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Training to Teach Graduate Information Literacy Sessions Using a Team-based Mentorship Approach: Report on a Pilot Project at the OISE Library

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Abstract

Staffing changes in the summer of 2015 at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Library and an increased student enrolment in one of OISE's core programs meant that the OISE Library would not be able to meet the demand for information literacy (IL) instruction in the fall. A new librarian and two Library and Information Science (LIS) graduate students were hired in early September and had only a short time to learn about OISE's students, programs, and IL instruction more broadly before designing, delivering, and evaluating IL sessions for graduate students in OISE's Master of Teaching (MT) program. Recognizing and drawing on each team member's unique skills and experiences, the OISE Library piloted a team-based mentorship approach to training which enabled the team to collaboratively develop their instructional skills while meeting the goal of a better IL session for its MT students. In turn, this approach provided the LIS student instructors the unique opportunity to gain instructional experience within the library, teaching fellow graduate-level students. This paper outlines the rationale for piloting a team-based mentorship approach, describes the various implementation stages of the pilot project, and explores the ways in which the instruction team incorporated MT student feedback to improve its teaching. LIS students on the instruction team share their perspectives on participating in an instruction team.

Keywords

information literacy instruction, instruction teams, instruction librarians, LIS training, LIS student instructors, mentorship

Introduction

Faced with staffing changes and a projected increase to student enrolment in one of the education department's core programs, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Library anticipated that it would be unable to meet the demand for information literacy (IL) instruction in the fall of 2015 using its current model of instruction. OISE's Master of Teaching (MT) program, an intensive two-year program designed to train students to become teachers while pursuing research in the field of education, had steadily increased in size over the previous three years. MT faculty members predicted that the number of MT classes might double from the fall of 2014 to the fall of 2015. After exploring a variety of possible solutions, the OISE Library ultimately decided to reduce the length of MT IL sessions from three hours to two hours and to request funding to hire an additional instructional librarian and two LIS students to provide instruction for OISE's graduate students.

Context

The OISE Library is the largest education library in Canada and one of 44 libraries at the University of Toronto. The OISE Library supports students, staff, and faculty in initial teacher education (Master of Teaching, and Master of Arts in Child Study and Education), graduate studies in education (M.A., M.Ed., PhD., and Ed.D.) programs, and those pursuing professional development, research, and teaching in the field of education. In the 2015-2016 academic year, there were approximately 3,000 graduate students enrolled in graduate degree programs at OISE.

Due to a high demand for customized in-class IL sessions and declining attendance at open registration workshops, the OISE Library discontinued most of its open registration workshops in the fall of 2012. Instead, librarians focused on working directly with faculty members in OISE's various departments and programs to design course-embedded IL sessions. While demand for customized in-class IL instruction continued to climb in the following years, the number of instruction librarians decreased.

Table 1.

Total number of IL sessions and % increase over previous year

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of IL sessions</u>	<u>% Increase over previous year</u>
2012-2013	96	n/a
2013-2014	106	10.5%
2014-2015	112	5.7%

IL staffing at the OISE Library reached critical levels in the summer of 2015. As the result of a series of unanticipated staffing changes, only one librarian—the Acting Director—remained available to provide in-person IL instruction for the fall 2015 session. This, combined with an increase in enrolment in OISE's Master of Teaching

(MT) program, meant that the Library would not be able to meet the demand for IL instruction.

Funding was approved to hire a new instruction librarian and two graduate LIS students in September to assist the Acting Director with IL instruction for the 2015-2016 academic year. The two LIS students were hired for ten hours per week each to participate in the design and delivery of the IL session for all 14 of OISE's MT classes, and to work on a variety of initiatives to support instruction such as curriculum mapping, and updating and creating worksheets, handouts, LibGuides, and screencasts. Once new staff had been hired, the question then became how best to prepare them to become the most effective instructors in a short period of time.

