

Chapter 10

Teaching New Librarians

How to Teach: A Model for Building a Peer Learning Program

Merinda Kaye Hensley

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

ABSTRACT

Librarians enter the academy with little background in the pedagogical and theoretical intricacies of teaching and learning. With library instruction responsibilities on the rise, institutions are searching for ways to encourage librarians to engage in the process of learning how to teach. Instruction librarians and coordinators can build a peer learning program that incorporates a progressive teaching structure where librarians graduate from shadow teaching to team teaching to solo teaching. By combining support in the classroom with a dynamic mentoring environment, librarians work as a team in order to provide students with high quality instructional experiences that promote lifelong learning. Formative assessment is built into the mentoring process while simultaneously providing analysis of the program. Suggestions for professional development and a reading list are included.

INTRODUCTION

Each day in the classroom is as much a learning experience as a teaching experience. (Vidmar, 2006, pp. 140)

As access to information grows increasingly more complex and the scope of inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary studies change the landscape of research and information management, academic

librarians are in the classroom more than ever. Unfortunately, most library science programs don't formally prepare students for the inevitability that instruction will be a part of their job responsibilities (Julien, 2005; Westbrook, 1999). Lacking a foundational repertoire of teaching skills, new librarians are at a clear disadvantage in the classroom. A teaching portfolio includes, at minimum, a diverse array of pedagogical strategies, presentation skills and assessment techniques. Many new librarians are tossed into the fray of teaching instruction sessions with little or no guidance on the mechanics of how to

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teach. To complicate matters even further, there are many types of library instruction for which to be prepared including course-integrated, workshops, discipline specific, online instruction, reference interactions and library tours. This practical guide will be relevant for instruction librarians and coordinators in all types of academic libraries, whether a library includes two teaching librarians or twenty-five. The chapter will describe the process of building a supportive peer learning program where new librarians can gain on-the-job training while finding their own teaching voice. It will also promote the development of a reflective learning community by including the following elements:

- Building a progressive teaching environment in and out of the classroom
- How to develop mentoring relationships between new and experienced librarians
- Professional development within and outside the organization
- Assessment of a peer learning environment

Literature Review

There is a debate raging among librarians. The future of how academic librarians promote information literacy in the academy is being questioned within the larger context of higher education (Elmborg, 2006; Jacobs, 2008; Ward 2006). The outcome will depend on how librarians adapt to their roles as educators in the 21st century.

Through a content analysis of job announcements in the 1990's, Lynch and Smith (2001) concluded that virtually all reference jobs included instruction responsibilities, predicting that the development of job titles that include 'instruction' (e.g. bibliographic instruction, information literacy) would quickly become common place in the academic library. Avery and Ketchner (1996) confirmed that employers do indeed value instruction skills in new librarians, while Shonrock and

Mulder (1993) explored what proficiencies were valued for instruction responsibilities and how they were acquired. Kilcullen (1997) highlighted the changes necessary to the LIS curriculum while outlining a pedagogical start for new librarians. If instruction has become paramount in the desirable characteristics of public service positions, how prepared are new graduates? How have library schools adapted to this evolution of needs in the academic library? Julien's (2005) examination of LIS curricula confirms that most library and information science graduates do not receive any formal education on "basic information literacy concepts, outcomes evaluation, needs assessment, or Web-based instructional strategies" (p. 214). She goes on to conclude that "in an era of accountability and within a context in many libraries of limited resources, both financial and human, the need to demonstrate positive outcomes from all library services would appear obvious" (p. 214). Institutional assessment and accreditation standards indicate that it is increasingly essential for new graduates to enter the profession already prepared with a background of pedagogical knowledge and an array of teaching skills. Once the librarian is on-the-job, she or he can draw upon a secondary support system, professional development opportunities. Professional organizations and institutions have acknowledged this gap by offering a plethora of supplementary educational opportunities including professional literature, programming at annual library-related conferences (e.g. the ACRL Instruction Section's Discussion Groups held at both ALA Annual and Midwinter Conference) attendance at instruction-based conferences (e.g. LOEX and WILU) and participation in programs such as ACRL's Information Literacy Immersion program. However, Jacobs (2008) argues that "unless skills, practices, and ideas are used in relevant ways and developed in reflective creative environments, instruction and pedagogy courses in MLIS programs may suffer the same fate as decontextualized 'one-shot' information literacy sessions" (p. 257). The same can be said

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