

# LearningExchange

September 2018

“School ends, but education doesn’t.”

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## How Can Libraries Increase Professional Development Habits Amongst Staff?

Susana Goldman

Associate Director of Operations, Alamance County Public Libraries

Professional development is a crucial part of keeping abreast of library trends and improving interpersonal skills. Most of the libraries where I have worked, are not able to hire professional development staff or continuing education trainers. All of the librarians and staff are doing the work of multiple employees including programming, technical support, marketing and public relations. When this is the case professional development tends to fall down the wayside on the scale of importance.

With this being the case in many libraries, as well as running into the mindset of “I don’t need to do that; I’ve been at this a long time,” there is a struggle to get staff to complete professional development - even when training is stressed as a critical factor. The Alamance County Public Libraries have historically encouraged staff to participate in webinars, training, etc. but in an abstract way.



We didn’t highlight the need for professional development, promote it, or suggest it. Rather, staff had to ask permission for time to do these things, which led to many staff not bothering with it.

With a new mid-set towards promoting professional development, I was given the task of encouraging our staff to complete training, participate in webinars, listen to podcasts, etc. that could improve their skills and interactions with our patrons. But with a VERY minimal budget what could we possibly do?

### New ideas to share?

Send your articles to the editors at  
[editor@alalearning.org](mailto:editor@alalearning.org)

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**SUBSCRIPTION** questions (e.g. missing issues, address changes) should be sent to:

Kimberly Redd

ALA/LearnRT

50 E. Huron Street

Chicago, IL 60611

Fax: 312-280-3256

**CONTENT** questions should be sent to:

LearningExchange Editor  
editor@alalarning.org

**GENERAL** questions about

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info@alalarning.org

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natalie.a.bazan@gmail.com

**Newsletter Editor (Ex Officio)**

Colleen Hooks

Orange County Library System

hooks.colleen@ocls.info

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## LearnRT Handbook

Did you know that LearnRT has a handbook, outlining LearnRT projects, roles and responsibilities of board officers, committee chairs, and other pertinent planning information? We do! It was approved by the board in June and has been made accessible.

You can find the handbook on the LearnRT ALA site, <http://www.ala.org/rt/learnrt> and the selecting the Handbook Committee. This is an incredible tool that several of our members worked very hard on. It makes serving on a committee or on the board a little bit easier, and helps to provide continuity of leadership.

# President's Message

## Angela Glowcheski, LearnRT President

Welcome to September and welcome to a new term for the Learning Round Table board. New terms began July 1 for board members, committee chairs and many new committee volunteers. Thank you all for sharing your time and talents with this round table.

I want to congratulate everyone on all their efforts at ALA Annual in New Orleans. We met new faces, had some really impactful programs and great conversations. Crystal Schimpf, Cheryl Wright and Dustin Fife lead a well-attended pre-conference program, where they offered tips and advice on how to create a staff development day and a staff development plan. At the President's Program, Dustin Fife lead a panel responding to the statement, 'Staff Development is the new Strategic Planning.' Panelists included Peter Bromberg, Courtney Young and Wendy Knapp. One of the programs I enjoyed the most was the Discussion and Networking Group. Many new faces attended this program and there was a wonderful exchange of ideas and discussion. Finally our training showcase on Sunday Afternoon was a fun, fast-paced event. We hope to grow with more table exhibitors next year.

Programming at Annual:

- Pre-Conference - Creating a Culture of Learning, 48 Attendees
- President's Program - Staff Development is the New Strategic Plan, 138 Attendees
- Learning Round Table Discussion and Networking Group, 26 Attendees
- Training Showcase, 98 Attendees

At our board meeting in New Orleans, I shared with those in attendance an idea for a mentoring program within our round table. One aspect of the mission of LearnRT is to help members of our round table connect with other staff development and continuing education providers for the exchange of ideas, concerns and solutions. I'd like to take those connections one step further and introduce a mentoring program.

The goal of the mentoring program would be to connect peers and help them establish a professional relationship. For me, one of the best parts of a conference is being able to talk to other people who have similar job responsibilities. In my library system, I am the only person who coordinates staff training. I know that is the case for many of our LearnRT members. Which is one reason we are drawn to this group. Making those connections at a conference are often invaluable. If there is a way for LearnRT to provide that connection to members as part of our membership, without the expense of a conference, I think we should explore the idea. I know one of the things that that instantly drew me to LearnRT was the very real and very sustaining connections I made to the members of our round table. Making those connections with all members, especially new members when they join, can help us sustain membership and further volunteer efforts. I hope you all will consider opting into the program when it is organized. I feel very lucky to be able to work with all of you. I am continually impressed by the people that make up LearnRT. The dedication and enthusiasm people show in volunteering and participating in LearnRT is not only impressive, it is infectious. I look forward to working with everyone this year as we strive toward new goals and overcome new challenges. ▪

# Wabi-Sabi: Imperfect, Impermanent, and Incomplete.

Kimberly Brown-Harden, Northwest Regional Coordinator  
Professional Development Office  
Indiana State Library

As a regional coordinator, I train librarians and library staff on a variety of topics: technology, customer service, communication, etc. My colleagues and I are always on the lookout for new ways to engage our community and to become better trainers. One day while reading an article, I ran across the term, 'wabi-sabi'. I know you're wondering what that has to do with learning or professional development, but if you use your imagination, you'll see a similarity, as I did. This article will have more questions than answers, but hopefully these questions will trigger some new and interesting thoughts about learning.

