7013 Project

**Introduction**

When one envisions a school library of the 1950s, one thinks of a calm, orderly environment with students consulting the *Reader’s Guide* and others studying silently, carefully avoiding the librarian who seemed austere and distant. Indeed, mid twentieth-century librarians thought of little more than their collections, so mired as they were in the quagmire of manual organizational systems. Days were spent keeping track of loaned and overdue books, identifying, ordering, and processing new purchases, checking in serials, maintaining a card catalog, and other endless duties. Spare time was spent taking inventory to establish which books had been stolen and needed replacement. Library functions required hours of typing cards, forms and labels. Little wonder the patron was an afterthought, and the tranquil atmosphere in the library was not peaceful but forced. Until automation, librarians only dreamed of providing the services expected of information centers today.

In the early days of computers, using them for library tasks seemed to some more trouble than they were worth. The black and green screens, arcane commands and blinking cursors of early systems were unfathomable. Automation has come a long way in both technological sophistication and consideration for the user. Today’s integrated systems are attractive, inviting, intuitive, and genuinely helpful. And school libraries, which have traditionally been a step behind larger institutions in offering the latest technology, are finally catching up. For years, lack of money to buy the equipment, lack of awareness of what the systems offer and how they work, and lack of understanding about their influence on library services all played a part in delaying school library automation. Most school libraries bought their first systems only twenty years ago.

Since then, the automation industry has consolidated to a few vendors in a fiercely competitive market. Schools who had automated in the 1980s are currently replacing their outdated “legacy” and PC-based systems. Today’s schools want systems that manage a variety of assets, from library books, audio books and films, to a/v equipment, textbooks, and digital objects. They prefer a web-based, district-wide system to promote the sharing of resources and the conservation of effort, and they want all the convenience and resources of the Internet. Further, all information--whether free, paid, or locally-available--should be retrieved in a single search with an easy-to-use interface. In an environment where open-source systems beckon the cost-conscious, profit-oriented automation companies are racing to develop systems with the most features and the highest level of service at an affordable price. Although no system offers every new development, school libraries have increasingly chosen Follett Software Company’s products for their balance between simplicity and sophistication (Breeding, 2008).

Follett’s top product, Destiny Library Manager, offers a completely web-based system that is marketed as a solution to organizing multiple assets for the entire school district. With a highly customizable interface and a content-enhanced OPAC, Destiny offers all of the traditional functions of an automation system with a myriad of conveniences. Not only can librarians now purchase materials through the vendor’s TitleWave system, they can quickly download MARC records that contain hyperlinked subject terms, tables of contents, user reviews, and images of the books’ covers. User searches return educationally-approved websites as well as records for books, films, and other materials. Today the patron has virtually “everything” at his fingertips. But appreciating the features of any automation system is difficult without an idea of their development--from the austere systems of the past to the bejeweled configurations of today.

**A Brief History of School Library Automation**

Almost a half century ago, computers were exciting, mysterious machines that promised relief from some of librarians’ most tiresome procedures. During the 1960s the Library of Congress developed the break-through MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging) record so that information about books could be displayed in a standard bibliographic format readable and searchable by a computer. MARC records could be shared among libraries, reducing the burden of original cataloging, and in addition to permitting author, title, and subject searches, they supported queries with keywords and Boolean logic (and, or, not.) Yet the expense of the equipment and the dearth of ready-made software meant that few libraries could afford to experiment with automation. University and public libraries were among the first, with software written in-house and run on their institutions’ mainframes (Bilal Meghabghab, 1997). These early systems often comprised a single function, such as circulation or acquisitions (Bilal, 2002). A few school systems explored automation as well during the early years--Albuquerque, NM began an automated central processing system in 1963, Madison, WI cataloged with a computer-based system in 1967, and Shawnee Mission, KS developed a batch ordering and cataloging system the following year (Driver & Driver, 1982).

Mainframes had become commonplace in larger businesses by 1970 and progressive school librarians urged colleagues to use computer equipment already on campus to benefit the library. Accounting programs could calculate library expenditures, word processors might produce bibliographies, and label printing systems could turn out spine labels and shelf list cards. Yet the very idea of computers seemed overwhelming to many librarians, who suddenly appreciated the tangibility of their paper cards and forms. Citing expense and lack of expertise, they waited to automate, and some librarians actively resisted. In 1970, crews attempting to implement the Oregon Automated Library System in a school library had to withdraw when they found the staff antagonistic and uncooperative (Driver & Driver, 1982).

