

Blueprint for Educational Excellence National Institute

By Chris Steinhauer, Coolidge Middle School, Reading

Professional development is an important part of being a Librarian. OK, I confess, I love professional development. I like to learn about new things. I love to share new things with my colleagues. This spring I experienced two days of some of the best professional development I have ever attended. I had the opportunity to participate in the Blueprint for Educational Excellence National Institute, presented by the Reading Public Schools and Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence.



The Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Organization <http://www.blueribbonschools.com/> is committed to helping schools ensure that all students achieve their highest potential. In 2004, the Coolidge Middle School in Reading was awarded the Lighthouse School award for Teamwork. This was my first year with the Reading Public School district as the Coolidge Middle School's Library Teacher. I had the opportunity to participate in all of the award ceremonies, and to attend the national conference the next year. At that time, our school district made a commitment to excellence. The goal was to host a Blueprint for Excellence National Institute in Reading. This spring, five years after setting that goal, it was realized.

The first day of the conference included morning visits to various schools in our district with the afternoon focused on workshops. Topics included offerings from SMART Technologies, Cyber Safety, run by the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, and 21st Century Skills.

The second day started out with a keynote presentation with Will Richardson followed by a series of smaller workshops. I am proud to say that I, along with all of the other librarians in the district, presented a variety of workshops with topics ranging from technology integration and collaboration, 21st Century Skills, new literature, and classroom demonstrations of several emerging technologies such as wikis, blogs, Twitter, VoiceThread, podcasting, PhotoStory, and Oovoo (Online Video Conferencing).

The highlight of the two days was attending a "non-workshop" with Will Richardson. In this session we were allowed to just ask questions, make comments, have a conversation about anything we wanted. This was the last session of the day. The classroom was full of teachers with laptops, online, chatting about whatever we wanted to. Will connected to his Oovoo account and his Twitter and instantly we were "Global", communicating with teachers from all over the world. Yes, I mean the world, as we had teachers from Asia, South America, and across the US, adding to our conversation. I even recognized a few of them- have you heard of *Bud the Teacher*? He follows Will on Twitter, and was instantly a part of our discussion. The hour we spent "chatting" was, for lack of a better word, Awesome. It was a demonstration of what the future holds. It was the connection of people with the common goal of academic excellence, having a conversation, asking questions, contributing thoughts, and just being aware of each other. It was a look at what can be done with the 21st Century tools we have today. I still don't have my head completely around Twitter, but then again it took me a while to figure out Facebook, and now I use it daily. I still don't have Oovoo up and running at my school (filters keep getting in the way), but now I know about them and their potential and am making plans with teachers for the upcoming year. I am giving it all a try; introducing applications to teachers and students and running as fast as I can to keep up. Oh, and did I mention that all of the applications I have mentioned are free downloads?

So, as I mentioned before, I love professional development, and this conference was one of the best. If you ever have the chance to attend a The Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence conference, I would highly recommend it. Likewise, if you ever have the chance to attend a workshop with Will Richardson, take it. You can also follow Will through his blog [Weblog-ed: http://weblog-ed.com/](http://weblog-ed.com/)

Surviving & Thriving:
Tips we Share

Special Collection Shelf Placeholders

Using empty DVD cases with book covers slid in the front and spine labels on the side as placeholders, for books shelved in other areas. For instance, the English department teachers wanted me to put Multicultural Fiction on a separate shelf entitled Global Collection to go with a new part of the English Curriculum.

So if a student goes to look for it in Fiction, they will find a "dummy book" DVD case which directs them to the Global Shelf - with a florescent label. Then all the multicultural books have fluorescent labels so the kids can see them at a glance as different from the other labels.

I called Blockbuster Video and they donated more than enough blank cases to me for the project.

~Submitted by
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