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Alan R. Bailey

East Carolina University, baileya@ecu.edu

Linda M. Teel

East Carolina University, teell@ecu.edu

Hazel J. Walker

East Carolina University, walkerh@ecu.edu

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Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit: Collaboratively Providing Professional Development for School Media Personnel

Alan R. Bailey, Linda M. Teel, and Hazel J. Walker

The authors are Assistant Professors at the Teaching Resources Center, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University. Mr. Bailey can be reached at baileya@ecu.edu. Ms. Teel can be reached at teell@ecu.edu. Ms. Walker can be reached at walkerh@ecu.edu.

Introduction

Effective professional development remains a major focus for universities, educational agencies, school districts and educators. Successful staff development projects for educators provide long-range effects in which administrators, communities, universities, students and even parents eventually receive benefits.¹ Quality professional development encompasses a wide range of opportunities for the purpose of enhancing educator performance and excellence. This article discusses the organization and implementation of a summit designed to target an audience of school media personnel. Additionally, the paper presents the organization and implementation of the summit. In the planning of any professional development activity, two equally important tasks emerge (1) developing the program and (2) selecting the targeted participants. The development of the program is based on the needs of the targeted audience; therefore, the targeted audience must be determined prior to the beginning of the planning process. Several additional factors are critical in the success of a staff development event. It is equally essential to have clear library administrative support of the project and have a wide-range of professional contacts for identifying and recruiting experts to facilitate sessions.²

After obtaining administrative support and understanding the commitment of time required to develop, plan, and implement a successful program, the Teaching Resources Center (TRC)

at East Carolina University's J.Y. Joyner Library partnered with Scholastic Library Publishing and formed a planning team comprised of individuals from both Joyner Library and Scholastic Library Publishing. The team's charge included developing a professional development opportunity designed for eastern North Carolina school media personnel. The TRC Outreach Program offered this opportunity as a service to area educators. The outreach program provides services to educators in the East Carolina University College of Education Walter and Daisy Carson Latham Clinical Schools Network, which encompasses a wide area of public school systems in eastern North Carolina. The key functions of the network are to (1) provide a network in which public schools and East Carolina University can collaborate, (2) seek to enhance recruitment, retention, and renewal of teachers from pre-service to in-service, (3) provide quality field placements and clinical experiences for teacher education candidates, (4) facilitate the implementation of innovative practices and new initiatives in both public schools and universities, and (5) provide continuous professional development for public schools and university partners.³ In conjunction with providing continuous professional development for public schools and university partners, offering professional development to school media personnel strengthens and enhances the partnership as well as the TRC Outreach Program. With school media personnel recognizing the significance of professional development, a successful project requires peer and administrative support, collaboration, needs

assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Effectiveness and quality of the project were considered key elements throughout the entire planning process. The goal of the project was to create an atmosphere focused on the cooperative sharing of ideas, methods, solutions, resources and materials applicable in the real world of education. In other words, the project must provide participants an opportunity to discuss and address the issues faced by school media personnel in their efforts to meet the goals established by the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study*.

Audience Assessment

With school media personnel targeted as the audience for the event, a major component involved assessing the needs of the group. Following the initial meeting, the members of the planning team agreed that a needs assessment of the projected audience would provide valuable feedback in planning the successful staff development event. Based on previous experiences and the results of an informal needs assessment, the reoccurring recommendation to offer a summit surfaced. A summit would provide an opportunity for school media personnel to share their expertise with each other, while establishing a network of colleagues who would serve as resources in the future. While serving as an assistant principal, Leslie Standerfer gained valuable insight on staff development. In her article, "Staff Development: Finding the Right Fit," she relates how many teachers welcome the chance to share their expertise with colleagues, and many times are insulted when they find themselves as only attendees in the audience rather than participating as facilitators or presenters.⁴ The solicited input gained from school media personnel drove the planning and design from the inception of the summit. Just as author Ellen McCarthy learned from the results of a staff development needs assessment survey given to the Mt. View Alternative High School of Centreville, Virginia, the summit planning team also discovered that school media personnel requested a wide-range of topic interests making the development of the summit appear daunting. However, after reviewing the results closely several topics surfaced indicating a theme-

centered, round table event led by teachers and librarians recognized as experts in the given topic areas.⁵ The summit planning team informally polled eastern North Carolina school media personnel through email correspondences to determine the most appropriate month of the year and day of the week to offer the summit. The majority of respondents recommended January as the best month with Saturday being the most logical day of the week to offer the event. Saturday provided many attendees the opportunity to participate because absence during school days often involved acquiring a substitute and additional planning. To further encourage attendance, school media personnel requested that registration cost be minimal and that continuing education units (CEUs) be offered. The planning team considered and incorporated both recommendations as the summit was planned.

