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Chapter 2:

Ethnographic Study of Information Literacy Librarians' Work Experience: A Report from Two States

Dr. Celene Seymour

Introduction

This chapter reports on an ethnographic study of the experiences, practices and feelings of academic librarians who teach information literacy. Based on in-depth interviews with nine librarians who have information literacy responsibilities – five in West Virginia and four in Colorado – it examines the real-life work of practitioners in a wide variety of instructional environments. The research considers participants' preparation for their instructional role, ambiguity about the concept of information literacy, instructional challenges and professional practices. The authentic voices of instructional librarians provide insights into the roadblocks they face, success they experience and their expectations for the future.

The goal of this study is to explore the environment of information literacy instruction, especially in view of the paradigm shift associated with new information literacy initiatives described by Mitchell et al. (2001) and Ondrusek (2008). According to Ondrusek, "the custodial conception of the library no longer serves the societal good" and instruction is becoming the central role of college and university librarians under this new paradigm (2008, 59).

This research provides a valuable opportunity to illuminate the culture and context of instructional librarians' work environment that is not often available through information literacy literature.

Ethnographic Research: An Overview

Ethnographic research seeks to understand and describe cultures by gathering perceptions of the people in that culture. "Ethnographic methods are used for capturing the largely unconscious cultural beliefs and practices" of participants (Hunter and Ward 2011, 265). By documenting these beliefs and practices and making implicit assumptions explicit, conclusions about how these assumptions impact behavior can be developed.

While quantitative or statistical research attempts to test a preconceived hypothesis by sampling large numbers of individuals, qualitative research such as ethnography generally focuses on a limited number of participants selected for the rich information they can contribute on a culture and issues related to that culture.

Once data is collected from interviews, observations, and other interactions with participants, it is sorted, reduced and analyzed. Interpretation of data, which has been called both an art and a science, consists of a close reading of accumulated information. Interview responses, for example, "are broken down into manageable sections or 'basic descriptive units', so that they may be more easily sorted, with the researcher concentrating on commonality of theme and pattern" (Maggs-Rapport 2000, 220).

Ethnography has been used by anthropologists to study exotic cultures for the past century, including Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928). The following year Robert and Helen Lynd published a study of what was considered an average American small town, *Middletown: A Study of Contemporary American Culture*. Their research applied ethnographic research to Western cultures and helped to popularize the methodology. Clifford Geertz further established the theoretical foundations with such works as *Interpretation of Culture* (1973). The framework for ethnography to be applied to broader social sciences was developed in the 1980's and 1990's by theorists and researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985), Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Norman Denzin (1997).

Ethnography has been used extensively to study education, including the cultures of educational institutions, interactions between students and among educators and students. Early research studied the social life of students (Cusick 1973) and made an attempt describe the classroom experience from the teacher's perspective (Smith and Geoffrey 1968). More recent research has studied learning from the perspective of minorities (Chang 1992) and the impact of emotions on teachers (Zembylas 2005).

While ethnography was an appropriate methodology to address the research goal of this chapter, it will not answer all questions pertaining to information literacy instruction or any other field. "The environment in which libraries exist increasingly requires them to possess a diverse and robust toolbox of research methods for understanding the rapidly changing needs and behaviors of students and faculty," according to Hunter and Ward (2011, 267). Some of the suggestions for further

research mentioned in the conclusions are better suited to quantitative research or other tools in the research toolbox.

Review of the Literature

My dissertation research (Seymour 2008) was an ethnography that mirrors much of the research methodology and data analysis used in the study described in this chapter. I studied eight college writing teachers to uncover what texts college writing teachers used, both published textbooks and student-created texts, and explore how these texts reflected a theory of writing instruction. I interviewed participants, observed their writing classes, and convened focus groups of their students to enrich my understanding of how texts were used. Textual analysis of research notes and interview transcripts allowed me to make comparisons among participants and develop conclusions about the beliefs and experiences that inform their instruction and how these drive their practices.

The research on information literacy instruction described in this chapter is similar to the strategies I used in my dissertation research in several ways. In both cases primary research data is comprised of the words participants used to describe their beliefs and experiences. Their rich descriptions are intentionally used to understand the culture they work in and what impact their environment has on their practices.

There have been a number of other studies that have informed both the methodology and subject of information literacy instruction which focus this chapter.

Julien and Genuis (2009) used interviews and diaries to explore how “library staff relate to their instructional roles and the implications of those self-understandings for instructional outcomes” (926). The emotions they uncovered range from “significant pleasure” and “personal satisfaction” to “frustration, disappointment, and other negative emotions” (930). As “librarians have shifted from being straightforward service providers to trainers and then to teachers, this latter role assumes some level of expertise in pedagogy and curriculum design,” what they found is related to “role stress” (926-927).

Julien and Given (2002/03) investigated “the discourse of librarians discussing their relationship with teaching faculty in postings to the Bibliographic Instruction/Information Literacy Instruction Listserve ...over the past seven years” (65). Researchers found that librarians “generally do not consider faculty members to be their clients—only those faculty members’ students.” (82).