Review of the Literature

A Gap in LIS Training

One theme that emerged from a review of the literature is the tension that exists between the need for academic librarians to teach information literacy sessions and the sentiment expressed by many academic librarians of feeling inadequately prepared to teach as a result of a gap in their LIS training (Kane & Meehlhause, 2014; Saunders, 2015). The Ithaka S&R U.S. Library Survey 2013 reports that library directors of four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. are nearly unanimous in asserting that teaching information literacy and research skills is an important function of the academic library (Long & Schonfeld, 2013). In an analysis of entry-level job postings for academic librarians published in 2012, Johnson, Sproles, and Detmering found that 96.8% of entry-level postings required information literacy instruction skills. While information literacy instruction is a core competency for many academic librarians, courses on information literacy instruction continue to be elective at almost all ALA accredited library schools (Saunders, 2015).

Building Teaching Capacity Through Peer Observations

To bridge this gap in training, practicing instruction librarians have developed their teaching skills through ongoing professional development, including peer observations. In 1998, Oregon State University Libraries began exploring peer evaluation of instruction. In the first years of the program, only academic librarians in the early stages of their careers observed and critiqued one another's teaching (Middleton, 2002). Following a successful pilot, it became common practice for tenure track librarians in different stages of their careers to participate in a more formal peer observation process. Middleton concludes that peer evaluation in any form is a critical component to building strong, successful instructors by sharing expertise, offering support, and staying current and effective. It is not only being critiqued that is beneficial, but also observing peers and picking up useful teaching strategies in the process.

Building Teaching Capacity Through Mentorship

In addition to peer observation, another strategy to develop teaching capacity is mentorship. Lacy and Copeland (2013) point out that there are a number of initiatives that focus on mentorship for newly hired librarians but that there continues to be a gap in mentorship opportunities for LIS students. The authors outline the benefits of a joint library mentorship program for LIS students at the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) and the university library at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). While the goal of the program was not specifically to provide opportunities for mentorship in teaching, students who participated in the program reported that co-teaching with an instruction librarian was highly beneficial. The SLIS / IUPUI mentorship program exemplifies a traditional mentorship model, wherein “the librarian makes a conscious, deliberate effort to give advice, answer questions, and provide feedback to the student” (Lacy & Copeland, p. 5).

In traditional mentorship relationships, the transfer of knowledge is from the mentor to the mentee. One model of mentorship which moves away from a top-down approach to mentorship is E.P. Clapp’s (2011) omni-directional approach to mentoring. Clapp proposed a “conceptual case for a new approach to mentorship” (p.1) which combined “the concepts of mentoring-up and lateral mentorship with more traditional notions of top-down mentorship” (p.1). Unlike traditional mentorship models where a “wizened field leader shar[es] knowledge and expertise with a less experienced protégé” (Clapp, 2011, p.1), Clapp’s omni-directional approach to mentorship posits that there are multiple stakeholders in the mentorship process, and that the exchange of knowledge and expertise between stakeholders is multidirectional and reciprocal.

Team-based Mentorship Approach

Although not specific to academic libraries, group mentoring in organizations has been discussed in the training literature, most notably by Kaye and Jacobson (1995). The authors detail group mentoring in organizations where an experienced “organizational veteran” is placed with “a group of four to six less experienced protégés” (p. 24). The authors state the benefit of this model is that the group becomes a “learning group”, with members exchanging ideas with one another and where the “responsibility for learning and leading” is shared among the group (p. 24).

In the academic library setting, Bosch, Ramachandran, Luevano and Wakiji (2010) discuss a pilot Resource Team Model (RTM) at the California State University, Long Beach. The team included three mentor librarians who were paired with one new librarian to introduce the new librarian to all aspects of librarianship and to the organization as a whole. Their RTM approach incorporated aspects of coaching, mentoring and training. The authors write that one of the model’s advantages was that it allowed all members to teach and learn from one another: the mentee gained guidance from the team and mentors learned from each other by exchanging ideas about teaching and learning. While the authors initially felt that they used a group mentoring model, they note that the focus was on passing information to a new librarian. They did not discuss mentors learning from the mentees or peer mentoring.

