



The Indispensable Teacher

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One of the highlights of Super Conference 2002 was the OSLA Spotlight Session by Doug Johnson, the director of media and technology for the Mankato School District in Minnesota. This presentation was a real treat for all those in attendance as Johnson, with a stand-up routine a comic would envy, entertained, educated and inspired a crowd of teacher-librarians large enough to fill a Crowne Plaza ballroom.

The increasing emphasis on digital information instead of print means that teacher-librarianship is changing. Although this time of change is stressful, it's also a time of opportunity. Johnson encouraged us to reflect on our reasons for deciding on careers as teacher-librarians. Those who became teacher-librarians because they liked books and quiet spaces are likely to find themselves threatened by the shift from print to digital information. On the other hand, those who became teacher-librarians because they enjoyed the challenge of helping others identify and meet their information needs and communicate what they've learned will find that, while the tools have changed, this purpose has not.

To illustrate the challenges of change, Johnson shared the Mankato experience. As the district's director of media and technology, Johnson was responsible for restructuring the Mankato system. School libraries were combined with AV and computers to deliver curriculum that teaches information literacy and technology skills to every student.

BECOMING INDISPENSABLE

Of course, being adaptable teacher-librarians is only part of the challenge. An even greater challenge is convincing teachers, administrators and parents that having teacher-librarians is a good investment of scarce education dollars. Doug Johnson's answer to this challenge is simple: become indispensable. In the pursuit of indispensability, it's important to ask four questions:

- 1) What qualities or functions give a person value to an organization?
- 2) What roles can teacher-librarians fill that give them value to the educational process?
- 3) What tasks can teacher-librarians perform within these roles?
- 4) What does becoming "indispensable" look like in a real school?