Julien and Pecoskie (2009) looked at how librarians experience the teaching role. Interviews conducted with Canadian librarians with teaching responsibilities discovered ambivalence and even hostility. “One of the most salient themes identified in data analysis was the experience of complex and asymmetrical relationships between instructional librarians and teaching faculty at academic institutions.” (150)

Sanders (2009) surveyed 13 information literacy experts, “library professionals who demonstrated high levels of participation and leadership in the field” (102-103), to document their expectations of how information literacy will evolve over the next decade. The study reveals that new librarians and even experienced practitioners are

unprepared to fully partner with teaching faculty in instructional design. Sanders concluded that, "if librarians hope to advise faculty on instructional design and assignments or even take on a more full partnership role in instruction, they must be sure that they have learned the pedagogical theory to support the role" (109).

Cull (2005) used in-depth interviews of university teaching librarians to study their perceptions of information literacy instruction. He developed a description of academic librarians involved in information literacy instruction as "largely self-reflective, student focused, and pedagogically competent teachers who are passionate believers in the core role of information literacy in academic libraries" (1). Cull felt this type of research, which privileges the experiences and beliefs of information literacy instructors, was important because "few of their voices have been recorded in the professional literature" (2).

Ethnography has also been used to study issues related to student research and library usage. The University of Rochester hired Nancy Fried Foster, an anthropologist, to shed light on how students perform research and write papers by observing and interviewing them. The ethnographic study of undergraduate research practices by Foster and Gibbons (2007) "helped guide a library renovation, influence a Web-site redesign, led to changes in the way the library markets itself to students, and, in some cases, completely changed the image of undergraduates in the eyes of Rochester librarians" (Carlson 2007, 34).

Researchers have studied the various aspects of information literacy instruction – instructional (Julien and Pecoski (2009), Cull (2005), Manus (2009)), emotional (Julien

and Genius (2009)), cultural (Julien and Given (2002/03), Lister (2003)) and institutional (Saunders (2009)). The research described in this chapter seeks to integrate these four aspects of IL librarians' work in order to provide a unique understanding of their intersections and significance. What emerges is a holistic evaluation of their various effects on the viability and effectiveness of academic information literacy programs.

Methodology

Nine IL librarians, largely or primarily responsible for information literacy instruction in their academic libraries, were selected because they were either recommended by the editors of this book or were librarians at colleges or universities known to the researcher. The nine participants – five from West Virginia and four from Colorado -- represent a variety of academic credentials and professional experiences. Three had completed library school in the past decade while two had received degrees before 1980. Six had additional master degrees, beyond the professional requirement of MLS or MLIS, or will complete a second degree within the next year. One participant had a Ph.D. in English. Two librarians in this study had degrees in education or significant experience teaching outside of library instruction.

Participants were included with no expectation that they will precisely "represent" the entire population of IL librarians but would shed light on common experiences and concerns.

The initial research instrument for this study was a list of 18 open-ended questions regarding experience with, practices in, and beliefs about information literacy instruction. "Generally, semi- or unstructured, opened ended, informal interviewing is preferred to allow for more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes for both the interviewer and the respondent." (Jackson et al 2007, 25) These questions are included as an appendix to this chapter.

Follow-up questions were developed after responses to the initial survey were reviewed. Most follow-up questions were individualized for a particular participant, based on his or her earlier responses in order to better understand or expand on these responses.

This research used emails to communicate between the researcher and participants. James, who studied the validity of email interviews in educational research, concluded that "email interviews create an arena in which the academic self could be articulated and explored, and in which the researcher could study and understand their lives" (James 2007, 973).

During this study, I found emails provided a rich text which was analyzed and comparisons among participants made. The informality and safety of emails, in addition to providing time for reflection and correction to assure accuracy, allowed the passion, humor, hope and discouragement of participants to surface.

This research focuses on IL instructors in West Virginia and Colorado. All participants are associated with colleges or universities accredited by the Higher

Learning Commission, part of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which assures the quality of the educational environment.

Any similarities or differences between the two states in regard to providing information literacy instruction would enrich the study. Results shows IL instructors in the two states have similar backgrounds and experiences. They reported a range of support provided to information literacy programs and mirror the emotional and instructional terrain traveled.

In this chapter I will not attribute individual quotes to specific participants. I will use the term Information Literacy instructor (IL instructor) to refer to all participants. For a list of participants, see the Acknowledgements section at the end of this chapter.

Findings: Voices of Practitioners

This study is based on the input from practitioners in information literacy instruction. Participating IL instructors describe their backgrounds, responsibilities, instructional practices, challenges, success, expectations for the future and the emotional issues they deal with in the following section.

Preparation and Responsibilities

Preparation for their instructional responsibilities was a concern among participants. Only three of the nine participants took a course in library school devoted to instruction, others had no coursework focused on instruction and most indicated they feel this lack of training is problematic. Even those who completed library school since 2000 did not feel they were adequately prepared for information literacy instruction.