Planning and Implementation

A creative concept and theme can ensure that your conference delivers a clear message and achieves a lasting impression. The title, *Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit*, was agreed upon to promote solidarity amongst school media personnel. Each year a different theme will be chosen to represent the continuity of the conference. The 2006 theme, *Can You Hear Us Now?*, was designed to encourage media personnel to communicate with each other and the educational community at large in order to promote the essential role librarians play in student academic success.

The agenda is often considered one of the most important parts of a conference since it attracts the audience to the event. Gayle Jasso, a professional event planner and consultant, states, "As event coordinators plan the agenda, they need to decide (1) what experiences they want the attendees to have from the time they start their trip to the event to the time they return home, (2) how they want the event to influence the attendees, (3) what they want the attendees to learn as a result of their participation in the event, and (4) what opinions they want the attendees to form as a result of the attendees' experiences during the event."⁶ With this knowledge, the

planning committee organized a one-day Saturday summit. The agenda encompassed registration, opening and closing sessions, four concurrent sessions, morning and afternoon breaks, and an on-site box lunch. Keynote speaker, Frances Bradburn, Director of Institutional Technology for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, set the tone of the summit during the opening session by discussing the implementation of the newly revised *IMPACT: Guidelines for North Carolina Media and Technology Program*. The closing session provided a time of reflection and evaluation ending an informative and exhilarating day.

Research indicates employees have a wide variety of unmet professional and personal needs.⁷ In conjunction with surveying school media personnel, the planning committee reviewed recent conference topics and professional journals to determine additional trends and needs. Topics were chosen by the summit planning committee based on interest to participants, timeliness, and relevance to school media personnel. Summit topics included:

- National Board Certification: You Have Questions? Certified Librarians Have The Answers
- New Librarian: Contract Signed – Now What?
- Grant Writing: Big Bucks Just For the Asking
- Technology + Information Literacy = Successful Students
- IMPACTing your school?
- Making a Difference: Building Relationships with Community Organizations & Agencies
- Library Strategies for Promoting Multicultural Education
- Bull's Eye: Assessing School Media Centers/Facilities

- Collection Development: How to Maintain Control?
- How Inclusive or Exclusive is Your Library Collection?
- 21st Century Learning
- Facilitating English Language Learning via Media Resources
- Super Heroes to the Rescue! (Graphic Novels and Reluctant Readers for Grades 6-12)
- Show Me the Money: Grant Writing
- Using Schools' Media Centers to Provide the Latino/Hispanic Population with a More Sound Education
- Enhancing Teachers Classrooms: Let's Create!
- Joyner Library Teaching Resources Center: See It All (Tour)
- Joyner Library Teaching Resources Center Outreach Program: Free for the Asking
- What's New – NC Wise Owl
- What's New – NC History and Fiction Digital Library
- What's New – Learn NC
- Ask Frances? (A question and answer session with Frances Bradburn, Director of Institutional Technology for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction)
- Ask Evan? (A question and answer session with Evan St. Lifer, Vice President and General Manager of Scholastic Library Publishing)

To provoke informal discussion, a roundtable format was chosen for the *Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit*. Participants were given the opportunity to prioritize their selections based on their needs and interests. Eight roundtable

discussions were offered during each of the four sessions. This format allowed each participant opportunities to contribute thoughts and ideas during the forty-five minute sessions while exchanging information among peers. Within the roundtable format, “What’s New” and “Ask” sessions were incorporated. “What’s New” highlighted technological advances and updates of North Carolina resources, while “Ask” featured a question and answer opportunity with invited speakers, Frances Bradburn, Director of Institutional Technology for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Evan St. Lifer, Vice President and General Manager of Scholastic Library Publishing.

The planning team invited knowledgeable professionals to serve as summit facilitators. The role of facilitator included briefly introducing the topic and providing an overview if necessary, moderating discussion, serving as a resource, guiding participation, posing questions when needed, clarifying questions, and wrapping up the session. In addition to being well-informed and well-spoken, the committee desired a diverse group of practitioners to assist with the sessions. The summit planning team selected individuals representing colleges, universities, public schools, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, education and library consulting firms, and book publishing companies to support the roundtable discussions. To keep the cost of registration minimum, facilitators did not receive monetary payments for their roles in the summit. In order to provide some form of compensation, facilitators received free registration and lunch, the option to participate in sessions, and a small honorarium was offered to those traveling more than fifty miles.

