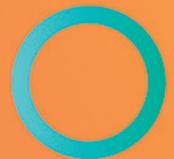# School Librarians Take the Lead Collaborating on Professional Development

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School librarians are in the unique position of reaching all areas of the school: curriculum and learners. This role gives school librarians an amazing opportunity to be a leader in the school community and contribute to the culture and direction of the school. One of the ways school librarians can become a leader in the school community is to design, organize, and present professional development opportunities for fellow educators. Running professional development is a chance for school librarians to become leaders in the school, as well as an opportunity to collaborate with fellow educators, advance the goals of the school library, and share resources. It also enables the school library to be involved in the curriculum and goals of the school. Designing and implementing professional development opportunities in schools is a way for school librarians to implement many of the Competencies of the Collaborate Shared Foundation from the AASL *National School Library Standards*.

The members of my school library department were looking for ways to make more connections with fellow educators and share resources and new technologies. We have shared at faculty meetings and hosted after-school workshops and teacher collaboration cohorts. We brainstormed different ways that we could reach out, starting with thinking about our own learning and how we learn new ideas and technologies. The common thread was professional development conferences where we had hands-on experiences and fellow educators shared lessons and projects that could easily be taken back and integrated into an existing curriculum. We thought, "What if we designed, organized and held a professional development conference at our school?"

The Benefits of Professional Development

The goal was to design a workshop day that would showcase the school library's resources and technologies and meet the goals of fellow educators and the administration. The first factor in developing the workshop was determining how to design a day for fellow educators.

When thinking about what makes professional development a beneficial experience that impacts the curriculum and the student experience, research shows there are several key components to high-quality professional development. A three-year study on the effects of professional development on teachers' instruction found that the characteristics of high-quality professional development include:

- Focus on content and how students learn content

- In-depth, active learning opportunities

- Links to high standards

- Opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles

- Extended duration

- Collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, grade, or department (Desimone et al. 2002).

It is important to keep these factors in mind when developing a workshop day or conference that is truly beneficial and meets the needs of fellow educators.

We also wanted to highlight the school library and its role in the school curriculum, emphasizing how collaboration with school librarians and department members benefit both educators and learners. Sue Kimmel found that school librarians help collaborative instructional design and planning meetings with teachers by connecting unit and lesson plan goals with resources that supported these objectives (2012). When designing the workshop day, the school library department focused on connecting the school library's resources and technology to

the curriculum, and focused on how collaboration between the teacher and the school library could benefit learners and help fellow educators meet their curricular goals. This aligned with the Collaborate Shared Foundation from AASL's *National School Library Standards*. The AASL Standards state, "the school library provides opportunities for school librarians to connect and work with the learning community by: designing and leading professional-development opportunities that reinforce the impact of the school library's resources, services, and programming on learners' academic learning and educators' effectiveness" (2018, School Library III.C.2).

The final factor that we addressed was meeting the larger school community goals for professional development. In order to gain support from the administrators to host this all-school workday, it needed to meet some of the whole-school goals. One of the goals in our school's strategic plan is to "Expand professional development for faculty and staff to enhance our own learning community" (Francis W. Parker School n.d.). The workshop day that the school library department was planning would enhance our learning community by connecting teachers with new technologies and resources, expand their knowledge of project-based learning, and make connections with fellow

educators. The school library department highlighted the benefit of the internal professional development day for the school library, teachers, and the administration by connecting the workshop's goals with the administration's strategic planning goals.

Our school has two full-day faculty workshop days scheduled each school year. The administration works one year ahead to decide on the theme and focus of the workshop days. We reached out to the administration a year before the scheduled workshop day to ensure we were able to secure the day. We had a brief outline and idea for the day but not a fully flushed out agenda and schedule. In

the initial contact with administration we shared the goal of the day and the connections to educators' learning and the strategic plan. The administration gave us the go ahead to host the workshop day and the budget we would be able to work with to plan and present the day.

Designing the Professional Development Day

Once we had support from the administration to host a workshop day, the first step was to create the framework for the day. Our school library department includes school librarians, technology teachers, and STEM and coding teachers who work with students from preschool through twelfth grade. The makeup of the department reflects a section of cross-divisional teachers with experience with fellow educators in all areas of the school. The department gathered for a planning session to begin sketching out the framework for the day.