One IL instructor reported a need for a stronger pedagogical background. "My MLS program emphasized that we were to find the information that the user needed, not teach them how to find it." Another IL instructor reported having "absolutely no preparation for the pedagogical requirements of information literacy instruction." All participants have taken part in professional development activities and two have participated in ACRL's Information Literacy Immersion program.

One participant commented that librarians need the same instructional tools and training as faculty rather than those developed by and for librarians. "I feel that I have gained some of my best teaching skills from taking education classes and participating in teaching workshops designed for faculty."

There is not one simple description of the responsibilities the participants in this study fill. The number of students these programs serve, as reflected in student enrollment, varies substantially. Two institutions have fewer than 2,500 students and three have more than 29,000. One participant reported responsibility for 50,000 students across three institutions.

In larger universities, IL instructors would both manage the information literacy program and develop and provide instruction. As managers of information literacy instruction programs, participants report a significant amount of administrative responsibility. "As the Instruction Coordinator I plan and schedule the first-year writing workshops and general workshops and also manage the statistics and assessment analysis. I am also responsible for training the reference librarians on new instructional techniques, pedagogies, and technologies as appropriate. Finally, I also provide

instruction for the reference librarians on the creation of Research Guides (LibGuides) and online tutorials.”

Librarians in smaller colleges with limited (and sometimes rapidly diminishing) staff had general library duties such as covering the reference desk and providing assistance with technology in addition to their instructional duties.

An IL instructor said a broader responsibility is

bringing emotion into the workplace constructively to make change with a team of librarians who agree to be part of a learning organization. It's not the teaching itself and it's not convincing the faculty of the need for collaborative instruction. It's the challenge right here in our library workplaces to do things differently than ever before and talk together about whether and how we are going to face the intellectual and emotional demands of the 21st century academic library's educational mission together.

“This work is just plain hard,” she further reported.

Information Literacy Instruction Culture

Ethnography is a research methodology designed to explore and describe a culture that binds together individuals with similar values and interests. Although the information literacy instructors in this study do not share a physical environment or a common organizational structure, they do share the same responsibility for promoting student learning. An important goal in this research is to find out, based on the views of participants, if and how instructional librarians form a cohesive culture that can be studied and described and which supports their practices.

A description of the information Literacy mission was provided by one participant. “We collaborate to facilitate student learning before the student is involved, we expect students to be part of the information retrieval and evaluation process, and

we want them to reflect on the learning experience.” But is there a culture which specifically supports the expectations of this mission?

According to participant responses, IL librarians share their experiences with others in the field through informal exchanges and more formally at state library conferences. Some reported that listservs or blogs add opportunities for sharing. But one stated that, while she “benefited from the information in blogs and lists, they don’t compare to face to face communication.”

One IL librarian did not feel these cultural expectations are met in day-to-day experiences. “I’m not sure if the culture exists and I’ve just never managed to really plug into it, or if most other librarians feel sort of isolated as well.” Another reported that she is “incredibly busy, somewhat geographically isolated, and lacks access to funding for professional development activities.” Another participant remarked that she “would welcome a discussion on shared beliefs and experiences regarding instruction with other librarians....But I do not remember that such a conversation has ever happened, regrettably.” These appear to be common roadblocks to the creation of a viable information literacy instruction culture.

Opportunities for exchanging practices, questions and successes can lead to improved instruction by causing instructors to reflect on what they do. “I think anything that makes us think about what we do and why we do it can improve our instructional practices if we’re willing to be lifelong learners who can admit that we in

fact don't know everything about our chosen fields and...still have things to learn," remarked one participant.

The difficulty of determining a shared culture of information literacy instruction is obvious from participants' comments and it is evident that IL instructors do not exist in one culture, but in several. They generally provide reference services along with other librarians, in addition to teaching, and share activities such as instructional design and delivery with non-library faculty.

Several participants reported that approximately 50% of their time is spent providing reference assistance and it isn't possible to differentiate between reference and instructional services. "Reference librarians provide services one-on-one to users *and* they teach. They have very demanding responsibilities that require a balance between service and education. This sets up a cultural conflict within their positions because a service culture and an instructional culture have different beliefs and pressures."

However, another participant describes the relationship between reference and instruction more positively.

I consider reference and instruction to be two sides of the same coin – each reference encounter should be a teaching moment in helping students to develop information literacy skills and each instruction session (good ones anyway) should have hints of the reference interview as students are engaged in exploring what kinds of information resources are appropriate for a specific context.

In contrast, another participant commented that the gap between instructional librarians and librarians serving other functions is of real concern.

Open dialogue between sub groups within each culture is not easy when it comes to the issues of territory, changing practices, sharing core principles, and areas of disagreement. It is well past time to stop walking away from talking to each other about these underlying issues of changing roles and new challenges.

Some participants reported their participation in the wider instructional culture, sharing with non-library faculty, is valuable. One participant reported that "I'm finding that talking with my non-library colleagues at the institution where I work in is very informative." She is currently collaborating with the campus Writing Center to provide research instruction. "The folks in the Writing Center are fueling my ideas for this project, not my colleagues in the library."