Developments in the late 1970s and the following decade made automation more attractive and attainable. Beginning in 1976, Apple introduced the Apple II and five years later IBM followed with the PC. These microcomputers sat on an individual’s desktop and were independent from a mainframe. As their price declined and their processing and storage capabilities improved, school libraries began to purchase microcomputers while vendors developed compatible automation software. In 1981 Colorado Computer Systems developed Computer Cat for the Mountain View Elementary School. Computer Cat had three main components: OPAC, Cataloging, and Inventory. Its OPAC allowed users to search by author, title, and subject. Soon software developers invested in “turnkey” systems that offered coordinating hardware and software. After 1987 the creation of MicroLIF, the Microcomputer Library Interchange Format, enabled librarians to import MARC records into automated systems using floppy diskettes. This protocol, today called USMARC/MicroLIF, allows librarians to “copy catalog” by downloading pre-written MARC records for most books—saving librarians from time-consuming original cataloging (Bilal Meghabghab, 1997).

Early systems were stand-alone, including one or more modules, such as Cataloging, Public Access (OPAC), or Circulation. Each component operated independently from the others. To save money, modules could be purchased separately, but because they did not share a common database, a user identifying a book of interest in the OPAC would then have to check Circulation to see whether it was available. By the early 1990s, vendors began to introduce Integrated Library Systems (ILS) with interrelated modules that shared a common database. Patrons viewing a record in an OPAC today see data taken from the cataloging module and determine whether the book is available through Circulation. An acquisitions module alerts users when items of interest are on order, and Interlibrary Loan indicates when an item is on loan to another library (Bilal, 2002).

Until the 1990s, systems were also closed, meaning that automation software was loaded onto the local computer, often at the circulation desk, with no connection to remote machines. Any “outside” contact was through the librarian himself who might key in MARC records or download them from a CD-ROM. When automation systems became compatible with the Z39.50 protocol, automated systems could then “talk” to each other and librarians could consult other libraries’ catalogs. Vendors such as Follett began to offer services such as Alliance Plus, which allowed the downloading of MARC records directly from the company’s computers, eliminating the need for CD-ROMs (Rubin, 2004).

Some of the most visible changes in automation systems unfolded in the late 1990s, when technology developed twenty years earlier was finally incorporated into affordable options for the library. In schools, users observed that the number of terminals available to search the library catalog blossomed from one to several, and within a few years, networking enabled access campus-wide. Character-based DOS systems were replaced with Microsoft Windows which provided a more intuitive graphical user interface, or GUI. More systems claimed to be Z39.50 compatible, and several were “open,” permitting access to remote computers offering fee-based services such as DIALOG and WILSONLINE (Bridge, 1993, p. 54).

By the end of the century, the growth of the Internet inspired vendors to explore ways in which library catalogs could incorporate resources available on the World Wide Web. Follett introduced the 856Express which linked subjects in the MARC record to related websites (Bilal, Barry, & Penniman, 1999). Just a few years later Follett introduced Destiny, its completely Web-based automation system. Although most school libraries were still using outdated “legacy” systems, many were ready to migrate to a new one, and vendors busily developed new Internet-enabled features such as hyperlinked subject terms in the OPAC, book jacket images displayed with searches, and tables of contents, abstracts, and reviews offered along with standard bibliographic information (Breeding, 2002, p. 51).

Today, automation systems are similar at heart to their ancestors: they have a minimum of three modules including an OPAC, Cataloging, and Circulation. OPACs provide the same information found in card catalogs but allow advanced searching capabilities. Whereas card catalogs provided author, title, subject headings, and call number, computerized catalogs permit keyword and Boolean searching as well. Keyword searches scan the entire catalog record for the search term, not just the subject headings. Boolean logic allows users to filter queries with “and,” “or” and “not.” Search terms can also be truncated, so patrons typing in librar\* will retrieve items with either “library” or “libraries” in the subject heading. OPACs also permit users combine search strategies, such as searching both author and title or author and subject at the same time. Many Web-based catalogs feature hyperlinked terms which link users to records for related items (Bilal, 2002). OPACs in an Integrated Library System display copy status, indicating how many copies of an item are owned by the library and whether they are available.

