Chapter Eight:
Tech Savvy Library Professionals: Competencies, Training, and Development for New Media Library Initiatives

by Jennifer L. Hopwood, Southern Maryland Regional Library Association

As technology advances, user manuals keep getting smaller and smaller; oftentimes new devices come with no manual at all. The user is expected to look at a company's website for information on how to use a device or to figure it out on their own. This is no problem for someone who is tech savvy, but for the novice user this can be a daunting experience. Many members of the communities our libraries serve, as well as some library staff tasked with assisting community members, fall into the category of "novice users" when it comes to new media and other emerging technologies.

Library staff need to be tech savvy in order to be able to address community technology questions; nothing makes an organization look less relevant to community stakeholders than a staff member who says they don't know or can't help. Additionally, library staff must be tech savvy with regard to the library's own internal technology, including projectors, computers, databases, and, increasingly, new media. Staff that work towards building upon their personal technology competence are more productive, successful, and have more opportunity for advancement.

New media and other technology changes at such a rapid pace that what is trending one day might not continue the next. Not only does staff need to be knowledgeable of current technology trends and advances, but they also need to keep up to date on any changes that reflect on their profession or fall within the scope of their duties.

This chapter explores a range of training models, training facilitation practices, and informal learning opportunities as related to developing and strengthening the new media competencies of library staff serving children and families. This chapter draws from the author's professional experiences as a trainer and training facilitator.

What Does New Media Have to Do with Training for Youth Staff?

Storytimes are designed to prepare young children for school readiness through the introduction of literacy

concepts and socialization. However, schooling has changed since the days of the early children's librarianship pioneers. Many school systems have already begun to incorporate 1:1 device programs and coding classes into their standard curriculum, many of which start as early as kindergarten. SMART Boards are used in classrooms across the country. Parents have already adapted the use of mobile technology into their regular routines. School readiness now includes digital competencies. In order for libraries to help children develop these digital competencies needed for school readiness, library staff serving youth must also possess digital competencies.

Facilitating New Media Training

In a perfect world, library systems would all have designated staff training experts who can devote their time 100% to staff training and nothing else. Unfortunately, we do not live in this perfect world, and training often falls to a range of staff at an institution, many of whom may have little background in training methods. Even if you are not fully immersed in the taxonomy or pedagogy of adult learning styles or professional development, however, by utilizing the information below, even the training layperson can implement a successful technology training program.

Competencies

In order to prepare staff to be successful when assisting patrons with new media and other technology questions and troubleshooting, or even to use technology as part of their own daily duties, organizations need to develop technical competencies. Competencies are designed not as specific skills or tasks, but as those characteristics that a successful employee needs to be able to perform. By supporting and developing these competencies, organizations can assess where staff have competency gaps—which can also help alert library supervisors to areas in which supplemental training is needed. Competencies assessment also relays to staff those characteristics that the organization considers important to job performance.

Some core competencies for library staff include:
- Technical knowledge
  - Understanding and use of various technology applications and devices
  - Subject matter understanding for the application of the device being used
- Problem Solving & Prevention
  - Reviewing, replicating, and drawing conclusions based on given information
  - Recognizing, exploring, and using a broad range of skills to think logically about a situation
  - Conceptualizing and developing frameworks and practices for best usability and understanding
  - Ability to recognize needed action in various situations
- Communication
  - Communicating information, observations, and conclusions for best understanding and actionability

- Ability to present information orally to achieve intended purposes
- Ability to prepare written material that is appropriate for the intended audience and achieves its purposes
- Ability to gather information from individuals and groups regarding insights on methods and applications
- Accountability
  - Knowing own limitations and recognizing areas needing improvement
  - Continuous education toward increasing knowledge base

Surveying staff is a great way to assess current levels of competence with regard to new media and other technology. This type of survey should ask staff to list their knowledge, skills, and abilities as they relate to specific types of technology. Once you know your current staff competencies, you can begin developing a plan to address the gaps. Some ways to develop these competencies in staff include on the job training, coaching from supervisors, peer to peer discussions, attending conferences, participating in hands-on training, reading about the topic, and watching demonstrations.

