

Finding Inspiration from Within: Harnessing Your Library's Knowledge for Professional Development Programming

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Introduction

In our role as academic librarians, we often seek out outlets for professional growth and education. Additionally, our administrators, universities, and sometimes our tenure process often require such professional development. In this pursuit, we often look to our professional organizations as well as experts in our fields outside of our own institutions for such development. While attending conferences and other external continuing education programming is important for library innovation and professional growth, looking inward at your own library colleague's varied skills and resources can be equally as important for many reasons. Librarians of today come in a variety of flavors; sharing our very unique knowledge across our own library community through peer teaching and learning can help us better assist our patrons through increased knowledge and improved referral. Not only can librarians learn a variety of skills, tools, and practices from each other, but encouraging these regular, organized discussions and programs can actually improve employee morale, collegiality, and organizational culture. Internal professional development, especially in a peer learning model (rather than trainer-trainee) gives librarians a sense of community while emphasizing value in each librarian's individual knowledge. It can be a mechanism for institutional knowledge management and the transfer of institutional memory through intergenerational

and cross job function learning. Additionally, because participants in internal professional development share a context for their knowledge building, (i.e. the issues and cultural specifics of their library and university), their development programming can be more targeted and thus their professional growth more meaningful. Internal professional development can be accomplished in a variety of ways including workshops, seminars, directed reading, journal clubs, peer mentoring, and more. They can be accomplished in-person or online or a combination of the two.

In addition to exploring the evolving nature of the academic librarian and the importance of professional development as peer learning in the context of the local institution, this paper will describe in detail one university library's professional development program for librarians. Furthermore, this example will offer practical ideas for both librarians and library administrators interested developing such a program.

Background

Academic librarians have very unique positions. Often we have faculty status with some sort of tenure process. As faculty, especially in a tenure track, we are expected to stay professionally active. An ongoing commitment to development generally is in our nature as well as in our position descriptions. We do not simply have jobs, we have professions and wish to continually learn and grow within our professions

and organizations. Because of this, academic librarians do not usually need much incentive to seek out professional opportunities. However, much of the focus tends to be within our professional organizations and other external means to learn and grow. These methods are not to be discredited. Many of the ideas we can teach each other in-house are ideas that we have learned outside of our own walls. Innovative ideas coming from different organizations with different cultures are extremely important to spark change. Internal professional development does not replace external development, instead they should be seen complementary activities. External professional development is very important even in financially difficult times. On the same note, internal professional development is equally as important even in financially prosperous times. However, it seems that little attention is paid to the importance and significance of internal professional development except, perhaps, in terms of financial savings.

It should be noted, that while sometimes used interchangeably, this paper focuses on library “development” rather than library “training.” While training is crucial to institutional success, its focus is on imparting skills and knowledge as a specific “means to an end.”¹ It is short term and does not focus on creating change and growth in the organization or library profession. Development seeks to impart skills and knowledge that is ongoing and transformative.² Internal library training or any job training is generally commonplace as new people are hired or positions are changed. However, *professional development* as defined here, especially for librarians, often takes place outside the library or is conducted by a person from outside the institution. Even when conducted by internal employees, it is often directed by a designated “trainer” rather than giving all involved parties equal opportunity and encouragement to teach as well as learn.

It should also be noted that this paper will focus specifically on professional development for librarians as opposed to support staff. This is not to say staff development for support staff is not just as important. However, in many academic settings, including the one we will examine in this paper, the professional roles and responsibilities of the librarian in his or her profession differs from staff who play a support role.

Professional development, staff training, and continuing education for librarians and library staff has been examined thoroughly in the literature, but very

little of it delves deeply into the various benefits of internal development programs for librarians, especially in an academic setting.

Benefits and Roles of Internal Professional Development *The Shifting Roles of the Academic Librarian*

Academic librarians today have extremely diverse roles in their libraries and across their campuses. We are Emerging Technologies Librarians, First Year Experience Librarians, Distance Learning Librarians, Digital Collection Librarians, in addition to our more traditional positions as Reference, Instruction, and Cataloging Librarians. These titles reflect many different skill sets, interests, and expertise. We no longer are a group of similarly skilled people. Collectively a library institution now holds a vast and varied assortment of skills. From understanding the intricacies of discipline specific databases and collections, to having instructional technology skills, to knowing best practices for working with university administrators, our varied roles have helped us grow our libraries and our knowledge as a profession. In addition to our varied job roles and responsibilities, a typical academic library is quite intergenerational. What a new librarian is taught in library school today is quite different than what was taught 30 years ago. Conversely, a librarian with 30 years of experience not only has a wealth of skills to share, but also institutional knowledge. Librarians, even at their own institution have a lot to share, teach, and learn from one another. Too often though, these important skills and experiences however, are not shared among colleagues, which prevents institutional growth and transformation.

