



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Journal of Academic Librarianship



Professional Development: A Qualitative Study of High Impact Characteristics Affecting Meaningful and Transformational Learning

Ramirose Ilene Attebury

University of Idaho Library, 875 Perimeter Drive, MS 2350, Moscow, ID 83844, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 January 2017

Received in revised form 23 February 2017

Accepted 23 February 2017

Available online xxxx

ABSTRACT

Changes in the academic library landscape necessitate continual professional development for librarians. The library literature offers a plethora of advice about how to keep skills and knowledge up-to-date in this rapidly changing environment. Yet few large-scale studies have sought to understand the experiences of academic librarians as they seek out and participate in professional development that they consider to be meaningful or transformational to their careers. This study uses a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understand these types of experiences. In the study, ten participants discuss professional development activities that they believe have had a meaningful or transformational impact on themselves and their careers. Their experiences are analyzed for common themes that may help others interested in professional development understand which characteristics of it may foster meaningful or transformational learning. The themes discussed that emerged most strongly from interviews with the participants include interaction, duration, reflection, discomfort, and self-awareness. Implications of and recommendations related to these themes are then explored.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

The need for professional development of academic librarians stems from both a rapidly changing library environment and from the impossibility of pre-professional education covering the myriad concepts and skills librarians need to succeed in the field. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) cites technological changes, growth of diverse patron populations, and changing needs of end users as reasons that professional development is a constant requirement for committed librarians (ACRL Professional Development Committee, 2000). Although professional librarians must typically undertake two years of graduate education in order to qualify for their positions, the changes mentioned by ACRL render many of the skills gained during that two-year period outdated shortly after graduation, further solidifying the need for continuous professional development.

Library science literature makes clear that the need for professional development among academic librarians is well understood by those in the profession; however, the methods and best practices of implementing professional development are less well-defined. Although the literature contains numerous examples of and suggestions for professional development activities and a number of anecdotal tales of success, many works contain few to no references about education theories. Fewer still look at professional development activities in the light of adult education concepts or with regard to what librarians themselves consider to be meaningful or transformational professional

development (Attebury, 2015). A thorough review of the literature found very little related to what characteristics of professional development activities librarians themselves perceive to be meaningful or even transformational. This study is an attempt to better understand those characteristics.

The phrase “professional development” is used to describe a variety of activities within the field of library and information science. For the sake of this study, a broad definition is drawn from librarians Auster and Chan (2004, p. 59):

Professional development activities can be characterized as formal or informal types of activities. Formal activities include courses and workshops offered in-house, by educational institutions, or by professional associations. Informal activities include attending conferences, discussions with colleagues, participating in e-mail discussion lists, reading the professional literature, and pursuing self-directed projects.

This conception of professional development is embraced because it allows study participants the ability to define the phrase as they see fit in their own unique meaningful and transformational experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rather than offering a comprehensive review of library literature related to professional development, which can be found elsewhere (Attebury, 2015), the concepts discussed here relate to meaningfulness, transformational learning, and sustained interaction. The first two are discussed in order to offer a definition of the constructs under study. The latter reflects a theme derived from the study's results, one that

E-mail address: rattebur@uidaho.edu.

emphasizes the importance of duration and interaction in meaningful and transformational professional development experiences.

MEANINGFULNESS

Traditionally, educational assessments have focused on the acquisition of content. A significant amount of educational research, however, has pointed to the importance of considering meaningfulness in an adult's quest for education, especially in the context of his or her work environment. Ciulla (2000) defines meaningful work as that which, "like a meaningful life, is morally worthy work undertaken in a morally worthy organization" (p. 226). Woods and Sofat (2013) define meaningfulness as "a state that specifically relates to the positive feelings that work is worthwhile or important" (p. 2205). Levoy (1997) connects meaningfulness to a sense of passion and value for the work one undertakes while Chalofsky (2003) notes the joy and satisfaction it creates. Paskett (2007) names "success, passion, money, fulfillment, wellness, and adult learning" all as possible sources of meaningfulness in the workplace (p. 20). The details of what constitutes "morally worthy work" may differ from person to person, yet all individuals can identify some aspect of their work upon which they place a morally high importance.

There is evidence of a link between meaningfulness and workplace motivation, productivity, and psychological well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Individuals who consider their work meaningful also tend have characteristics that are sought after by employers (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). In addition, motivated workers typically report greater levels of job satisfaction (Sparks & Schenk, 2001). Yeoman (2014) believes that it is possible to create system structures that will promote and enhance meaningfulness in the workplace. Before that is possible, however, it is necessary to identify the characteristics of what constitutes a meaningful experience for those workers. Yeoman notes that empirical studies on meaningful work remain limited, making this area of study ripe for further development, especially with regard to professional development. Those studies that do focus on meaningfulness in the workplace have uncovered a number of themes related to it: an increase of knowledge or thinking about things in a new way, the development of relationships that enhance knowledge and learning, and the opportunity for new training (Wood, 2015).