Adult Learning Styles

When training adults on how to use new media (or any other technology or skill, for that matter), it is important to take into consideration adult learning styles. Learning styles are the common ways that people learn. Some of these types are:

- Visual - The learner prefers images, pictures, and spatially-based instruction.
- Auditory - The learner prefers spoken word instruction, like lectures.
- Verbal - The learner prefers both spoken and written instruction.
- Kinesthetic - The learner prefers a hands-on approach to learning.
- Logical - The learner prefers reasoning or problem solving-based learning, like puzzles.
- Interpersonal - The learner prefers social situations, like group work.
- Intrapersonal - The learner prefers solitary approaches to learning, like self-study.

As an instructor or trainer, it is best to use a mix of these types of learning styles, as all learners best acquire knowledge and skills at their own pace with their own preferred style. As a learner, it is best to seek out learning situations that best match your preferred style so that you can better retain the learned information.

As a trainer, it is best to develop consistent training programs for both staff and patrons. This consistency can ensure that all learners receive the same information no matter who the trainer is or when they are trained. One way to accomplish training consistency is by developing detailed training scripts or facilitator guides so that all trainings take the same format and include the same information. The script should contain the verbiage a trainer will use in each session right down to the smallest details, like the location of the on/off button on a given device. By including such detailed information, the trainer can

guarantee that nothing is left out of the explanation, which is helpful when multiple session run together and trainers may not remember what has already been relayed to trainees in a given session. While ideally trainers will have reviewed and practiced a training script in advance of a session, a good script is such that any staff member can pick up and begin teaching even if they have no experience with the device, system, or service. Additionally, if you opt to use student workbooks in your training sessions, it is a good idea to include excerpts from the workbooks in the scripts.

Project Management

Project Management is a big part of every training session. It is a good idea to develop a list of tasks associated with the training to ensure that no details or elements are accidentally neglected. The author of this chapter prefers checklists with items in chronological order of which tasks need to be accomplished first.

One of the most important aspects of preparing for any training session is to practice. It is never a good idea to try to improvise or "wing" a training session. Taking the time to review training scripts and to do a full run-through of the training session can make the difference between a session filled with mishaps and a successful training session. It is okay for the trainer to not know the answer to every question posed in a session, but the trainer should be prepared to answer basic questions and to provide follow-up feedback after the session for those questions that cannot be answered right away.

Types of Professional Development Experiences

Training can be delivered in a variety of formats. The type of training utilized by an organization will depend on the content that is being taught. Just as not all media is suitable for all users, training formats are also not one size fits all. The type of training format used will depend on the content that is being taught.

A face to face workshop, sometimes referred to as F2F, is a live workshop with a presenter/trainer on site. Examples of face to face trainings are job shadowing, attending conferences, or seminars. Virtual trainings, in contrast, take place in online environments like webinars or virtual chats. Virtual trainings can be synchronous, which means it is a live environment taking place in a chat room or virtual classroom. Asynchronous classes are ones that can be done at the student's own pace and when convenient for the student. Asynchronous classes often make heavy use of learner discussion boards since learners do not have the benefit of meeting in a live environment. Both synchronous and asynchronous classes use a mix of virtual classroom tools in addition to discussion boards. These tools can be class wikis, electronic mailing lists, blogs, simulators, and other aspects of a learning commons.

Whether the format is F2F or virtual, there are ultimately two types of training: active and passive. Active training is very interactive with group discussion, simulations like role playing, and/or elements of gamification. It is the ideal environment for kinesthetic learners. Passive learning is the more traditional

experience when it comes to workplace training. Examples of this type of training are demonstrations, lectures, reading handouts, and panel discussion. An effective training session will have a mix of both active and passive activities to fit all learning types. This variation holds true whether it is a face to face training or a virtual training. It is a good idea to vary activities every ten minutes or so; this keeps the learning fresh and also helps participants stay interested and engaged in the content. Having a mix of different activities is also a good way to make sure that there is something for all learning styles.

Networking for Professional Development

Not all learning takes place in a classroom or workshop environment. These are just one part of the learner's Personal Learning Environment (PLE). A PLE is a combination of tools, places, and other materials that help individuals gain knowledge about a subject that is important to them. There is also substantial overlap between the professional and the personal. Just as the name implies, a PLE is a very personal environment and may be different for each learner. Some learners are more traditional and may include the library, books, and work as part of their PLE. Others may include the use of apps, listservs, and social media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest.