An article surveying different types of mentorship commonly discussed in academic library literature (Ross, 2013) lists informal and group mentorship, and pairings of peers, subordinates, and/or superiors. The author describes case studies in which students participated in extended outreach that would normally have been provided by librarians at various service points in academic libraries. In these cases, a peer mentorship relationship emerged in the process of student employees helping student library users, however peer mentoring between student staff members is not discussed. The author also notes that informal mentoring can emerge along with collaborative processes where library staff bring different levels of experience to a project, in which mentorship is not the explicit goal or draw of participation. There are benefits for both the mentor and mentee in informal mentorship, including having a salutary influence on the profession and the potential for reverse mentoring. In reverse mentoring, newer and often younger team members bring fresh eyes and new approaches to existing projects, in the process mentoring older and more experienced team members. Though this article refers to the concept of reverse mentoring in two sections, it does not elaborate upon case examples in academic libraries.

LIS Students as Teachers

Other institutions have recognized the value of creating opportunities for LIS students to develop their teaching skills. UBC developed a peer-to-peer volunteer tutoring service to help them experience teaching and form a professional identity (O'Brien, Freund, Jantzi, & Sinanan, 2014). During the process, the LIS tutors were able to negotiate their leadership role with fellow students and also within the larger university system as professionals. For many LIS students, it was their first opportunity to interact with the interpersonal and information service aspects of librarianship, skills that O'Brien et al. assert cannot be provided in the classroom. Limitations of the model include the use of the term "peer tutors" which may have confined the participants, and led to a focus on boundaries rather than opportunities.

In 2009, the Science and Engineering Library at UBC hired LIS students to assist with a variety of reference tasks, including teaching bibliographic instruction sessions to undergraduates (Barsky, Greenwood, Sinanan, Tripp, & Willson, 2010). Students taught from a comprehensive lesson plan, preparing by observing librarians teaching and being observed in turn, and sharing feedback along the way. Students were not involved in the lesson planning process. This UBC program was intended to help students experience working in a library setting like a librarian, building professional skills and competencies, and building a professional academic network. The program also had the benefit of providing release time for librarians.

Another more recent example of a program designed to provide LIS students with teaching experience prior to graduation is the Graduate Teaching Assistants program (GTA), a partnership between Emporia State University Libraries and Emporia State's School of Library and Information Management (Kane & Meehlhause, 2014). Similar to UBC's Engineering Library, LIS students were hired to assist with reference services and to provide information literacy instruction for undergraduate students. As was the case with UBC, training included observing experienced instruction librarians, being

observed, and receiving formative feedback on their own teaching. Another parallel between the programs was that GTA student librarians did not assist in the design of the lesson plan or supporting materials.

An example of a university that incorporates LIS students in a team-based instructional model is San Jose State University. As part of an internship program designed to provide LIS students with practical workplace experience, students at San Jose's School of Library and Information Science have been supporting programming since the fall of 2007 (Sargent, Becker & Klingberg, 2011). As members of subject-specific teams supervised by librarians, LIS students observed librarians providing instruction, attended team meetings, and helped to co-design and co-teach one-shot instruction sessions. Focus groups revealed that LIS interns felt that the program had contributed to their professional and career development, but that they would have benefitted from additional feedback and mentoring (Sargent, Becker & Klingberg, 2011). Any unique contributions of the LIS interns to the instructional teams are not discussed in the article.