While the OPAC is the interface seen by the user, Cataloging and Circulation are normally the domain of the librarian. The cataloging module makes the OPAC possible by acting as a database from which records of interest are queried using the OPAC. Librarians may create their own MARC records or import them from external sources, such as a CD-ROMs or remote libraries. Because of the time and training required to perform original cataloging, most libraries opt to use other libraries’ records and amend them to suit local needs. Records saved in the cataloging module provide the brief description viewed in the OPAC. Circulation keeps track of loaned materials. Overdue notices, holds and reserves, fines, and circulation statistics are generated from data available in Circulation.

Many systems offer additional modules such as Acquisitions, Serials, or Interlibrary Loan. Acquisitions keeps track of material requests and receipt, purchase orders, the budget, and vendor performance. Serials organizes periodical subscriptions, and Interlibrary Loan coordinates the borrowing and lending of items among libraries. Utilities addresses database problems, management, reports, statistics, and customizing the automation software (Bilal, 2002).

The right automation system is undoubtedly time-consuming to choose, install, and maintain. It is also expensive to purchase, considering the costs of equipment, software, record conversion, labels, and barcodes. The staff must then be trained to use the system, which will be periodically unavailable during power failures and interruptions to Internet access. Librarians have found, however, that the benefits of automation far outweigh its drawbacks. The increased efficiency enjoyed by both librarian and patron have enabled a new relationship where collection maintenance can take a back seat to service. Because the librarian’s tasks can be performed in a fraction of the time previously needed, librarians have been able to question what matters most to the patron, and explore how they can best deliver it. (Bilal, 2002).

The numerous advantages of automation makes implementing a well-designed system a necessity for the modern library. “Schools themselves, even small schools, are now complex organizations that create and use vast quantities of information… and … as the information needs of students, teachers, and school administrators increase and become more complex so does the need for a powerful information management system” (Clyde, 2000). School librarians have responded to this need and at least 85 percent of school libraries reported utilizing automated catalog and circulation systems by 2000 (Prestenbak & Wightman, 2000). One popular school library automation system is the Follett Destiny Library Manager. Approximately one out of every four public US public schools report using Destiny Library Manager, and Follett reported a major increase in sales in 2007 ( Follett Software Company, 2008). Why is Destiny Library Manager such a popular choice among school librarians? Library Manager is a web-based, integrated management system that “… combines circulation, cataloging, searching, reporting, and management” (Destiny Library Manager, 2008) into one relatively-easy-to-install system that requires little technical knowledge to maintain. Furthermore, the Destiny system is primarily designed for school districts that wish to gather individual schools into one database to facilitate streamlined reporting and sharing of resources (Minkel, 2003).

**Components of the System**

Library Manager is an open integrated retrieval and management system with mechanistic and adaptive objectives. Integrated systems have components that function together to increase functionality ( Burke, 2001) and are able to manage a variety of resources. Other advantageous functions of integrated systems include the capability of expanding to include new formats, providing powerful search options , and allowing patrons to create custom bibliographies (Cohn, Kelsey, and Fiels, 2001). Library Manager achieves integration through its four main components: the Catalog, Circulation, the Back Office, and the Home Page. The mechanistic or formally dictated objective of Library Manager is fulfilled through the circulation component of the system which checks materials in and out in the same manner every time. The adaptive aspect of Library Manager continues to evolve as each new version of the system is becoming more collaborative through features like Destiny Quest. (Destiny Quest is a graphics-enhanced search interface that includes prominent top ten “check out” and “new arrival” charts.) Another feature that fulfills the adaptive objective is the Interactive Catalog that allows patrons to rate or review books in the Catalog component ( Library Manager Particpant Guide, 2008). It is reasonable to expect that future versions of Library Manager will continue to add adaptive features. Two aspects of Library Manager demonstrate that is a relatively open system that does interact with other systems and its environment. Library Manager is a Schools Interoperability Framework certified product, which enables the system to share information with other School Information Systems and is capable of importing data such as student personal information or identification numbers (Destiny Library Manager, 2008). This compatibility greatly reduces the amount of time dedicated to data entry and instead frees the school librarian to collaborate with teachers and students on curriculum issues (Sharp, 2005). Library Manager also works in concert with Follett’s other management systems, Asset Manager and Textbook Manager, to produce a comprehensive picture of the school’s holdings and a particular patron’s status. (Destiny Library Manager, 2008)

