



Equipping Academic Librarians to Integrate the *Framework* into Instructional Practices: A Theoretical Application



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ABSTRACT

Academic librarians are increasingly charged with providing instruction in conducting research and using library resources to students, faculty, and staff in higher education. In early 2015, the Association of College and Research Libraries released the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* and this new set of guidelines significantly impacts how academic libraries and librarians approach library instruction. However, little meaningful research has been done on how to equip this particular group of educational professionals through job-situated or job-related learning to reframe their instructional practices to fit this new mold. In seeking to best address these changing instructional needs, the author proposes that those involved in designing professional learning for academic librarians – such as conference planning committees, instructional designers, and library leaders charged with providing and supporting professional learning on information literacy instruction – design and deliver learning experiences that incorporate transformational learning theory, use principles of social learning theory, and consider learners' goal orientation and motivation. By incorporating these theories into professional learning practice, academic librarians can more effectively and meaningfully integrate the ACRL *Framework* into their instruction.

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For many educators, ongoing professional learning is an important component of their work. In both K-12 and higher education, those individuals with instructional responsibilities engage in work-centered learning to develop new skill sets, expand or refresh existing knowledge, and explore new ideas related to teaching and learning. In some cases, this professional learning is mandated by local, state, or national certification rules; in other instances, this learning is undertaken by choice. While work-specific learning may be engaged in externally through conferences, professional seminars, or professional organizations, many educational professionals engage in job-situated professional learning to further skills or advance knowledge. Professional learning opportunities that are job-situated refer specifically to the formal and informal programs offered within educational entities to increase educators' knowledge of and experience in different concepts, skills, and topics. These experiences may also be referred to as professional development, continuing education, or job-embedded learning opportunities.

Even though K-12 and higher education professionals are continually engaged in professional learning, these learning opportunities may not impact practice or shape student success. Whether job-embedded or external, professional learning opportunities for educators often seem disconnected from a specific work environment, or they may fail to consider both the big picture and small details simultaneously. This is especially problematic for job-situated learning. Because it exists

within a particular work context, this type of learning needs to be designed to effectively impact practices. Poorly executed job-embedded professional learning may result in several undesirable consequences: learning may not appear applicable; educators may not have time or occasion to apply it, or may not see a need to apply it in practice based on their current perceptions of their practices; or educators may not have time or interest in even participating in the learning experience.

JOB-SITUATED LEARNING FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS

Academic librarians represent a unique group of educators who need to engage in ongoing professional learning both externally and on-the-job. Libraries of all types have undergone transformational change in the Information Age as resources have become increasingly digital; these transformative changes have impacted those who teach library users information literacy skills, or how to find, access, and ethically use information (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000). Academic librarians are among this group, for they work with undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff in developing information literacy skills and understanding for research, scholarship, and lifelong learning. This instruction most commonly takes the form of course-embedded information literacy sessions, which represent instructional collaborations between academic librarians and subject area faculty. These instructional sessions address the specific information literacy skills students need for a particular course or discipline, such as finding specific types of research in discipline-specific resources,

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understanding the scholarly conventions of a discipline, or using an academic library's resources more generally.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS' INSTRUCTIONAL ROLES

These kinds of instructional responsibilities are an increasingly important function in academic librarians' daily work (Bailey, 2010; Bell, 2008). However, librarians' educational experiences do not equip them with the pedagogical and instructional training provided to other educators. While higher education instructors in general may experience these challenges, discipline-specific faculty engage in different kinds of instruction than academic librarians. Many (if not most) academic librarians do not teach credit-bearing courses over the length of an entire academic semester; moreover, academic librarians must focus on integrating their discipline-specific standards into *another* subject area, which differs from their faculty colleagues. The differences in how instructional responsibilities are structured for academic librarians in comparison with other academic faculty means that campus supports – such as a center for teaching and learning, for instance – may not adequately address librarians' needs.

