Student Deep Participation in Library Work: A Chinese Academic Library's Experience

Lifeng Han [a], Yuan Wang [a], Lili Luo [b],*

[a] Tsinghua University Library, No. 1, Qinghuayuan, Haidian District, Beijing 100084, China
[b] School of Library and Information Science, San Jose Sate University, One Washington Square, San Jose, CA 9519-0029, USA

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Student deep participation in library work allows students to actively participate in library operation and become deeply involved in library service and program development. There are usually two levels of deep participation: level I refers to the employment of student assistants in different areas of library routine work, ranging from shelving to IT support; and level II refers to the engagement of students as library partners or collaborators, working with librarians to complete independent project. Sharing Tsinghua University Library's experiences, we provide a holistic view of how the two levels of student deep participation are implemented at an academic library, with a focus on level II. We seek to generate a thorough understanding of the practices and benefits of student deep participation, and encourage academic libraries to create more opportunities to deeply involve students in library work, and to ultimately demonstrate the value and relevance of the library to the campus community.

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries have a well-established tradition of involving students in library work. Student participation usually falls under two categories—shallow participation and deep participation. Shallow participation indicates that students' role is library users, and their involvement in library work is rather superficial and minimal, where they participate in librarian-led studies and offer input that could help the library improve its collections/services/programs. In deep participation, students are no longer merely library users; instead, they are active participants in library operation. A common deep participation practice is the employment of student assistants in different areas of library work, ranging from shelving to IT support. Recently, a new form of student deep participation is emerging where students become library partners or collaborators on particular projects, and work with librarians in developing and implementing library services and programs.

In this paper, we present an in-depth discussion of a Chinese academic library's experience in engaging students in deep participation in library work. The discussion includes an overview of routine-work based participation where students are involved in the day-to-day operation as library assistants, and then focuses on two project-based scenarios where students collaborate with librarians on innovative library marketing and research support projects. The collaborative projects allow the library to integrate library service with teaching and learning, and create opportunities for students to enhance their academic experience. Bennett (2009) opined that librarians should be more like educators rather than service providers, and it is our goal to contribute more to the university's educational mission by facilitating student learning through their deep participation in library projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student involvement or participation is frequently discussed in the field of education, referring to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience (Astin, 1984). In the business literature, Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, and Ilić (2011) define "involvement" and "participation" to be viewed as customer engagement antecedents, based on the existence of a customer's interactive, co-creative experiences with a specific engagement object (e.g., a brand). In this literature review, we focus on the examination of "participation", including both participation theories and typologies, and student participation in library work.

PARTICIPATION THEORIES AND TYPOLOGIES

The ladder theory of citizen participation proposed by Arnstein (1969) includes three levels and eight rungs: (1) nonparticipation (manipulation, therapy); (2) tokenism (informing, consultation, and placation) and (3) citizen power (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control). To evaluate the degree of participatory activities, Daigneault and Jacob (2009) suggested three areas for investigation: control of the process, stakeholder diversity and extent of involvement. Harder,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 408 537 3520; fax: +1 408 924 2476.
E-mail address: lili.luo@sjsu.edu (L. Luo).

Burford, and Hoover (2013) renamed these three areas as depth, breadth and scope respectively, and put forward a fourth dimension "output" to evaluate participation impact and output content. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) viewed participation as points on two scales—from "shallow" to "deep" on the depth scale, and from "narrow" (few participants) to "broad" (many participants) on the scope scale. Wals and Jickling (2009) pointed out that in their study of youth education and sustainable development, shallow participation refers to "superficial, obligatory, detached, false, cosmetic and strategic", whereas, deep participation tends to "real, intrinsic, involved, genuine and meaningful". Another typology of participation degree was proposed by Claycomb, Lengnick-Hall, and Inks (2001), and three vertical levels of customer participation were identified—low, moderate and high. Level "low" indicates that customers' involvement is limited to mere physical presence or attendance, and the organization is responsible for developing and providing all the services. Level "moderate" indicates that customers act as a consultant, quality inspector and reporter to the organization. Level "high" indicates that customers work in partnership with the service organization, where customers can be regarded as co-producers, co-creators or partial employees who contribute time and effort or other resources.

