

The Impact of Electronic Resources in the School Library Collection

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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Anita J. Hammond



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How might a teacher-librarian successfully incorporate electronic resources in the school library collection and ensure access by teachers and students? The advancement in technology has impacted the role of the teacher librarian: “In many schools, teacher-librarians are technology leaders in the school and are particularly skilled in the use of digital technologies” (Asselin, Branch, & Oberg, 2003, p. 57). With continued growth of online resources teacher-librarians are challenged to consider how electronic resources should be added to the school library collection: “The learning environment in a school library includes not only young people reading books, magazines, and newspapers, but also students who are actively engaged in connecting to resources” (Mardis, 2016). Through my research I hope to specify the criteria for selecting appropriate electronic resources, discover effective curation tools, and consider strategies to provide access to teachers and students.

I remember our weekly library class in elementary school. For 30 minutes once a week, while our classroom teacher had her preparation time, our class sat in the school library and learned library skills with the teacher-librarian. We were introduced to strategies to access library materials such as the Dewey Decimal system and the card catalogue. I remember my excitement when I learned that after choosing a topic, I had the opportunity to search for possible books related to that topic and could borrow any resource from the school library collection. The number of possibilities housed in our small school library seemed limitless! Imagine, then, how a student might feel today, walking into her school library. Her choices today are not limited to the number of physical copies within the space of one school library. Instead, with access to, not only physical materials within her school, but also to electronic

information and online resources, the possibilities are endless.

“Just in Case” versus “Just in Time”

The two school libraries referenced above and separated by only 30 years illustrate two very different realities for school library management. My elementary school library depended on a “just in case” model of collection management. In previous years, school libraries were hesitant to remove any titles from the collection “just in case” a patron required the title. Since physical copies were not easy to acquire, the books remained on the shelves for many years. With the advent of electronic resources in our school libraries, the focus has shifted to a “just in time” model of access. The question is no longer “Can we find the resource?” Our focus has shifted to “Can I find the resource when I need it?” (Valenza, 2010).

The Role of the Teacher-Librarian

This advancement in technology and subsequent shift in collection management has impacted the role of the teacher-librarian. No longer are teacher-librarians simply keepers of the books, responsible for collection management and organization and the promotion of print resources: “In many schools, teacher-librarians are technology leaders in the school and are particularly skilled in the use of digital technologies” (Asselin, Branch, & Oberg, 2003, p. 57). According to Media Smarts, digital literacy includes not only the ability to access, use, and understand digital information, but also to create and communicate content using a variety of digital media tools (Media Smarts, n.d.). The result of ever-increasing digital access and resources on collection management in our school libraries is that teacher-librarians must develop specific criteria to select appropriate electronic resources, use effective curation tools, and consider strategies to promote access to teachers and students.

Criteria to select electronic resources

The process of adding electronic resources to the library collection is similar to the

addition of traditional library materials. Teacher-librarians should complete a needs assessment, select and acquire required materials, catalogue the additions, and promote the new materials (Lagarde & Johnson, 2014). The criteria used to assess a possible item for the school library, electronic or not, considers the literary quality, accuracy of information, application to curriculum outcomes, and appeal to students (Mardis, 2016). Typical examples of electronic resources in a school library are databases, e-books, and websites.

Databases.

Databases provide digital access to texts such as journal articles, newspapers, and encyclopedias (Mardis, 2016). Saskatchewan schools have access to the provincial Multitype Database Licensing Program (MDLP) which includes magazines, journals, reference books, and newspapers. Some school divisions provide additional databases to their schools such as Gale's World History in Context. Within the school context it may be appropriate to consider providing access to an electronic encyclopedia, which will remain updated and current in electronic format, rather than purchasing a print copy. When examining the addition of a database to a school library collection consider which databases may be available at the provincial or division level, which subject areas require additional resource material, and the currency and accuracy of the information (Mardis, 2016).

eBooks.

Digital books, or eBooks, are typically available either on a computer or eBook reader. Happily, some publications are freely available in the public domain. Additionally, some eBooks include sound files and moving images, which may entice reluctant readers. When considering the addition of eBooks to the library collection, it may be necessary to provide eBook reading devices. Investigate, too, which titles are available in eBook format and compare the cost of the digital and paper format (Mardis, 2016). Two popular providers of eBooks are Tumblebooks

and Overdrive, both of which may be available through the school division or the local public library.

Websites.