The web-based catalog of Library Manager is the system component that is most used by patrons. This component offers the patron complete access to the library’s catalog at anytime and from any Internet-accessible location. Library Manager provides several powerful search options to the patron. The Basic Search function offers searching by keyword, title, author, subject, series, or award-winner status. Patrons wanting a more robust search experience can use the Power Search function which includes the basic search options with Boolean logic and limiters such as material type or publication year. Additionally, Library Manager offers a visual search choice for patrons which displays materials sorted into frequently-used categories that are represented by colorful icons. Once a search term is entered into any of the search formats, the patron receives a list of titles that matches the search term. The title records contain a wealth of information for the patron including title, author, availability, publication information, reading level, review citations, and an explore feature that provides links to additional materials under different but related subject headings. Follett offers two popular add-on features to Library Manager to enhance the search process. Web Path Express is an attempt to address the concern that students often fail to choose accurate and reliable resources by providing what Follett claims is over sixty thousand Internet sites and library materials that are ” …evaluated for objectivity, currency, authority, credibility, and educational value.” (Web Path Express, 2008). Title Peek, the other popular add-on feature, incorporates an image of the resource’s cover into the bibliographic record and may also provide additional information such as the table of contents or reviews (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008).

Today’s students are digital natives and many prefer a more visual or graphic search interface. Follett has recognized this and created the Destiny Quest search feature. Destiny Quest, the graphic search interface, is designed to look more like a web page than a traditional OPAC. A Destiny Quest search begins with a keyword search and eventually allows the patron to narrow search options by author, title, or format. Search results are graphically depicted and appear on more of a virtual shelf that can be manipulated rather than a static list of bibliographic information. Destiny Quest will have more collaborative features in the newest 9.0 version of Library Manager including a wish list feature that allows patrons to suggest titles for the collection and a “did you mean” prompt to help patrons when a search term produces no results (What’s New in Destiny 9.0, 2008).

A patron would not have access to a catalog if the librarian did not have the capability to create and maintain bibliographic records. The Catalog component of Library Manager automates those tasks for the librarian. The Add Title function allows the librarian to input acquisitions into the catalog. A drop-down menu lists a variety of formats that can be added including books, maps, recordings, or video. A powerful feature of the Catalog component is the instant availability of MARC records from several sources such as Alliance Plus, other district libraries, or other librarian-designated Z sources. Existing title records can be searched by title, author, LCCN, ISBN, or ISSN. The Add Title feature can also guide the librarian to create new title records when an existing record cannot be found by using the Marc Editor or Easy Editor templates. Titles can also be imported from vendors or exported to other libraries in order to share records. Occasionally, a librarian may want to add specific subject headings to improve patron search results, and these site-specific subject headings can be added by the Update Title function. Featured prominently on the Add Title page is a link to Follett’s Title Wave, a web-based collection development tool intended to make ordering from the Follett Resource Company an easy process. Eventually copies will have to be removed from the collection and the Update Copies function gives the librarian the option of deleting individual copies or groups of copies. (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008)

A vibrant school library circulates many items each day, and the Circulation component of Library Manager helps a busy librarian manage the numerous check-ins, check-outs, renews, and holds that occur all day long. Materials can be easily checked out by using names, barcodes, student photographs, or by manually inputting the title. The check-in function is designed to be as simple as check-out and can be completed by scanning the material’s barcode or inputting the title. In-library use can be recorded in the Circulation component to provide a clearer picture of library material usage. In Library Manager, holds can be placed by patrons with Destiny user names and passwords from the Title Record display or by the Hold feature found in the librarian interface. Many school libraries charge fines for overdue or lost materials, and the Catalog component of Library Manager can manage those transactions. Fines are searchable by patron name, and the librarian has the option of adding fines, viewing fine history, or waiving fines. Copy and Patron Status is also accessed in this system component. The Copy Status function allows the librarian to add a hold, mark a copy as lost, or print barcodes or spine labels. Patron Status provides instant access to patron information such as user identification numbers, grade level, fine history, hold history, transactions, and statistics. The last function available in the Catalog component is Library Information. The Library Information tab gives a table of current due dates, library statistics including current number of titles in the collection, and lists of patrons that frequently check out materials. Although the web-based nature of Library Manager is one of the system’s best features, technical difficulties do happen with any online application. Follett Remote is an offline circulation function that allows the library to operate when the school’s Internet connection is experiencing technical issues. Follett Remote is loaded onto the desktop and offline circulation transactions are uploaded to the system at a later time. Through all of these features, circulation data is seamlessly shared with the Catalog component to provide patrons with accurate resource availability or their own account status (Library Manager Particpant Guide, 2008).