While there have always been different job roles for academic librarians, a 2010 study analyzing academic reference librarian job descriptions showed a significant increase in the diversity of roles and responsibilities in the last 20-30 years. In the 1960s nearly all reference positions were as reference librarians with very few other responsibilities. However, by the 2000s reference librarians wear many different hats and have very different responsibilities including instruction, collection development, outreach, and maintaining liaison relationships with academic and other university departments.³ New titles such as “Online Services Librarian,” “Instruction & Outreach Librarian,” and “Off-Campus Librarian” were now identified as “typical job titles for reference positions.”⁴ As reflected in the job titles, much of this has to do

with changes in technology,⁵ but it also has to do with the changes in academia, how the library views itself within the university or college institution as a whole, and the increasing diversity of our students.⁶ This is reflected especially in the many outreach focused positions. Many universities are beginning to leave their siloed models of the past and need librarians that can work collaboratively with campus partners.⁷

With these significant changes in academic librarianship, how do we stay current as our jobs and responsibilities as our jobs change? And, how do we stay in touch with the vast roles and responsibilities stationed right within our own libraries? When we leave university siloes, do we create our own siloes within the library? Does the Off-Campus Librarian know what the First Year Experience Librarian is doing, how she does it, and most importantly, how they can work together? Professional organizations often lead many of our growth opportunities through conferences and other professional development activities and these are extremely important for new ideas and innovation in our libraries. However, these outside programs generally do not directly facilitate internal collaboration and transformation at a particular library or a university.

In addition to the growing diversity of librarian roles and responsibilities, there is a growing spectrum of ages represented in our libraries. Due to a variety of factors, the Boomer generation of librarians (born 1946-1964) are forecasted to linger in their profession later than previous generations all while there is significant uptick in library school enrollment, especially those under age 35. In comparing data from the Association for Library and Information Science Education Statistical Reports (2002-2006) with data reported by Davis, 2007, Munde points out that 54% of new librarians entering the workforce in 2010 would be forty or younger, while 70% of those already employed were over fifty.⁸ Intergenerational learning is also extremely important as our libraries grow and change. This can certainly occur through external professional development such as conferences and national mentoring programs. A new librarian can learn a wealth of information from any practicing librarian and the learning can also be very reciprocal as the older librarian learns new ideas and explores new innovations with a younger librarian. However, when this is done inside of one's own institution, not only do the individual librarians benefit, but the institution benefits through the transfer of institutional memory,

organizational culture, and other institution-specific knowledge. Thus, internal development can facilitate a knowledge management process. With internal development, not only is "new" information coming into the organization and to the librarians, but important existing organizational knowledge is carried on and disseminated through changing personnel.

Institutional Memory, Knowledge Management

The transfer of institutional knowledge and organizational culture is a specific type of knowledge that is not only extremely important, but also more difficult to accomplish through typical staff training programs and is nearly impossible through external professional development. Nonaka defines two types of knowledge, tacit and explicit. Explicit knowledge is defined as the tangible or articulated information that can easily be transferred to others through written word or verbalization. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is much more difficult to transfer. It is the knowledge of how to do something or the "know-how."⁹ Tacit knowledge, for example, is knowing how to be a "good" teacher or librarian or how to best work within the structure of one's own university culture. It is something that is acquired over time and cannot be explained easily. While training manuals can transfer explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge must be taught in a different way. According to Linde, one type of tacit knowledge is social tacit knowledge and one example of the transfer of social knowledge is the transfer of institutional identity and memory.¹⁰ As noted above, intergenerational learning is an important feature of internal professional development. Internal development encourages not only formalized transfer of explicit knowledge as new librarians come and experienced librarians retire, but also helps to encourage social connections between librarians through informal narrative; i.e. the story telling that often happens through informal and casual interactions. That is not to say that internal professional development should not be structured or organized, but when it is accomplished through a peer learning model, collegial social connections straddle generations, as well as job functions, and informal expression organically occurs.

Peer Learning and Communities of Practice

Peer learning is not a new concept; it is something that frequently occurs informally. As defined by Eisen, "peer learning partnerships are reciprocal helping re-

relationships between individuals of comparable status, who share a common or closely related learning/development objective.”¹¹ Rather than following the trainer/trainee or teacher/student model that much of the library development literature focuses on, peer learning can transfer tacit knowledge through the social relationships one form when in a reciprocal relationship.