The next step in designing the workshop day was to brainstorm ideas for different types of sessions and experiences we wanted fellow teachers to have. We started by determining the structure for the day. The whole team shared their positive PD experiences. As members shared, a scribe wrote down all the adjectives and ideas on a large whiteboard. Next, we circled words that had come up several times. Words included "hands on, engaging, new ideas, practical ways to use new technologies, fun, experiential, immersive, takeaway to use right away." We agreed that the goal of the day would be to host workshops that were hands on, incorporated new technologies,

The Jam Session and brainstorming activities helped the library department narrow our focus and organize our thoughts and ideas into a working list of sessions and workshops.

SESSIONS

Session 1 10:15-11:15	Presenters	Room	Session 2 11:30-12:30	Presenters	Room	Session 3 1:30-2:30	Presenters	Room
Partnering with Parents w/ Design Thinking	Sherry/Tisha/ Erica C.	TBD	Notability (?)	Vicki Lee And Ashleigh	TBD	Portal	Nick/Pete	TBD
AR/VR Co-Spaces	Seth	TBD	Putting a new E & S into STEM	Sven/Tim	TBD	Shooting/Editing Better Videos	Travis	TBD
Makerspace 3D/2D	Mary Catherine and Sarah	TBD	AR/VR Google Expeditions	Sarah/Mary Catherine	TBD	Google My Maps	Seth/Mike	TBD
Google Classroom Digital Portfolio	Mike, Tim	TBD	Minecraft Applications	Seth	TBD	AR/VR Oculus Go-Build and View in VR	Annette Mary Catherine	TBD
Project Invent/ SE	Annette	TBD	Google Photos	Nick	TBD	Creative Computing	Adam	TBD
Biomimicry and Design	Adam/Gabe '02/Angela	TBD	Coding and Humanities	Annette	TBD	Question your Questions? (applying DT to improve teacher questioning)	Sven/Tim	TBD

were fun, and would provide teachers with practical ideas they could use right away in their classrooms.

Next, we passed out sticky notes and markers to the team. Team members were asked to write down any ideas they had for workshop sessions, encouraging the team to formulate ideas that were simple or crazy—there were no bad ideas! The instructions were to not think about the cost or if the session was feasible, but to come up with fun, hands-on engaging sessions. We set the timer for seven minutes and everyone started writing. Department members filled up sheets and sheets of sticky notes with ideas, everything from how to better use Google Drive to engage with students, to field trips to the Coral Reef to see the impact of climate change. Once we had all the ideas gathered we used a thinking routine from the "Collective Action Toolkit" called Jam Session, developed by the frog design firm, a global design and innovation consultancy. The toolkit was designed to offer a universal framework for empowering communities with the design thinking process and to allow communities of all sizes to design their own solutions (Frog n.d.). The toolkit contains dozens of brainstorming routines for groups to use to help focus on a challenge, brainstorm solutions, and include different perspectives. The routines in the kit can be used for one-time brainstorming or used in order to work through all stages of problem solving.

The Jam Session is a routine that helps a team take a lot of ideas and then narrow a long list down to a manageable level to move forward (Frog n.d.). On a wall in the meeting space we drew a long arrow. At the beginning of the arrow we wrote the word "easy" and at the end we wrote the word "impossible." Team members took all the sticky notes with their session ideas and placed them along the arrow based on how easy or difficult they would be.

Next, we looked at the different areas along the arrow (easy, mild, hard, impossible), and we grouped all the ideas from each area into similar themes. Ideas that were duplicates, had similar threads, etc., were clumped together and a theme or idea was written next to it. For the "impossible" section, we looked at the different themes that came out of the ideas and brainstormed ideas for sessions that connected to those themes but were possible. For example, one of the ideas was to host a session on rethinking the whole school schedule and department structure to allow for large blocks of collaborative integrated departments to teach subjects collaboratively. While this was a great idea, it was not something that could be accomplished in one workshop session. The new idea was to highlight collaborations between departments that did not traditionally work together to share ways teachers could work together. The Jam Session and brainstorming activities helped the library department narrow our focus and organize our thoughts and ideas into a working list of sessions and workshops.

