

## **When Librarians Become Computer Technicians: I know how you Feel, But. . .**

***Book Report, March/April 2002***

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I read No Torres's excellent article, "When Librarians become Computer Technicians" (*Library Talk*, November/December 2001) on a day when I had spent considerable amounts of time coping with going to "Plan B." Our servers were attacked by the Nimda virus; teachers were angry because classroom computers weren't working; and I had to figure out why the keyboarding software wasn't behaving. It was also a day when I spent too much time stressing about the students who didn't receive adequate assistance, or the information literacy skills that weren't addressed. In other words, as I read Torres's lamentations, I thought, 'I've been there, too.'

My daily routine includes reinstalling systems, dealing with warranty information, routine troubleshooting, and supporting the technology needs of teachers and kids. I wish I had more time for book talks, displays, and bibliographies. I wish I had more time to interact with the hundreds of kids who use our media center daily, and more time for quality planning with staff. I know how Torres feels when he says we are thought of as technicians rather than as professional educators. I've been there, too.

But. . . we need to think about the realities of today's education. Most schools will never be able to afford enough technical support, and even if they could, most technical support people would rather work with networks and high-end technology, not be "fix-it" people. If we want teachers to use our media centers and online resources, if we want information technology to be used effectively, and if we want our media programs to impact the entire school, we must take on a technical support role. Teachers can't teach and students can't use information technology when the "stuff" doesn't work.

My principal frequently counts on me for technical support. But, he also knows I'm there to help the kids and the teachers; he knows that when I argue for improved technical support and for improved information literacy, I'm arguing for the teachers and kids. I teach students, I plan and implement staff development, and I work with teachers—and I know that when push comes to shove, the "just-in-time" technical support and leadership I provide is what teachers appreciate.

We win friends and influence people by becoming technicians now and then. That visit to a classroom to fix a computer might be a great opportunity to talk to a teacher about ways to implement a research project; that visit with a teaching team about server problems might be a time to discuss information literacy, new online databases, or even reading.

I'm proud of what our students are doing. They do well because I take the time to teach and assist them. But, I don't need to be deeply involved in everything they do, because I've worked with the teachers throughout our "growing years," providing staff development and helping them plan good lessons. I'm there, I'm involved, but I'm also free to fix a computer or attend a district technology meeting. I know we aren't truly an information literate school, but I'm confident that we're on the right path, doing a good job and getting better. But we can't get better if the stuff doesn't work.

No one ever told me to take on technical support; the role just evolved. I consider myself teacher, an instructional leader, and a media specialist who fights for the information needs of teachers and kids. My principal appreciates all of these roles. And, it's nice to no longer hear questions such as "Do you

have to go to school to be a librarian?" When we mix a bit of technical expertise with our passion for books and information, we become more valuable&mdash;even indispensable&mdash;to our schools. It may even be a matter of job survival. The expanded role of media specialist/technical support person can be the best of both worlds.

May 02

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