

Applications in the Workplace

Development of English Department Website

December 2006-Ongoing

Experience Description

This has been something I have wanted to work on for quite a while, but to be honest never found the time. We have Professional Learning Committees (PLC) at [redacted] and the English department is one of those PLCs; we meet about once every other month for 2 hours. At the end of last year we met with the [redacted] Junior High English teachers to discuss the possibility of combining forces to align what we teach. Everyone agreed this was needed. If you look at the English Language standards there is too much overlap. I really noticed this last year when I spent half of my day at [redacted] teaching ninth graders then returning to the high school to teach sophomores. I saw eighth grade teachers struggling to teach students how to do a complete research paper. Was this struggle really necessary? It all came down to how you interpret the standards. After some long discussions we decided we would splinter into cross-building teams. (We first needed to get the approval of our principals and curriculum director since we were effectively changing the makeup of the PLC for half of our contractual hours. They liked the idea and permitted us a trial year.) With approval in hand, we broke into four groups: Grammar, Research, Electronic Portfolios, and Web Page creation. We all volunteered for a committee, well all except me—I was assigned to the Web Page since I was the only one who even knew where to start. That was ok, like I said; this was one of my goals anyway. We were excited to get this project started.

I met with Cindy [redacted], the English department chair and fellow committee member, along with Kelli [redacted], yes, that's her real name, and Alan [redacted], teachers from [redacted]. At the initial meeting I suggested we either use Word or Dreamweaver to create the web page since I was most comfortable with those programs. I choose Dreamweaver since I had just used it; Cindy agreed, as did Kelli and Alan. We brainstormed about what we would like to see on the page and surfed the net for other English department sites to get a feel of style and content.

After that initial meeting Cindy and I became a committee of two. The [redacted] teachers thought their contribution was helping to determine what was going to go on the site, and that was all. They planned their contractual hours without allowing time for the website, so we were on our own.

Cindy and I met *many* times over the next few months, creating a philosophy statement, designing the look of the site, finding pages to link, adding/subtracting content, generally making changes every time we met or presented it to the high school English department staff. I was pleased with the work we did, especially considering we had both many other things pulling us in different directions. All we needed was the material we asked other teachers to provide for us.

One of our sections on the web page is a place for students to go if they needed extra help with research. We wanted them to be able to see models of thesis statements, models of how to format note cards, bibliography cards, etc. This was the information we requested of the group doing the research section. Unfortunately, we didn't receive their information before school ended, or even at this point. We also wanted the teachers to create a homepage for themselves and we would link of the home page. Well...

I had hoped to have these links done for this binder, but we ran into a snag. While the homepage and general links are done, most of the teachers felt Cindy and I were going to design and construct their pages for them as well. I did talk with several of the teachers and listened to their fears. Although Dreamweaver is a relatively easy program to learn, we do not have access to it at school (and loaning them my copy? Not a chance.) So, I decided to revert to a program I know everyone has access to... Word. (These directions are located later in this binder.) At the beginning of next school year, each teacher is to send me his/her homepage. That was their homework over the summer, but quite honestly, I'm not holding me breath. In fact, I am planning to hold a web site creation Saturday in September.

Reflection

This was another educational experience for me. I knew what I thought the site should contain and how it should look; luckily for Cindy and me the teachers really didn't care as long as they didn't have to do it. When we presented it to them at the end of the year they were excited to get this site posted. I had to remind them that we didn't want to post something that wasn't ready to be seen by the world. Although I really wanted this site completed and posted by the start of the 2007-2008 school year, I had to be flexible, especially when you are relying on others for material. While we could post it, with the help of the technology department, there are obviously still items that need completed. This frustrates me beyond belief.

The "research" teachers promised they are going to meet in the first few weeks of school to work on the example pages. We want to present a cohesive front to our students, which means everyone has to agree with the sample pages. My recommendation to the group was to remove these links until they are active if they really want to post it at the start of school. There's really no sense of including them if they don't work.

Cindy and I are both doers, so I know this site will be up and running by October 1, 2007. Even if this means we have to create the sample pages ourselves. However, we are both frustrated at the slowness of this project. If it was just us, we know it would have been done in less than a month. It really comes down to making this site a priority for the start of the new school year. Which we have done.

Supporting Documentation

- ❖ English Department Website (as currently stands)
- ❖ Notes from meetings