Once we had a list of the possible session ideas, the library department members identified the sessions they wanted to teach and listed the fellow educators that the team had worked with on collaborative projects to co-teach a session or teach a session on their own. We felt it was important to highlight existing collaborations with fellow educators to illustrate to the community the successful collaborative lessons and projects that already existed. We hoped this would show that collaborations were already happening in the school and celebrate and highlight the work of fellow educators, allowing them to take leadership roles in the school community.

As we mapped out the schedule for the day, we made sure that the sessions were a good mix of offerings for early elementary, middle grade, and high school teachers. We also wanted to make sure our offerings covered the gamut of skill levels as well, from beginner skills and an introduction to resources and technologies for educators who were not as skilled, to workshops for teachers who were using technology or resources. This way we provided educators with options to push and learn a new skill.

The Who, What, When, and Where of the PD Day

The next step in the process of designing and planning the workshop day was to create a schedule, make lists of resources and spaces we would need on the day, and plan the marketing and communication that would go out to the community. The library department met every two weeks to plan and check in on the process of our to-do list and address any concerns or questions that came up to ensure that we were prepared and ready for the day.

For the schedule we mapped out what would be a reasonable conference day with workshops based on our experiences at other conferences. In our discussions we felt that three one-hour workshops for each faculty member to attend seemed like a reasonable amount of time and information to take in during a day. When we planned out the day's schedule we also took into consideration transition times, restroom and coffee breaks, as well as a whole-school gathering in the morning to set the tone for the day and ending the day with a reflection and survey time for all participants.

As we planned out the schedule, we took into consideration how many attendees each session could handle. Since the workshops were going to be hands-on, we wanted to ensure we had the technology, laptops and tablets, and/or VR/AR equipment for participants to be able to use during the workshop. We also wanted to make sure we would have the supplies and materials needed for building or making sessions.

Space was another consideration. We looked at all the rooms in the school building and mapped out what would be the best classroom or meeting space for each of the workshops. During this brainstorming meeting, we determined that the maximum number of participants per session would be 25 people. In order to organize the sessions and ensure that we had the correct number of participants, we realized that we would need faculty to sign up for sessions before the day of the workshop, and communication about the workshop day was going to be essential to ensure that the day was successful for everyone.

Communication—There's an App for That!

Communication was going to be essential to ensure the workshop was a successful event for participants and the library department. During the next planning meetings we established our communication plan and protocols for faculty to sign up for the workshop day. We started by discussing the different platforms we could use to have faculty sign up for the workshop sessions, including Google Docs, Sheets, or Forms. We also discussed the logistics of keeping track of all the sign-ups, how to notify teachers if a session filled up, outreach to faculty who did not sign up, etc. All these questions led to a brainstorming session where we analyzed how larger conferences we

had attended dealt with these issues. Throughout this process, we had a lightbulb moment: I bet there's an app for that!

The team realized that having an app for the conference would streamline the sign-up process before the event, help keep everyone organized on the day, and allow for follow-up with participants after the conference. We started researching apps available to contract with for our conference day. We reached out to the Whova app team (<https://whova.com/>). The app's features included the ability to upload participant names and e-mail addresses, participant sign-up for individual sessions, limiting the number of participants for each session, e-mailing participants their schedule for the day (including room locations), uploading presentations and resources for participants to access during and after the conference, and feedback surveys. The app could also be accessed on a device such as a phone or tablet or on a computer through a web browser, making it accessible to everyone at our school. We had 250 faculty and staff members attending the conference, and the cost for using the app fit into the budget for the conference.

Once we had the app set up, we were ready to communicate with the faculty and staff about the PD day. We created a communications schedule, including all school e-mail addresses, information about the professional development day, descriptions of the different sessions, and instructions on downloading and using the app. The library department team broke into groups to talk at different faculty and departmental meetings to share the information and be available after to help teachers sign up, navigate the app, and answer any questions about the session offerings. We also provided faculty

with an open invitation to come to the school library before and after school or during lunch times if they had questions or needed help using the app.

Using the data from the app we were able to see who had and had not logged in and signed up for sessions. We divided up the faculty and staff list among the library department to keep track of sign-ups and personally reach out to any members who did not sign up for sessions.

