

The Value of Staff Development

Mary Alice Anderson

Lead Media Specialist, Winona (Minnesota) Area Public Schools

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Staff development is one of our newest yet most important roles. By becoming involved in staff development we increase our opportunities to shape the curriculum and be viewed as instructional leaders. *Information Power*, a collection of information literacy standards crafted by the American Association of School Librarians to foster student learning, challenges media specialists to take "a proactive role in promoting the use of technology by staff, in determining staff development needs, in facilitating staff learning explorations, and by serving as a leader in staff development activities."

A dearth of meaningful staff development opportunities has put a crimp in educators' ability to use technology to help students learn better. Teachers are relying on technology more than ever, but, as an increasing number of studies show, not necessarily more effectively.

Studies by researcher Henry Becker show that exemplary technology-using teachers work in an atmosphere of collegial support and prefer to learn from their peers rather than from an outside trainer or someone they perceive as too technical. A media specialist may be the perfect person to teach staff-development classes and facilitate peer support groups. The more we reach out to others, the more we increase the odds that our expertise is valued. If you aren't already involved in staff development, here are five compelling reasons why now is the time to start:

Most teachers are inadequately prepared to use technology. With an average of only 12 hours of technology training per year, most teachers have had more training in areas such as diversity, standards, and district initiatives. Some states require technology training, but the requirement is not universal and teachers often oppose it. Studies show only half of today's teachers consider themselves skilled technology users. Beginning teachers are often inadequately prepared to use technology beyond reading e-mail messages or searching the Internet. It can take years for teachers to feel comfortable with technology and too few take advantage of the learning

potential technology offers. Too often, teachers use technology to do the same old thing, only electronically.

Staff development provides connections between technology, curriculum, and Information processes. Technology classes usually emphasize software and hardware. Getting comfortable with a new online grade book is more important for many teachers than learning the secrets of searching the Internet. Media specialists can and should teach technology skills: the Excel class that we teach may provide a forum for discussing curricular issues.

Think about what you do on a daily basis, what you know, and with whom you interact. Librarians are the only teachers who work in all areas of the curriculum, with all of the students and staff. Our daily interactions with curriculum and teachers are occasions for informal staff development and offer insight into staff needs. Sharing your insights with curriculum directors, information systems coordinators, and others can make a difference. Combine organizational, curriculum, technological, and teaching skills to develop and implement extended staff development that reaches the entire learning community.

Staff development has a positive Impact on Instructional strategies and student learning. Once teachers realize the potential of technology, they often become eager to use it and to try new teaching techniques. Varied instructional strategies have a positive impact on student achievement. Teachers with even a small amount of technology training teach more effectively and have a better understanding of how students learn. Initially, trying new approaches may overwhelm a teacher. As an educational peer, media specialists can provide technical assistance and instructional support, which is another form of staff development. Research has shown that the more time media specialists spend providing in-service training to teachers, the higher the level of academic achievement by students. Researcher Keith Lance's studies have demonstrated that a media specialist's proactive, leadership role sets the stage for collaboration and, in turn, leads to higher achievement. (See "Dick and Jane Go to the Head of the Class," April 2000, pp. 44-47.) In addition, a study by the Software Publishers Association has demonstrated that teacher training influences the type of software used, which, in turn, increases students' test scores. Training in software selection and implementation is yet another way in which media specialists can become

staff development leaders. These studies validate the need for staff development and suggest avenues for media specialist involvement.

Staff development is an opportunity to introduce new resources.

We've all heard teachers say, "I wish I'd known about that." A teacher who never uses the media center and its resources might attend a staff development session. For example, a workshop about a new online resource or some new educational software may be an occasion to increase a teacher's awareness of related books and videos. During an informal staff development session, an English teacher got so excited about Inspiration, a software program that encourages critical thinking and writing skills, that she used the program with her students the next day.

Bringing a variety of resources to the learning experience increases the chances of student success. Staff development sessions can generate a wealth of ideas and provide openings for further partnerships. Like the English teacher mentioned above, it's not uncommon for a teacher to schedule a new student activity immediately following a staff development session.

A staff development role contributes to increased job security.

Administrators and teachers want and need tech-savvy media specialists. Administrators at a small rural school were surprised and pleased when they discovered a media specialist might be just the person to help their school overcome the problem of underutilized technology. Consider these remarks by other administrators and board members:

- "We're doing fine with the literature activities, we need someone to help us with the technology."
- "We need a media specialist to help with the Internet and searching for online information "
- "Are you the person a teacher can turn to if they need help with Excel?"
- "How are our teachers doing with their technology?"
- "She's always right there when I need help with my computer!"

- "Please contact our media specialist about the workshops; he's in charge of staff development."

How would your administrator describe you?

Curricular involvement and requests for technological assistance provide insight into big-picture needs and a tool to develop further staff development options. Staff development involving technology can also substantially strengthen the image teachers have of media specialists. Be the person teachers can turn to when they need help. Extend that assistance to others working in the school. It will not go unnoticed. Grab those opportunities that exist, seek out others, and be at the forefront.

Staff development is our most important role.

How involved are you? Assess your involvement.

Personal skills	
	I know nothing about technology and don't want to know anything about technology.
	I'm skilled enough to handle my own basic technology needs.
	I am highly skilled.
	I eagerly seek opportunities to improve my own skills.
Providing assistance to others	
	I help people when they ask for assistance.
	I proactively seek out opportunities to help others.
	I have developed help sheets and plans for helping others.
Staff development involvement	
	No thank you, I have enough to do.
	I teach training and staff development classes when I'm asked.
	I suggest ideas for training and staff development and work with others to see that it happens.
	I am responsible for technology staff development in my school/district or I'm very involved.