



BACK TO THE FUTURE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Marge Cox

margecox@gmail.com

Evolution in PD Options

Back to the Future, the 1985 movie, showed what life could look like with the possibility of time travel. As an educator for thirty-four years, I feel like I've seen great changes in our field since I started in the 1970s. I can only imagine what life will look like in future decades for educators just beginning their careers now.

"Lifelong learning"—type those words into a search engine, and you will get back more than nineteen thousand hits. As school librarians, my guess is we all believe in it, but how does it look in the twenty-first century? Do we learn differently now than we did fifteen or twenty years ago? According to the *Schools and Staffing Survey*, the 2011–2012 data showed the average age of a United States public educator as 42.4 (U.S. Dept. of Education 2012). That finding indicates

that most of us have been in the education business for a few years. If you are close to that average age, the ways you received professional development (PD) when you started teaching and how you get it now probably look different. If you're newer to the profession, let me give you a quick trip back through time.

"Sit and Get" Conferences

I'm a second-generation educator, and I can remember going to educational conferences as a child with my parents in the 1950s. We got dressed up and went to the state capital for an annual event held over two days of all-day meetings. Occasionally, we visited a school but generally we were in "sit and get" gatherings. A renowned lecturer might be brought in to add excitement. (I did see Eleanor Roosevelt at one of those meetings.) My parents attended the conferences faithfully every year because they felt like it was their professional duty to be there. I'm not sure how much the

experience actually affected their day-to-day teaching.

As a beginning educator in the 1970s, I found a big change from what my parents experienced; the meetings were held regionally throughout the state. I didn't travel as far, but the format was very much the same: listening to a speaker. School staff meetings were mostly used for communication of policies and procedures, and didn't offer much in terms of instructional support. Did I learn something from those experiences? Yes. I believe it is my responsibility to learn from every experience I have. When I went to the state regional conferences, I met other people in the field and heard about what life was like in their schools. It was good to see how other educators handled the same concerns I had. Networking, even in the most basic form, provides the opportunity to learn from other professionals. Were the staff meetings inspirational? Not exactly.

However, I did learn to listen and better understand the teachers with whom I worked. We developed an informal group that some days met for breakfast, happy hours after work, and, eventually, in our homes.

The small group that I got to know best was bound by a commitment to students and a desire to do our best, even though we were new to the profession. While my first school did have a formal mentor program, an older teacher with whom I carpooled most affected my teaching. She listened to me, laughed with me, and encouraged me. The relationships from that first teaching job have lasted more than forty years. If you're a fairly new educator, look for positive like-minded staff members. Don't waste your time on the people sending out negative vibes. You won't change them, and they will drain your energy. If you're an experienced educator, who can you help become a better educator? Your years of experience can not only benefit your students, but also the newer teachers on your staff. As school library professionals, we have the wonderful opportunity to work with the entire staff. This circumstance provides us with the chance to get to know them better than most of the other staff members do. We can help set the tone for the school.

Since that first teaching job, I've enjoyed a variety of PD opportunities. Each has provided a worthwhile experience. Consider the possibilities available to you today.

Variety of Associations and Perspectives

Get involved in state and national associations that support library professionals, reading, and technology. Each organization offers a unique perspective about a portion of our job. This

involvement is a little like looking through a kaleidoscope. Each time it is turned, we see a slightly different view. This variety of perspectives is important because our school library positions require us to be experts in a broad range of areas. Start with the group that specifically supports school library professionals. If you're new to your state, find the group by entering "school librarians," "association," and the state name in a search engine. Go to the organization's website. If they have an online discussion list, sign up for it. See what types of programs are offered. Find out when the state conference is held. Does the organization have regional meetings? A periodical? You'll learn something from each opportunity offered. Of course, the national association will give an even broader view of the field. Belonging to AASL, our national organization, provides a great connection to school library professionals across the country. The AASL National Conference and Exhibition is held every two years. I believe the cost of attending is money well spent—and I'm really financially conservative. The networking and concurrent sessions provide a broad view of our field. The exhibits give a look at materials to consider for your facility and the opportunity to test them hands-on.

The International Literacy Association (ILA) (formerly the International Reading Association) focuses on exciting children about reading. ILA makes a great connecting association for us. When I attended my state's ILA affiliate, I heard wonderful authors. That experience helped me to build a bridge from my students to the written word. I saw sessions that helped me better understand a classroom teacher's point of view. The state and national publications give in-depth information that

helps us do our job of exciting youngsters about books. *Editor's note: URLs for resources mentioned in this article are in the Recommended Resources list following this article.*

For more information about technology, get in touch with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and the affiliate in your state. ISTE conferences and publications give in-depth perspectives about the wide range of technology opportunities. While AASL definitely supports reading and technology, I meet different people at the ILA and ISTE conferences, and see distinctive authors in their publications. I'm a better school librarian because I also hear the voices in those organizations. My participation in organizations for other types of educators also gives me an opportunity to share the school librarian's point of view.

