Abby has requested a meeting with her principal, Paul, to talk about her plans for the library program. She has worked hard over the past few years to be an active, engaged presence in the school. Circulation is up, grants have been won, and she often attends teacher planning meetings, always with new ideas in tow. Paul is also allocating resources and priorities: a new teacher-evaluation system, yesterday’s late bus, the Common Core State Standards, technology integration, and ever-shrinking funding. In the following two narratives, we draw back the curtain to observe their meeting, first from Abby’s point of view and then from Paul’s.

**ABBY’S PERSPECTIVE**

Abby rested her hands in her lap and looked up at the principal. He seemed only politely interested in her proposal to present a series of professional development (PD) workshops on information literacy to the faculty. “Funny,” she mused, “I thought my ducks were in a row . . .”

Abby loved working in this large, urban high school, and for the last six years she’d experienced a series of successes that had situated the library front and center in the school. With lots of creative energy and not much money, she’d restyled her thirty-year-old library space to look more like a learning commons, with small clusters of work spaces, nooks for reading, and a semiprivate, quieter space for teacher planning. Library usage was growing exponentially, although she acknowledged ruefully that the teacher space was still used mostly by student groups. A modest district grant she’d written had funded a cluster of powerful computers for high-end computing and had set up the next grant, co-authored with the IT Department, for a 3D printer. Since the PTO and the tech team were enthusiastically backing it, she felt confident that she’d be spending at least part of this summer learning how to create 3D objects.

Web traffic for the library’s virtual commons was also increasing. Student podcast book reviews were now linked to the titles in the library catalog, and student work was featured on the library blog. She’d migrated her library website to LibGuides for all student projects. Although teachers were not independently adding their assignments, they said they appreciated the consistency of having the same interface for every research project.

Mentally she checked off her advocacy efforts:

- A quarterly library report with statistics on usage and events for the principal to share at school board meetings
- A weekly blog posting for parents about library happenings
- A book fair organized by the PTO with a local independent bookstore, so that the library could now afford honorariums for one author per grade
- Several presentations at conferences this year, which she had publicized to her community

She had just reminded Paul of her recent work with faculty. Typically she would rotate among the departments’ professional learning communities for about an hour each semester. Her strategy for these meetings was to highlight a few subject-specific tools, drawing an explicit connection to school initiatives like Literacy First, Library Standards, STEM, Common Core State Standards, and College and Career Readiness. As part of her “show and tell” she would showcase related resources on the library website, databases, and state resources.

“You see, Paul, I just want my library program to be everywhere,” she said.

She looked eagerly at him, awaiting his enthusiastic support.

Instead, Paul looked at his watch and crossed his arms. “Why,” she wondered, “wasn’t he responding to her PD ideas with more enthusiasm?”

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“In my teaching career, I have repeatedly blossomed, along with my colleagues, when we coplanned, cotaught, and coassessed learning.”
PAUL’S PERSPECTIVE

“Everywhere?” thought Paul. “Is that the goal?”

Paul pushed back from his desk, his mind still focused on the phone call from the superintendent. Yet one more district meeting on enrollment projections—he’d have to reschedule that walkthrough of the ninth-grade wing again. There were so many things begging for his attention, but he really wanted to focus on teaching and learning. How could he do it all when there was always some new administrative edict? Putting his game face on, Paul walked around to where Abby was sitting and settled into a chair facing her.

He watched Abby’s face: animated and excited. He nodded his head in agreement and smiled as she reminded him of some of the changes she’d made in her library these last few years.

“Her library,” Paul mused. “Well, there’s no denying that Abby has turned this program around—she’s transformed that dreary space to a humming ‘cool’ spot for teens! And made some amazing strides with teachers... but her library... that does sound odd.”

Paul had nodded encouragingly when she’d reminded him of the tech grants she’d written for the school. Unlike the previous librarian, Abby got along well with the district’s IT department—for the most part. “I can’t get bogged down mediating those filtering issues she brings me,” he mused. “It’s a power play between them that I just can’t get my mind around.”