Wabi-sabi is a Japanese word. It's a worldview centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. It is the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It's traditional Japanese aesthetics. Characteristics include asymmetry, roughness, simplicity, economy, austerity, modesty, etc. (Various, 2018). Originally, the Japanese words wabi and sabi had very different meanings. Sabi originally meant 'chill', 'lean', or 'withered'. Wabi originally meant the misery of living alone in nature, away from society. Over time, the meanings have changed and reflects more modern aesthetics. (Chiappa, 2018)

As a trainer, I've tried to become more learner focused when thinking about training methods. Shifting to a learner, instead of a trainer mindset, changed the way I plan, coordinate, and execute



trainings. It's more about making a difference and connecting with the learner.

It begins and ends with the learner and the goal or outcome you want to achieve. You can read a variety of resources about training and you'll get at least ten different thoughts and opinions, especially for adult learners. It may take several tries to make this 'shift' second nature in planning, coordinating, and executing trainings. How do you best reach the adult learner? How do you know you've made a difference? Did they learn something to apply to their work? Does your training have impact? If there is impact, how will you know?

So, back to the question: "what does this Japanese term have to do with training and professional development?"

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After playing around for a while with emailing training and webinars out, I decided that there needed to be an easier and more uniform way for staff to access information on professional development that applies to them and provide a stronger reason for them to complete it.

This resulted in the Quarterly Professional Development Incentive Program. I started with creating a Professional Development LibGuide, which let me compile all of the training, webinars, and library resources that I had at my fingertips into one easy location for staff to access from any work station. I chose to break information down into various tabs such as training resources, video/podcast resources, leadership & management resources, youth services resources, technology resources, and staff recommended resources.

Then, I needed to figure out the logistics of tracking training completion and prize entries from over thirty staff members. I developed three ways that staff could enter to win the prize(s) and the necessary forms to prove completion.

1. Participate in one webinar or attend one in-person training.
2. Watch five work related videos or listen to five podcasts that teach something not previously known to staff member (total video footage time should not be shorter than 30 minutes combined)
3. Become an expert in a service or resource offered to library patrons.

Expert = being able to teach anyone to use service/resource, over the phone or in person.

Staff would be required to fill out the necessary forms to earn their points and turn them into their direct supervisor and myself. I created an excel spreadsheet that allows me to enter their participation and use color coding to track their quarterly progress and prize winners. At the suggestion of a colleague, I also implemented a small participation prize since not everyone can win the big prizes. This consists of a favorite snack such as candy bars, mixed bags of nuts, library swag, etc. for every ten entries completed.

As staff began to see their co-workers receive participation prizes, and quarterly like gift cards to local ice cream shops, home improvement stores, gas cards, etc., there was an increased interest in completing professional development throughout the year. After a full [fiscal] year of running this program, ACPL leaders now know that 100% of staff participated at least once in professional development. 42% of staff completed five or more webinars, day training, etc. and 19% of staff received a participation prize.

With the beginning of year two, I have decided to add a weekly email with linked articles, webinars, and Ted Talks to let staff know that these are all good ways to keep up with their continuing education and enter the Professional Development Incentive Program.

sgoldman@alamancelibraries.org

*Wabi-sabi continued from front page*

A lot actually. Training and the process of training in and of itself is imperfect, impermanent, and can be incomplete. How often have you prepared a training, but discovered typos while giving the presentation? You think your topic will really reach the learner, but you fail to connect with them because of either the topic or your delivery.

For example, you may have 'taught' for 50 minutes and only gave your audience 5-10 minutes for questions. This group may have responded better to 'hands on' activities or group work. Or vice versa: you presented and you did activities to a room full of introverts and no one opened up. Learning is incomplete - we are constantly learning new things and new ways to present them. Online trainings, microlearning, podcasts, etc. Each new trend causes us to stretch and learn, hopefully connecting to our learners, only to be outdated in six months.

Don't even get me started on technology! VR, AR, Robots, tablets-how do we teach this to those who teach patrons knowing that technology is out of date as soon as we open the box (ok, maybe not that fast, but you get the idea).

Recently, I created a short survey for my library community about how they learn and got some surprising results. In an hour's time, I received 152 responses; so that tells me they are serious about learning and professional development! The respondents' training preference is hands on with lecture being a close second. I asked about their ideal learning environment and got a variety of answers.

From a lecture style preference, to being in a cool room with a lot of Diet Coke and an engaging speaker - (hey, that's fair!)

Shifting and looking at trainings as learner focused helped me to view the survey questions and results differently. This shift caused me to think about what I wanted them to tell me and to keep their time constraints in mind: a five-question survey instead of 20; open-ended questions vs. ranking, etc. I was able to look at their responses more objectively and not as a way to criticize me as a trainer or my methods, but really look at their concerns and issues as a way to grow and improve as a professional and to give them what THEY need vs. what I THINK they need.

Now you know what wabi-sabi is and how it can relate to professional development. The next time you start researching a training or preparing to deliver one, remember these concepts: imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It's in failure and mistakes that we learn our greatest lessons. No matter how polished our presentations may be, remember that they're still imperfect, incomplete, and impermanent; that's the nature and beauty of what we do.