Websites, documents accessible on the World Wide Web, may be the most popular research platform for our students, coupled, of course, with a Google search! The benefit of websites includes access on both school and home computers, as well as personal devices, links to sources of information, and multiple formats including audio, video, and animation. However, students and teachers need to consider the credibility, reliability, and currency of information included on web pages. Is the content and vocabulary age-appropriate? Is the author or publication information available (Mardis, 2016)? The implication of web-based information for school library collections is that teacher-librarians play a necessary role curating online material for school use and supporting the growth of their students' information literacy skills.

Curation Tools

How can the teacher-librarian support student learning outcomes in an age of information overload? Teacher-librarians must help students sift through the myriad of online information to find the best information possible. In other words, teacher-librarians must help students make sense of information and put it into a meaningful context. Just as teacher-librarians will pull resources off the shelf for class projects, curating online resources is the process of gathering current, relevant, vocabulary-appropriate information for student use (Kirkland, 2013). Teacher-librarians are encouraged to employ curation tools in order that electronic resources are available to patrons in a timely manner.

Which curation tools might best gather relevant, reliable online resources in order to support learning outcomes?

- Diigo is a text-based social bookmarking tool which allows the user to add a website to collections of resources.
- Pocket is a useful tool for storing web content.
- PearlTrees allows for the creation of collections which can include webpages, pdf documents, images, or personal notes.
- Pinterest is a popular social media tool that gathers “pins” and provides access to other users’ boards of information (Hammond, 2016).

With the endless amount of information available on the World Wide Web, teacher-librarians can begin to support learning outcomes by curating appropriate resources for student use.

Information Literacy Skills

Curating electronic resources is just the first step to providing current relevant resources. The inclusion of electronic resources in our school library collections necessitates information literacy skills education. Students require information literacy skills in order to access electronic resources. They need to learn how to evaluate information, identify its validity, and become critical, independent thinkers (Levitin, 2014, p. 336). Fortunately, teacher-librarians can reference the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards in order to create a framework for supporting the growth of information literacy skills in schools. The ISTE standards are meant to be used by educators across the curriculum and urge students to “engage and thrive in a connected, digital world” (International Society of Technology in Education, 2016). Through technology education students

- become empowered learners,
- demonstrate positive digital citizenship behaviours,

- construct knowledge,
- design and create solutions,
- solve problems using technology,
- communicate creatively, and
- collaborate globally (ISTE, 2016).

The result of the inclusion of electronic resources in a school library program is that the role of the teacher-librarian must also include supporting information literacy skills in order for staff and students to have the necessary skills to access library resources.

School Budget

How does the acquisition of electronic resources impact the school library budget? The reality of future school library budgets may include increased fees for licensing electronic resources. Increasingly, schools may need to navigate agreements that provide access to digital information. Teacher-librarians will need to be well versed in issues of ownership and access, consider terms and conditions that best meet the needs of the school community, and define who is authorized to use the resource, remembering that the academic goals of the school should govern the resources and access opportunities available in the school resource centre (Mardis, 2016).

Looking to the Future

The consequence of the advancement of digital resources in school libraries is that teacher-librarians, as learning leaders, must also add the promotion of digital and new literacies to their portfolio (de Groot & Branch, 2011, p. 291). The study of new literacies identifies the impact of technology, and the increase of digital resources, on “meaning-making” (Knoble & Lankshear, 2014, p. 97). These transliteracy skills include Web 2.0 applications such as blogging, video gaming, and online social networking (Newsum, 2016, p. 102). This

advancement of participatory culture has implications for the school library and the teacher-librarian (p. 98). Certainly, the teacher-librarian must understand how to engage in new literacies and model that level of technological literacy for teaching staff and students (p. 100). Attention to new literacies in our schools by encouraging students to develop communication skills congruent with continual digital advancements will help prepare our students for an unforeseeable future (p. 97).

Conclusion

Advancements in technology have impacted school library collections and the role of the teacher-librarian. The criteria for adding online resources to the school library should consider their accuracy and relevance to learning outcomes. With an ever-increasing number of electronic resources, teacher-librarians may need to consider the implication on the school library budget and use curation tools such as Diigo, Pearltrees, and Pinterest to gather online resources for students. Finally, teacher-librarians are encouraged to use ISTE standards to promote an increased understanding and application of information literacy skills. With continued advancements in technology, teacher-librarians should continue to grow their own information literacy skills in order to support necessary trans-literacy skills in a participatory culture.

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