On the other hand, Paul did appreciate Abby’s practical, roll-up-her-sleeves attitude toward technology. Parents were delighted to hear their teens’ podcast reviews, and several had mentioned that they read the library’s blog.

“Maybe ‘her’ library isn’t so unreasonable,” he mused, smiling as she spoke animatedly. “The book fair volunteers pulled in a tidy sum this year... and those earnest readers love hanging out with her. She has quite a following among the parents, too.”

Not quite the same vibe with teachers, unfortunately. Just the other day, Becky, a strong history teacher, had told him she wasn’t sure what was so great about blogging. Was she nervous—or envious?

Paul stiffened, remembering the handholding he’d done after the last PLC with Elba, the English department chair. He could hear administrative frustration in her voice: “Abby just threw a bunch of resources at us... pushing too much tech, too fast.” Energy, yes—but Elba hadn’t heard the explicit connections to student learning or assessment that would have hooked her or the department.

Paul shifted his weight in the chair and crossed his arms so he could see her watch. He needed a graceful way to end this conversation—without dampening Abby’s enthusiasm.

Ah, the lunch bell.

Paul rose, mouthing some general words of encouragement, and escorted Abby to the door.

SELF-QUESTIONING AND REFLECTION: KEYS TO PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

If you have been as energetic and passionate as Abby, building a dynamic center of learning for everyone, it’s hard to understand why any principal would hesitate about your ideas for PD. When this happens, however, it’s time to hit the pause button, take a deep breath, step away, and reflect. As much as we want students to be curious, analytical, and critical inquirers, we must embrace these same traits in designing PD. It begins with asking hard but essential questions that enable us to reflect on our assumptions in preparation for change. For Abby, the following questions may reveal critical gaps that she needs to close as she strives to implement a needs-based approach to PD that will foster mutual benefit and growth.

What do my teachers need help with?
How do I know this?

Abby has built-in opportunities to meet with her teachers, during which she enthru-
SPORTS

Abramovitz, Melissa. Volleyball. (Science Behind Sports). Lucent, 2013. 128p. LB $29.72. 978-1-4205-1157-4. Grades 6-12. This series combines science information with sports to include training, physics, biomechanics, and health issues. Extensive back matter has chapter notes, glossary, more information, and an index.


McClafferty, Carla Killough. Fourth Down and Inches: Concussions and Football’s Make-or-break Moment. Carolrhoda, 2013. 96p. LB $14.13. 978-1-4677-1067-1. Grades 6-12. With the concussion controversy and sport safety regulations being a hot topic, here is a popular title for sports fans. Opening with the history of football and its appeal as a rough sport, the author leads the reader through the on-going process of concern for the players’ safety. In-depth back matter has source notes, detailed bibliography, further reading, and an index.

Abby has done a terrific job learning what new information was not yet within my grasp. As a result, I started thinking that it was less my job to “teach everything” than to teach them how to continue learning in a sustainable way, long after they’ve left my courses. I needed to shift my approach that emphasized skills and content mastery to one that prioritized continual self-learning.” (249)

Abby’s teachers will bring valuable knowledge to any PD initiative. She recognizes that they bring subject and teaching expertise—but she has not taken into account, and probably doesn’t know, what tech tools they have tested in their classrooms already. What have they found valuable about tools they continue to use? Why did others get discarded? Understanding their reasoning brings her closer to differentiating tools to match individual teaching styles and goals. While Abby may be the tireless cheerleader for technology, her teachers have unique and useful skills and talents that can enrich their PD together. How can she acknowledge and leverage their expertise? Abby might consider alternative approaches that invite informal, customized learning. Susan Geiger and Anne Arriaga describe a “concierge” approach that blends online learning and face-to-face interactions, always with a focus on the learner:

“We would greet questioners with enthusiasm and listen carefully. Whether it was how to embed a video into a blog or how to close a window, we offered the same nonjudgmental support. We tried to acknowledge the challenges and ease their fears. Interactions were informal and nonthreatening. People learned to trust us because we were coaches and partners; our goal was their achievement. . . . The success of the program depended on our accessibility and on-the-spot help when participants encountered a roadblock. Our take-aways from this include recognizing the power of as-needed, individualized learning in which librarians are experts, but not the only experts. Group discovery was happening naturally . . . everyone shifted either into the role of learner or teacher.” (30–32)

As part of the group discovery, Abby
can listen carefully for those who do not use technology in their classroom. What are the barriers to use? A well-reasoned choice in favor of superlative traditional methods? Poor tools? Fear? Inadequate lab space? Spotty WiFi? A jam-packed academic curriculum? Abby has been in cheerleader mode, trying to rev up the crowd alone. By finding other compatriots—including those who can help her understand technology non-adopters—she gains a team.

