Do you see yourself as a leader within the professional learning community? Black (2007) discussed professional learning communities from the aspect of school leadership, but her statements are equally applicable to school librarians. Black (41) referred to research done at the University of Lethbridge, identifying several key elements that contribute to the success of learning communities:

- effective communication and a clear set of goals along with administrative support
- focus on improving teaching and learning
- use of data to plan for instructional needs
- sharing of collective knowledge and expertise

According to the Professional Development Web site from the North Carolina Department of Instruction, professional learning communities are composed of a "collegial group who are united in their commitment to an outcome . . . student learning." Many school librarians exemplify the leadership role and contribute to the overall learning community.

Librarians promote student learning through technology, literacy, and collaboration with teachers. Each element provides ample opportunities to offer leadership and to learn as a member of the learning community. The librarian demonstrates leadership within the professional learning community (PLC) by providing professional development for classroom technology integration, sharing information about new resources, and demonstrating innovative instructional tools. The standards of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) support the librarian's role in promoting literacy and a love of reading. Providing resources and novel approaches to appreciating and understanding literature connects the library to the classroom. As instructional partners, the school librarian and the classroom teacher learn from each other and improve instructional strategies. When a project is particularly successful, other teachers want to have the same learning experience for their students. Networking within the school builds a strong sense of community and shared goals. From instructional partner to program administrator, the librarian can have a great impact on student learning through modeling good instructional practices and providing relevant curriculum materials.

Since student learning is the underlying motivation for developing professional learning communities and the theme of the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner, it seems only natural for librarians to be at the forefront of developing strong professional learning communities. The ultimate goal of improving student learning and utilizing the best practices school-wide requires all stakeholders in the learning community to work together. Utilizing the "whole school" view, the librarian is in a key position to contribute to the development of strong professional learning communities through professional development and technology integration. As a supervisor of school library media interns, I see first-hand how mentors in the field demonstrate their leadership within the learning community. The librarians included in this article are examples of how others are leading from the "center" of their professional learning communities. Each contributes to the success of the academic program of their schools and places the library program right in the center of the learning community.

"Utilizing the 'whole school' view, the librarian is in a key position to contribute to the development of strong professional learning communities through professional development and technology integration."

LIBRARIANS AS LEADERS IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY, LITERACY, AND COLLABORATION

By Dianne Dees, Alisande Mayer, Heather Morin, and Elaine Willis

BUILDING THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION AND TRAINING

Debra Martin and Heather Morin, media specialists at Hahira Middle School, Georgia's 2008 Library Media Program of the Year, fully understand the need for collaboration with their teachers. In fact, these media specialists offer a full-day staff development where academic area teachers come together to learn the latest and greatest educational technology and see how it can be implemented in their classrooms. The training day has evolved, growing from basic uses of email, word processing, and Internet searches to modeling use of interactive whiteboards, incorporating wikis, and podcasting. The development of the training is a process steeped in collaboration. First, Debra and Heather closely monitor their online resource scheduler to determine which resources are used most and which are not and by whom. Once this information is determined, they begin providing lesson ideas, resource suggestions, and collaboration opportunities to various teachers, and they begin constructing the format for that school year's teacher technology training.

Recently, Debra and Heather created an entirely different sort of technology training opportunity. They set up a classroom with an interactive whiteboard, student response system, laptop carts, and then modeled effective teaching practices that incorporated the everyday use of not only these components but also wikis,
blogs, podcasts, and video editing software. Throughout the day, teachers participated in the lesson as students, creating podcasts, wikis, blogs, and videos. From this training, Debra and Heather created wiki spaces for 23 of their 40 academic teachers, assisted five teachers in creating classroom blogs, and collaborated with nine teachers on video editing projects. Hahira Middle School teachers have begun expressing an interest in moving toward a paperless classroom, and more teachers than ever have stopped using their overhead projectors in favor of LCD projectors and document cameras.

Immediately following the technology training, Debra and Heather begin scheduling collaboration opportunities with teachers. Many of the teachers want to create wiki spaces for their students to store, share, and collaborate on writing projects. Whatever the need expressed by the teacher, Debra and Heather make certain each teacher is comfortable with that level of technology integration. Collaborative sessions result in lessons that include integration of student response systems, interactive whiteboards, or wikis. The learning community here expands to include students who also contribute ideas or requests for lessons utilizing the new technology. In fact, Debra and Heather have taught many lessons for classroom teachers at the request of students who heard about a great project that another teacher assigned.

Another example of the PLC in action is the development of the teacher wiki. This space is a collaborative work area where the middle school teachers share quizzes, study guides, vocabulary lists, Web sites, interactive whiteboard lessons, and videos they have created and a space for documentation of departmental, grade-level, and interdepartmental meetings. Because of this workspace, teachers can stay abreast of issues regardless of grade or academic area. Off campus teachers are also included so they continue to be active participants in the learning community. Several teachers are developing wikis that will serve as their online classrooms. Through these wikis, students will view the daily agenda, look for lost handouts, view assessment rubrics, turn in assignments, edit documents, and work in a digital environment much like they will in their future workplaces.

Collaboration of this nature does not happen by chance. Hahira Middle School teachers have grown to value the technical knowledge and instructional expertise of these two school librarians. Over time their collective efforts to provide both necessary equipment and instructional support to the teachers has impacted classroom instructional practices. Ten years ago, nearly every teacher posted an agenda on the marker board. Now, teachers have multimedia displays welcoming their students to class with problems of the day, introductory videos, or curriculum reviews. Instead of traditional paper and pencil projects, teachers allow students to choose from an assortment of technology-based projects to culminate their units of study. Through listening to and surveying teacher needs, providing equipment to meet their goals, and patiently guiding teachers through the process, the Hahira Middle School learning community is enriched by technology with the media specialists squarely at the center.