It is clear from responses that IL librarians exist in a complex environment that straddles the cultures of reference librarians and non-library faculty. As part of library culture but also part of the institution's overall instructional culture, it may be more constructive to understand how IL instructors interact with these cultures to serve both the library's mission and the overall instructional mission of the institution.

Definition and Concept of Information Literacy

Participants in this study reflect an ambiguity in regard to the concept of information literacy and describe how our understanding of information literacy has changed over the past 20 years and continues to evolve.

"The concept of information literacy has its roots in the emergence of the information society, characterized by rapid growth in available information and accompanying changes in technology used to generate, disseminate, access and manage that information" (Bruce 1997, 2). In 1989 ALA defined information literacy as the

ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." Since that time the term has been challenged and debated. Shapiro & Hughes (1996) calls the term "an often-used but dangerously ambiguous concept." According to Budd, "coiners of the term probably meant something by it, but that meaning has been replaced by a circulating mélange of possible meanings" (Budd 2009, 63).

According to these IL instructors, there has been a shift in priorities from finding information to evaluating information and its appropriateness for meeting a particular need. Technology has also had a large impact on research and information gathering. One IL instructor remarked that the 'means' of locating the information should be added to the description.

The 'tools' of 1989 were far different from the technological advances used in today's information searching. In fact, these advancements are coming or changing at a rate that is challenging to the information professional, and they are overwhelming to the general information seeker.

Another IL instructor remarked on the need to address the "instant information" world these students live in. "Rather than seeing Google and/or Wikipedia as the enemy, we need to teach students how and when to use these tools and when it is more appropriate to use a more 'academic' source."

The need for librarians to keep alive the traditional standards for information evaluation in a culture where all information is considered equally valuable was voiced by one participant using a powerful mythological figure. He sees "the front lines of the information literacy battle today as more like Janus, the infamous two-headed god of

the door, who looked both backward and forward simultaneously,” occupying the middle ground between “barbarity and civilization.”

The traditional definition of information literacy was criticized by some participants because it lacks attention to critical thinking.

Both the term and the definition have always bothered me....My cat processes information at this defined level. He hears the pantry door open and comes running. Library research involves higher cognitive functions and incorporate experience, prior learning and problem solving. Somehow that doesn't come across in the definition,” reported one IL instructor.

Several IL instructors expressed the view that the concept of information literacy should not exist only within the walls of the academic library. Educators need to develop a culture of learning that extends beyond the wall of the classroom or the institution to the larger culture. The article by Shapiro and Hughes (1996) that presents information literacy as a “new liberal art” was quoted by one participant. Information literacy is a “new liberal art that extends from knowing how to use computers and access information to critical reflection on the nature of information itself, its technical infrastructure and its social, cultural, and philosophical context and impact”.

The ability to ponder, refine, debate and challenge the definition of information literacy and the direction in which it is evolving reflects the exciting times these leaders in the field of information literacy instruction work in. Although many felt the existing term and associated concepts of bibliographic instruction and library instruction are inadequate or inaccurate, no one offered an alternative term. “Information literacy

includes some admission of the inadequacy of those terms, but it does not replace them with a name that is sufficiently meaningful" (Budd 2009, 40).

Two participants defined information in the following way: "An information literate person has learned how to learn."

Describing it in a way that reflects learning skills rather than library skills, IL instructors can promote their critical function in the overall university curriculum.

Libraries' instructional programs are invaluable to facilitating learning, knowledge growth, and communication. Librarians can enable understanding of the nature and purposes of communication, help students engage in dialogue with what others say, write, and show, and foster, through phenomenological cognitive action, student learning, (Budd 2009).

By more precisely defining information literacy, both within the library profession and as individual IL instructors, practitioners will be better able to grasp the goals they are striving for and to articulate these goals to the university community.

Institutional Support for Instruction

None of the colleges or universities in this study has an institutional or state mandate to provide information literacy instruction. Several participating IL instructors indicated this lack of a mandate is a roadblock to successful and uniform information literacy instruction. Six of the nine participants responded that information literacy instruction is integrated into the First Year Experience, general studies program or other core curriculum. In describing the ideal information literacy program, several participants stated that the program would need to be required. But a requirement for information literacy is doubtful according to many participants. "The integration of information literacies across the curriculum is still only a dream," reported one IL

instructor. Another participant reported that “attempts have been made to integrate IL into general students or the core curriculum, but that has proven very difficult.”

As an example of institutional support for information literacy, one university offers a summer grant for faculty members to work with librarians to integrate information literacy instruction into their courses.

When participating IL instructors were asked to describe the institutional support their program received on a score from 1 (no support) to 5 (significant support), the wide range of perceived support became obvious. Some IL librarians reported support as low or non-existent (1 or 1.5) and others reported a high level of support (5 of a possible 5). The average score reported by Colorado librarians was 3.38, only somewhat higher than those reported by West Virginia participants (3.3).