**How do my teachers love to learn, and how do they learn best?**

While sharing resources at a faculty meeting or delivering a series of training sessions on information literacy feels expedient to Abby, teachers may see them as irrelevant. By opening the door to learner-focused PD, possibilities emerge from the learning goals, teacher preferences, and time and resources available, rather than a desire to “cover” tools or subjects. Everything from tech playgrounds to collaborative teaching experiences to in-depth lesson studies can develop from listening, observing, and understanding teachers.

Recognizing that she didn’t have extensive knowledge of each teacher’s needs, Kelly Ahlfeld made choice the key ingredient in her Exploratorium. In a playground atmosphere, teachers selected the tools they wished to explore, then experimented and share their experiences with one another. Ahlfeld identifies this as a shift from teaching to learning:

“When we challenged ourselves to engage in a new kind of professional development at my school, we created new opportunities for learning and growth. . . . There has been a cultural shift at our school that has led to new conversations, new purchases, new ways of teaching our students. . . . Perhaps most importantly, we have a new attitude: one that favors risk taking, experimentation, and traveling in new directions.” (15)

Exploratorium showed Ahlfeld and her colleagues that, given time and choice, they were happy to tinker with technology. From Skype to Dance Dance Revolution, teachers selected resources they hypothesized would be valuable to them and to their students. Exploratorium gave them the space to test their theories. Accountability came not from sharing lesson plans but from sharing what had been learned.

While Ahlfeld’s school culture flourished when the entire faculty took time out to learn, Judi Moreillon advocates for PD throughout the school day, describing coteaching as a form of practice-embedded PD:

“In my teaching career, I have repeatedly blossomed, along with my colleagues, when we have coplanned, coauthored, and coassessed learning. It’s one-on-one professional development that is unlike most professional development relationships because both parties benefit equally.” (141)

Like Moreillon, Anne Stokes describes how teachers and librarians learn from one another when they plan, execute, and evaluate collaborative lessons. During Lesson Study, a format that originated in Japan, a small group of teachers meet over several sessions to construct a lesson moment by moment. One teacher is selected to teach that lesson, while the others make notes about student response and engagement. The team debriefs and adjusts the lesson plan; then a second teacher reteaches it, again with the other instructors as note-taking observers. Stokes recounts the benefits of the experience for both librarian and teacher:

“By working intensively on a unit, I came to know a group of teachers in a way that would otherwise have taken years. I can appreciate the intensity with which they go about planning lessons. Having observed their strengths, expertise, and teaching styles, I feel confident that I can approach them with pedagogical questions. In turn, teachers now approach me for insights on students or teaching. When investigating materials they need to support other units, they are more likely to ask me to research other materials that are available rather than just using what they have at hand.” (60)

Stokes’s model shows a librarian leading with her teaching expertise. Instead of limiting herself to the role of resource provider, she has immersed herself in pedagogical conversations. She demonstrates that, like her classroom colleagues, she’s eager to engage in the tough preparations, facilitation, and reflection of the learning process.