LITERACY IS THIS LIBRARIAN'S FOCUS WITHIN THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Elaine Willis is the school librarian at Irwin County Middle/High School. Even though she considers information access skills an important aspect of student learning, her focus is on developing a lifelong love of reading. She often quotes Mark Twain, "A person who won't read has no advantage over one who can't read." She is consistently on the lookout for new ways to promote particular titles, as well as new ways to hook the reluctant reader.

Earlier this year, Elaine promoted AASL's Teens' Top Ten (TTT) program in her high school. An avid reader herself and wanting to be prepared for the upcoming TTT event, she purchased the approximately 25 titles to read over the summer. Many of the books were a part of a series, and knowing how much her students enjoyed series, she ended up reading far more than the titles on the list. Her preparation enabled her to match the books to the right students.

Elaine collaborated with her English teachers, including the Gifted teacher, to promote these books on the TTT list. Two of the English teachers used the books with Literature Circles while the Gifted teacher included the list of TTTs as alternates to her original reading list. Without her leadership, the teachers would not have known about the books or thought to consider them as alternatives for traditional reading lists. In October, the students participated in the online voting for the Teens' Top Ten books. Elaine plans to have a "voting booth" for the TTT next year.

Incorporating technology with the Literature Circles, Elaine and one of the English teachers developed a wiki for the students to use with their Literature Circles. Each group had their own page on which they discussed the books. The teacher included a rubric for the students to follow which was also posted on each page. Now there were no more worries about lost rubrics. The wiki was so successful that the teacher increased the number of groups from four the first semester it was implemented to 10 in the next semester.

Ever mindful of how technology can motivate all students, even reluctant readers, Elaine observed how the incorporation of wikis encouraged some of the more reluctant readers to participate in the Literature Circles. To help keep interest high, she has recently added 90 Sony Touch Readers (purchased with grant funds) to the library collection. The readers are currently being used in Literature Circles, during extended learning, and as a reward for students who have completed their work. Following the wiki experiment with the Literature Circles, more teachers incorporated wikis as part of their instruction.
Alisande Mayer considers collaboration to be one of the most rewarding aspects of being a school librarian. Writing was an area of need within her school community, therefore a 30-minute period was set aside each day during which all classes would concentrate on writing and the writing process. Alisande saw this as an opportunity to work with teachers on a specific need and one in which she could be an instructional partner. Alisande illustrates what it means to "provide leadership... and establish connections with... the education community... that focus on student learning" (ALA/AASL, Standard 3). Many times it may be difficult for a school librarian to see herself as a part of the classroom learning experience. However, as a school librarian, the goal should not be to create a standalone lesson on a skill you feel needs to be addressed, but to look at what students are learning and what teachers are teaching in the classroom and see where your knowledge and skills can fit into that plan. Approach teachers with ideas that you may have and ask for their input. Provide openings for teachers to approach you and ask for your knowledge in lesson planning. They may love your idea and feel it fits with what they are teaching or the conversation may spark another idea that would be better suited. The ultimate goal is to provide opportunities for your teachers to see you as an instructional partner and a valuable resource in increasing student achievement.

AASL guidelines dictate that our focus will be on student learning. As part of the learning community, we are challenged to serve as leaders who can identify needs based on data including the Spanish teacher who uses wikis to plan daily activities for his classes. As a technology leader in her school, Elaine knows most of her teachers are receptive to incorporating new technology into their lessons, but the teachers do not really have the time to explore the variety of tools available to them. In response, Elaine organized and delivered after-school sessions called "Tech Tuesday" for the teachers. Each series consists of 12 sessions, and teachers can earn one PLU credit (10 Tech Tuesday sessions). Elaine focuses on free Web 2.0 tools and different ways they can be used in the classroom. The classes have become so popular that some of the teachers do not even apply for the PLUs; they are just interested in the information. Including students as a part of the learning community, Elaine plans to incorporate Web 2.0 tools such as Diigo (http://www.diigo.com/) and Evernote (http://www.evernote.com/) with her student research classes in the fall. Utilizing Diigo and Google Reader, Elaine keeps up with new resources for her own professional development and to provide quick access to resources for the teachers. She spends a lot of time searching out curriculum-related resources to share. Elaine certainly illustrates how a school librarian can take a strong leadership role within the PLC to make a difference in the instructional program of the school and integrate technology and literacy with young adults. In her words, "I consider myself a catalyst. The teachers carry the torch to the students."
and observation and then provide positive feedback to the community for addressing those needs. Teaching and learning through collaboration is another significant element of a learning community (Pennell 26). Who best to demonstrate and encourage that process than the school librarian? Being an active participant in a professional learning community is not for the faint of heart as explained by Black (41). It involves dedication and determination as illustrated by Heather and Debra, Elaine, and Alisande. Be an active participant in your professional learning community, contributing both as a leader and learner.

REFERENCES


Dr. Dianne Dees is the facilitator for the School Library Media Program at Valdosta (Georgia) State University and can be reached at eceees@vadosta.edu.

Mrs. Alisande Mayer is a school librarian at Moulton-Branch Elementary School in Valdosta, Georgia and can be reached at amayer@lowndes.k12.ga.us.

Mrs. Heather Morin is a school librarian at the Hahira (Georgia) Middle School and can be reached at hmorin@lowndes.k12.ga.us.

Dr. Elaine Willis is a school librarian at the Irwin County Middle/High School in Ocilla, Georgia and can be reached at drewillis@gmail.com.

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