Much of the literature focusing on peer learning in the current professional development arena uses the communities of practice model. Wenger defines communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”¹² Communities of practice by definition do not require participants to work together at the same institution, but by doing so, there is the added value of institutional knowledge management. A more famous example of the effectiveness of communities of practice in organizational knowledge management is at the Xerox Corporation. Xerox company managers recognized the importance of the tacit knowledge transfer that occurred in small group informal situations (such as the lunch room) and thus facilitated a formalized means to capture and expand the dissemination of such knowledge. Because Xerox is an enormous corporation with multiple locations around the world, it is not feasible to have employees share their knowledge in person (as done in the case study below) so they developed an online database of best practices as identified by the employees themselves. Xerox claims that this online database has saved the corporation an estimate \$100 million.¹³

Like the Xerox Corporation, libraries should consider using the peer learning model of internal professional development as a mechanism for management of library knowledge, especially for tacit knowledge in the form of institutional memory and culture as well as library “know-how”. This is especially important as our roles and responsibilities continue to change and grow with in the library and university.

In addition to the added knowledge management benefits of internal professional development, the transferred knowledge has a shared context for application. While professional development conferences or external development programs present ideas and information that can be internalized and transformed into knowledge, it can be difficult to apply to one’s specific library due to the vast organizational and

cultural differences between academic libraries and institutions. A benefit of internal professional development is that there is a shared context for the application of new ideas.

Shared Context at Home

Whether the need for increased knowledge sharing is due to shifting job responsibilities and focuses, expanding librarian demographics or a need for knowledge management, internal professional development encourages the transfer of knowledge between librarians in the context of the home institution. This learning not only helps pass along existing institutional knowledge (in addition to new information and knowledge), but also helps give context to knowledge as it is transferred. “Situated learning” coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, suggests that learning should not be simply the abstract and decontextualized transfer of knowledge or information as we so often see at professional conferences. Rather it should be accomplished socially in the context of where the knowledge will be applied.¹⁴

Along the same lines, Boud discusses peer learning in academia by comparing and contrasting academic department level development versus university level development opportunities. Boud says, “Well-designed university-wide development programmes are extremely valuable and are often highly regarded by those who participate in them, but nevertheless they are not sufficient for internalization of new practice and implementation in another context to fully occur. There is often little opportunity to practice new skills or ways of working, the colleagues who can support or undermine initiatives are rarely involved in such programmes and new practices are often insufficiently contextualized to work in what might appear to be an alien environment.”¹⁵ When librarians learn and teach together at their library they have a common context in mind and will likely be able to better internalize information turning it into applicable knowledge for their own situations within their university.

The Teach Around: A Case Study

The following is an example of one internal professional development program utilizing the peer learning model. It is not meant to be a standard model for all types of programs. Rather, it is simply one example of a successful program. As stated, internal professional development through peer learning can take a

variety of shapes and sizes. The needs and cultures of each situation should be evaluated to determine the best type of program for any given library.

Towson University is a large public comprehensive university in suburban Baltimore. The Albert S. Cook Library serves just less than 22,000 students including about 18,000 undergraduates and 4,000 graduate students.¹⁶ While the university is quite large, Cook Library is a single comprehensive facility. There are 50 total library employees including 24 professional librarians. Librarians are classified as faculty on campus and go through a promotion and permanent status review (similar to promotion and tenure). They are expected to engage in professional development as well as serve as leaders on campus. Of the 24 librarians, more than a third have been hired in the last five years. These newer librarians are primarily recent graduates in their twenties or thirties. Cook librarians' ages and job experience spans many decades.

Cook Library is heavily engaged in a library liaison model which traditionally has meant that each librarian was assigned as liaison to one or more academic departments on campus. Librarians are often assigned to a department based on educational background or interest. While not all librarians begin as subject specialists for their liaison departments, they most definitely grow into that role as they work with faculty to purchase relevant material, assist faculty and students with their research, and teach a variety of subject and assignment based library sessions. In more recent times, the liaison model has been extended to include liaison responsibilities to university offices outside of academic departments such as Student Affairs and the Honors College. In addition to the formalized liaison relationships, many librarians have formed cross campus working partnerships with a variety of faculty and staff. These formal and informal relationships have been exceedingly useful for the library's influence on and participation in university wide projects. Librarians have worked hard to increase library visibility on campus and continue to succeed collectively and individually as university leaders.

