Preface

Reflect, Connect, Perform: Reframing Teacher Development for Inclusive Library Learning

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In 2016, three enterprising librarians seized the opportunity to collaborate through their libraries in a nationally funded program of work that enabled their staff to experiment with new approaches to personal, professional, and organization development, and to redefine their roles and goals in the changing educational arena. L2L – Library Staff Learning to Support Learners Learning– is a groundbreaking endeavour that has transformed the professional lives of librarians and library assistants in Irish academic libraries and given new meaning and direction to their educational work and goals. L2L has real potential to revitalize the library teaching and learning community globally and catalyze similar transformations in other countries; the stories and insights shared in this book and companion website represent the first step in that process.

Narrated and crafted by project participants as candid accounts and honest reflections of their own educational journeys as library teachers and learning facilitators, the chapters and vignettes presented here will help fellow library workers around the world take a fresh look at their practice and the whole process of teacher development in libraries and encourage them to approach their own professional learning with renewed commitment and creativity. Projects in the UK and other countries have explored the professional development of librarians as teachers and contributed to our understanding of the forces driving and inhibiting the changes many of us want to see come to fruition. Yet despite advances on several fronts library workers continue to be frustrated in their efforts to accomplish their vision of the teaching library. Challenges have come from within and outside the library; access to resources, availability of courses, attitudes of colleagues, and ambiguity around roles have all been cited as barriers to professional development.
The L2L experience shows how library staff can overcome these and other challenges. The key to success is the National Professional Development Framework for All Staff Who Teach in Higher Education, a tool that is available on the web for anyone interested to access and use. Launched in 2016 in Dublin, Ireland, by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, the PD Framework (also known as the PDF) is captured in a ten-page document that sets out five domains for professional development, supported by a typology of professional development activities and learning, a cyclical model of evidence-based reflection and planning, and articulation of five core values underpinning the framework. The L2L consortium of three Irish academic libraries was funded to field test and evaluate the utility and quality of this new framework as a professional development tool for library staff.

Other frameworks supporting the professional development of teachers exist, but this Irish framework has several distinctive, unique qualities that make it an exceptionally good fit for the library community. First and foremost, it is truly inclusive, explicitly designed to support the professional development of all staff – not just academics, and not just professionals – who teach or facilitate learning in higher education, thus including in one single framework everyone on campus who interacts with learners from senior professors to library shelvers. Secondly, it is appositely holistic: most professional development/competency frameworks focus on professional knowledge and skills, and some also cover professional ethics and values. This framework goes well beyond those areas and in addition includes as domains in their own right:

- the ‘Self’ in teaching and learning, including the personal values, perspectives and emotions that individuals bring to their teaching and learning facilitation;
- professional/disciplinary identity, values and development, including the development of critical reflection skills and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL);
- personal and professional digital capacity in teaching and learning, again promoting a holistic socio-technical perspective on the use of information, communication, collaboration and education technologies and tools.

Additional features that speak directly to the needs of the academic
library community at this particular juncture include the welcome emphasis on informal and collaborative learning in the workplace, promoting professional development as a process, not an event; and the complementary emphasis and explanatory guidance on reflective, evidence-based practice – which has often been promoted by professional organizations in our own and other fields, but typically with minimal advice on what it means to reflect, to do reflection, or be reflective (Corrall, 2017).

However, to understand fully the importance and significance of the approach, design, and methods of the Irish PDF for librarianship and information work worldwide, and also to appreciate properly the relevance and timeliness of the L2L project, we need first to review the current position of libraries in the higher education teaching and learning landscape. This foreword is intended to set the context for the stories that follow, and enable readers from different backgrounds to connect the Irish experience with key themes from research and practice in other countries. Our survey provides a necessary perspective for understanding why inclusivity, identity, informal learning, and reflective practice must be seen as central building blocks for advancing the development of teaching and learning in libraries.