Ambiance can be defined as a feeling or mood associated with a particular place, person, or thing. Positive ambiance is essential to the success of a special event.⁸ From their arrival to departure, participants were surrounded by an environment filled with comfort and ease. The summit planning committee was committed to ensuring the comfort of each participant. Employees of the Teaching Resources Center greeted participants with a warm and friendly smile in the parking area as they directed them to

the building’s entrance. The registration table, staffed by two library employees, was located in the foyer of the facility. Upon registration, each participant received a summit packet which included a name tag, agenda, a confirmation of sessions, building map, registration receipt, pen, notepad, lunch ticket, and a gift bag containing a coffee mug, highlighter, ruler, and product information from Scholastic Library Publishing. For participants interested in earning CEU credits, forms were available at registration. From registration to the closing session, volunteers were strategically placed throughout the building to assist attendees.

Facility

When the concept of hosting a summit was discussed in July 2005, the committee unanimously agreed it should be held in the aesthetically pleasing environment of Joyner Library with as many events as possible scheduled in the Teaching Resources Center. Bringing participants to campus provided the Teaching Resources Center an opportunity to promote its specialized services and resources to school media personnel and other educators in the state, many of whom received library degrees from East Carolina University. For many alumni, attending the summit was their first opportunity to return to ECU and experience the library’s 1999 renovation and expansion project. Unfortunately Joyner Library’s expansion project did not include large multi-purpose rooms or an auditorium; therefore, hosting the Summit during regular operating hours posed a dilemma. Securing space for concurrent sessions was manageable since these sessions primarily consisted of roundtable discussions; however, locating areas for general sessions and lunch for more than 130 individuals required in-depth thought and planning. The committee brainstormed ideas and consulted with the library’s building manager to reach a win-win solution. The luncheon was held in one of the collaborative learning areas within the library. This area provided a pleasant environment for eating, networking, and listening to Evan St. Lifer as he informed participants of trends in school libraries and the book publishing industry. To further enhance the sessions, Scholastic

Library Publishing provided a display of books. The area representative personally selected display titles appropriate for K-12 school media centers, which generated discussion as well as allowed participants a hands-on opportunity to review new materials.

Publicity

Summit organizers designed and mailed a promotional flyer to each school within the Walter and Daisy Carson Latham Clinical Schools Network to announce the date, place, and time as well as purpose of the summit. Organizers also posted announcements on various LISTSERVs and discussion lists in order to promote the *Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit*. To encourage pre-registration, the committee sent packets via electronic communications. These packets contained a registration form, summit agenda, list of sessions, and facilitator biographies. A committee member designed a web site for the summit to provide registration and current information. Registration and communication remained constant until the day of the summit.

Follow-up

The planning team placed handouts from the sessions on the web site along with additional resources beneficial to attendees. After the summit, the committee paid bills and honorariums, and sent letters of appreciation to all guests, facilitators, and volunteers. In addition, emails were sent to all participants with the purpose of thanking them for their attendance, soliciting comments about the summit, and reminding them to return CEU forms for renewal credit.

Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of the total planning process. The evaluation tool used for this summit gathered specific data relating to the goals and objectives of the event with the primary purposes of identifying participants' reactions to the summit and improvements for future summits. Simply stated, the planning committee's desire was to discover what worked, what did not work, what should be changed, and what new ideas developed from the summit.

In response to the committee's need, a summative evaluation form collected quantitative and qualitative data for both the overall summit and sessions. Questions one through six of the evaluation asked respondents to rate each question on a Likert Scale, the most widely used scale in survey research which allows respondents to mark their level of agreement to a statement or question. Questions seven through twelve of the survey were open-ended questions designed to allow lengthy and detailed responses, revealing the emotions behind the facts. Evaluation forms, included in the summit packet given to each facilitator and participant at the registration desk, were concise and could be completed in less than ten minutes. The evaluation form used is included as Appendix A.

Findings

Of the eighty evaluations distributed, forty-four were completed with a return rate of 55%, which is well above the 10-33% average survey return rate.⁹ With the understanding that higher return rates increase the validity of surveys, summit organizers collected questionnaires during the closing session of the event and awarded numerous door prizes as an additional incentive for participants and facilitators to appraise their summit experience. Evaluation results clearly revealed that the initial *Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit* was a major success. Ninety-five percent of the people surveyed rated the presentation of the information and quality of the discussions good or excellent, 98% rated the facility as good or excellent (89% considered the facility excellent), 100% would recommend the summit to a colleague, and 100% of the evaluations received indicated an overall summit rating of good or excellent. As expected, the summit evaluations also contained several suggestions for improvement. These comments were eagerly received by the planning committee and were considered as they discussed ways to replicate successful components as well as ways to improve future summits. Detailed results of the quantitative questions can be found as Appendix B.

