

The Media Center
Staff Development: From Theory to Practice
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Last issue's Media Center column addressed the role media specialists can play in implementing staff development programs. Research and examples of success in our district were shared.* But what are some of the realities of implementation? Success is always relative; our district's efforts are often praised by others, but we know there is much more to do. What does it take to turn theory, research, and enthusiasm into practice? What works? What doesn't? What's easy to do? What's more difficult?

Starting with Easy

Organizing, scheduling, and implementing short workshops and our well-attended summer technology academy is easy. With several years' experience, it's easy to prepare a list of classes, contact instructors, publish brochures, and collect the registration form ongoing technology classes. An ongoing File Maker Pro database of class titles, descriptions, instructors, and registration is used for organizing and record keeping. Formats for the brochures, web page, certificates and letters remain standard. Staff expect the familiar opportunities for after school and summer classes offered throughout the district. They know to contact our media center if they have questions. It's easy to gain support from administration because we meet the diverse needs, provide training that is practical, and keep expenses low. Staff attend classes at no charge; our only costs are instructor salaries, occasional gifts, and snacks, a must have. Staff receive certificates for continuing education, another must have that should never be underestimated. We maintain our attendance database from year to year; quite often a staff member will ask for proof of attendance as they complete continuing education or license renewal paperwork. Attendance numbers are of interest to administrators and the school board.

Classes are generally application based; discussion and theory classes attract only limited staff, but do provide support for teachers who want to think about technology, not just use it. Because our costs are low (our instructors receive an average of \$40 for teaching an after school class or \$75.00 for a half day summer class) we can hold those classes if only a few enroll. One example, "Critical use of the Internet" appeals to teachers who recognize that there is more to the Internet than surfing and searching. Some of the most energizing classes are those that involve only a handful of participants but allow adequate time for discussion and only a limited time using technology. On one occasion a planned inservice on networked resources became a discussion group when a squirrel got caught in a transformer, causing our network to go down. I suggested we reschedule, but people wanted to stay. The question/answer session was probably more beneficial than being online!

It's been easy to work with the local university to offer our summer classes for university credit. Teachers need credits and the university's continued education department needs students. We provide class descriptions, objections, specifics on logistics, and an instructor of record. University staff collect registration and fees; participants complete a project beyond class attendance. All completed credits are eligible for board approved lane changes.

At the building level it's been easy to gain the support of Principal Dr. Scott Hannon. The media specialist/principal partnership and our mutual desire (to see that teachers make effective use of technology to provide an engaged, active learning) are in place. His involvement and support of technology training has been critical to our school's high level of curricular integration. Recent workshop successes include half days for new staff, a half day workshop for teachers implementing a technology based graduation standard, and a half day session for a group of teachers who have been reluctant to use technology.

The new teacher session was held mid-November, after they had become familiar with available resources and what their curricular and personal needs are. It would have been overwhelming and ineffective to conduct a workshop such as this during new teacher orientation. The workshop's goals were to be certain all new staff had the same core knowledge of resources, technology integration and expectations. We provided time to work with information technology resources they'd be using in their teaching. A language arts teacher brushed up on Hyperstudio skills in preparation for an upcoming literature project; a science teacher prepared to implement an inquiry standard, and a math teacher became familiar with Tesselmania. They all left with their heads spinning and a recognition that there is more to learn.

The Going Gets Tougher

Success is relative when describing a workshop for reluctant technology users. With expectations for technology use increasing, we identified a group of teachers who could be counted among the reluctant or phobic. Dr. Hannon asked each person to complete a self-assessment on core technology skill and usage; three half day sessions were established based on the ability levels and personalities. Word got out and others who had not been identified asked if they could also attend. We drew-up class lists based skill level and the best possible instructor/participant mix. Participants knew they had to be there and knew the expectations, but did not necessarily attend enthusiastically. The workshop was a mix of skill building and time to address questions, concerns and fears. One young teacher wrote a follow-up response indicating she had no interest in technology and would only do what was required of her. The workshop was an eye-opener for participants and instructors. Clearly some people had been left behind in our various staff development efforts. We need to look seriously at the situation and try to make it easier for everyone to be successful.

What else isn't easy?