Just as important as the what and the where, the who is another important part of the PLE. The learner's Personal Learning Network (PLN) is made up of people in their PLEs. In other words, these are the people at work they go to

for answers, the Twitter users they follow, or the people in the associations they join.

We as professionals do not exist in bubbles; we should not assume that our learning does either. While it is a great idea to include in your PLN people that are in the same field as you, this practice can also be very constricting for the innovation of ideas. The cross sharing of information across fields and disciplines can sometimes provide a new aspect of learning or new skills that might not have been considered before. It is a good idea to include a variety of people in your network. You do not need to have met a person in real life for them to be included in your PLN.

Examples of New Media Training Opportunities

In addition to formal face to face and/or virtual trainings in new media as outlined above, many professionals have access to, or can facilitate, a range of other types of training opportunities specific to new media technology and related skills.

Professional Development Book Clubs

Just as you want to network with people outside your particular specialty, you also want to read outside of it. Professional Development Book Clubs are a great way to network with other people, but they are also a good way to build your learning. Most Professional Development Book Clubs focus on reading leadership materials, but they really can be on any subject geared around improving your professional self. This includes reading and discussing books about new media.

To host a professional development book club, identify a core group of potential participants who may be interested in developing knowledge and skills through reading and discussion. Identify books that address some of the desired areas for learning of the group. Schedule a meeting for the book club that allows participants time to complete the assigned book in advance. Discuss the book, its related skills, and its implications for library practice at the meeting.

New Media Unconferences

An unconference is a participant-driven event where the attendees create the agenda at the start of the event. There are no formal speakers or trainers; anyone in attendance can lead and/or facilitate a discussion. At a New Media Unconference, the discussions would all be centered on the topic of New Media. All attendees are expected to contribute to the conversation in some way, whether it is to ask questions or to offer thoughts and tips from professional experience. It is acceptable to bring presentation materials or to prepare ahead of time to lead a discussion at an unconference, but discussions should be organic. Be prepared for the conversation to lead where the session goes.

To host a new media unconference, first choose a location and date for the event. Share these details with professionals in the area, be it within a library system, a consortium, a regional network, and/or a state association; the earlier the date of the unconference is shared, the more likely area professionals will be able to prioritize attending. Correspond with professionals who plan to attend the unconference to determine their main learning outcomes for the event. For example, in asking participants what topics they want to discuss during the unconference, the facilitator may identify that new media, storytimes, and early literacy skills are the main areas of learning interest among attendees. On the day of the unconference, offer sessions centered around discussing these chosen topics. Designate a session discussion leader (who will guide discussion, keep the session moving, and given all attendees an opportunity to speak) as well as a notetaker (who will capture the information shared in the session) for each session. Share the notes from all sessions with attendees after the unconference.

Digital Petting Zoos

Digital Petting Zoos are opportunities to use a variety of devices and technology in a hands-on environment. It is a chance to see devices first hand and ask questions of other users. A Digital Petting Zoo can also be paired with a larger event as an extension of the learning to allow participants to try out what they have learned.

Libraries can use Digital Petting Zoos as a chance for staff to test new technology and discuss how these devices can be implemented into programming or offering better services. If a large scale event is not possible, having devices that float around the library system for staff use also allows the same opportunities for staff to gain hands-on experience and to appeal to those users that prefer to try something out in addition to watching a video on its use.

Observing New Media in Action

While watching a demonstration at a conference can be a great way to learn how to implement the use of new media into library programs, nothing beats actually observing it being used in a real setting. Many of those who use new media are also advocates and would gladly welcome other library professionals observing their storytimes or other programming. Reach out to your PLN in your area to ask if anyone has plans to host a new media program that you can observe.

Conclusion

While new media is exciting and considered by many to be innovative and a part of the future of libraries, it is important to remember that individual libraries all have different communities and different needs. What works for one library will not necessarily work for all libraries. The same can be said of learners of new media; not all learners possess the same foundation of knowledge or skills and/or comfort of use for new media and other emerging technologies. Having a well-trained, tech savvy staff is the foundation that is needed before any new media project can fully begin. It is important to learn as much as possible, assess the needs of the community and staff, and to implement a training program that best serves both the individual and the institution's goals so that any implementation of new media in the library is both intentional and supported by staff competency.

Resources for Further Reading

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