In addition to liaison responsibilities, librarians have a growing variety of roles within the library. Most traditionally, librarians at Cook Library were classified as Reference Librarian or Cataloging Librarian, but in recent years, new positions such as "Emerging Technologies Librarian," "First Year Experience Librarian," "Communications Librarian," and

"Digital Collections Librarian" have been created. In addition to their liaison subject knowledge, these new positions require skills and knowledge.

These new positions along with the growing emphasis on liaison responsibilities and the growing variety of librarian ages and experiences distinguish Cook Library librarians from one another in terms of knowledge and skills. At the same time, all librarians have some overlapping roles and responsibilities and a shared library and university mission. Because of the positive collegial culture at Cook Library, much knowledge is shared informally especially by those who share office space. However, as the variety of librarian knowledge begins to grow, there is a need for a more formalized sharing of skills and knowledge through an internal professional development program.

While staff development at Cook Library is encouraged for all staff and librarians, the staff development opportunities offered through the library's staff development committee generally are on broad topics as to be relevant to all staff and librarians. While librarians do often attend staff development events, the unique nature of librarian responsibilities coupled with the unique nature of faculty status encouraged Cook librarians to seek out additional internal professional development opportunities. In the summer of 2010, the "Teach Around" was born. Now held one to two times a semester and three times over the summer, it is one of the primary formalized means for knowledge sharing between librarians at Cook Library. It began simply as an open call to librarians to teach a 15-30 minute session on a topic about which they believed their colleagues would benefit. While this is still the primary way topics and presenters are chosen, it was important for participants to be able to make requests for topics about which they would like to learn as well. In order to accommodate both types of suggestions, a simple online Google Doc spreadsheet was created and shared. Below are the spreadsheet instructions and questions:

One librarian, acting as Teach Around facilitator, uses the spreadsheet in Table 1 to recruit needed teachers as well as plan upcoming Teach Around events.

The Teach Around has primarily adopted a format where 2-3 librarians take turns teaching the group for about 20-30 minutes each. However, there have been a couple longer sessions including a half day retreat focused specifically on a sharing pedagogical ideas

TABLE 1
Teach Around Topics:

Please enter a topic that you are interested in learning about or teaching and who it might be taught by. If you are listed as a possible instructor and would like to teach that topic, please check the agreed box by your name.

Topic	Taught By	Agreed?	Notes/Questions	Date Taught

and learning objects such as worksheets and presentations. The topics represent a variety of expertise and skills. Most common topics were related to specific classes, library resources, technology, and subject specific information.

Examples include:

- Best practices for online embedded librarianship
- Case study in embedded librarianship in “ART 100”
- IDEO and design thinking discussion
- SciFinder and ScienceDirect
- Google Docs as a real-time learning AND assessment tool
- Best places to get historical stock reports
- Best places to get market share information
- Best places to find play reviews
- How to use subject search (including explode and major concept functions) in CINAHL and MEDLINE
- Religious resources/search tips in relation to Judaic studies
- The “English 301” experience
- Searching for legislation (policy)
- How to learn to love Factiva
- Common education research topics
- Using ValueLine online
- Finding images: ARTstor, CAMIO, Flickr, and more
- Finding children’s books & book lists
- Searching for information on nations - statistical and overview
- RefWorks
- Finding musical scores
- PowerPoint best practices for pedagogy
- Quick way to find an article IN PRINT on any subject

- Tour of the student e-mail and online document storage systems
- Tour of Blackboard’s SafeAssign
- LexisNexis
- Federal Reserve economic data
- National Geologic Map database
- Microsoft Office tips and tricks - Formatting for APA
- SafeCite exercise student response data
- Dealing with difficulty faculty

It is important to note that the “Teach Around” program was developed from the bottom up. It was not a directive from administration. It was developed by and is run by and for librarians. Currently there is one primary person involved in facilitating the meetings, but all librarians are encouraged to teach as well as learn. Overall the Teach Around has been very well received by Cook librarians. While no one is required to attend Teach Aroun ds, attendance is extraordinarily high with most librarians joining. There is no real “credit” for attending, although it could be included on one’s end of year report for professional development. This structure may not work at every library. Additional incentives and marketing of the program may need to be implemented, especially at the start of such a program. At Cook Library, most librarians have found the benefits of the Teach Around sufficient incentive to continue attendance.

Originally, the sole intention of the Teach Around was to give librarians time to share their specialized knowledge with one another in order to improve services to students and faculty through reference desk and instruction interactions. While this goal has been met, there have been many added benefits that reflect the benefits of internal professional development listed in this paper.