To-Do Lists Mixed with Excitement and Anxiety

In the final weeks leading up to the library department's workshop day the team was going over checklists of resources and technology, checking in with fellow educators they were co-presenting with, adding final details to presentations, and connecting with administrators about the details. We had all the details and logistics set, but there is always that nagging feeling that no one will show up to your party, or maybe worse, no one will have fun! In the final meetings the library department team was full of anxiety about the reaction to the workshop day. Would fellow educators find it worthwhile? To help us work through some of our concerns and anxiety we turned to a meeting protocol from the School Reform Initiative (<https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/>) called "Fears and Hopes."

The "Fears and Hopes" routine is used as a way to allow people to share their expectations and concerns, put them out in the open, and then begin to address them together as a group (School Reform Initiative n.d.). For the first step we asked the question: "If this is the worst workshop ever, what will happen or not happen?" The team wrote down all their thoughts about the worst things that could happen on the PD day. Ideas included technology

failing, half the faculty taking a sick day, the body language from the attendees indicating that the session was a waste of time, etc. We collected all the information on a board to share our fears. Next, we asked, "If this is the best workshop day ever, what will the outcomes be?" Answers included collaborative partnerships develop because people attend sessions together, everyone walks away from the day feeling like they learned something new, more requests for collaborative partnerships with the library, etc.

After we had collected all our fears and hopes we talked through what we could do to prepare for the worst-case scenarios and which fears were beyond our control. We talked about all the work we had put into the day, the great work we had already done, the connections we made with fellow educators for the presentations, and celebrated those accomplishments no matter what happened on the professional development day. We were ready!

The Fear We Never Anticipated…A Global Pandemic!

As we moved closer to the professional development day, the world and our state moved closer to a total shutdown due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Then the decisions came down from our governor and state health department ordering all schools closed and a shelter-in-place order declared for the whole state. As the administration and teachers rushed to deal with technology needs for distance learning and the library department shifted its efforts to ensure students and teachers had access to resources and materials for the foreseeable future, the professional development workshop day was postponed several weeks. Soon, it became apparent that we would not be able to return to school for the rest of the academic year, and the day was canceled. We were disappointed that the day we had put so much time and effort into was not going to happen, but we were determined to continue to advocate for collaboration with our fellow educators through professional development.

The library department contacted the administration and asked if we could go ahead with our plans for the workshop day in the 2020–2021 school year, and in the event that we still would be in distance learning we would love to offer the professional workshop day as a virtual conference. The administration was excited we were thinking ahead and that we were

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We created a communications schedule, including all school e-mail addresses, information about the professional development day, descriptions of the different sessions.

still willing to share with the school community and gave us the opportunity to present the day during the 2020–21 school year.

We are planning for the virtual conference in January 2021. The day will include hands-on virtual sessions following the schedule of the in-person workshop day plans. We are taking the time to think about the sessions we are offering and making changes based on distance learning and resources to make sure we provide the best professional development possible for our fellow educators, while still meeting the goals and expectations for the library department. The new sessions we are adding focus on using technology and resources in a virtual classroom but that can also be used during in-person instruction. This includes sessions on using digital resources and virtual reality from museums and institutions like the Library of Congress and our local Chicago History Museum. We are also creating sessions that

offer hands-on tools for providing feedback and collaboration using Google Classroom and Google Docs for teachers and students to utilize. In the event the guidelines from the city of Chicago or the state of Illinois health departments change and we are able to host an in-person workshop day we will be able to pivot and provide the learning experience.

Tips and Ideas for School Librarians to Create PD Opportunities

- **Think outside the library box.** When planning a PD event make connections with fellow educators and ask them to collaborate with you. This will involve more members of your school community and help connect with other people in your school.

- **Don't reinvent the PD wheel.** Think about other positive PD experiences you and members of your department have attended. Use those proven methods and techniques to help craft a positive PD experience at your school.

- **Tailor your PD plans to the culture of your school.** You know your school culture and what will

work best. If a whole-day professional development workshop day is not feasible for your school what could work? A before- or after-school workshop? A lunch teach-in? Or ask to run a faculty meeting and use that as an opportunity to run a PD workshop.

- **Get out of an idea rut—brainstorm ideas!** The Frog toolkits has lots of great brainstorming routines that can help get ideas flowing and help you and your school library team create an innovative and unique PD experience for your school.

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