBN or LC numbers as reference points for matching with established data bases.

Ensure that resources chosen to be included in a statewide bibliographic data base are cataloged to the required standards. Know the standards and request that preprocessed materials purchased for the school library meet them.

Interesting ideas are being discussed about networking in North Carolina by the North Carolina Library Networking Steering Committee, by librarians, and by citizens. The day of an individual school library/media center, isolated from other school libraries and other library resources and library users, is fading.

Realistically, not every school library will join an electronic network, but varying levels of cooperation can be achieved. Networking, electronic cooperation, is working today.

Ready access to resources for the best service to the most people is a definite need. Be a part.

References

1. Barbara Froling Immroth, "The Role of the School Library Media Program in a Multitype Library Network" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1980).
2. Eugene A. Lynch, "A Survey of School Library Participation in Cooperative Activities in Southeastern Connecticut" (Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Connecticut Educational Media Association, New Haven, October 29, 1981): 20.