TABLE 2
Value of the Teach Around

	How valuable has the Teach Around been in increasing your knowledge and skills in working at the reference desk?	How valuable has the Teach Around been in increasing your knowledge and skills in teaching classes?	How valuable has the Teach Around been in promoting a collegial environment?	How valuable has the Teach Around been in showing the value of each librarian's knowledge?	How valuable has the Teach Around been in sharing institutional memory?	How valuable has the Teach Around been in promoting intergenerational learning?
Very Valuable	3 (18.75%)	4 (25%)	10 (62.5%)	9 (56.25%)	4 (25%)	6 (37.5%)
Valuable	8 (50%)	8 (50%)	4 (25%)	7 (43.75%)	6 (37.5%)	5 (31.25%)
Not Valuable	0 (0%)	1 (6.25%)	1 (6.25%)	0 (0%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.25%)
Not Applicable	4 (25%)*	3 (18.75%)*	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (18.75%)**	2 (12.5%)**
Did Not Answer	1 (6.25%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.25%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.25%)	2 (12.5%)

*Not all librarians work at the reference desk or teach. **An answer of "Not Applicable" for these questions may indicate that librarians did not feel that the Teach Around was applicable to institutional knowledge sharing or intergenerational learning.

In a short survey, Cook librarians were asked to comment on the value of the Teach Around in terms of several key points. Overall, the responses were very positive, indicating the level of "very valuable" or "valuable" by a majority of respondents on each question.

TABLE 3
Teach Around Overall Value

Overall do you think the Teach Around program is worthwhile?	
Yes	16 (100%)
No	0 (0%)

When asked to list any advantages to an internal professional development program (such as the Teach Around), the librarians gave a variety of responses including:

- "An insider can more accurately address topics/training that meets our specific needs and environment."
- "Presenters gain more expertise on a topic and more experience in presenting"
- "Colleagues get to know more about one another's areas of expertise so they know who to call for help."

- "I feel like having the Teach Arouns conducted by people I know through working in close proximity with them, and the smaller number of people in attendance, actually makes me more inclined to listen and absorb what they say than I would be at larger conferences with a bunch of strangers."
- "I think the more relaxed environment of the Teach Around encourages me to pay attention more than the more formal/professional nature of presentations at conferences. The familiarity of the presenters and the less formal setting combine to make me more comfortable and encourages me to be more engaged with the presenters."
- "Cheaper."
- "It's a good opportunity to test ideas and get feedback from your peers about a project you might be considering implementing."
- "The in-house professional development is more likely to be applicable to our specific activities here at Cook Library and it's more likely to be something I can use in my current daily practices because it's been designed specifically for our department."
- "Don't need to travel."

The Teach Around will likely continue to evolve to meet the needs of the changing library and librarian roles. It will however continue to be complementary, not supplementary, to the external professional development programs that Cook librarians are encouraged to attend and present at. As one librarian commented in the survey, "It's not good to become ingrained or insular in thinking. It's probably more likely that someone outside of our organization (or an insider who has had the benefit of attending conferences with participants from all types of institutions) will present a "fresh" perspective that an insider might not because of our institutional group think. On the other hand, an insider can more accurately address topics/training that meets our specific needs and environment. Essentially then, it is best to have a combination of internal and external professional development programs."

Future Research Directions

While the theories justifying the benefits of internal professional development and peer learning are evident, there is little actual research proving the effectiveness of such programs in an academic library setting. Cook Library's anecdotal evidence is useful, as are studies examining similar programs in other professions, but more research must be done in this area. This is especially true as this type of development becomes more utilized. Perhaps motivated by recent economic downturns, alternatives to costly professional development have become a priority for many libraries. The economic climate coupled with changing roles for librarians and an increased need for development programs will likely increase the exploration of internal development programming. Even if libraries are simply seeking out a way to save money, the added benefits described in this paper will likely become evident locally in our libraries and in our profession as a whole. As this happens, larger research projects studying the impacts of internal professional development will need to be developed. Additionally, as the body of literature relating to knowledge management, situated learning, and peer learning continues to grow, these theories will help inform best practices in such a program.

Conclusion

While professional development through conferences and other external means continues to be essential to

professional growth and gaining new perspectives, the added benefits of internal professional development are not to be overlooked. In a time when the roles of librarians are changing, expanding, and growing more varied, it is crucial that we stay in touch with our colleagues at our own institutions. As we become less siloed on campus, we must make sure that we do not put up silos within our own libraries. Internal professional development encourages this communication between colleagues not only in hope to share information and knowledge, but also to inspire transformation through partnerships.

Notes

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