

Chapter 79

A Perfect Match: Partnering with Education Faculty for Pedagogical Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

A persistent challenge for many librarians is a lack of formal training in pedagogical techniques. In addition to lacking academic coursework in this area, librarians seldom look beyond their professional community for opportunities to develop these vital skills. Given the obvious parallels in mission and responsibilities, the field of education seems a natural fit. This chapter explores the benefits of cross-disciplinary professional development in the context of a collaboration between a librarian and an educational studies professor. Through alternating points of view, it presents the motivation for the partnership, the challenges it presented, and the positive outcomes for each participant. It also offers an in-depth look at the instructional development itself.

INTRODUCTION

Librarianship can often be an insular profession. We network extensively—with other librarians. We attend conferences—with other librarians. We read professional literature—written by other librarians. We therefore miss valuable opportunities to seek perspectives beyond these confines. This leads to “reinventing the wheel”: struggling to create new solutions to the many challenges we face without considering the strategies already developed in other disciplines.

Teaching library research skills to students has long been an important part of librarians’ activities. Whether we call it bibliographic instruction, library education, or information literacy instruction, the overall purpose remains the same. We aim to prepare students to comprehend, navigate, and evaluate the vast quantities and infinite varieties of resources available to them through the library and beyond.

A persistent challenge for many librarians is a lack of formal training in pedagogical techniques. Various organizations within the profession offer

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conferences, such as LOEX (Library Orientation Exchange), or extended workshops, such as the ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) Information Literacy Immersion Program, designed to prepare librarians for instructional experiences, but seldom do we look outside our own community for such learning opportunities.

Given the obvious parallels in mission and responsibilities, the field of education seems a natural fit. Education faculty prepare new teachers for precisely the same circumstances we face as librarians. This chapter will explore the benefits of cross-disciplinary professional development through the context of a collaboration between a librarian and an educational studies professor.

Some of this chapter will focus on the actual content of our collaboration, such as writing objectives, pedagogical techniques, reflecting on teaching, and assessment. Mirroring our own process, it will include alternating viewpoints. Through this method, we hope to demonstrate the strategies that contributed to the effectiveness of our work. We will also emphasize the components of what makes such partnerships successful, and describe the benefits each of the participants may derive from the experience.

Full disclosure: we are, in fact, married. But for a successful *professional* partnership, what mattered most was not sharing a home or cooking meals together. It required mutual respect, a commitment to meeting regularly and setting achievable benchmarks, and a willingness to learn the language of our two very different disciplines. Our proximity and professionalism, more than our personal relationship, had a substantial positive impact on our success.

BACKGROUND

Librarians spend a significant portion of their time teaching. Statistics vary, but one study's results indicated that they may spend as much as "50% of their time on library instruction and/or

information literacy functions" (Albrecht & Baron, 2002, p. 85); another reports that the "hours per week spent preparing and delivering IL teaching (formally or informally) ... range from 0 to 25 hours for full-time [staff]" (Bewick & Corral, 2010, p. 101).

The teaching described above might include course-related instruction in research techniques, workshops for faculty, one-on-one consultations with students, and teaching skills to patrons at the reference desk. In spite of these significant instruction responsibilities, "in many instances, librarians find themselves adopting a teaching role with little formal training and without ample opportunity for teacher development" (Sinkinson, 2011, p. 10). In Albrecht and Baron's 2002 study, for example, the authors surveyed practicing librarians, who stated that they "first learned to teach library instruction on the job" (p. 90); the authors also analyzed course offerings for students pursuing degrees in librarianship and noted that "SLIS programs are reluctant to embrace the pedagogy as a core requirement of librarians" (p. 89). Despite study results produced by Sproles, Johnson, and Fairson (2008) emphasizing that coursework in instruction has increased, Westbrook and Fabian's 2010 article on their survey of practicing librarians showed that of the 41 competencies listed in *Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators: A Practical Guide* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2008), not a single one was learned primarily in school (p. 585). Concerns about inadequate preparation for instruction remain very much in the forefront of librarians' minds.

The *Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators: A Practical Guide* lay out a wide range of skills necessary for instruction librarians to be effective teachers. These range from "instructional design skills" (lesson planning, developing activities, achieving learning outcomes), to "teaching skills" (adapting to different learning styles, creating a learner-centered environment), to "assessment

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