Technology Professional Development: Blog Reflections from a TL

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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Editor's note: Reading online blogs is a marvelous way to connect with the thoughts of others. Lisa Katchin's blog, *Re-Thinking TL: Teacher Librarian - Technology Leader - Teacher – Leader,* chronicles her thoughtful reflections on her job as teacher librarian. Lisa has ten years experience teaching in rural Saskatchewan. Her position currently is part-time teacher librarian, part-time classroom teacher. Lisa is working toward a Masters in Educational Technology and Design (ETAD). While taking the ETAD courses from the University of Saskatchewan, she and a team of classmates designed a model for effective technological professional development for teachers of Saskatoon Public Schools. She is now implementing a version of this with her own staff. She has kindly allowed us to republish two blog postings from September 2010 that talk about this project. To follow the progress of this project, please visit Lisa directly at her blog http://re-thinking-tl.blogspot.com .

Thursday, September 16, 2010

Back in the saddle again

Ask any teacher and they'll tell you that September and June are the most hectic months of the school year.

Now that my school year is off to a solid start, I finally have time to reflect on the goals I've set for myself this year. The biggest challenge I've taken on this year is leading my staff's technological professional development.

Ever since I took on the role of teacher librarian, I've felt pretty strongly about the TL's responsibility for assisting teachers with their own technological professional development. It is important that the TL take the lead on fleshing out the technologies and weeding out the time wasters. This allows them to suggest the technologies that are most appropriate for a teacher's need and the outcomes they are striving to attain.

This particular opportunity is exciting for me for several reasons. The first relates directly to my past laments about **drumming up business.** This opportunity allows me to connect with teachers that I have not worked with before. Just last week a teacher I've never worked with asked me to assist him in introducing a new technology tool to his class. Woohoo!

Another reason that I am so excited is because I have an amazing opportunity to apply the learning from my Masters program courses. During one of my Instructional Design courses, I worked as part of a team given the task to create a model of effective technological professional development for teachers in the Saskatoon Public School Division. From a learning standpoint, it is very powerful to apply and implement the methods and strategies that research suggests are so strong for this avenue of professional learning.

In upcoming postings, I'll share some of the design elements of this professional learning experience and reflect on their effectiveness. I can't wait to see where this journey takes us! Stay tuned.

Photo by woodleywonderworks published @ flickr.com.

Sunday, September 19, 2010

Technology PD: A Research-Based Approach in Action
PowerPoint 101… Making Better Use of MS Office… Photoshop Shortcuts…

Why is it that titles like these are so common yet they fail to inspire and initiate change?

I know from experience that I'll leave these types of sessions with the biggest question, *"Who can I use this with?"* I could never clearly define why this question was accompanied with disappointment until I began to delve into the research surrounding effective technology professional development (PD).

Last winter I had the unique opportunity to collaborate with a team of fellow ETAD students on a project to create a model of technological professional development for Saskatoon Public School Division. Over the course of this project, I discovered some truths about technology PD that I was familiar with, but for which I never had the words.

The **research** made key points that resonated with me. It said that technology PD should be self-directed, applicable to a teacher's classroom and curriculum, hands-on, and collaborative. It should be supported with time to learn, collaborate, develop, implement and reflect. It should be supported by administration. It should also include just-in-time support that provides instruction and assistance at the time it is needed.

Uncovering the research that supported what I had always felt was powerful. I realized that this was the reason I had been dissatisfied with most of the technology PD I had encountered so far. The excitement continued as my team worked on our prototype. The more we worked the more I wished I could have the chance to take part in the eventual experience.

Little did I know that I would soon have the chance to see the process in action and test out the research for myself.

A series of conversations with my administrator allowed me to voice my concerns over our school's efforts

to prepare our students with the 21st Century skills that are being demanded by most workplaces and educational institutions. I presented the **ISTE NETS** standards for Students, Teachers and Administrators as an end goal. As our conversations continued, we began to envision a personalized version of technology PD that could take our students and us to a new level of technological literacy.

We knew that since this was a school-based initiative we needed to work with what time and resources we had. I offered to facilitate the professional development and offer any support of instruction that was necessary. We also had the added support of another staff member with a small percentage of release time for technical support. In addition, we knew we had other skilled teachers whose strengths were more focused on particular software programs and we hoped to tap into those if the need arose.

We decided to use our locally negotiated hour and fifteen minutes of professional development prior to staff meetings to help us achieve our goal. To supplement this time, teachers were invited to schedule sessions with me during my scheduled TL time to collaborate on student projects that will utilize the newly learned technology to increase student learning.

The main premise of the experience is that teachers work on *self-directed* learning goals that are directly transferable to their classrooms and will increase student learning through effective technology integration.

We start our meetings as a group in order to share learning goals and hopefully spark new ideas and discover opportunities for collegial mentorship. Teachers may work in a common area or they are free to move to a quieter workspace if they prefer. To support the learning process, just-in-time instruction and troubleshooting support is delivered in the common area by request. We conclude the sessions with a group meeting so we can share progress and complete personal reflections.

In an effort to allow for self-paced learning and differentiated learning goals, I've created a **blog** for our PD and will add pages with easy to follow lessons and supporting resources for each of the topics requested.

The whole process is quite fluid, much like a classroom situation where peer collaboration and assistance is encouraged. In fact, we model the inclusive environment also by encouraging our educational assistants to participate in the learning process as well. They work either on self-directed goals or in conjunction with the teachers with whom they most often work.

We ask all teachers to complete a reflection form at the end of each session to serve as an accountability measure, an opportunity to request instructional support, an opportunity for focused goal setting, and evaluation of the process.

Although our model doesn't entirely fit the recommendations made in research, it is realistic and tailored to best meet our needs given our circumstances.

Even after only two sessions of PD using this model I sense optimism and eagerness in my staff that I haven't seen in previous years. Initial feedback indicates that teachers are most grateful for the *time* and opportunity for *genuine implementation.*

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