

# How Many Is Too Many? Introducing Digital Resources to Teachers

Feature

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How many digital tools and resources do school librarians need to conduct a successful lesson? How many versions of annotation software, research sites, databases, and fact checking websites are part of our repertoires? As librarians, some of us spend a big portion of our "free" time finding and evaluating new resources—and we enjoy it! We hear about new technology and sources during workshops, conferences, or professional development days. Inspired, we come back to school willing to use our newly acquired skills, as well as share new ideas with our colleagues, administrators, and especially with the teachers.

And then the teachers may say...no thank you! In thinking about this well-intentioned sharing, we do tend to dump lists of amazing resources, and often teachers are not able to test them out and adapt them in the classroom because of time constraints and other reasons. The list of potential reasons is very long. Do these scenarios remind you of teachers in your school?

- Teachers have a list of go-to's and they don't feel the need for new digital tools
- They don't have time to learn how to use new tools
- They don't have the skills to keep up with the fast pace of new tech
- They are not aware of new tools or aren't sure how to incorporate new tools into their existing lessons
- They cannot test out new technology due to issues like outdated operating systems or software versions, set-up of passwords and accounts, or access problems due to filters

All of these teacher concerns and needs are valid; therefore we need to come from a place of compassion, empathy, and understanding when serving in a role of information professional. We need to be creative and careful with how we approach the teachers and introduce our ideas, and this approach must cover two major areas of concern. First, librarians need to know relevant resources based on the curricular need, including student level of understanding and/or reading level and teacher's instructional or project requirements. Second, when teachers talk to us about a project, subject, or idea, we need to be able to jump in and assist with attention to not only the students' needs but also the teacher's. What is the teacher's level of comfort, skill, and interest in using digital tools? What previous experiences have they had, positive and negative?

What might this preparing and sharing all look like? Let's consider a few steps toward successful introduction of digital tools with classroom teachers.

## **Strategy 1: Listen to What Teachers Are Saying, and Not Saying**

The most important part is to learn what the teacher needs. Even if you are absolutely certain that they could really use that amazing annotation app, you cannot "sell it" to them if they do not see how can they apply it in their classroom. Last year a teacher came looking for article to annotate. Once we found the article, we decided to explore some tools together. On my end I tested out few apps and decided which one would be the most useful for us. Then we co-taught a class: she focused on the content and I focused on how to use the app.

Sometimes teachers don't necessarily come to you looking for help, but librarians can step in to support an anticipated need. For example, our social studies department went through some changes regarding who teaches what courses. I already had a "partner in crime" in the department and we had done several projects together over the past few years, but now someone else would be teaching the class. I mentioned to the new teacher what was done in the past and recently we planned out how we can make it work for him. He saw the value in the research projects we had developed previously and now he is willing to give it a try.

## **Strategy 2: Learn about Tech Limitations**

This is a crucial component in learning what tools can be used and how. Depending on the school district, we might run into many different issues: students do not have access to individual devices, firewalls are blocking the usage of certain tools, teachers might not be able to download the software, and more. Learn about possible roadblocks and strategies that librarians and teachers are permitted to apply to get the access and tools you need. Include your technology department not only when you require assistance, but also on a regular basis to keep them in the loop of your activities and needs.

## **Strategy 3: Introduce New Tools at the Point of Need**

You cannot force new tools upon teachers who are not ready to explore. After learning that my colleagues want to do annotations without paper, I decided to offer a workshop to all of the teachers. The premise of the seminar was to introduce teachers to a few tools and then give them time to explore which options would be the most beneficial in their classrooms for that particular assignment and need. As we worked together, it turned out that time to learn and figure out options was what they needed the most.

#### **Strategy 4: Know Your Content**

There is no point in bringing a list of new tools, software, or pieces of technology if you are not comfortable using them. As best you can, know the strengths and weaknesses of all of your offerings. Just as we do not like to stand in front of students and not be able to answer all of the crucial questions regarding what we teach, we probably do not want to stand in front of a group of teachers unprepared. Learn the tools, and also anticipate questions and be open to seeking tutorials, FAQs, help tools, and other features to make the tools work for your teachers in their classrooms.

#### **Strategy 5: Be Available to Assist and Enlist Experts**

When you have launched a new piece of technology, set aside some time after a session or roll-out to assist your colleagues. In the best case scenario as soon as they leave the library they want to put to work what they have learned from you. Maybe you can drop everything and run to the classroom to help out when they try something out, but this isn't always possible or practical. Consider options for guiding teachers when you can't do it yourself: student experts, teachers to act as point-people on certain resources, and guides available on your library website. Another tip: Don't push new tech during testing season or at the end of the year, when everyone's focus is elsewhere.

#### **Strategy 6: Be Open to Questions and Suggestions**

Last year a desperate teacher came to the library saying that she had this article from *National Geographic* from three decades ago but it fell apart and now she would like to continue using it, but she cannot work with the version she had. Could I find it for her? We had a subscription to *National Geographic*, so a few phone calls later, I was able to get an online subscription to the archives of magazines and access to not only that one article but all of the past articles. The science teachers were thrilled.

#### **Conclusion**

As you may have noticed I am not throwing a long list of names of apps and tools here. Over the years of being around education, I have learned that tools are just that: tools. Education technology is moving on as fast as any other type of technology. I can't afford to focus on only 2019's best ed tech because in a short while there will be new and better 2020 ones. Yes, they will have catchy names. Yes, the graphics will be even more appealing. Even the user friendliness will improve. But the gist of the tools will not change: they will be just tools to achieve other goals—teaching and learning, and solid strategies for these stick around a long time.

#### **MLA CITATION**

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