**Who are my natural allies and PD partners?**

Paul astutely picked up on her frequent references to “her library” and “wanting to be everywhere.” He sensed that her efforts were often librarian centered (“I”) rather than school or student focused (“we”). As observers of this conversation, we are privy to Abby’s thinking: We know that her intent is to use the library to improve how her students learn. Unfortunately, we know from Paul’s inner monologue that her words overshadow her intent. A library such as Abby’s that is built on a commons approach begs not only for student collaboration but also for educators to work together to address questions, wrestle with problems, and create products and solutions. Is this a missing piece in Abby’s puzzle? Carolyn Kirio and Sandy Yamamoto discovered that building school learning communities requires a collaborative mindset. They share the following as essential leadership skills:

“Listen with an open mind. . . . Appreciate that adult learners have different needs. . . . Adapt and differentiate strategies to meet these needs. . . . Respect different points of view.” (167)

Think broadly about your allies and partners. In a large high school, classroom teachers are obvious collaborators, and, indeed, they often work together based on common class preps, department affiliations, or shared students. However, like Abby, others provide academic support and peer leadership. Guidance counselors, special education teachers, literacy coaches, and instructional specialists also strive to improve the learning culture of their school. An added benefit is that they are likely to have a flexible schedule, making them ideal candidates to take on PD planning, as they can modify their daytime schedules accordingly. Additionally,
THE SECURITY OF COMPANIONSHIP!

Brun-Cosme, Nadine. Big Wolf & Little Wolf: Such a Beautiful Orange! Illus. by Olivier Tallec. Enchanted Lion, 2011. 32p. $16.95. 978-1-59270-106-3. Grades PreK-2. Third in a trilogy originally from France, little wolf and big wolf seek to regain an orange and, after traveling alone through the big city, each finds a new hill, a new tree, and each other. The need for friendship and the quiet relationship of the two wolves speaks volumes to children about the importance of love, loyalty, and perseverance. Gentle brushstrokes reinforce the softness of the hearts of the two characters, while the color palette reflects the their ever changing moods.

Chapman, Jane. Hands Off MY HONEY! Illus. by Tim Warnes. Tiger Tales, 2013. 32p. $12.95. 978-1-58925-142-7. Grades K-2. Bear has possession of a great pot of honey and a group consisting of mouse, mole, and two rabbits want it. While bear noisily slurps the honey, the group sneaks through the woods quietly until mole’s clumsiness gives them away to bear. It’s all in good fun as it is revealed to be a game the five friends have played before!

DiCamillo, Kate and Alison McGhee. Bink and Gollie: Two for One. Illus. by Tony Fucile. Candlewick, 2013. 96p. $15.99. 978-0-7636-3361-5. $6.99 pb. 978-0-7636-6445-9. Grades 1-3. The short and tall pair return for an adventure at the state fair. This graphic novel for the youngest readers shares the delight of two friends as they experience playing a carnival game, Whack a Duck, to win “the world’s largest donut.” Bink supports Gollie’s attempt to perform in a talent show and they brave a fortune teller to learn that their friendship is sound and they will be together. As a relieved Bink exclaims, “That’s all the future I need to know,” the reader is assured that this twosome is going to be around for some time.

because these staff members work across grade levels or content areas, they share Abby’s rare cross-curricular perspective. They can see how curriculum scales up over time and teachers approach content differently. Abby might thrive as a member of such a team.

Paul sees Abby’s passionate interests driving her interactions with faculty. He wonders if there is a reasoned and coherent plan of action behind this. Are the school’s initiatives a superficial checklist that Abby uses to decide what tools and resources to share? How might she deepen this approach to systematically align initiatives with the library’s vision and goals? Does she mention anything about what students are actually learning? Do her tools help teachers assess learning?

Input measures like circulation statistics and numbers of classes are important for a school librarian to document. Even more critical, however, are the output measures that provide the evidence of learning, not just activity. Pamela Kramer and Linda Diekman describe how evidence-based practice became the center of their PD when librarians discovered that building-level administrators wanted more “specific evidence of how libraries contributed to student learning” (72):

“The three major goals for PD participants were: to develop a strategic approach to planning and assessment, to apply outcome-focused lesson planning, and to communicate findings to stakeholders. We selected these goals because we realized that the instruction being provided through many of our libraries was marginally connected to the classroom. We believed that school librarians could produce more compelling evidence of their value as teaching partners.” (73)

Is Abby demonstrating “compelling evidence”? Sadly, no. In her eagerness to be an enthusiastic contributor to her school, her narrative is becoming, by default, “I’m the librarian. I’m always enthusiastically doing lots of stuff. Look how busy I am!” However, merely doing is not how school leaders are measuring success. They are looking for evidence of impact.