Many participants reported that, while support from the library administration was high, support from the college or university administration was limited. Even within the library the support may vary from person to person. As one participant said, “the library administration does place a very high priority on information literacy. The rank and file may disagree with some of the administration’s ideas and methods, but they do support it.”

IL librarians may feel a lack of institutional support on a personal level. One participant reported a clear separation between librarians and non-library faculty and a distinction made by the university administration. “We do not generate FTE, there is no credit earning library courses. That places us low or nonexistent in the campus power structure. We are a service unit in the eyes of the university administration.”

“The reality in this challenging economy is that we will not get all the resources we need to make the program ideal, but we are doing the best we can with what we have by being creative,” is the philosophical and pragmatic way one participant described the need to “make do” with the financial support that is available. Without pressure from states and accreditation bodies, consistent and uniform support for information literacy instruction continues to be a problem in most institutions.

Instructional Terrain

Although much of the discussion of information literacy focuses on broader conceptual and cultural issues, it is also important to understand what goes on in the information literacy classroom and how student learning is impacted, either positively or negatively, by these other issues. The study reported in this chapter allowed participants to explain the teaching and learning process as they understand it and what instructional practices they use in information literacy instruction. The issue of communication with faculty and students regarding instruction was also discussed.

Instructional Standards:

Any description of instruction should start with an understanding of the specific standards or learning objectives which focus that instruction. Most participating IL instructors reported they rely on ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* to provide the focus for instruction. One IL instructor states, “They are the foundation for all that we do.” According to another IL instructor, “We keep them in the back of our minds as we prepare for information literacy modules or present to classes.” Several of the participants specifically post ACRL standards on their

library instruction web sites to justify their programs and to educate teaching colleagues.

Other participants don't directly articulate these standards but they do use them to create appropriate learning objectives. "We build our own learning objectives off of ACRL standards, in consultation with the course professor and course goals," states one IL instructor. Another participant reported creating student learning objectives related to ACRL standards with faculty input.

Although standards and competencies are the starting point for instructional design, Budd argues these narrow competencies do not define learning. "The concentration on skills and competencies omit integrated informing, cognitive growth and learning." (Budd 2009, 40) Budd states they "signaled a noble effort informed by the best intentions" (2009, 40) but discusses the inadequacy of these standards. For example, "they *are definitely necessary for students' learning, but they are far from sufficient*" (italicizes origin), (41).

Instructional Practices:

Instructional programs described by participants show a variety of practices and strategies. Instruction strategies range from typical one-shot sessions (limited in scope and scalable to reach many students) to strategies that allow the librarian to fully participate in course design, delivery and assessment. Strategies, described below, are categorized as Low Integration to Full Integration to reflect the degree that instruction is designed for a specific class with the continued involvement of the librarian.

Low-Integration into Instruction: Strategies mentioned by participants are one-shot orientation sessions (generally focused on use of the online catalog and databases and maybe a tour of the library); drop-in workshops (which could be focused on information search strategies, term-paper writing, citation of sources, etc.); online tutorials and videos. Wimba is also used by some programs and is particularly useful for distant or non-traditional students.

Medium Integration into Instruction: Options mentioned by participants include on-demand instructional session customized to fit needs of an individual class; Libguides (online research guides) developed specifically for a discipline, a course or an assignment; and information literacy components integrated into discipline-specific courses.

High Integration into Instruction: Embedded Librarian programs were reported by two participants. This is the practice of assigning a librarian to take "an active role as a secondary instructor" and attends several or most class meetings in a particular for-credit course. "By teaching information-literacy sessions evaluating student assignments, and answering questions about research and writing, I have direct influence within the course", reports Manus (2009, 250). As reported by one IL instructor, this commitment is difficult to sustain and it was not known if the staff will be able to continue this workload in the future.

An IL instructor described the development of a new required writing course in which a librarian was involved in goal setting and course design. As a result "the

mutuality of the goals and objectives of information literacy and writing instruction have come to the forefront for the writing faculty as well as for librarians.”

Those strategies in which the librarian is fully integrated into instruction are problematic because of the time and effort involved given the tremendous demand on the IL librarian’s time. Several participants reported having to cut back on some areas of instruction in order to sustain more intensive instructional efforts for other categories of students.

The degree to which library instruction can evolve from a cursory, one-shot orientation model, which Badke calls “remedial” (2010, 130), to one that allows a full range of involvement by a teacher librarian depends on the commitment of resources by the library and university administration and the willingness of faculty to share their instructional role.

Assessment of Learning:

Assessment of student learning is increasingly important as the demand for accountability in education grows. Assessment processes described by these IL instructors were uneven. Many programs rely on pre- and post-tests, minutes papers and surveys from students completing the instruction. There isn’t much formal measurement of how much students gained from the instruction but librarians rely on informal feedback and anecdotal evidence to judge the success of instruction. In some cases instructors reported they had developed an assessment process but they were still collecting data and analyzing results.

