

This is a difficult session for me because everyone in this room knows my love for libraries and my passion for what we do. But I confess to regularly vacillating between doom and gloom and cock-eyed optimism. As I began to prepare this panel presentation—a reflection, I think I’d call it—I have had a possible epiphany. What future are we fighting to save? The library as place, the library as resources and services, or the library as personnel? Put another way, are we fighting to save the library or the librarian (school library media coordinator to most of us in this room)?

Now the library as place is easy to appreciate. Look around you at Joyner Library and its TRC. Walk into the Transylvania County Public Library, the newest building in that small mountain town. It’s a building as majestic as the mountains themselves. The community loves it; the City Council even holds its meetings there. Walk into any IMPACT school and you understand the mantra, “The media center is the hub of the school.” In situations such as these, it’s easy to imagine a wonderful future for libraries—the library as place.

But is the library as place the true mission of libraries—public, academic, or school? Should that be our battleground for the future? Perhaps we should have within our sights the library as resources and services—online repositories of vetted information like NC WiseOwl and NC Live, digital reference services that feature your IM reference desk, even books and leisure-reading newspapers and magazines. Suddenly the case for the library’s future becomes less crystal clear, what with Google and the Amazon Kindle. Yet it is these resources, so carefully and lovingly selected, so assiduously pored over for just the right answer, that are the essence of library, right?

Or should our true advocacy efforts be focused on the library as person, the librarian, the SLMC, who actually has the ability, education, and commitment to transcend the library as place and the library as resources and services to eventually reach our goal: the librarian as information interpreter and evaluator? After all, when we do our jobs well, this is the true essence of library, correct? We help others make sense of the morass of information surrounding us; we work hard to help our students become good consumers of information, astute evaluators of resources, articulate presenters of information in a variety of formats. Shouldn’t this be our line in the sand? Shouldn’t the future of libraries really be centered around a

discussion and advocacy movement for the librarian regardless of employment venue?

The *Scholastic Administrator* has a wonderful article that does just this in its latest issue—with a very well-deserved nod to our own Linda Teel, I might add. It focuses on our myriad roles within a school and its media center, many of them morphing from the traditional “keeper of the books” to the tech-adept information interpreter and evaluator—information educator. While the article alludes to the library as place and naturally subsumes within it the library as resources and services, its focus—its advocacy—is centered upon the librarian—the school librarian in this instance; the library as personnel, people.

My point here is that as we look to the future of libraries, as we fight for the library’s very survival, it is important for all of us to be fighting the same war. If we confuse our public by mixing our messages—save the library as place (the building or room), save the library as resources and services, save the library as its personnel, we run the risk of bifurcating our influence and our message. The real future of libraries is in us, its librarians. If we do our jobs well, if we recruit effectively, if we stop tilting at the Google windmill, accept the technology obsession, and do our jobs well, the future of libraries is assured. So let’s be careful that we focus on the war, not its individual battles. To paraphrase a famous person, “I have seen the future and it is us.”

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