In this study, we decided to draw upon the depth scale of participation discussed by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) and Wals and Jickling (2009) because they provided a vertical view of participation on a continuous spectrum. We propose a three-level typology to characterize student participation in the work of academic libraries.

(1) Shallow participation. Students as users—students participate in librarian-led studies (e.g. survey questionnaires, focus group interviews, usability studies) and provide input from the user perspective to help the library improve services/collections/programs.
(2) Deep participation level I. Students as partial employees—students work with librarians as assistants, sharing librarians' day-to-day workload.
(3) Deep participation level II. Students as collaborators and co-creators—students, with special expertise, collaborate with librarians in the development and implementation of library services/collections/programs.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN LIBRARY WORK

The literature is abundant with evidence of student shallow participation, where they offer input in library studies from the user perspective. As for deep participation level I, numerous studies have discussed students' participation as assistants in routine activities (White, 1985; Hasty, 2001; Foley, 2004; Reeg-Steidinger, Madland, & Hagness, 2005; Maxey-Harris, Cross, & McFarland, 2010). Traditionally, students are employed as shelving assistants or in clerical roles (Black, 1995). Now their assistant work has expanded to other library departments, including but not limited to IT, reference, and cataloging. For instance, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Library employed students as IT and Library Monitors to help with queries related to IT and the use of e-resources. Student computer assistants that require above-average computer and communication skills were hired in Butler Library (Foley, 2004). Student Advisors at Huddersfield University Library in

England helped with publicity, surveys, and answering basic directional queries. Lincoln University employed PALs (Peer Assisted Learning) who promote services and resources to fellow students. Similarly, the University of Connecticut Library employed library student ambassadors to promote a specific online database to their fellow students (Betz, Brown, Barberi, & Langendorfer, 2009).

The literature on deep participation level II is rather scant. An extensive literature search only resulted in two articles (Saines, 2011; Martin, 2012). Saines (2011) reported a case where the Ohio University Libraries created short videos about library services for the university's Freshman Year Experience classes. Librarians collaborated with a film student in the video production process. Martin (2012) described a streaming video communication effort developed at the California State University, Northridge Oviatt Library to reach out to campus faculty. The videos were accessible on YouTube and the library's website, aiming at promoting new and existing library resources and services. Two library staff members, a librarian and a Cinema and Television Arts student joined forces to produce the videos with support from other campus departments.

However, in both articles, the focus was the descriptive process of the project, and collaborating with students was merely mentioned as part of the process without much detail. Meanwhile, students' role in the two collaborative projects was primarily to technically execute librarians' ideas in the video production and they did not contribute to the development of content.

Although these two articles show that libraries are seeking new ways to engage with students as partners and collaborators (Walton, 2010), particularly in the development of innovative services such as video marketing, more research is needed to examine students' participation in the collaborative efforts and to understand how both libraries and students benefit from them. Scupola and Nicolajsen (2010) are one of the few authors who explore the students' role in innovation services in academic libraries. They state that the importance of involving customers in service innovation and development has been a popular theme of business innovation literature over the last decade. Yet, based on an analysis of Roskilde University Library (RUB) in Denmark where the authors work, they find that RUB involves students in service innovations in a limited way and lacks a systematic approach to student involvement in the management perspective. This is another testament to the need for more empirical studies on student deep participation in library work, and particularly, in library service innovation. We hope to address this need by sharing students' deep participation experience at Tsinghua University Library.

STUDENT DEEP PARTICIPATION LEVEL I.

Tsinghua University Library has a long history of engaging students to participate in library day-to-day work. As early as 1921, among the 14 staff members at the Library, three were student assistants. Currently, both undergraduate and graduate students participate in a wide range of library work. As shown in Table 1, they have varying titles and job responsibilities.

Students participating in routine library work are considered library part-time employees, and their regular assistive contribution is deemed as deep participation because it is "real, intrinsic, involved, genuine and meaningful" as defined by Wals and Jickling (2009). Their participation

Table 1
Student deep participation level I

Categories of students	Title	Job description	Total number/working hours
Undergraduate students	Work-study team members	Shelving books	270 students/no longer than 8 hours per week per person
Graduate students (master's and doctoral students)	Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Management Assistants	Conducting assistive work for teaching, research and management at different library departments such as reference, IT, and maintenance.	45 students (20 in the department reference and instructional services, 12 in IT and 13 in other departments)/12–15 hours per week per person