The Destiny Library Manager’s Back Office component houses several support functions that are essential to delivering services to patrons. There are six patron functions in this component. The librarian may edit patron information, add patrons, delete patrons, or update groups of patrons in the Back Office. One example of how Library Manager works seamlessly with other school information systems is the ability the librarian has to upload student photographs from other systems or the school photography service into the patron record. A crucial part of the Back Office is the Library Policy function. The school librarian is able to set circulation policies based on patron and material type. The policy function works with the circulation component to provide loan periods and fines. Library Manager has the capability to create administrator, guest, student, teacher, and patron accounts with varying access levels related to loan periods and fines. The Back Office calendar task manages the school library’s schedule and shares this data with the Circulation component to create due dates and loan periods that do not conflict with holidays or weekends. (Library Manager Participant Guide, 2008).

Librarians must manage an enormous amount of data including circulation rates, collection age, and inventories. The Reports function of the Back Office instantly provides this type of information without any time-consuming data tabulation on the part of the librarian. The Library Materials reports function can create collection statistic reports, bar code labels and lists, spine labels, hold reports, inventory reports, search statistics, shelf lists, and weeding logs. School librarians called upon to create bibliographies may use the Reports function to develop list by title, subject, or call number. Particularly valuable is the Collection Statistics Summary that supplies the age of materials in Dewey Range. (Library Manager Particpant Guide, 2008) This is a powerful collection tool that can guide a school librarian during weeding or provide the evidence necessary to support budget requests. (Minkel, 2001)The Back Office also provides librarians the means to create and print custom reports. Inventories are completed using the Back Office and librarians have the option to conduct annual or circulation type inventories.(Library Manager Participants Guide, 2008).

Most automated school library systems consist only of the Catalog, Circulation, and Administrative components but in the 21st century, a school library must have a presence on the World Wide Web. Follett provides a fully customizable home page with Library Manager to serve as the gateway to the system. Text, links, and pathfinders are easily added to the Home Page even if the librarian has little web page creation experience. This component can serve as an important marketing tool for the school library, and a creative design can entice students to use the other components of the system (Library Manager Particpant Guide, 2008).

**Applications Within the School Library**

Follett’s Destiny Library Manager is marketed as a “total solution” for library operations, according to Connie Hansen, sales representative for Follett. The system’s application is reflected in how librarians, teachers, and students use it. The impact it has on the librarian is certainly more immediate than it is for teachers and students, due to the nature of the librarian’s job. However, many aspects of Destiny ultimately affect the quality of the library’s collections as well as the ability of students to efficiently access those collections. This, in effect, allows the librarian to support book literacy and information literacy as part of the educational goals of the school system.

“Maintaining an accurate catalog is a critical function for the school library media specialist and the cataloging module must support this function” (Schultz-Jones, 2006, 42). In order to maintain authority control, the librarian can order materials and import their MARC records from Destiny’s database rather than undertake original cataloging. If the database does not have the MARC record that is needed, Z39.50 protocol for MARC records allows the librarian to interface directly through Destiny’s database to other online databases, such as Library of Congress. As records are imported, the librarian can easily maintain authority control (Saffady, 2000, 47-48). She may edit the records or create her own if desired.

A reliable OPAC is dependent upon an accurate catalog. All OPACs allow for searching of records by author, title, or subject, but Destiny allows for customization by the librarian. Besides displaying the school logo and captions, the interface appearance can be configured by the librarian to suit the age group of the student users (Felix, 2003). She can also customize the OPAC’s toolbar to meet student searching needs. If needed, Destiny has the capability to check other schools’ catalogs for a desired item.

Circulation is important to a librarian not only operationally, but also for management data. (Schultz-Jones, 2006, p.50). For the operation of circulation, this component supports policies and tracks materials. Fine, loan period, and hold policies are automatically applied to transactions. Fines are calculated for overdue items according to the school’s policy, for example. Accurate holdings information is maintained by the check-out, check-in, and renewal buttons on the circulation tab, and students’ current checkouts are tracked by their identification card barcodes. With Destiny, the librarian assigns a barcode to each new student, and indicates relevant information, such as a contact teacher (usually for homeroom or English), phone number, and graduation year. Each year, existing students’ information is updated, but the same barcode is retained. Teachers are also assigned a barcode number, which is placed on an ID. This component also supports the library’s fine, loan period, and hold policies.