Opportunity to Rethink Instruction

Content of IL Sessions

While the prospect of reducing the length of MT sessions at the OISE Library by a third and training a new instruction team at the beginning of September was daunting, it was also exciting to consider the opportunities that these changes might provide for rethinking instruction. In terms of the IL sessions themselves, planning for a shorter two-hour session provided opportunities for members of the instruction team, in consultation with MT faculty members to:

- consider how the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework and assessment would be incorporated
- re-examine and update learning outcomes and session activities
- determine what information was "key" and what could be omitted and/or shared with students in another way (e.g., via a research guide or handout)
- write a detailed lesson plan
- review, update, and create supplemental materials (worksheets, handouts, slides, and an accompanying research guide)
- develop an online workshop evaluation form

Instruction Team and Training

Forming a new four-person instruction team, combined with short timelines for training, also provided an opportunity to rethink the library's approach to staff training. The most efficient approach for training the new instruction librarian and LIS students might have been for the Acting Director, an experienced instruction librarian, to have created a

detailed lesson plan for MT sessions and then invited the librarian and LIS students to observe her teach.

But would this be the most effective way to train the new instruction librarian and LIS students while building on their strengths and skills? Could the LIS students successfully help MT students achieve learning outcomes if they did not first understand what a learning outcome was or the reasons why specific outcomes had been selected? Without at least a basic understanding of the ACRL Framework, would they grasp the importance of helping MT students develop core conceptual understandings rather than focusing exclusively on teaching them to use tools?

After considering a variety of alternative approaches to training, the Acting Director adopted a team-based mentorship approach to designing MT sessions. This approach had the potential to provide opportunities for all members of the newly formed instruction team to engage in meaningful discussions about pedagogical theory and practice, while actively participating in the design and development of the MT sessions. One important benefit of the new team-based approach to planning MT sessions was that the process provided multiple training and mentorship opportunities. Planning meetings provided teachable moments, allowing for team members to grapple with challenging aspects of IL instruction such as the development of learning outcomes, and how best to incorporate threshold concepts and assessment into instruction.

The team-based approach to redesigning MT sessions facilitated the sharing of diverse ideas. All members of the team made important contributions. The Acting Director shared with the team the knowledge and experience she had gained from providing IL instruction over the past six years to OISE's students and instructors. As a former elementary school teacher and sessional lecturer of Design and Evaluation of Information Literacy Programs at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information, she was also able to contribute expertise and support for other team members on pedagogical theory and practice. The newly hired librarian was also a former elementary school teacher and able to contribute teaching expertise to the team. As a lead teacher, she had acquired experience observing colleagues and providing feedback to improve their instruction practices. As a recent graduate of the Faculty of Information, the new instruction librarian brought with her fresh perspectives, as did the first and second year graduate LIS students. The LIS students were also better able to relate to the students in the MT programs, and provided valuable insights on making the content and delivery of sessions more accessible. It is also important to note that there was an exchange of knowledge between the two LIS students, which will be discussed later in the article.

Figure 1. Team Dynamics

The Teaching Process

Prior to Teaching

In the three weeks leading up to the team's first teaching session, the Acting Director created a structure of support that built the team's confidence in library instruction.

The team first began the teaching process by reviewing the ACRL framework and discussing how to build learning outcomes based on the topics that needed to be covered during the workshop sessions. Through consultations with the MT coordinator and instructors over the summer, the instruction team knew which topics were "must haves" and should be covered during the two-hour workshop. The topics included both library research skills and preparing students for their practice teaching placements. The tools and resources introduced included:

- citation management
- online polling tools to use in the K-12 classroom
- resources for practice teaching and lesson planning, including educational databases
- introduction to OISE's Deepening Knowledge Project, a website which seeks to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into all levels of education¹
- open access and an introduction to the University of Toronto's institutional repository, TSpace
- research skills that would be needed for their major research project

In addition, the team wanted to provide students with an orientation to the resources and services offered by the OISE Library. With this list of resources and services in mind, the Acting Director and Instruction Librarian created the outline of the workshop

¹ <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/>

lesson plan and developed an in-depth script to help prepare the team for teaching. The script was not prescriptive, but rather provided an idea of what one might say to students to explain a topic, questions that could be asked, and key points and considerations for each section. The lesson plan was made available to the team prior to the first teaching session so that each member could provide comments and ask questions about the first draft.

