TECH CAMP for Library Teachers

By Ann Perham
"There is no such thing as a finished product; there is only a satisfying stopping point."
David Roane

During six days of July and August, 11 Library Teachers learned to design, create and launch a school library webpage, but also learned that the job is never done! Under the "coaching" of Ann Perham and Tim Dailey, the "campers" worked on their unique school webpages. While each of their webpages was dramatically unique, the participants shared a common goal: adding an important tool to their library program.

Taking the graduate class were: Ethel Downey, Kathy Lowe, Dorothy McQuillan, Julianne Toomey-Kautz, Bonnie Shapland, Cathy Rosenstock, Tricia DiPietro, Marge Vanderhill, Kathe Liias, Anne Croak, and Marnie Bolstad.

In an "email interview" some of the participants offered their candid thoughts and advice:

Why did you take this course, spending 6 days of a precious summer cooped up in a lab?

Kathy Lowe:
I had wanted to revise my rudimentary web page for quite some time. I was happy with the content of the page, but not its design. I wanted the library web page to reflect the quality of the program we provide to our students at Boston Arts Academy and Fenway High School, and both schools have great-looking web pages, so I didn't want the library page to look amateurish in comparison. I also felt that in our high-tech school, having a professional looking and useful web page would elevate the role of the library and its staff in the eyes of students and faculty.

Tricia DiPietro:
The evolution of my web page began several years ago when I began seeing other libraries' web pages and, I thought, why not? I could do this. Finally, the perfect class was offered: School Library Web Page Design. These were my people; they would know my language: Athena, rubric, Dewey, assessment, etc.

While the class actually met for six days (with an introductory meeting in June), I probably spent about 100 hours over the course of the summer developing, designing and ultimately tweaking my web page. My goal was to have as much of an informative teaching tool in place as I possibly could for September. I think I have been successful. When the students and teachers of Stoneham High come back to school, they will encounter a brand new home page on all the library computers ... mine! It will serve as an information gateway, to the library and to the internet.

Anne Croak:
I took the course because one of the goals in our long-range plans was to create a template for the library web pages. This course was of particular interest because it was specifically for school librarians so the focus was on what would be most effective for them. The structure of the course allowed enough hands on time so that we could walk away with a beginning product that could be tweaked.

Julianne Toomey-Kautz
I took this course for several reasons: for PDPs-- that goes without saying --but primarily because I saw a real need for a school library webpage that could serve my students, parents and staff.

What do you expect to be the effect of your webpage?

Anne Croak:
When I asked the elementary school librarians to share with me what they thought the purpose of a library web page should be they listed the following:

   * A venue to see what's happening in the school library, a homepage of links to research/online resources, and a literature resource for kids.
   * To inform students, teachers and parents of the curriculum topics discussed during library classes.

I would hope that the web site would share library related news; introduce the library program to parents; provide links to the curriculum connections page for project based resources and/or recording sheets

The site could also provide library news for parents. I would rather see links to common elements instead of recreating the information over and over again. Then the individual pages could be used for images and things that personalize the page to each school ie: Downey's Summer Reading Program.

I would like parents to use the web page to stay informed of the activities/projects that are happening in the library.

What is your vision of the function of your new webpage?

Kathy Lowe:
In addition to serving as a PR tool for our program, I wanted our web page to become our students' regular jumping-off point for any research they need to do. My hope was to have a page that would lead students through the research process and ensure that they would not overlook any of the resources available to them. I also wanted the page to provide students with help in using the resources and to contain all of the documents they would need to use, like citation guides and source logs. I felt it was important, too, to have something besides required school work to draw students to the library page, so I wanted to provide opportunities for students to contribute book reviews and writing that would be showcased there.

Julianne Toomey-Kautz
I see it as an instructional tool, and huge Public Relations tool—to faculty, parents and the wider community. I think that we need to show our school communities that we're not just sitting in our library media centers eating bonbons or reading stories and doing fingerplays with the children. I feel as though I need to put it "out there" in a tangible way that we are teachers, instructors, and research skills specialists. We need to blow our own horns and this is one way to do so.

Was creating the webpage hard? Is the technology overwhelming? What does it take to be a webmaster?

Kathy Lowe:
In order to create my web page, I neeeded to learn a new software program - Microsoft FrontPage. I chose to use FrontPage because that is the program our students are taught to use and I wanted to be able to help them and answer their questions when they are working on their own pages. I spent quite a bit of time figuring out how to get the most out of this software. I even downloaded a tutorial from the Microsoft web site and spent a Saturday going through the whole thing. This was time well spent. After I completed the tutorial, most of the things I had been confused about were cleared up and I was ready to dive into creating my own web page. Had I not been taking a class, I'm not sure I would have spent the time to learn FrontPage so thoroughly, so now I'm obviously glad that I "had to" learn it for the class. Once I knew what I was doing, I really enjoyed creating my library page and continued to improve and add to it after the class ended. Now I feel that I have much of what I need to provide instruction for the school year already prepared! I will use my web page when I plan with teachers and when I work with classes. It will continue to grow throughout the year as I add resources specific to the projects that are assigned, but I now have the framework in place, so adding to it won't take any more time than I usually spend preparing for classes.

Tricia DiPietro:
The hardest part of this project for me was trying to learn Front Page on the fly as I tried to learn the intricacies of web page design. I am still learning something new every time I edit my page. The easiest, yet time-consuming, part was gathering all the links I wanted to include on the various web pages.

I will continue to gather links. I will continue to add pages. I will continue to look at my site with a critical eye. The truth? A web page is never, ever finished. It will become part of your life. And, hopefully, a successful part of the lives of those you teach.

Anne Croak:
The easiest part was deciding on what elements should be included: literature, reference sources etc. The most difficult was designing a format that I liked. I probably redesigned the structure of the page ten times (and will probably redesign it ten more times in the next year!). Finding information to include was easy!

Julianne Toomey-Kautz
Creating the webpage-- or in my case, website-- wasn't really all that hard. I used Claris Home Page, which was fairly easy to use, especially once I got the hang of it. I had the advantage of some professional development in Home Page in years previous.

Advice for those who do not have a webpage? … advice for other library teachers?

Kathy Lowe:
I would strongly recommend that all school librarians make your library web page a priority. Having a well-designed library web page is tangible proof of your important role in the instructional process and the life of your school.

Anne Croak:
Taking this course with other librarians was valuable. They were able to offer relevant links as well as feedback about what worked for them in their settings. The knowledge of the instructors, and their patience (!!!) allowed us to accomplish a great deal in a fairly short amount of time. Having the time "scheduled" for me, made me do something I might have just talked about and put off during the school year. Sometimes you just have to take the plunge. :)

Julianne Toomey-Kautz
Make one. As soon as you can. It's worth the effort.