One participant reported participating in the national assessment efforts *iSkills* (now *iCritical Thinking*) offered by the Educational Testing Service which provides national benchmarks for both information and computer literacy. But results were not useful in terms of an overall impact on the information literacy program.

An IL instructor recommends “grass roots” assessment, which she describes as assessment in which librarians and faculty work together to “identify what we thought every student should know (or have experience with) upon leaving our institution.” This information then provides a foundation for the information literacy program and benchmarks for success.

Referring to assessment of the information literacy program, one participant described a program analysis she performed. “My findings were that we had a collection of instructional activities that were not directly or strategically linked to the mission of [the university] or each other from campus to campus.” Although participants report greater emphasis on measurement of student learning, they are struggling to create a system where evidence of student success (or failure) can be used to improve instruction.

Communication Related to Instruction:

The most effective way to educate the university community about the library instruction program is individually through face-to-face communication, according to participants in this study. “I talk to a lot of people when they come for coffee,” said one IL instructor. But, given the large number of faculty members some of these participants potentially collaborate with, more efficient ways are needed. Emails for a

specific reason, such as reminding faculty of instructional services at the beginning of the fall semester, sometimes work but faculty are often overwhelmed by the volume of emails they receive.

Communication is further complicated when many faculty work part-time. One participating IL instructor reported the difficulty communicating with part-time faculty. "Many instructors are adjunct and re-education about the library's instruction program has to happen every year or every semester."

Some instruction librarians participate in or initiate more formal in-person presentations. They partner with specific departments or programs, attending their faculty meetings, or provide workshops. The program described by one IL instructor offers "general workshop each quarter on a variety of topics. These workshops are open to any member of the [university] community, but...more faculty have been attending the workshops themselves and have then been requesting similar workshops for their classes...My guess is that by coming to a workshop themselves, faculty have a better sense of the kind of instruction that the librarians can provide."

Virtually all participants maintain web sites for instructional services which allow faculty to schedule instruction and communicate with the librarian about instruction. Some of these web sites are extensive, articulating information literacy standards and other resources. However, no participants indicated it was a significant means of communicating with others about their program. The function of the library instruction web site and how well it serves that function should be a concern of library instruction programs.

Educators are challenged to communicate with and educate students who exist in a culture very different from the one they lived in as undergraduate students. This gap is sometimes manifested in a clash of values. According to one IL instructor, "I see so many undergraduates that don't seem to value education for the purpose of being educated. Every project and assignment is a series of checks to get the degree...to get the job." Another IL instructor has no problem bridging the gap between students and faculty and feels the key is continuous learning rather than refusal to evolve. "There is so much learning to keep up with that I feel we all need each other to act as mentors no matter what age we are."

The technology gap between students and librarians of a different generation may not be as big as reported, according to one participant. "I multi-task just as badly as the 20 something's. As old as I am, I love IM and flipping around media sources in order to find information. The human commonalities are far more important than differences." Another IL instructor acknowledges the challenges of engaging students who exist in a digital culture so different from the one she was raised in. "I try to bring them some pure energy about the excitement of learning every micro-change that I get. It's rewarding. Their eyes light up. The conversation happens."

According to Ondrusek, the instructional foundation of information literacy must be built on a teaching force who "strive to understand learning itself", who "form partnerships with an institution's teaching faculty" and understand that "assessment of learning must be integrated into the program..." (50). Participants in this study display

an awareness of these requirements but are encountering roadblocks to addressing them given the failure of their institutions and a culture to fully support their endeavors.

The Emotional Terrain

Throughout the interviews the emotions expressed by participants, both positive and negative, are of particular importance to a deep understanding of the cultural, instructional and institutional terrains they travel. It is “reasonable to surmise that negative instructional experiences influence librarians’ efforts to educate learners” (Julien and Genuis 2009, 934). Therefore, exploring the emotional terrain associated with information literacy instruction and improving this environment should maximize the impact of instruction by minimizing negative instructional experiences.

In their study of how library staff members feel about their instructional responsibilities, Julien and Genuis found that “participants’ effective response was strongly shaped by their relationship with students and faculty” (2009, 930). In that regard, a feeling of isolation was expressed by a number of participants in the current study. One aspect of this isolation is a disconnect they feel from librarians serving other functions. In some regard this is because instruction programs are generally one-person operations with librarians from other departments filling in for a certain number of courses, but it is also because information literacy librarians see themselves as change agents. Their function is to upset the status quo which is no longer seen as effective.

One IL instructor reported being demoralized because “few of the librarians I work with seem to understand what I’m doing in the classroom. I feel they are only

interested in providing reactive services from the reference desk; oftentimes when it is too late to impact assignment design. Because of these differing philosophies I've been accused of 'not doing my job.' Frankly it is very demoralizing." However, she realizes that "librarians not as heavily involved in instruction may not have had the time, space or circumstances to reflect on" information literacy.

Several participants report it is difficult to convince library faculty to upset the status quo. Another participant said "convincing teaching faculty that the move away from one-shot sessions to more of an embedded librarian approach is necessary." "I am isolated and solo change agents do not make much headway in certain respects," reported another IL instructor.