Everyone on the team was consulted and involved in the planning process. This degree of involvement in the planning stages created a collaborative team where each member felt engaged and invested in the sessions. Before the team began teaching, they worked on redesigning handouts and updating research guides to ensure that the supporting instruction materials were tailored to the sessions. The Acting Director also provided the instruction team with training on educational databases and search strategies to help strengthen the team's teaching over the semester.

MT students were required to come prepared for the sessions. Members of the instruction team contacted MT instructors prior to the workshops to provide them with the materials students needed to complete before the session. Students were asked to fill out a research handout where they brainstormed their topic, keywords and related terms for their major research project. They were also asked to register in advance for a citation management tool.

During the Teaching Sessions

Between September 28 and October 20, 2015, the instruction team delivered 13 two-hour workshops to approximately 325 MT students. Early on, the instruction team established a teaching schedule based on creating a supportive foundation for teaching. The Acting Director and Instruction Librarian co-taught the first MT session to get an idea of the pace of the session, to understand what could be omitted due to time constraints and to gauge the level of student readiness. There were varying levels of preparedness within the 13 cohorts. For example, in classes where students had not created their citation management accounts ahead of time, there was limited time available for students to explore practicum resources.

After the first session, the LIS students took turns shadowing the Acting Director and Instruction Librarian. They were encouraged to provide feedback about the content, pacing and delivery of the session. Actively asking for feedback from the LIS students strengthened the team-based mentorship approach as it demonstrated that each team member's input was valued and that their participation in the team was reciprocal. Each LIS student then co-taught once with the Acting Director before teaching independently. The Instruction Librarian sat in to observe and provide feedback to each student about their first solo teaching session. Attending the session also provided the Instruction Librarian with an opportunity to observe MT students in the class: to better understand which concepts MT students found challenging, or areas where extra support might be needed. After each session, the LIS students were encouraged to reflect on their own teaching to consider what went well during the session and what could improve.

Figure 2. LIS Scaffolding

Once the lesson plan for the MT workshops had been finalized, the instruction team consulted with an OISE librarian, to discuss questions to ask students and the methods of data collection to use for session evaluation. One key consideration was that the team wanted to gather feedback that could be immediately incorporated into the remaining sessions. Four open-ended questions were asked:

- What did you find useful about today's session?
- How could this session be more relevant to you?
- Is there anything we missed?
- Do you have any other comments?

The evaluation was embedded within a research guide that was used throughout the session. The last five minutes of the workshop were allocated to students completing the workshop evaluation to ensure a high response rate. An important benefit of this method of data collection was that the team was able to see evaluation results immediately after each session, allowing changes to be made quickly as needed. The team learned from each other's successes and challenges in each session by collectively sharing MT student feedback. Team members were then able to apply feedback that individual instructors received to improve their upcoming workshops. Feedback provided by MT students was also a timely and useful tool for preparing the LIS students for their first solo teaching session, along with observation notes from the instruction librarian. Once all 13 sessions had been delivered, the LIS students worked on analyzing the results of all workshop evaluations.

The LIS Student Instructor Experience

In preparing for the workshops, the instruction librarians and LIS students had frequent planning meetings. Through the collaborative nature of the meetings the LIS students were able to share perspectives drawn from their previous experience and professional backgrounds. The second year LIS student drew from experience with graduate research, seminar presentations, and working in previous student library assistant positions. In addition, the second year LIS student had previously completed a course on the design and evaluation of information literacy programs at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information and was therefore able to share what she had learned with the first year LIS student. The first year LIS student had professional experience teaching photography and giving workshops at a design college.

