

# The Librarian's Role in Schoolwide Professional Development

Article

---

by Carl A. Harvey II, November 2013

To: Librarian@K-12School.us From: Principal@K-12School.us

*Librarian:*

*Please find time in your schedule for a 1-hour meeting with me next week.*

*Thanks,*

*Principal*

Ever gotten an e-mail like that? I did one March afternoon. It was a little unnerving because I talked daily with my principal. We would have multiple conversations in a day, so the thought that he wanted to block out time and have a more formal meeting was kind of interesting. I'm sure lots of ideas went running through my mind of what it could be about, but I replied with times and we set up a meeting.

## **THE BIG REVEAL**

We went to the conference room and sat down. The first thing out of his mouth was, "I've decided on our professional development theme for next year." Now, this was not shocking. My principal *loved* his annual themes. He spent a great deal of time thinking, plodding, and planning them. But, his number one goal always was to keep it a secret. None of the teachers or staff knew anything about the theme until the opening day meeting. (He wouldn't even tell his secretary! He did all the ordering of stuff that he needed!) So my initial reaction to his statement was just a nod because I figured he wasn't telling me anything about it. But he continued. "I know what I need to do, but I can't do it. You have to!" That's when I realized I was being pulled into a pretty big project.

I've done professional development sessions for teachers since I started as a librarian. We've done before-school, after-school, during prep, collaboration planning days, etc. We've done a variety of tips and tricks and how-to sessions with technology. We've highlighted new books, new resources, and new ideas. Typically I'd always had decent attendance. We made it relevant, valued their time, and tried to make those connections to what they were doing in the classroom. So the concept of the librarian being part of professional development was not a new thing. However, this year-long theme/plan was going to be a lot bigger than anything we had accomplished before.

## **THE BIG PLAN—A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH**

The principal had decided that we needed to make a big push with technology and literacy. As we talked through what he hoped to accomplish, we decided to narrow our focus for the year to three tools: blogs, wikis, and podcasts. We then began to think through the best way to present all this to teachers. We decided on the following format. We would have a group staff meeting to present the tool in a fun and interesting way. Then, sometime in the following week we'd meet with each grade level team for small-group training on how to actually use the tool and brainstorm ways they could use it with students. Following the training, teachers had six to nine weeks to integrate this tool into their curriculum and use it with students. At the end of the time period, we had a staff meeting to show off their work and celebrate their successes. The process was repeated for all three tools.

From there the roles began to divide. Together, the principal and I planned the staff meetings (both the beginning of each three-week stretch as well as the celebration staff meetings) as well as a kickoff event for the beginning of the year. I took sole charge of planning the small-group training sessions for each tool as well as being available for support as needed by the staff. We wanted teachers to feel they could always come for help.

Actually, I was hoping they might need my help. I saw this project as an opportunity to open the door for some collaborative projects. The amount of help teachers needed

varied greatly. Some were completely comfortable with the tools and ran with it. Others were not as comfortable and wanted an additional set of hands on the project. A few others were in the middle. I was happy to support any and all along the spectrum.

So what are some lessons that we learned through the planning and implementation process?

## **SMALL GROUPS**

In providing professional development to teachers with a wide range of grade levels (or subject content at the secondary level), it is hard to aim for the middle. Say you use an example from second grade. The Kindergarten teachers are going to be convinced that it is too hard for their students and shut down, and the fifth grade teachers are going to look at you like that's way too easy for their students, and shut down. So we've come up with ways to do our technology training in small groups by grade level. That way, examples and discussions can focus on a specific level. It eliminates the "shut down" effect, and you can really talk about the possibilities for *their* students. It also brings down the numbers of a training group, so when you need to help someone one on one, it is much more manageable.

## **SCHEDULES**

We also took advantage of two other systems already in place at our school. Our teachers were accustomed to meeting weekly in a professional learning community (PLC) as a grade level team. To respect their schedules, we did our small-group trainings during these PLC times. The other system in place was a flexible schedule for the librarian. I blocked out a day so I could just rotate from grade level to grade level during their preps. It made it smooth and easy to provide the training. We certainly could have done before- or afterschool training sessions, but this worked with the structures we had. Work within the structures available in your school.

