

Dr. Hardwick -
Here is an example of what an
instructional technology specialist
could do. Nancy

In Melanie Bowen's Librarian of the Year presentation for TCEA, she opened by saying, "For the past eight years, a partnership between librarian and technology specialist on this campus has grown into a relationship that fosters each other's growth and commitment to serving our campus to the best of our abilities. It is a partnership that neither of us can imagine being without."

Bowen won the honor of TCEA Librarian of the Year and Melissa Garffer also won as TCEA Instructional Technology Specialist of the Year. They work together at Carl Schurz Elementary in New Braunfels ISD. As a team and separately, they have created an environment and long list of programs that enhance the lives and learning of the students via technology.

Bowen and Garffer dubbed themselves the team of "Mel & Mel" as they began to work together closely several years ago. They are indeed a dynamic duo, each feeding off the strength and knowledge of the other.

Bowen, who is the only librarian at Carl Schurz, strives to give the school "a book-rich and technology-rich environment." Her goal as a librarian is to promote cooperative learning and independent thinking to help students find solutions to real-world problems.

When Bowen became librarian, she knew the technology set-up was not conducive to good research. But under her guidance, within a few years, the school was networked and she started a number of technology programs for both teachers and students.

One of her most visible methods to involve students in the library resources and technology offered is her Library Lords and Ladies Club, a morning program that emphasizes technology. The older students assist with library work and help the younger students with books and technology.

She also developed a method for voting on the Bluebonnet Reading Program that uses Tabletop for the casting of votes and post-voting analysis. "It's way for them to analyze the data and have fun doing it," she says. The graphing part of the Tabletop program allows students to manipulate the data and find patterns of voting.

In the area of professional development, Bowen uses unitedstreaming.com, educational videos that help teachers teach the TEKS. She also involves teachers in the Digital Knowledge Center and Accelerated Reader/STAR programs. In addition, Bowen works on telecollaborative



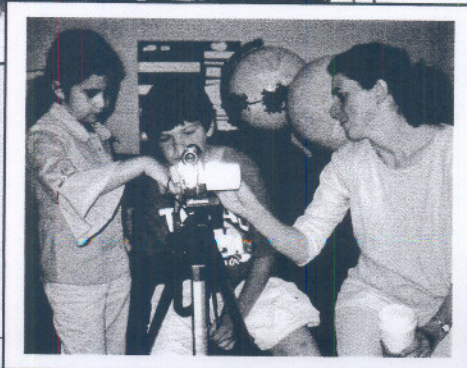
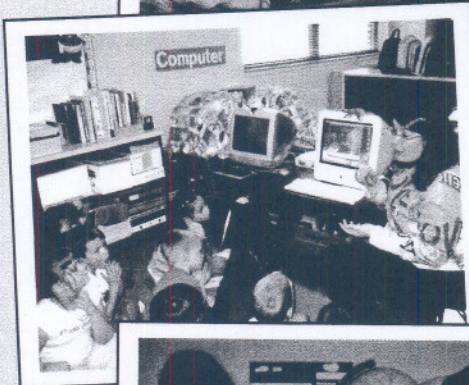
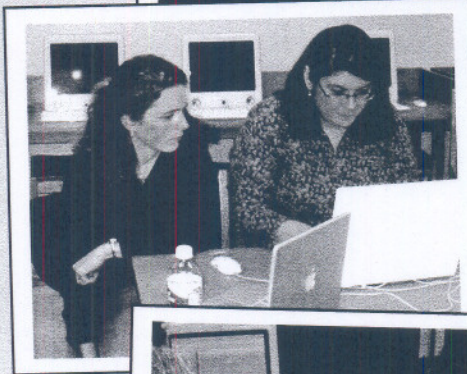
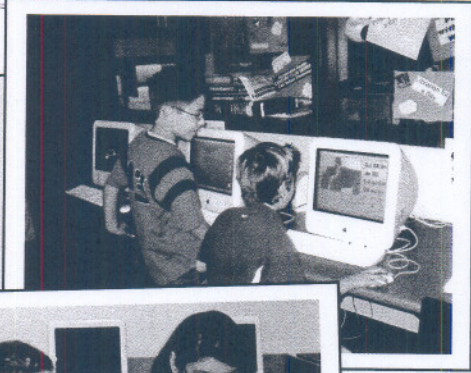
Melissa Garffer and Melanie Bowen

The Dynamic Duo of 'Mel & Mel'

TCEA's Instructional Technology
Specialist of the Year
and Librarian of the Year
collaborate to bring technology to
students at Carl Schurz Elementary
in New Braunfels ISD

By Kathy Sargent
Director of Communications
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Photos courtesy of Melissa Garffer and Melanie Bowen



Pictured at left from top to bottom: Members of the Library Lords and Ladies Club work in the library; students work on a project; Melanie Bowen and Melissa Garffer work on teacher guides for the Tech App TEKS; Carl Schurz Elementary teachers learn how to use science probes; Garffer works with some of the youngest students; and Bowen helps students use the video camera.

projects, the District Technology Showcase, and district-wide teacher training.

