

Jump Starting Staff Development

By Mary Alice Anderson

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Library media specialists have a big role to play in staff development involving technology. There's still room for you to take a leadership role, even if someone else is in charge. Don't be afraid, getting started is easy. Here's how you can begin.

("The Value of Staff Development" (November 2002) establishes the premise that technology staff development is needed and media specialists must be involved in staff development)

Get Organized

1. **Listen to your colleagues:** Pay attention to questions and concerns that keep popping up. If someone is interested in iMovie, it's likely that others want to learn more about it too. Outline key points about specific inquiries and turn them into lessons. A group of special education teachers in my school wanted to know how to scan text and use the readability features of Microsoft Word. Their questions led to a class called Using OCR Software and the Spelling and Grammar Features of the Word Toolbar. The lessons included information about how to locate grade-level appropriate resources using the online catalog and other media center tools.
2. **Review the curriculum.** The goal of media programs has always been about making curriculum connections, and now it's much easier with the numerous tools and resources at our fingertips. Explore the various technology resources that can benefit the classroom curriculum, and find out how we can better help the transitions that take place when curriculums are revised.
3. **Assess your skills.** As a media specialist, you're equipped with a huge toolbox of skills so take advantage of all you have to offer. Make a long list of the technology you use everyday. It will likely include software that your colleagues occasionally or never use, such as databases to compile orders and spreadsheets to manage your library media center budget. Use those skills to show teachers how they can use spreadsheets to manage their data. If you use Inspiration, the visual software that helps kids organize research projects, show your co-workers how they can become "inspired" too. Allow yourself to be the expert who teachers and office personal turn to for advice. But remember, you don't have to be an expert to teach: staff development is as much about providing opportunities as it is direct instruction. A little knowledge and self-confidence will take you far.
4. **Take advantage of non-instructional technology:** Technology can be used to help educators in so many ways outside of the direct instruction. Show your colleagues how to use electronic report card and attendance systems, help your school or district add information to their Web sites, or create an electronic classroom newsletter.
5. **Identify all resources:** Expose your colleagues to software, hardware, manuals, and peripherals that are underutilized or not understood. Develop handouts and tip sheets explaining what they do and how they work. These are the key ingredients and tools for training and staff development.
6. **Reach out to those who can help.** Two heads are better than one, so ask others to provide insight to staff needs. Invite teachers who are most skilled or excited about technology to teach or facilitate a class. Ask your principal, the staff development coordinator, the curriculum director, or other appropriate administrators for their support. They'll most likely feel privileged to assist you.

7. **Spend quality time with classroom teachers.** Individual attention will help allay the fear of ignorance that some people may feel in larger groups. Discuss how content-specific software and other resources can enhance teaching. News of your knowledge and helpfulness will spread throughout the school.
8. **Offer classes in your building.** Even if classes have been offered several times at the district level there is still a need for in-building training. Last fall our district had a tech-training day. All teachers were required to attend, but facilities limitations meant we could only offer classes in half of the schools. Teachers who had to travel to another building for classes were the least satisfied with that day. For the next staff development day they worked with their own media staff to have in-building training so they could work in their own environment and with their own computers in their own classrooms.
9. **Always be prepared to move quickly:** Classes prepared on-the-fly provide immediate and practical solutions. Professional development occurs best when teachers are presented with opportunities for learning when they're ready for them. At report card time, teachers might need a refresher course on the grading system, and at the beginning of the school year some might benefit from learning about things forgotten over the summer. Nothing will kill your efforts quicker if they're not timely. Your colleagues' attitudes will become more positive and excited when they know you're providing them with useful information.
10. **Maintain momentum:** Teachers have busy schedules, so try offering Ten Minutes of Tech on Tuesdays, Q & A sessions during lunch time, or short classes after school. Quick classes in small doses may have a higher success rate than those that are formal and longer.
11. **Keep class sizes small.** Smaller classes will make it easier for you as a beginning instructor and also benefit your participants. It's helpful to have two instructors when class sizes rise above 12 to 15 attendees or if a new topic is introduced. A co-instructor and I were kept extremely busy trying to teach only four people how to place content on our district Web site.
12. **Review the characteristics of adult-learners.** While it's nice to believe that teachers are life-long learners, the truth is, adults learn when they're ready to learn and like to know exactly what they have to learn. Encourage questions and praise progress. Humor and friendly conversation go a long way.

Now that you're all organized, it's time to put everything you've learned into action. Just follow these simple steps in the classroom:

1. **Schedule classes in an environment conducive to learning.** Classrooms with comfortable temperature, limited distractions, good lighting, and adult-sized furniture make a big difference. If the class is not during regular school hours make sure there is convenient access to phones and restrooms. Supply food or a light snack.
2. **Make sure everything works.** Arrive well before the start of your class. Equipment failures will hurt your efforts, so double-check all equipment, and don't assume anything, especially if you're working in a lab or with equipment that isn't your own. Have manuals and helpful resources readily available. Participants often arrive early to make sure they get a good seat or to ask questions.
3. **Welcome discussion and class participation:** If your group is small enough, start by informally sitting around a table to explore what the participants hope to learn or accomplish during the lesson. Conduct brief introductions and demonstrations away from the computer so that participants focus on your instruction rather than on the technology. You might even consider beginning the session in a classroom before moving closer to the computers. Make sure you spend individual time with participants, and take time to demonstrate and review what you've taught. End the class when you know people are ready to wrap things up. Stay longer with those who want to continue learning.

Small beginnings can lead to huge successes. If you've reached only a few people, you've made a good start. But in time, word about you will spread, and you'll end up influencing more than you expected.

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Especially Recommended Resources

International Society for Technology in Education, *Educational Technology Standards and Performance Indicators for All Teachers* (NETS Standards)

http://cnets.iste.org/teachers/t_stands.html

Johnson, Doug *The Indispensable Teacher's Guide to Computer Skills*. 2nd edition Columbus, Linworth. (2002). (Sample workshop agendas correlated with the NETS standards)

This could be a place to cite my November 2002 column