Coming from different academic backgrounds and levels of experience with teaching and libraries, the LIS students learned from one another's experiences, supported one another, and could draw from their combined skills when teaching. Planning for MT sessions in 2016-2017, the returning LIS student will be able to share his knowledge and experiences with the incoming LIS student. In mentoring the incoming LIS student, the returning LIS student brings the mentorship model full circle.

The planning process involved key aspects of instruction (planning, delivery, and assessment), and understanding how these activities all inform each other and work together. Through direct involvement in the planning process, the LIS students built an understanding of key instructional concepts such as developing learning outcomes, applying ACRL threshold concepts, and planning and delivering a workshop tailored to graduate level students. The LIS graduate students also learned the importance of engaging audiences through active learning techniques such as hands-on practice, online polling software, think-pair-share, and self-guided activities.

In addition to team planning meetings, the instruction librarians met with the LIS students in one-on-one meetings after their first few workshops to provide guidance and feedback. Topics discussed in the feedback included approaches for engaging students, presentation delivery, and integrating supplementary materials and resources into instruction sessions. Results from the workshop evaluations completed by MT students were also reviewed by the instruction librarian and the LIS student immediately following each workshop. This was crucial since all of the workshops had to be delivered over a short period of time. The iterative and immediate feedback allowed the LIS students to make improvements to successive workshops and improve as instructors.

One particularly salient piece of feedback from MT students was that they viewed the LIS students as effective instructors. Indeed, when students volunteered feedback on the instructors, it was consistently positive. MT students did not make distinctions between the librarians and LIS students as instructors. Going into the sessions, the LIS students had concerns about teaching a group of peers. Furthermore, the Master of Teaching students were education students and, as such, would be more attuned to the pedagogical choices involved in the lecture, increasing the pressure on the LIS students. Receiving positive feedback immediately after their first solo teaching sessions bolstered their confidence going forward.

In late October, after all of the workshops had wrapped up, the LIS students undertook an in-depth analysis of workshop evaluations. In analyzing and interpreting the findings and trends, the LIS students learned important skills for their future planning and for the delivery of instruction sessions, in terms of incorporating feedback and being attuned to students' needs.

The LIS students shared the successful outcomes of the team-based mentorship approach to training with the MT instructors and other OISE librarians. They presented a brief overview of the project at a University of Toronto Libraries' Library Teaching and Learning Committee meeting midway through the academic year, and a more in-depth

presentation at a library conference in spring 2016. These provided opportunities to discuss the project and their roles within it, and to answer questions from librarians who might consider undertaking a similar approach to training and instruction at their own libraries.

The LIS students now possess a skill set that is unique among their peers at the institution and will be valuable when they enter the profession after graduation, as they will be able to confidently deliver library information literacy sessions. Having had the opportunity to turn theory into practice, they gained experience and familiarity with teaching in a library setting and an understanding of the time required to prepare and refine an IL session. Through feedback received from the librarian mentors, MT students, and one another, the LIS students learned to see teaching as a process in which improvement is ongoing.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset, this team-based mentorship approach to training provided opportunities to rethink instruction in novel ways at the OISE Library, and benefited everyone in the team. The change in approach enabled the team to meet the increased demand for instruction sessions with a better workshop. For the LIS students, this project helped build a strong skill set and ensured that they would feel ready to teach in the future, benefitting the profession in turn as they move beyond their program of study into the field. The team was able to rethink established workshop plans and make changes grounded in feedback and assessment. The change also infused the fresh perspectives of a new librarian and two LIS students at different points in their studies, and closer to the graduate student experience of the MT students in the workshop. Overall, the workshop was refreshed and renewed. Preparing and delivering the workshop also led to the creation of materials and resources that will be used in future workshops, such as lesson plans that can be added to or customized rather than starting from scratch each year. The time invested during this project will pay off when it comes to planning and delivering future workshops, as the returning LIS student will require only minimal training and will be able to help train the newly hired LIS student. Ultimately, the team-based mentorship approach to training enabled all members to contribute fully to the team, drawing on one another's strengths and past experiences.

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