At the top of the list is financing, scheduling, drawing attendance at district-wide workshops with an integration focus. Substitute availability, substitute costs, time, competing staff development needs and a perceived need are barriers. What meets the need of one building may not meet the need of another. Administrators who believe "all their teachers are above average" tend to overestimate what's happening in their building and do not encourage or promote technology based staff development. One unfortunate example was a series of daytime workshops, which would allow teachers to work with information technology that would help them implement parts of state graduation standards projects. Teachers would be allotted 3 hours of quality time and receive help from their building media specialists. Substitutes would be provided. Only a handful of teachers took advantage of the opportunity.

As a way to inform all elementary staff about new online resources in the district, our curriculum director and I scheduled a workshop for 90 elementary teachers. Hands-on experience scheduled in conjunction with a grade level meeting was the least expensive way to go, but not necessarily quality time since it was after school. The district's media specialists pooled their teaching abilities; teachers were divided into grade level groups. Logistically the workshop succeeded; all teachers received the same information, and

participated in the same hands-on experience. Whether they learned or cared is another issue. Ideally, the workshop should have been multiple, small group sessions, and offered in each building.

Truth in Labeling: Collaboration or Not?

Another far from successful situation illustrates how collaboration can be just another name for meetings. Through a partnership between the university, an education agency representing area schools, and our school district, we planned to offer in depth summer courses for university credit; classes would focus on content specific integration; participants would be required to provide follow-up coaching in their buildings in the fall. The classes would be co-taught by a K-12 classroom teacher and a college professor. Participants would even receive free credit or a stipend from money in a grant the university had received. Only a handful of teachers registered. What went wrong? The vision was there early but planning got bogged down in too many meeting and too many layers of coordination. And we were competing against ourselves; there were many other district initiatives scheduled throughout the summer.

It is difficult if not impossible to mandate technology use and integration without adequate access and immediate application. As one principal commented, "Why should they learn to use technology if it's not a part of their daily life? Teachers cannot be expected to use productivity tools or email unless they have efficient access at their desktop and that is part of the day to day business of the school. The level of curriculum integration throughout the district shows an obviously high correlation between the amount of access to labs and the level of integration.

It's not always easy finding the right instructors. Teachers like to learn from their peers but not all teachers are comfortable teaching their colleagues. Or, they may underestimate their own abilities and knowledge and may not want to take the time needed to prepare teaching materials. We do try to convince teachers that they do have the skills to teach others. One class that always gets enthusiastic response is from a teacher who was reluctant to teach, but once convinced she could do it has continued to enjoy her new role. Sometimes the person who wants to teach may not be the best possible instructor; when this occurs it is best to schedule two instructors.

Tidbits and other realities

o **"How to" classes are only a start and can only go so far towards the integration of technology throughout the curriculum.**

But they will probably be needed for some time as technology and staff needs evolve. And, our experience indicates that these classes do have an impact teaching and learning. Clearly the highest level of integration is in the buildings that have the highest attendance rate at classes.

o **After school workshops should be optional; if they are required of everyone they need to be held during quality, regularly scheduled time.**

It is interesting to see who does attend classes.

One teacher who has never attended workshops has been attending workshops while on medical leave; she now has the time and desire to learn. And too often those who should be there are not; fears, lack of interest or just being comfortable with doing things the same old way, even the same "old technology" way can be a deterrent to learning something new.

o **Technology savvy new teachers present new challenges.**

Teachers entering the profession generally have skills, but are not necessarily competent in integration. Nor are many of them accustomed to the idea of working with a media specialist. The good news in our district was the eagerness at which they attention the technology session held as part of a 4 day new-staff mentorship program; they had many questions and appeared generally interested, but were more anxious to learn about their email accounts than anything to do with integration

o Surveys are easy to administer but it is difficult to get the right information.

Teachers don't always know what they want, what they need to know. We've conducted surveys but seldom found them to be provide enough information. Careful observation and listening are just as valuable.

Have we always been successful? Of course not? Have we been successful? Without a doubt, yes. It may be an uphill struggle, but we're learning as we go. After all, the vistas we seek for all learners are only found on the mountaintop!

*Ongoing Staff Development: Sideways, Bubbly, and Chaotic!, published in Multimedia Schools, January/February 1998, also describes successful staff development practices in our district.

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