## **RELEVANCE**

Any training on anything has to be relevant. Our principal made it relevant by connecting it to literacy and the way our students need to be able to read and write in the future. It was clear from the onset this wasn't to be seen as an "extra" something to do, but really as a way to begin to think about how we can maximize these tools and resources to help our students improve their literacy skills.

## **SUPPORT**

We made sure there was constant support throughout the process. Teachers knew they could always come and ask for help whenever they needed it in the process. The wide window of time gave flexibility so that not everyone was doing a project at the same time, and that freed up the librarian to be able to circulate with the groups.

## **CELEBRATIONS**

We thought it was important to celebrate the successes. Just like our students needed opportunities to know when they've done great work, our staff needed that affirmation as well. For many of them these tools were brand new. We couldn't highlight everyone's work, but we wanted to show off as many as we could. It was a great chance for the staff to see the creativity we have at the different grade levels and the different ways the tools were used. Our celebrations made sure everyone got an "award" for something. "Best use of sound effects in a podcast" or "Best use of visuals in a wiki" were some of the awards we used. Each award had a prize too. Sometimes it was treats from the dollar store; other times, when we had no money, it was an extra recess the principal would cover or an extra day for the teacher to wear jeans.

## **FOOD**

We always had food at the trainings (little bowls of candy or cookies from the library cookie jar). The training on our new e-mail system had cookies shaped like the Gmail logo. Those were a big hit. It doesn't have to be elaborate, and it can be healthy. Food lightens the mood and makes everyone feel a little more relaxed.

## **FUN**

We built a ton of fun into the plan as well. Everyone got a thumb drive and t-shirt to kick off the year-long theme. We used Peter Reynolds's *North Star* as a book to start us off on our journey (and found some funds to buy a copy for each classroom!). Each staff meeting had some sort of game or element of fun. We know that this is work,

but at the same time we're building community. Everyone is in the same boat, so we might as well have some fun with it!

## **INCLUSIVE**

We made sure no one was left out. Special area teachers like art, music, and PE all explored these tools. Our special education support teachers made sure they came up with ways to utilize these tools too. Sometimes they worked with classroom teachers, and sometimes they jumped out on their own. We had to modify and be creative, but in the end they used each and every tool with their students. It was important that everyone was involved.

## **CONVERSATIONS**

This entire project developed from conversations. I used to throw articles I read in journals into my principal's box (or forward e-mails, blog posts, etc.). I always tried to make sure the things I shared linked our agendas—things I knew the principal wanted to accomplish along with things I hoped to accomplish. Eventually, those grew into the plan we implemented. We continued to tweak and modify this throughout the year. The next year we talked about ways to continue what we'd done. We gave teachers free choice on when to use the tools during the year. It didn't have quite the success we had hoped, but we regrouped to think about how to plan for the next year.

## **NEXT STEPS**

It has now been about three years since this big push. We have a new principal. Priorities shift when the leadership changes. It is the nature of the game. We're working to figure out where our next steps need to be and what role as the school librarian I can play in helping us get there. We certainly continue to push using these resources and provide professional development for staff on new tools and ideas. It isn't as organized as the year above was, but this is merely just one example of possibilities that a school could use. We'll continue conversations about where we want to go and how to get there. The key is to be a part of those conversations.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Harvey, Carl A., II. *Adult Learners: Professional Development and the School Librarian*. Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2012. Print.; Reynolds, Peter. *The North Star*. Somerville: Candlewick, 2009. Print.

## **MLA CITATION**

Harvey, Carl A., II. "The Librarian's Role in Schoolwide Professional Development." *Library Media Connection*, 32, no. 3, November 2013. *School Library Connection*, [schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/1949081](https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/1949081).

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/Article/1949081>

Entry ID: 1949081