Chapter 13
Lights, Cameras, Actions!
Via Teacher Librarian Video Conferencing

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ABSTRACT

How can professional organizations build an online community of practice that enables teacher librarians globally to connect meaningfully and make a difference locally—and beyond? Video conferencing is one solution. Using video conferencing, teacher librarians have a unique opportunity to help build a strong collaborative, professional network that will positively impact best practices while at the same time raise awareness of twenty-first century librarianship. Critical elements and practices are identified that facilitate communities of practice and support teacher librarian professional development. Aspects of video conferencing are detailed, and a case study on the use of video conferencing explains how to facilitate a national-wide community of practice among teacher librarians.

INTRODUCTION

To become a proficient teacher librarian (TL) requires ongoing education and interaction with peers (Smith, 2003). Some school districts provide mechanisms for professional development: material and human resources, formal and information learning opportunities, and funding for participation in professional development venues. More recently, school districts and professional organizations have been experimenting with ways to build and maintain communities of practice (CoP). For communities of practice to succeed, both social interaction and ongoing improvement must exist. Time constraints and transportation make face-to-face meetings increasingly problematic. In this interactive digital age, virtual social networking models need to be explored as an effective means of facilitating communities of practice, particularly if TLs are to expand their knowledge beyond local practice.

Video is making a comeback because of its multimedia and archival features. Particularly with the advent of digital camcorders and easy-to-use editing software, video has regained its reputation as a viable
educational tool for professional development and management since video is an appropriate vehicle for training, knowledge management, systems analysis, and public relations.

This chapter explores the effectiveness of video conferencing as a mechanism for developing and maintaining a community of practice for learning leaders (such as teacher librarians). Using video conferencing, teacher librarians have a unique opportunity to help build a strong collaborative, professional network that will positively impact best practices while at the same time raise awareness of twenty-first century librarianship. This chapter examines the philosophy of communities of practice, the nature of video conferencing, and provides a case study on the use of video conferencing to facilitate a nation-wide community of practice among teacher librarians. Both general considerations and lessons learned from an extended case study are provided.

BACKGROUND

Teacher librarians (TLs) work in K-12 school settings, and have as their mission to ensure that students and staff become effective users of ideas and information. To carry out this charge, successful TLs:

- provide intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats;
- provide instruction to foster competence and stimulate interest in reading, viewing and using information and ideas;
- work with other educators to design learning strategies to meet the needs of individual students.

They need to develop and manage resource collections, serve as effective teachers as well as effective information specialists, and administer a library program of services. The role of the TL requires multiple competencies (curriculum, media, administration, collaboration, professional development, etc.) and as a result of these efforts, TLs make positive advancements in multiple contexts.

The need to bring these multiple worlds together is becoming more critical because of the increasingly underestimated value of the TLs. In this digital age of easy access to online resources; who needs libraries? Can’t online help take care of information questions? Yet, it is apparent that students usually are not efficient online searchers or critical thinkers. Who is best positioned to teach all students about how to access and process information in myriad forms for myriad purposes? TLs. They are truly resource persons, providing value-added physical and intellectual access to information and ideas. Not only do TLs know how information is created, disseminated, organized and used across the curriculum and beyond, but they know how to teach the entire school community how to be fluent and responsible users of these resources.

Using video conferencing, TLs have a unique opportunity to help build a strong collaborative, professional network that will provide ongoing professional improvement and facilitate collaboratively-created products (e.g., online bibliographies, web tutorials, library portals, digital learning objects) that can be shared with the rest of the education community.

Need for Professional Development

For K-12 teacher librarians (TL) to be effective in their work, they need to keep current in the field. Dall’Alba and Sandberg (2006) defined two dimensions of professional development: improved skills (the competency level) and embodied understanding of practice (the “big picture”); beginners tend to focus on the former, while experienced TLs may well stay at the competency level rather than continuing to seek challenges and take a longer-term perspective. Oberg (1995) found that expert TLs had stronger professional networks, and were