Because of the power structure of the library and the institution, IL librarians are frustrated by a lack of leverage to force change. "No one reports to me so there are no repercussions for refusing to pick up classes or failing to impart useful information to students in the classroom or at the reference desk", according to a participant. Another participant reported that she has no formal authority to promote change or authority to influence the integration of information literacy instruction except the power of influence.

Another emotional issue raised by participants is lack of acceptance as equals by non-library faculty members. The majority of participants reported that they have faculty status but not tenure. Some indicated they feel fully accepted by non-library faculty members, especially those they collaborate with, and serve on committees such as the Faculty Senate and participant in other important university functions. According

to an IL instructor, "I think the faculty members who request presentations for their classes every semester respect my abilities and what I teach their students." She is not bothered by any perceived lack of respect.

But not all IL librarians are negatively impacted by this isolation and a number of participants addressed it in a positive way. "The more I accept myself as equal but unique in my own right, the better I feel." As another IL instructor reported, "the more they see us and work with us in classrooms throughout campus, the more they will understand and appreciate the unique instructional abilities of information literacy librarians."

All librarians who deal with the public directly, such as reference and circulation staff, face this "emotional labour" of providing service with a smile even at the most trying times and with the most trying patrons. But instructional librarians may face a different kind of emotional toll which requires proactive responses such as better preparation for and support for their instructional responsibilities and a greater understanding of the emotional issues they face that stand in the way of their success.

"I am convinced that we can best move toward our professional goals buoyed by the supportive tide of collegiality," (Lister 2003, 34). The nurturing of an information literacy culture could foster this collegiality and help IL librarians move toward their professional goals.

Challenges

The primary roadblocks to information literacy programs, as reported by participants in this study, are institutional and cultural.

The lack of support from the institution, both the library and university administrations, is reflected in inadequate staffing and funding. This shortage of manpower was reflected in larger institutions that had to provide instruction for 50,000 students and smaller institutions, one of which is eliminating the instruction librarian position. A participating IL instructor said, "Our strongest information literacy partner has been asking for more instruction and we simply can't provide it."

Getting information literacy taken seriously at the institutional level is a critical requirement to improving instructional success. These challenges also involve the library culture. Although some participants report a "sea change" in support of information literacy from librarians and library staff, others say librarians are reluctant to change their traditional responsibilities to provide instruction or are unwilling to update their teaching skills to have greater impact on student learning.

One participant reported that the library's historical commitment to service is having a negative impact on instruction. "Information literacy program development is about learning outcomes and there is a very strong culture of service in our library system that unintentionally undermines advances in educational practices," according to one IL instructor.

Successes

Instructional success is primarily reflected in greater demand and an increase in number of students in sessions. One IL instructor reported providing information literacy instruction for 5,000 students each year. Another said 2,100 students participated in instruction each semester as part of the required writing course. One

librarian who provides IL instruction (along with other public service duties) in a small institution with a very limited staff reported teaching 124 classes in the previous year.

Anecdotal evidence can also point to instructional successes. One instructor feels our assessment sometimes comes in informal encounters with students. The librarian told the following story to illustrate his point.

I observed a young man explaining to a young lady how to construct a proper search in a complicated database. He [the young man] explained that her search was too broad and that she needed to add more search terms to her strategy in order to narrow the search....Then he told her to check the boxes for full-text and peer-reviewed articles. Peer-reviewed were especially important, he instructed, because those articles were judged by a committee before they were published.

The librarian reported, "I was stunned. I asked him how he knew all of that, and he replied, "You taught us that in my English 201 class four years ago." He was surprised and pleased. "Not only do they learn, but they teach their classmates."

Another instructor related student led instruction as an example of success. She described it as "students guiding the instruction, how it happens, and what they learn." She has found that

students are more ready to learn, and more prepared to internalize what's happening in their class, if they are actively making choices about what and how they learn; if they are leading the conversations about what works in research and what doesn't, if they are guiding their own learning experience. It takes some effort from the instructor to prepare an environment where that can happen productively, but with that right environment, students can and will lead themselves into learning all the same things I want to teach them, without me having to tell them.

The excitement and satisfaction these instructors find in these examples of success is evident as they tell stories of interactions with learners. It is clear these interactions enhance their professional work lives. On the other hand, the challenge of

acceptance in the wider university environment and expectation that they will provide support for all learners without adequate support is also evident.

Expectations for the Future

According to participants, information literacy programs in the future should be well-funded, mandated, assessed and focused on critical thinking. It would be both top down (fully supported by the administration) and bottom up (a grassroots movement by faculty, academic departments and students). The program should build on what had been taught at the K-12 level and would be developed and taught in collaboration with academic departments. Although many participants had clear views of what the ideal is, none felt the profession is close to meeting that ideal on any consistent level.