Academic libraries have always played an important part in supporting the educational mission of their parent institutions and their instructional role has become increasingly prominent in university and college library mission statements, with commitments to support the curriculum, teach information skills, and facilitate lifelong learning featuring strongly in statements from both teaching-oriented and research-intensive institutions (Aldrich, 2007; Bangert, 1997). Showing learners how to find and handle books and other documents has been part of library work for more than a century, but during the past three decades the vision of the “teaching library” and “teaching librarian” has gained new momentum as the teaching role of academic libraries has been extended, developed and diversified in tandem with advances in technology, shifts in pedagogy, and expansion of higher education (ACRL, 2017; Ariew, 2014; Palmer, 2011). We have seen changes in the content or subject-matter taught (the “what” of teaching), in the modes and forms of instruction (the “how”), and in the people performing the role (the “who”).
The scope of library educational interventions has evolved from narrow library-oriented training through broader information-related education (including copyright, information fluency, and metaliteracy), to wider contemporary concerns such as academic and digital literacies, maker spaces and digital humanities labs, bibliometrics and research data management (ACRL, 2013; Cox, Gadd, Petersohn & Sbaffi, 2017; Cox, Kennan, Lyon & Pinfield, 2017; Horava, 2010; Sproles & Detmering, 2016). Methods of facilitating learning have also evolved, and now include screencasts, online tutorials, LibGuides, courseware, social media, flipped classrooms and digital games as examples of online and blended learning facilitation, in addition to face-to-face methods such as library orientation tours, printed handouts, “one-shot” lectures and demonstrations, hands-on laboratories, individual and group instruction, course-embedded sessions, credit and non-credit courses, essay-writing workshops, and a scholarly communication board game for researchers (Broussard, 2012; Julien, Gross & Latham, 2018; McGuinness, 2009; Morrison & Secker, 2018).

Information education is more extensive and more pervasive than ever before, integrated and embedded in library activities and library staff interactions with learners and researchers in physical and digital spaces. Interactions between library staff (as teachers/learning facilitators) and students or researchers (as learners) are central and critical to the learning experience; and such interactions can take place within a classroom, across a circulation or reference desk, face-to-face and online, or be embodied in printed or electronic resources serving as learning materials (Elmborg, 2002; Walter, 2008; Webb & Powis, 2009). The library teaching workforce has also grown to reflect the central and foundational role of formal and informal information education in the contemporary academic library. Information literacy education has traditionally been part of the job of reference, subject or liaison librarians, but today many academic libraries have established positions for highly specialized practitioners for whom instruction is a primary, full-time responsibility, and who often lead, coordinate or work with other staff expected to contribute to teaching and the facilitation of learning for varying amounts of time along with activities in areas such as academic liaison, reference, public services, and scholarly communication; and these other staff who make up the enlarged academic library teaching workforce today increasingly include paraprofessionals, library
technicians and library assistants, as well as librarians (Julien et al., 2018; Julien, Tan & Merillat, 2013).

A decade ago, Jo Webb and Chris Powis (2009, p. 29) noted that “teaching and supporting learning are now core activities for many library and information services staff, irrespective of the sector in which they work”, asserting that “skills in enhancing learning are a vital part of our professional role”, and arguing that “training for pedagogical development must include not only development for information skills teaching in formal education but also informal interaction through, for example, roving support in a library”. Ten years on the teaching function of the library has become more diffuse and inclusive, with growing acknowledgement that all frontline staff and many backroom workers have a significant role to play in facilitating learning, whether through formal teaching and training or informal guidance and invisible support. At the same time, the teaching role of librarians has become more specialized and professionalized, with job advertisements evidencing rising demand for librarians as teachers, growing diversity in the teaching-oriented positions announced, and “a substantial increase in job expectations, especially in regard to the level and amount of expertise required”, emphasizing both pedagogical know-how and experience with emergent technologies (Sproles & Detmering, 2016, p. 26).