Too often, classroom teachers and technology specialists don't have a clear view of us and how we can collaborate with them. Networking is always a priority for me. Telling our library story is a responsibility we all have, and I learn so much from others while I spread the word about ways school librarians can support and collaborate with other educators. Be sure to look at the books these organizations publish. They are worth your professional time to read and reflect on.


If you were a classroom teacher before you were a school librarian you may have participated in content-area organizations. They are still good ways to get ideas for teaching specific curriculum. If you work with young children investigate the National Association for the Education of Young Children. It provides information about development of our youngest students. The National Council

of Teachers of Mathematics offers lesson plans that can be adapted for use in the school library. A plethora of great mathematics books are available for elementary children, and sharing these books with our students gives them a new appreciation for reading-aloud time. The National Science Teachers Association creates a list of outstanding science books each year; this list can help us with collection development. The same can be said for the National Council for the Social Studies, which puts together a list of Notable [Social Studies] Tradebooks for Young People. The National Council of Teachers of English offers an online community that gives the opportunity to interact with other professionals that care deeply about literature. We need to be sure administrators have the opportunity to know and understand what we do, and one way to provide those opportunities is to write for their organizations and present at their conferences. Be a voice for school librarians by getting involved in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.


Listening to the needs of educators outside the library field helped me be better at my job. Hearing all of these perspectives allowed me to “walk a mile in the shoes” of the content-area specialists and administrators, and helped them to have more respect for me because I could talk their language. It was a win-win situation.

LIS Journals

Another way to polish my professional skills is by reading professional journals in the LIS field. Just as our profession has changed over time, so have the magazines that support it. Print versions still exist, but online choices give a 21st-century look to



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WE NEED TO BE SURE ADMINISTRATORS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND WHAT WE DO, AND ONE WAY TO PROVIDE THOSE OPPORTUNITIES IS TO WRITE FOR THEIR ORGANIZATIONS AND PRESENT AT THEIR CONFERENCES. BE A VOICE FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIANS BY GETTING INVOLVED IN THE ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT.

some old favorites. Our professional organization provides a good range of materials to help us in our jobs. American Library Association publishes *Booklist*, *Book Links*, *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, *School Library Research*, and *Knowledge Quest*. Each of them has a special focus but can be helpful as we meet multiple needs.

Of course, several corporate-owned magazines are published, too. *Horn Book* includes articles, reviews, and blogs. *Internet@Schools* contains many articles focused on how the Internet and Web can be used for educational purposes. *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal* are both published by the same company. While I've read both, I like *SLJ*'s focus on schools. In the interest of full disclosure, I've previously written for the next two titles: *Library Media Connection* and *School Library Monthly*. I read them because I find their articles and reviews helpful in my professional work. Get more good information from *Teacher Librarian*. As a profession, we are blessed with a variety of good support materials. Try them out and see which ones best serve you and your clientele. As you plan your budget, be sure to plan for a professional journal for yourself. Reading reviews is critical in collection development, and the articles keep you current about the hot topics in our field.

Workshops and Courses at Colleges and Other Institutions

Last summer, I found a picture of my mother as an attendee at a college workshop in the 1950s. Obviously, the opportunity has been around for a while. However, when is the last time you've checked out what an institution of higher learning offers? Often workshops are available, and taking a class because you are interested in the topic

feels a lot different (better!) than taking it because it is required for a specific major. Some of my most pleasant professional development came when I attended children's literature conferences on different college campuses. I've picked up technology tips from summer university workshops. Check the websites of colleges and universities close to you to see what they plan to offer. These workshops and courses also provide a good way to network. I usually meet some new people at these events.

Some organizations provide professional development as their primary mission. Depending upon the part of the country you live in, you will have the opportunity to go to the seminars they offer. The Bureau of Education and Research (BER) provides PD opportunities on a variety of topics, and some of them can be helpful to you. I've been to several BER sessions and found the print materials worthwhile and the day entertaining and educational. Staff Development for Educators also offers a variety of resources, including face-to-face sessions, online courses, and printed materials.