Using Destiny, data collection is very easy, and relevant reports can be quickly generated. With a few clicks of the mouse, the librarian can pull up circulation numbers, overdue notices, a list of items checked out to a student or teacher, or the last circulation date of a particular item, among other things (Shultz-Jones, 2006, p.52). Overdue fine notices are easily generated and can be printed according to students’ English teacher or advisor and placed in the teachers’ mailboxes or emailed directly to the student and/or teacher. The librarian can also obtain a detailed collection analysis report using a feature known as Title Wise.

One of the built-in features of Destiny is the ability to order items online through their sister company, Title Wave. This feature allows the librarian to build orders over a period of time, and once funds have been secured, to transmit the order electronically with a click of the mouse. If the school participates in the Accelerated Reader program, the librarian can order AR tests to go with the books being ordered. Title Wave automatically shows which books and accelerated reader tests on an order are already in the library’s collection, thus reducing unintentional duplication. Current, previously processed, and future orders are maintained in the database and can be viewed at any time.

Using an intuitive interface based on icons, students are able to do several library operations using Destiny. Because the system is Web based, they can perform such activities as checking for an item’s availability and placing holds twenty-four hours a day (Library Systems Today, 2001, 43). The catalog toolbar can be customized by the librarian for users to perform a basic search for an item by author, subject, keyword, title, call number, or barcode. Additionally, the librarian may enable other types of searches such as Power advanced searching or a visual search. The ability to place holds is also at the discretion of the librarian. Students may also check to see whether the library has an Accelerated Reader test for a particular book, which can be crucial to the decision whether to check out the book or look for another one. They can also open their own records and view fines and/or fees. Since everything is web-based, parents may also access the above information remotely.

Teachers are able to perform the same activities students using Destiny, in addition to two others. First, “Destiny enables teachers to create relevant content bibliographies for students to search on specific topics…the librarian can provide a list of applicable resources available in the library” (Cox, 2006, 35). Second, the teacher can efficiently dispense and collect textbooks by taking classes to the library for check-in or check-out.

**Strengths**

Follett’s Destiny Library Manager is a valuable system to librarians for many reasons. First, it is convenient. Librarians and patrons easily get access to information relevant to the library’s collection as well as extended access to other collections via the Internet. Resources can be easily shared among schools within the district (Breeding, 2005). Because it is web-based, students and parents may access the system 24/7 to access the collection, place or cancel holds, and view fines in the borrower’s record. Second, it is efficient. Circulation transactions are completed quickly for patrons. Librarians can create a class list of patron barcodes to scan for speedy textbook checkout, or students can have their ID’s scanned (Library Systems Today, 2001). Patron and item databases are maintained and updated instantly during a transaction(Schultz-Jones, 2006, 27), so that the database reflects reality. Librarian tasks such as generation and distribution of overdue notices, collection analysis, and acquisitions are streamlined to save time. Third, it is effective. Librarians ensure authority control over the collection by importing MARC records from Destiny’s database. Data and reports generated from information in Destiny’s databases can indicate issues that might otherwise go unnoticed (Schultz-Jones, 2006, 36). Vendor licensing provided to a single centralized system rather than each school within a district is cost-effective in most circumstances. Fourth, Destiny allows for improved library service. Since Follett’s software is installed on the district’s server, central office technology professionals handle any problems, not the librarian. Because Follett provides training on the system, librarians can maximize the system’s capabilities. As a result, the librarian has more time to devote to connecting students with books by engaging them in conversation about their interests, book talking, and implementing creative programs. This system also helps the librarian better ensure user confidentiality; the record of an item’s previous borrowers before the latest borrower is purged. Last, Destiny enables the librarian to spend more time on information literacy and support the school’s curriculum. The librarian has more time, giving her opportunity to teach students how to search in Destiny and how to perform research in general. She has more time for collaborating with teachers to integrate information literacy skills into their lessons and projects. There is also increased opportunity for supporting the curriculum by communicating with teachers about specific resources in the library that are applicable to each teacher’s subject matter.