Yet, the teaching role of librarians is not universally accepted; its reality and legitimacy have often been challenged, from within the profession as well as by others. Forty years ago, Pauline Wilson famously asserted that the whole notion of librarians as teachers was “an organization fiction”, a misnomer for the instructional work done by librarians (which she described as “informing” rather than teaching) that was actually harming our professional identity and status. In the same year, Ray Lester criticized the pedantry and rigidity of the (American) Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Objectives for Bibliographic Instruction and dismissed the growing library user education movement as “misconceived” and “quite inappropriate”, arguing that it was not the librarian’s job “formally to teach users how to use the library and search for information”, which should be the responsibility of subject teachers, though he accepted “one-to-one informal user education within the library as and when necessary” (Lester, 1979, p. 369).
The debate surrounding the librarian as teacher continues, with literature confirming the vision of the teaching library is “a project of identity as well as pedagogy” (Austin & Bhandol, 2013, p. 20), and revealing a spectrum of responses among librarians about their teaching responsibilities, from enthusiasm and enjoyment to reluctance and resistance, even resentment about choosing to be a librarian and then having to become a teacher (Bewick & Corrall, 2010; Davis, 2007; Julien & Genuis, 2011; Kemp, 2006). In the US, the debate is complicated by the related but different question of faculty status for librarians (Kemp, 2006; Wilson, 1979). The perceptions held by librarians of their teaching role are a crucial concern: are they “real” teachers, the same kind of teachers as academics? Alternatively, is their work a different type of teaching, such as learning support, or training? (Wheeler & McKinney, 2015). Librarians who view their job at the reference desk as supplying answers, rather than asking questions, may not recognize their encounters as “teachable moments”, and students may then leave such transactions better informed, but with poorer learning outcomes than could be achieved by adopting constructivist student-centred pedagogies at the reference desk (Elmborg, 2002).

The impact of technology on teaching and learning is another complicating factor affecting pedagogy in the library and the academy. Four decades ago, Wilson (1979, p. 157) suggested that “development and use of instructional technology may lead to a redefinition of teaching”, citing a report differentiating teaching from informing, and linking the latter with computer-assisted instruction and multimedia. Others have viewed the shift towards student-centred pedagogies, resource-based e-learning and online education as bringing the role of teacher closer to the librarian, practically and conceptually. Khanova’s (2013, pp. 36, 38) discussion of “becoming a virtual professor” equates the emerging role of online teachers, who “refer students to original sources of information for active, independent learning” with that of a “digital librarian”, whose task is to evaluate and select resources, such as “scholarly and news articles, blog posts on relevant topics, government documents, video recordings and assorted interactive tools”.

In 2004 (p. 373), Steve Bell and John Shank proposed the concept of the “blended librarian”, who combines “the traditional skill set of
librarianship with the information technologist’s hardware/software skills, and the instructional or educational designer’s ability to apply technology appropriately in the teaching-learning process”, flagging the need for librarians to embrace the skillsets of both instructional designers/educational developers and instructional/learning technologists, as virtual learning environments, blended or hybrid courses, and online education become more central to higher education. Matthew Koehler and Punya Mishra (2009, p. 66) confirm the need to give more thought to the integration of technology and pedagogy in teacher education, introducing the construct of “technological pedagogical content knowledge”, articulated in their TPACK framework, which illustrates the complex interactions among three bodies of knowledge – content (subject matter) knowledge, pedagogical (teaching and learning) knowledge, and information technology knowledge – which then give rise to more specialized kinds of knowledge, namely pedagogical content knowledge (disciplinary pedagogies), technological content knowledge (discipline-specific technologies), technological pedagogical knowledge (educational technologies), and finally technology, pedagogy and content knowledge, “an emergent form of knowledge that goes beyond all three “core” components”.

Teacher development, a concept that includes both attitudinal development and functional development (Evans, 2002), is the big issue threatening the educational goals of academic librarians. Studies of librarians with teaching responsibilities continually report that new entrants to the field feel unprepared – or at least underprepared – for their teaching roles (Julien & Genuis, 2011; McGuinness, 2011; Sproles, Johnson & Farison, 2008; Walter, 2008). In the USA, both academics and practitioners have consistently criticized professional education programs for inadequate provision of pedagogical content and insufficient emphasis on the teaching and learning role of information professionals in their core curriculum; nearly all programs accredited by the American Library Association now offer at least one specialist course on instruction, but generally as an elective rather than a requirement for graduation (Detlefsen, 2012; Saunders, 2015; Sproles, Johnson & Farison, 2008; Westbrock & Fabian, 2010), reinforcing the earlier argument that “pedagogy is no longer an area of “specialization” in librarianship” and “graduate programs must incorporate a vision of librarian as teacher” in all types of libraries (Albrecht & Baron, 2002, p. 75).
UK practitioners similarly want improved coverage of pedagogy in preservice education, while also recognizing the practicalities of teaching have to be learned on the job experientially as continuing development in the workplace (Bewick & Corrall, 2010; Inskip, 2017). A key point here is that teacher education for librarians is not just about pedagogical (and technological) knowledge and skills, but must include the development of teacher identity and self-image, and the ability to engage in reflective practice to support continuing professional development, as noted by Scott Walter (2008, p. 60) in his seminal study of professional identity of librarians as teachers:

“Reflection on teacher identity as part of preservice teacher education may also help students to develop the habits of personal reflection that contribute to their development as critical and reflective practitioners”.