You will also find companies and institutions that offer PD as part of their mission. The Library of Congress provides summer workshops targeted at educators. I've attended some of their workshops and found they really stretched me as an educator. Networking with educators from across our country was one of the high points of the experience. The Smithsonian also offers opportunities for teachers. I've never attended one of their training events, but I hope to do so in the future. I love the museums, and I can see potential for connecting my students, curriculum, and the museum. I have used Heinemann print materials for

years. Now this publisher offers PD services. I've not yet attended one of their workshops, but the quality of their print material leads me to believe that they will offer useful PD. More than likely in your state, the state library provides some type of PD opportunities, too. I've been to events in two different states and found them worthwhile. Look at state libraries' calendars and see which topics will be most helpful to you in your role.

So far, most of the opportunities mentioned could have been available to previous educators, though certainly not in the numbers available to us today. Now we have electronic choices that couldn't have been possible without the Internet. We have webinars, online discussion lists, blogs, and wikis. These really define the 21st-century learner. When my parents were teachers, they went to a PD conference. When I started teaching, some print materials were available, and I also went to conferences. Now, I can sit in my home and continue to polish my skills.

Electronic Options

One of the choices that I use every day is LM.NET. This listserv was started to give a voice to school librarians. The expertise that people share and the sense of collegiality make it one of the first resources I suggest to new school librarians. They can learn so much just by reading it. I've been on it for years, but post only occasionally. I've found the answers to be thoughtful and professional. The AASL Forum is sponsored by ALA and offers the opportunity for AASL members to discuss pertinent topics. Another great use of your ALA membership dollars is AASL eCOLLAB. This members-only site provides so many opportunities to grow professionally. Choose a webcast, a podcast, or get

some ideas for lesson plans. You have numerous options to get new ideas about our amazing profession.

The webinars available now would be mind boggling to previous generations of educators. Some webinars are created by companies to help train users of their products. Britannica offers numerous webinars as does PBS. If you use their materials, it is worth your time to take a look. You will probably find that online support is offered for whatever Britannica or PBS resources your school uses. My school uses Mimio products, and the Mimio site offers numerous ways to learn more about using the products effectively. EdWeb is an online social and learning network; webinars, research reports, and access to online forums are available through the website. You can also sign up for an e-newsletter.

If you're interested in trying a free online course, check out Coursera. I've taken one of their courses and found it worthwhile. SimpleK12 also offers online training. I've taken several of their classes. They are quick and offer good hands-on tips. Of course, you couldn't have this discussion without mentioning YouTube. This site includes videos on almost any topic; I find the Teaching Channel videos especially useful.

With electronics being available in the majority of American homes and schools, blogs and wikis have become very prevalent. They are a quick way to provide and get information. Knowing the expertise of the poster and the posting dates is essential. The TL Virtual Café lets you join free events focused on media needs. Check the website to see what the topics will be on Twitter and visit through Blackboard Collaborate. These sites will also get you started on some great places to learn

more electronically. OnlineCollege.org recently updated its list of best blogs for school librarians; I encourage you to look to see which would be the best additions to your personal learning environment. The “ALA Blogs, RSS Feeds, and Wikis” page offers a list of choices that are specific to our profession. Kathy Schrock’s Guide to Everything includes her *Kaffeeklatsch* blog and Kathy’s list of favorite ed tech blogs. She is one of the people in our field who continues to share her expertise after many years and keeps it fresh. Another person who provides great information year after year is Joyce Valenza. Her webpage starts a trip through numerous electronic resources. For a list of additional choices, explore the School Library Bloggers list on Wikispaces. You will surely find something that fits your needs.

Additional electronic choices, though not targeted specifically to school librarians, can certainly be useful. My guess is you are familiar with Skype, Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter. They can be fun sites for personal interests, but they can be great professional sources, too. My students and I Skyped with an author in England. The author and illustrator Facebook pages that

let me learn even more about my favorite creators make it one of my favorite sources. Pinterest lets me search for topics that interest me and see how others have addressed them. One of my district science directors says when he goes on Twitter, he learns things that make him smarter. What more could I want from any source?

Twenty-first century professional development lets me use some of the strategies that I used in the twentieth century. I can go to a conference, read a print book or journal, or talk to fellow teachers in my school. Face-to-face experiences provide wonderful opportunities to interact and learn. However, the new options enabled by technology offer me possibilities that previous educators couldn’t have imagined. I can learn from people literally around the world and in real time. I’m grateful for the choices I have, but now I have to think about the time involved. We really could spend twenty-four hours a day doing PD—but that approach isn’t practical. So now, this generation of educators gets to choose where to spend a lot of their PD time. On a recent Saturday, at the request of my principal, I attended a workshop for one of the products that my

school uses. The good news was I didn’t have to pay for registration, but, of course, the day spent at the workshop was my gift to the school. The room was filled with other educators who were there under the same conditions. As the day ended, I said to the person representing the company, “Generally, today’s young teachers want easily accessible PD at their beck and call, not an all-day workshop. If you want the business to grow, you are going to need to change how you do business.” He looked at me and grinned. “I know,” he said. “We began online training just a few months ago. I’ll let your principal know about it.”