**Weaknesses**

Although Follett’s Destiny Library Manager has many strengths, no system is perfect. Destiny is a relatively expensive system and cannot be purchased in separate, less expensive modules over time. As a result, small schools and districts may not find it to be a feasible option. In addition, Follett has bought out its closest competitor, Sagebrush, in 2006 (Kenney, 2006), setting up a possible monopoly of integrated library resource management systems that could affect pricing and options in the future. To make matters worse, many vendors are going out of business, giving Destiny even more control over the marketplace.

Private and independent schools not part of a district face an additional problem with Destiny. Library Manager is only offered in a district platform, and several functions are either district- or site- specific. Library Manager is configured for one person (a district administrator) to have control over certain functions such as authority control and subject headings and a library administrator that has control over day to day functions in the library such as check-ins or adding titles. This separation of tasks often does not make sense in a single-site school in which the same person may be both the district administrator and library manager and causes additional steps or confusion. The lack of a single-site platform also entails additional, lengthy district-level training for single sites that is duplicated during the Library Manager training. This additional training places a burden on single-site librarians. Another issue related to the lack of a single-site platform is that Follett customer service and training are often unsure of how to manage a single site and have a difficult time customizing Library Manager for one school.

There are also small technical issues that are little more than irksome to users. For instance, although Destiny calculates fines, it does not have a change-calculating function. As a result, if a student does not provide exact change, the librarian must figure out how much change to give back either mentally or using a calculator, both of which may be prone to mistakes. Second, patrons who would like to track the books they have checked out and read, usually for AR testing purposes, are not able to because Destiny purges a borrower’s history of checkouts once the books are returned. Finally, having books processed by Follett often yields less-than-ideal results.

**User Perceptions**

Eight high-school students who were first-time users of Destiny’s OPAC completed a survey about their perceptions of its usability. Of those students, only three thought that the school’s Destiny homepage clearly indicated how to proceed in order to perform a search for a book in the online catalog. Once they understood how to search, all participants responded that it was easy to find a book by searching by title or author and that it was also easy to check an item for availability. Each student found the graphics to be clear and clean as well. None of the students, however, thought the help function was clearly labeled. This information clearly indicates a need for Follett to examine its OPAC interface and make it more intuitive, especially for new end-users.

Two English teachers were surveyed about the OPAC and Circulation components as it pertains to teacher activities. Both reported that textbooks could be tracked easily by student name. Both also agreed that it was easy to determine fees owed by a student, but they were not sure how to print out a report. Neither were the teachers aware of the ability to produce research topic bibliographies in Destiny. Since the above-mentioned functions are beneficial to teachers yet underutilized, a brief in-service for the faculty by the media center specialist is warranted in order to give awareness and understanding of what Destiny can do for them.

Three librarians were interviewed to discuss their perceptions of Follett’s Destiny Library Manager. All three have used this system for three years to manage library books, textbooks, and technology equipment. Two of the respondents found Destiny to be better than the previous automation system used, mainly due to periodic upgrades from Follett that change or add features to make it more user-friendly. (The third respondent had only been a librarian for three years.) None of the respondents found the previous system to have any advantages. When asked about Destiny’s effect on their ability to deliver quality library service, two respondents pointed to the multi-level searching capabilities of the OPAC. The third believed that Destiny enabled her to work quickly and efficiently, allowing her more time for quality instruction. All three respondents listed Destiny’s strengths as its ease of use, efficiency, and web-based format. When asked about weaknesses, one noted the “fine” system requires her to calculate her own change. Another respondent did not like that the Circulation component’s check-in display only lists the last ten check-ins. The third respondent said that students sometimes would like to have a list of the books they have previously checked out for Accelerated Reader purposes, but this system does not allow for it. Overall, the participants perceived Destiny to be a user-friendly system with good customer service. Each respondent gave Destiny a rating of four (“mostly satisfied”) on a scale of zero to five, with zero being “completely dissatisfied” and five being “completely satisfied”, indicating that there is room for improvement.

**Conclusion**

Follett’s Destiny is a result of forward thinking in the realm of K-12 school library resource management systems. It has led the way in emergent technology to produce a centralized, district-wide automation that meets the needs of many school libraries, resulting in dramatic sales increases every year (Breeding, 2005). Librarians have found it indispensable to their effectiveness, and to them it has lived up to its claim as a “total solution”.

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