Other research confirms that in practice the majority of teaching librarians look to sources other than library/information schools for their teacher education and training, notably professional development offerings at their own institutions, such as workshops provided by centres for learning and teaching (Hook, Bracke, Greenfield & Mills, 2003; Hoseth, 2009) and/or events organized by special interest groups of professional associations, such as the week-long immersion programs delivered regularly since 1999 by ACRL, a division of the American Library Association (Blakesley & Baron, 2002; Martin & Davis, 2012). Additional strategies used include one-day courses, certificated programs, conference participation, peer observation, and self-directed development via online communities, education blogs, teaching textbooks and MOOCs (Bewick & Corrall, 2010; Becher & Klipfel, 2014; Inskip, 2017; Webb & Powis, 2009).

Teaching librarians are thus participating in professional development events and programs designed specifically for librarians, but also taking part in local and external programs for teachers (in higher education and other settings) and engaging in individual and collaborative learning activities and processes that cut across the library/information and education/pedagogy communities. However, as the concept of the teaching library has matured and expanded, and the responsibilities and practices of teaching librarians and other library learning support practitioners have become accepted and established, we can see a shift
of interest from participation in formal education and training to engagement in informal *in situ* learning as a continuing process of personal and professional development. A related trend here is the resurgence of interest in reflective practice in the library teaching community, with several practitioners sharing their experiences with colleagues through articles (Burgoyne & Chuppa-Cornell, 2018; Goodsett, 2014; Pullman, 2018; Tomkins, 2009) and books (Booth, 2011; Reale, 2017). Librarians are also using reflection to engage with critical pedagogy, action research, and and SoTL (Doherty, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; McNiff & Hays, 2017; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2015; Otto, 2014).

Individual and collaborative teacher development is also being supported by competency frameworks produced by professional bodies, such as the ACRL (2007, 2017) proficiencies for instruction librarians or the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) Professional Standards Framework (HEA, 2011). Webb and Powis (2009) advocate use of the latter rather than a library-specific tool in the absence of any reference to teaching in the professional knowledge specified by the (UK) Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP, 2004), beyond listing “training and mentoring” among the generic skills needed by practitioners; the CILIP (2013) Professional Knowledge and Skills Base now includes teaching and training skills in the professional expertise section, but the competency requirement is not properly elaborated. In 2017, ACRL replaced its list of 69 skills in 12 categories with a simpler less prescriptive model presenting a wider more holistic conception of the educational activities of academic librarians as seven potential *Roles* (Advocate, Coordinator, Instructional designer, Lifelong learner, Leader, Teacher, and Teaching partner) and identifying *strengths* (rather than skills) needed for each role, deliberately adopting the term *teaching librarian* “because it is deemed broader and more participatory than instruction” (ACRL, 2017, p. 364).

Despite their claims, none of the examples described or others reviewed in the context of this project offer the holistic perspective on professional development for teaching and learning support that the Irish PDF provides, nor do they promote the advancement of an inclusive and diverse teaching and learning workforce to the same extent. They also fail to deal adequately with professional identity, and give insufficient
attention to either reflective practice or digital technologies. In contrast, the Irish PDF provides clear, concise and complete coverage of the areas repeatedly highlighted by library and information practitioners. The stories that make up this inspiring volume furnish hard evidence of its practical utility and professional quality as a framework for the future development of all staff who teach and facilitate learning in libraries and other campus units, including the paraprofessionals, library technicians, library assistants and other workers who are increasingly important to our information literacy education programs, and the chapters here include a powerful example of one library assistant using the Framework during and following the L2L project to plan and make her journey from assistant to technician to conference presenter and published author.

As a librarian born in Ireland whose career as information specialist, library manager, service director, professional educator, and academic researcher has taken her to many different parts of the world, I am proud to have been involved as international advisor to this seminal work in my native land, and I urge readers to study the material presented here and use the outputs from L2L to enhance teaching and learning practices in their own communities.

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References


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