The challenges participants report are a result of a transformation in the profession and, hopefully, will be minimized by faculty, administrations and library staff who understand information literacy standards as learning standards relevant to all disciplines and lifelong learning. Preparing all librarians to carry out the instructional role and providing the institutional support to partner with non-library faculty should improve instruction and lessen the emotional labor.

One comment is particularly insightful in setting the context for this study and probably expresses the feeling of many of the exceptional librarians who are struggling to develop and maintain information literacy programs. "We are a teaching library." In her view, a library is not a building, a service desk or a passive collection of resources. It is part of an educational culture with the mission to provide instruction and support for learning throughout the institution.

Conclusions

Information literacy instruction has been “misunderstood and underestimated,” according to Badke (2010, 132), and those who provide this instruction have been largely invisible. The goal of this study is to shed light on the complex environment in which information literacy instructors work by allowing practitioners an opportunity to describe the issues they face. It is necessary to understand these instructional, institutional, cultural and emotional issues as inter-related and to address them in a holistic manner in order to fully support the library’s instructional mission.

A paradigm shift in information literacy instruction which is both arduous and rewarding is described by participants. Historically, library instruction has been a service – an extension of reference desk activities to assist students in using library resources. The evolving expectation is that the information literacy program is (or should be) part of the university curriculum, designed to provide instruction to all students as a valuable part of their course work and professional preparation. Support for instruction requires librarians committed to teaching, better prepared to design instruction and respected as equal partners with non-library faculty. It also requires institutions that support these information literacy competencies.

The primary roadblocks to meaningful and uniform instruction are a lack of institutional support, according to participants. “Until we convince the president, and the curriculum council that information literacy must be a required element of our students’ education, we will never be able to reach each student with our program,” according to another IL instructor.

Some participants see the lack of institutional support for their efforts as isolating and demoralizing. They view themselves as pioneers struggling to make headway in a challenging environment. As a result of their persistence and hard work, most participants report IL programs that are growing and increasingly integrated into the curriculum. Many report satisfaction and enthusiasm for the work they have undertaken but also alienation and frustration.

One possible solution to the frustration and isolation IL instructors feel is a better understanding of the culture in which they work. There is some evidence that a unique information literacy culture, allowing the systematic sharing of practices and concerns which could improve instruction, does not exist. Describing a unique culture which supports their instructional mission is problematic. But this complexity also makes it more important to understand and come to terms with this culture to fully support instructional practices and to address the emotional demands of IL instruction.

The IL instructors in this research come from the mountains of West Virginia and Colorado, but they provide a valuable map of the hills and valleys experienced by instructional librarians across the country. They are part of a profession that is struggling to come to terms with what information literacy is, how it can be given adequate respect in the academic culture, and the need for resources to build an effective and sustainable program.

Further research on the variety of issues uncovered in this study is needed. Institutional support for information literacy should be investigated, especially in terms of the budget reductions most institutions are dealing with. Is information literacy

seen as a cost-effective way to prepare a workforce for the future, resulting in increased funding, or is it viewed as an unnecessary addition to the curriculum which institutions are not able to support?

Additional research on the existence of a unique information literacy culture and how this culture relates to the library culture and overall teaching culture of the institution is needed. The gap between instructional and other categories of librarians described by some participants may result in librarians working at cross-purposes or not fully understanding or supporting the different but related roles each serve.

Instructional practices, especially related to evidence of student learning, should also be investigated to uncover methods that provide effective and sustainable information literacy instruction to all students.

“Information literacy is conceivably the foundation for learning in our contemporary environment of continuous technology change” (Budd 2009, 1). When the instructional, cultural, institutional and emotional pillars that support information literacy are better understood, there is an opportunity to strengthen the overall academic environment.

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Appendix 1

Initial Questionnaire:

Questions for Information Literacy Ethnographic Study

Briefly describe your academic background – degrees, certification & years received.

Briefly describe your experience as a librarian and educator.

In 1989 ALA defined information literacy as follows: *"To be information literate a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."* Do you think our understanding of information literacy has changed over the past 20 years? Does the traditional definition apply or can you suggest a better term for or description of this process?

How were you prepared for information literacy instruction in your formal library science degree program? Did you take any courses in instruction or teaching? Do you attend workshops or other development opportunities focused on information literacy?

Describe the history of information literacy at your university.

How does the information literacy program currently operate?

Within your library, how would you rate the priority placed on information literacy (5 being highest and 0 being the lowest)?

What library instruction do you provide for distant or online students?

What kind of support has information literacy received from the university administration in terms of funding, staffing or other encouragement?

Are you currently collaborating with other university departments or programs to provide information literacy instruction?

How do you assess the impact of your information literacy efforts based on student learning?

How do you assess the overall effectiveness of your information literacy program? Have you found your program to be successful overall?

What roadblocks have you faced in developing a successful program?

What successes can you report?

Some people feel it is too late to teach information literacy when students are in college. Do you agree with this view?

Describe your ideal for information literacy instruction in the best possible situation.

How close do you think we are to reaching that ideal both locally and nationally?

Do you have other comments about information literacy pedagogy or how this pedagogy is applied?

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