Planning for Future Summits

Several weeks following the event, the planning committee members scheduled a post-summit

meeting to interpret all data and discuss the effectiveness of the conference as a whole. This meeting was purposely delayed to allow a period of mature reflection which was essential prior to the appraisal of the one-day event. As expressed by Campbell, Robinson, and Brown, a period of mature reflection must be set aside for those involved in the planning process to celebrate the success of the event and revitalize themselves. Once this occurred, the planning members were able to separate gut reactions from genuine reflection, carefully discuss the relevancy of the summit, and analyze the implications provided from collected data.¹⁰ Based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, as well as observations by the summit planning committee, recommendations included:

- Hold the summit annually
- Extend length of sessions
- Send clearer expectations to facilitators prior to the event
- Continue roundtable format; however, via marketing materials and registration forms, stress that active participation is expected from summit attendees
- Make additional preparation for early arrivers and opening registration rush
- Provide a continental breakfast
- Provide an additional grant session with an overview of the grant writing process, including tips for success
- Invite a well-known author, illustrator, or librarian to serve as luncheon speaker
- Post large informational signs in areas where sessions are being held
- Release faculty and staff of the hosting library from serving as facilitators
- Make available promotional materials, registration information, and summit web page well in advance

- Redesign the evaluation tool
- Schedule additional time to review vendor materials and displays
- Provide backup equipment for facilitators and speakers

Conclusion

Based upon evaluation results, personal comments, telephone calls, electronic correspondences, and letters received from attendees, the initial *Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit* was a successful professional development opportunity for school media personnel. As a result of participating in this summit, attendees collectively gained confidence by establishing networks and knowing that other professionals share similar experiences. Studies indicate school cultures improve when educators commit to professionally share and learn from each other on an ongoing basis; therefore, networking and sharing knowledge among school media personnel is critical.¹¹ Additional research and assessment conducted by members of the Teaching Resources Center identified an important link between collaboration, networking and the *Librarian to Librarian Networking Summit*. Recognizing the value of this professional development, the Teaching Resources Center at East Carolina University in collaboration with Scholastic Library Publishing realized the need for future summits and are committed to providing them annually.

Appendix A: Summit Evaluation Form

Please take a few minutes to complete this evaluation form. Your thoughtful responses will help us improve the quality of future summits.

1) Please rate presentation of the information and quality of round table discussion.

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Somewhat Poor
- Not Applicable

2) Please rate the materials and handouts provided.

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Somewhat Poor
- Not Applicable

3) Please rate the facilities.

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Somewhat Poor
- Not Applicable

4) Overall, how would you rate this summit?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Somewhat Poor
- Not Applicable

5) Would you recommend this summit to a colleague?

- Definitely
- Very Probably
- Probably
- Possibly
- Probably Not
- Very Probably Not

6) Did the summit meet your expectations?

- To a Great Extent
- Somewhat
- Very Little
- Not at All

7) Which session did you like most and why?

8) Which session did you like least and why?

9) How can we improve future summits?

10) Please share any ideas for future sessions you may have.

11) Would you be willing to facilitate a session next year? If so, on what topic?

12) Please feel free to share any additional comments.

Appendix B: Summary of Quantitative Evaluation Questions

Please rate presentation of the information and quality of round table discussions.

55%	Excellent
41%	Good
4%	Fair
0%	Somewhat Poor
0%	Poor
0%	Not Applicable

Please rate the materials and handouts provided.

34%	Excellent
48%	Good
11%	Fair
0%	Somewhat Poor
0%	Poor
7%	Not Applicable

Please rate the facilities.

89%	Excellent
9%	Good
2%	Fair
0%	Somewhat Poor
0%	Poor
0%	Not Applicable

Overall, how would you rate this summit?

70 %	Excellent
30%	Good
0%	Fair
0%	Somewhat Poor
0%	Poor
0%	Not Applicable

Would you recommend this summit to a colleague?

73%	Definitely
27%	Very Probable
0%	Probable
0%	Possibly
0%	Probably Not
0%	Very Probably Not

Did the summit meet your expectations?

66%	To a Great Extent
34%	Somewhat
0%	Very Little
0%	Not at All

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