In addition to the concept of meaningful work, the issue of what constitutes meaningful learning has also been studied by researchers. Haverila, Myllyla, and Torp (2009) point out that "there are many views, opinions and definitions on what brings meaningfulness to learning" (p. 2). However, in trying to define what comprises meaningful learning, scholars have created lists that mesh closely with andragogical principles originally proposed by Knowles (1980). Jonassen (2003) identifies eight characteristics of meaningful learning: activeness, constructiveness, intentionality, collaboration, complexity, conversation, contextualization, and reflection. In addition to all of these characteristics, Hakkarainen (2011) adds more characteristics to his model of meaningful learning, including that it is self-directed, individual, co-operational, emotionally involving, goal-oriented, abstract, multiple perspectives-oriented, critical, experiential, multi-representational, and creative.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

Beyond meaningful learning, there is an understanding within the adult education field that learning has the potential to completely transform learners' mental understanding of their work and goals. Transformational learning theory describes a process whereby learners' existing frames of reference, or "meaning perspectives," change due to new input or information (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). Widely used in the education field, the theory suggests that learning takes place through a series of phases, which are initiated by a "disorienting dilemma." This

dilemma, something that doesn't fit in the learner's existing worldview, prompts self-examination and an assessment of currently held assumptions. Upon recognizing the disconnect between the previously held assumptions and the new reality, learners begin to explore new options and plan a new course of action that integrates their newfound perspective into their existing roles, relationships, and behaviors (Mezirow, 2009).

According to Mezirow (2000), learners hold assumptions that act as filters for interpreting experiences; these assumptions, or "habits of mind" could be sociolinguistic, moral, ethical, philosophical, psychological or aesthetic. Learners also have unique "points of view", which include their expectations, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs that shape how they interpret, judge, identify the typical, and determine cause and effect. Achieving a transformational change involves shifts in these "meaning perspectives" so that new interpretations of experiences are possible. A transformation may occur gradually or more rapidly, but will likely involve some period of critical reflection. This reflection may initiate either *objective reframing* in which learners critically reflect on the assumptions of others or *subjective reframing* which involves self-reflection about one's own assumptions.

Transformational learning can take place within an individual or as part of a group awakening. A number of scholars have studied it in relation to social learning theories and focus on collaboration and group transformation (Brown & Lambert, 2013; Taylor, 2012). Indeed, the focus on Habermas's ideas of "communicative learning" via discourse lends itself to exploring transformational learning as a function of interaction with others (Mezirow, 2009). Boyd (1989) discusses personal transformation as described by Carl Jung in an article designed to help facilitators bring about transformation in small groups, and Berger (2004) suggests that peer-approval or disapproval may help or hinder an individual who seems on the verge of a transformation.

Transformational learning theory also rests on constructivist principles of learning, meaning that the theory presumes that learners themselves construct meaning internally from their experiences and reflection on those experiences. As such, Segers and De Greef (2011) suggest that the focus on meaning makes transformational learning a useful concept in the field of professional development. Mezirow (2000) states the benefits of transformational learning as a way for learners to examine, negotiate, and act on their own "purposes values, feelings, and meanings rather than those [they] have uncritically assimilated from others" (p. 8). This process is believed to lead to greater clarity and control over one's professional actions, increasing responsibility and decision making.

SUSTAINED INTERACTION

The concept of "sustained interaction" is described by Huberman (1999). This construct entails repeated back-and-forth learning exchanges between or among individuals. As he says, "unidirectional flow has a short shelf life; it is simply not remembered" (p. 310). Rather, stronger retention of information and ability to act upon that information is associated with long-term interactions among facilitators and/or fellow learners.

Huberman (1999) states that each participant in a professional development activity, indeed each human being, occupies his or her own micro-world. When we interact with each other, our micro-worlds collide, and it is at the point of these collisions that participants learn from each other. The more frequent the collisions, the more complex the understandings that can develop among those interacting. Groups of individuals can also form their own micro-world. Committees, cohorts, task forces, or individual libraries that interact as single entities with others like them may encounter these collisions and hence learning opportunities. But actual learning, whether within an individual or a larger group, is predicated upon both time and a willingness to interact with others.

As discussed within transformational learning theory, elements of discomfort or disorientation also play a role in learning during a period

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4938909>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4938909>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)