Buffet of Choices

If I, a seasoned professional, want more online training, imagine how members of the younger generation of teachers feels. When I started teaching in the 1970s, I would never have dreamed of the possibilities that I have at my fingertips today. It does indeed sometimes feel like time travel that would make the characters of *Back to the Future* jealous. Enjoy the buffet of choices and then choose those things that make you smarter and help you to provide better services to your staff and students.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LETS ME USE SOME OF THE STRATEGIES THAT I USED IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. I CAN GO TO A CONFERENCE, READ A PRINT BOOK OR JOURNAL, OR TALK TO FELLOW TEACHERS IN MY SCHOOL.



Marge Cox *previously served on the AASL Library Program of the Year Award committee. She is co-author of*

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(accessed November 9, 2014).

Recommended Resources:

ALA Blogs, RSS Feeds, and
Wikis: <[www.ala.org/Template.
cfm?Section=News&template=
cfapps/xml/pr_inst.html](http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=News&template=/cfapps/xml/pr_inst.html)>
AASL eCOLLAB: <[www.ala.org/aasl/
ecollab](http://www.ala.org/aasl/ecollab)>
AASLForum: <[www.ala.org/aasl/
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Book Links: <[www.booklistonline.
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Britannica Digital Learning: <[http://
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Bureau of Education and Research:
<www.ber.org>
Coursera: <www.coursera.org>
edWeb: <<http://home.edweb.net>>
Heinemann: <[www.heinemann.com/
PD/default.aspx](http://www.heinemann.com/PD/default.aspx)>
Horn Book: <www.hbook.com>
International Literacy Association:
<www.reading.org>
International Society for Technology
in Education: <www.iste.org>
Internet @ Schools: <[www.
mmischools.com](http://www.mmischools.com)>
*Journal of Research on Libraries and Young
Adults*: <www.yalsa.ala.org/jrly>
Joyce Valenza's Homepage:
<[www.learnnc.org/lp/
external/3298?ref=search](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/external/3298?ref=search)>
Kathy Schrock's Guide to
Everything: <[www.schrockguide.
net](http://www.schrockguide.net)>

Knowledge Quest: <[http://
knowledgequest.aasl.org](http://knowledgequest.aasl.org)>

Library Journal: <[http://
lj.libraryjournal.com/#_](http://lj.libraryjournal.com/#_)>

Library Media Connection: <[www.
librarymediaconnection.com](http://www.librarymediaconnection.com)>

Library of Congress: <[www.loc.gov/
education](http://www.loc.gov/education)>

LM_NET: <[http://lmnet.wordpress.
com/subscribe](http://lmnet.wordpress.com/subscribe)>

MimioConnect: <[www.
mimioconnect.com](http://www.mimioconnect.com)>

National Association for the
Education of Young Children:
<www.naeyc.org>

National Council for the Social
Studies: <www.socialstudies.org>

National Council of Teachers of
English: <www.ncte.org>

National Council of Teachers of
Mathematics: <www.nctm.org>

National Science Teachers
Association: <www.nsta.org>

OnlineCollege.org:
<[www.onlinecollege.
org/2012/07/10/100-best-blogs-
school-librarians](http://www.onlinecollege.org/2012/07/10/100-best-blogs-school-librarians)>

PBS Learning Media: <[www.
pbslearningmedia.org](http://www.pbslearningmedia.org)>

School Library Bloggers:
<[schoollibrarywebsites.wikispaces.
com/SchoolLibraryBloggers](http://schoollibrarywebsites.wikispaces.com/SchoolLibraryBloggers)>

School Library Monthly: <[www.
schoollibrarymonthly.com/index.
html](http://www.schoollibrarymonthly.com/index.html)>

School Library Research: <[www.ala.org/
aasl/slr](http://www.ala.org/aasl/slr)>

SimpleK12: <www.simplek12.com>

Smithsonian: <[www.si.edu/
Educators](http://www.si.edu/Educators)>

Staff Development for Educators:
<www.sde.com>

Teacher Librarian: <[www.
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TL Virtual Café: <[http://
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YouTube: <[www.youtube.com/user/
TeachingChannel](http://www.youtube.com/user/TeachingChannel)>