Consider this graphic by visual thinker Armano (2008). Right now, Abby’s PD is “shotgun” style—a smattering of tools spread widely. By thoughtfully listening to needs, reading curriculum documents, and being attentive to school- and district-wide initiatives, she can sculpt and focus her efforts (and her energy!) and build a more sustainable path to better teaching and learning.

In the long term, Paul may also be wor-
ried about what he thinks of as a "cult of personality," a program that is driven by the force of one passionate individual. When that person leaves, the program will fade quickly, testimony to the faculty’s tolerant but superficial incorporation of the practices and values it represented. The administration at the school where Kirio and Yamamoto are librarians recognized the danger of change depending on one individual’s drive and charisma. The professional learning community that emerged at this high school was built on a shared vision of student learning. Kirio and Yamamoto elaborate:

"Change depends on the identification of clearly defined and shared goals and the gathering of relevant evidence on whether outcomes have or have not been met... . Leadership is critical. It starts with a vision-focused and supportive administration and extends to the identification of leaders amongst the faculty. It requires growing that leadership over time." (178)

As Abby matures as an instructional leader, she will develop a thoughtful vision for what technology tools will accomplish, based on her observations of teacher needs, curriculum maps, and district initiatives. As a result, she will better connect to what matters to her colleagues.

Am I Abby?

We’ve all been Abby at one time or another. Many librarians are unbridled in their enthusiasm, dedication, and desire to do outstanding work. And we’ve all made Abby’s missteps, too: accidentally prioritizing “our library program” over the school’s needs. If you see some aspects of Abby in yourself, consider walking yourself through a model that will help take stock of your PD planning process. ADDIE (Veldof 2006) is a mnemonic for a five-step process:

Analysis: Who are your learners? How do they like to learn? What do they need to learn?

Design: Based on the analysis, what should your workshop cover? In most cases, three objectives are plenty. If your workshop will cover a technology tool, consider how you can present it as sustainable rather than shotgun. Seek objectives related to why and how it will support the curriculum, such as, "Participants will understand why Dipity.com can help students visualize the sequence of historical events" instead of, "Participants will learn how to use Dipity.com."

Develop: Plan the workshop, including handouts, activities, and/or direct instruction. With whom can you partner? Envision yourself as a learner in the workshop. Would you find the experience valuable? How can you use choice, humor, modeling, peer learning, or other tools to maximize engagement?

Implement: Lead (or co-lead) the workshop.

Evaluate: Based on feedback from your participants, as well as your own observations, reflect on the outcomes and impact of your PD. What strategies were effective? Engaging? As you, your principal, and/or your colleagues walk through your school’s halls, what evidence of impact and implementation do you see? What can you take away from this experience that you will use in future PD planning?

Slowing down and moving through these stages may seem dull or even silly at first, but they will force you to check your instincts against a model that aims for sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Digital resources, laptop carts, 1:1 initiatives, and assignment to multiple buildings have fundamentally shifted how librarians function in schools and districts. Professional development, designed in concert with participants’ needs, implemented thoughtfully, and focused on impact over activity, is a powerful way for librarians to leverage their expertise, perspectives, and skills. Imagine yourself in Abby’s shoes as school begins this fall. Walk into Paul’s office. What is the narrative you want to tell? Is Elba still complaining of disconnected tool demos? Is Paul waiting patiently for you to stop bragging, or is he leaning forward, animatedly seeking your input?

REFERENCES

All quotes are taken from Growing Schools: Librarians as Professional Developers, edited by Debbie Abilock, Kristin Fontichiaro, and Violet H. Harada (Libraries Unlimited, 2012).


Debbie Abilock, a former school administrator and school librarian, co-founded and directs the education vision of NoodleTools, Inc., a full-service online teaching platform for academic research (http://www.NoodleTools.com). She speaks and consults in the U.S., Europe and Asia and is currently doing workshops (http://ala13.ala.org/node/10170) and writing an LMC column (http://www.librarymediaconnection.com/lmc/?page=featured_articles) about “friction,” the design of slow thinking into the research process.

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