
Editorial

Common Issues, Common Problems

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It seems that everyone I know has a horror story to tell about how computer technology has let them down in some devastating way. For example, in the change in the data analysis services in my faculty, going from a mainframe to a microcomputer based system, I lost the data from 400 questionnaires and had to have it reentered into the new system! And I still don't understand why some of my e-mail arrives at one office and some of it arrives at my other office, despite the best efforts of the network technician who has "pointed" all my mail to one address! For me, that is one more of the joys of a joint appointment—two offices, two e-mail programs, two different computer systems!

On the other hand, it is amazing to think how much computer technology has improved and enriched our professional and personal lives. The speed at which I can analyze research data and write research reports has increased at least fourfold. I communicate with my distance education students, spread out across the vast spaces of Western Canada, on a daily basis. I can keep in touch with friends around the world quickly and easily.

The theme of this issue of arose from informal discussions of those potentials and pitfalls and from the debate, going on in the literature of research and practice and on listservs and virtual conferences around the world, as to the role of technology in schools and libraries.

The authors of the articles in this issue are from Iceland, Malaysia, Australia, Germany, Canada, and Puerto Rico. One of the authors, Laurel A. Clyde, in writing about technology in Iceland's elementary school libraries, comments that although some aspects of the situation there are unique, many of the problems and issues that have emerged there are common to other countries as well. This point echoed for me as I read and reread the articles in this issue. Here are some of the themes that emerged for me.

Discussion of the use of technology in schools needs to take into account the impact of language and culture. This is particularly raised in this issue by Laurel A. Clyde, writing about the technology in elementary school libraries in Iceland, and by Siowck-Lee Gan, writing about the changing approaches to incorporating technology into the schools of Malaysia. Laurel A. Clyde is a professor in library education, and Siowck-Lee Gan works in distance education in a university. Both note the special challenges of technology development in countries with unique languages and cultures. In my own country, Canada, we have concerns in relation to maintaining our unique cultural identity in the face of the enormous and pervasive influence of

American culture, an influence that is exacerbated by technology such as the World Wide Web. There is the potential there, as the costs of technologies decrease, for increased production of Canadian resources, but that potential has not yet been realized.

Discussion of the use of technology in schools needs to take into account the key role of teachers in the innovation process. This is the theme of James Henri's article on the impact of teachers' information technology literacy on the effective integration of technology into teaching and learning. This concern is also raised in the articles by Laurel A. Clyde and by Siowck-Lee Gan. Teachers need to be supported in the development of their "IT literacy" if they are to help their students use the technology in new and powerful ways, to enhance their problem solving and decision-making abilities, to become—in the broadest sense of the term—"information literate."

Discussion of the use of technology in schools needs to take into account how students can be helped to make sense of the information that technology brings into their libraries and classrooms. John Royce from Germany and Susan Gibson from Canada explore two aspects of the use of technology for learning in the schools. John Royce, the librarian at an international school, draws on the research into reading reluctance to find strategies for helping students who find the technology, not a help, but a source of frustration, because of information overload. Susan Gibson, a professor in social studies education, draws on her own research into computer-based instructional resources, on the research on computer use in schools, and on the information search process to explore ways of using computer resources and tools to enhance student research.

Discussion of the use of technology in schools needs to take into account the potential of the technology for providing professional development for teacher-librarians and other educators. In their report, James Henri and Lyn Hay, lecturers in a distance education program for education in teacher-librarianship in an Australian university, and Sandra Hughes, a teacher-librarian in a school in Canada, give us a glimpse into the workings of a Virtual Conference. They help us to see the special challenges and opportunities that were involved in organizing and participating in the 1996 ITEC conference and invite us to be involved in the 1997 conference. One exciting aspect of this conference was the opportunity for teacher-librarians to explore issues with other educators.

In the *Of Special Interest* section of this issue, Consuelo Figueras, a professor in library education in Puerto Rico, reports the results of a survey on library services to youth in some Latin American countries. Analysis of the data from the survey, which was conducted in 1993 at the First Encounter of Latin American Library Educators, shows the factors that limit or enable the development of school library programs in Latin American are many of the same ones that influence the development of school library programs in other areas of the world.

Common issues, common problems—can we draw from the reports of research and practice in other countries and contexts in order to see the issues and problems in our own particular countries and contexts in new and insightful ways? That, I think, is the power and the potential of sharing our knowledge and our questions with others.