Garffer was a technology user from way back and viewed it as a necessity. "Luckily, the timing was perfect and I was able to be involved in the first Technology Integration Grant in New Braunfels," she says. Technology use just took off from there.

Garffer works half time at the school as a Campus Technology Specialist and half time coordinator of the TARGET grant program. She also conducts Campus Technology Specialists' Academy training sessions for TCEA.

In addition to her work keeping track of school technology resources and setting up and following through with student competencies, Garffer also established the Tech Buddies, an organization for the students. Tech Buddies volunteer to help fellow students and act as leaders, for which they are recognized at the end of the year.

She also helped develop Peer Coaching, a program for intermediate level teachers to receive support from advanced level teachers. Garffer describes the program as one of the most rewarding efforts she has invested in. She also has started podcasting at the school and worked on model grant awards such as Model Classroom Grant, Third Grade Bridge to Writing Grant, and Music Composition grant.

The two "Mels" are award-worthy in their individual roles, but they really shine when they work together.

The team effort developed gradually after Bowen and Garffer assumed their respective positions eight years ago. They started to realize how much they needed to support each other and jokingly started calling themselves "Mel & Mel." It turned into a partnership that is more powerful than either one could be individually.

One of the keys to the collaboration, they say, was having their workspace in close proximity. After Garffer's office was moved into the library, they really began to work together. "This really increased our interaction and helped us really get to know each other well, discovering each other's strengths," Bowen says. "We very quickly became advocates for each other."

They worked together on the design for a new library, on telecollaborative projects, applying for and getting a Model Classroom Grant, and creating space for a science lab that emphasizes project-based learning. And the collab-

oration and list of accomplishments only increased as they worked together.

Although they have a shared vision for technology and learning, they bring different personal styles to the partnership. Garffer tends to think outside the box and wants to stretch and try new things. Bowen tends to carry out the “schemes” they dream up, she says, since she has daily contact with students and teachers.

“Melanie is the nicer, comforting, supportive person who has her home base and is always available in the library,” Garffer says. “I am more likely to invade your classroom space, push you outside your comfort zone, and openly challenge you to think and do things differently.”

The shared space, the shared vision, the shared destination — these are the keys to a successful collaboration, they both say.

Bowen says one of her greatest joys is working with Melissa on professional development for the school’s staff.

“At our school, we have fallen in love with the IIM (Independent Investigation Method) research method,” she says. IIM is a teaching model that guides primary, elementary, and secondary students through the research process. It guides educators through the process of combining required curriculum with vital research skills, choosing from options for integration of state standards, the length of study, and students’ grade, skills and learning styles. For more information on the research method visit the IIM web site, <http://www.iimresearch.com/>.

IIM takes research to the level of the concrete and Bowen and Garffer have found that it is very helpful at involving at-risk students. The method is also suitable for Garffer’s Gifted and Talented students. Mel & Mel have worked hard to show teachers ways that the structure of IIM can be easily modified for students of all developmental levels.

Mel & Mel also worked together, along with a group of teachers, to apply for and win a grant for a model classroom at the school. The room is designed to encourage project-based learning and collaboration and is equipped with four workstations that include eMacs, microscopes, proscopes, science probes and other science tools.

Through the district model grant program, they applied for and received one of the first grants. They then chaired a team that designed the classroom, which resulted in an ideal classroom, particularly for science instruction.

“Melanie and I are both passionate about encouraging science in our school,” Garffer says. “It’s also ideal for other active learning with technology. The tools are at hand, the resources are available, the space is conducive to messy, inquisitive, hands-on teaching and learning.”

The two also work on various other projects such as teacher guides for Tech App:TEKS. They also trained in

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— Melanie Bowen



New Hampshire as trainers of the IIM method, and have presented on the method at the TCEA annual convention.

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The teachers’ excitement, in turn, adds to the students’ love of learning. They support teachers in making things happen for students.

“We can’t even fathom what challenges face these students when they reach adulthood, but we can do our best to teach them problem solving skills using technology in a seamless fashion.” Says Bowen. “The thing about educational technology is that it is not just about having a place to find information and display our knowledge; it’s also a way that we can communicate with and challenge each other on a higher and more global level.”

Meanwhile, the team of Mel & Mel continues to innovate and educate. They both say the possibilities are endless, and they’re having too much fun to stop.