To further complicate these issues, various studies have revealed that academic librarians have generally limited or inadequate exposure to information literacy in library school. This often occurs because of course sequencing, academic load, or curricular inconsistencies (Bailey, 2010; Corral, 2010; Sproles, Johnson, & Farison, 2008). Perhaps resulting from this underpreparedness, reports of academic librarians in the literature assert that on-the-job learning is both expected and desired. In their study of new academic librarians, Sare, Bales, and Neville (2012) found that new professionals enter the field expecting to engage in job-specific training. New librarians saw these opportunities as ways to enhance their skills and gain knowledge not addressed in their academic experiences. However, because of their unique instructional roles on campus, these experiences may only exist within the academic library or at external events (e.g. professional conferences or workshops).

ACADEMIC LIBRARY INSTRUCTIONAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Evolving standards and benchmarks used for designing and delivering information literacy instruction also present challenges for academic librarians seeking to become instructional experts. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published its *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* in 2000, and this document, with five standards and accompanying performance indicators and outcomes, provided academic librarians with a structure around which to craft information literacy instruction sessions in, and independent of, subject-specific courses in higher education. These standards were reviewed cyclically, and in 2012, an ACRL task force recommended revising the *Standards* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015). As a result, the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* was crafted and officially adopted by ACRL in 2015 as “one of the constellation of information literacy documents” academic librarians should use in informing their instructional practices (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015, p. 1).

The *Framework* presents a shift in how academic librarians need to think about instruction, because it moves away from “standards, learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration of skills” and toward “a cluster of interconnected core concepts, with flexible options for implementation” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015, p. 2). These core ideas also introduced threshold concepts more widely into the discipline of information literacy. The new *Framework* guidelines asserted that students in higher education who are developing their information literacy skills and knowledge should understand that:

- Information has value;
- Research as [a process of] inquiry;
- Scholarship [is a] conversation; and
- Searching as [a process of] strategic exploration (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015, p. 2).

At the most basic level, the terminology of these concepts differs from the standards of finding, evaluating, and using information ethically (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000). More significantly, though, the *Framework* asked academic librarians to shift how they design and assess information literacy instruction. While the Association of College and Research Libraries (2000) *Standards* provided specific performance indicators and outcomes, the *Framework* (2015) offered knowledge practices and dispositions but noted that, “each library and its partners on campus will need to... [design their own] learning outcomes” (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015, p. 2). While ACRL has asserted that the *Framework* and *Standards* documents are not mutually exclusive, shifting and integrating the new threshold concepts into everyday practices may require professional learning and training opportunities, both external and job-embedded.

ANTECEDENTS TO ENGAGING IN JOB-SPECIFIC LEARNING

As these opportunities are developed, it can be instructive to consider why adult learners in general may choose to engage in job-embedded or work-related professional learning. Kyndt and Baert (2013) examined these issues in a systematic review of the scholarship relating to employees' involvement in work-related learning; while not specific to education professionals, their findings provide insight that may be useful to those designing professional learning on the *Framework*. In this study, the authors defined work-related learning “as the engagement in formal and informal learning activities both on and off the job, whereby employees and groups of employees acquire and/or improve competencies... that change individuals' present and future professional achievement... and organizational performance” (Kyndt & Baert, 2013, p. 275). This definition captures both the informal and formal learning aspects that exist as part of work-related learning, and both components exist for academic librarians.

Kyndt and Baert (2013) specifically examined the scholarly literature for three levels of antecedents in the contexts of both intention to participate in such learning and actual participation in such learning. At the micro level, the researchers found that employees' sociodemographic characteristics, such as age or gender, and personal characteristics, including attitudes toward work-related learning and self-efficacy, pre-empted the development of their intentions to participate in job-specific learning. At the meso level, the researchers found that the types of learning activities had an impact on employees' levels of intention; their perceptions of the benefits or outcomes of participation, as well as the content to be learned and the perceived missed opportunities from participating in professional learning also shaped how they felt about engaging in such learning activities. And finally, at the macro level, the researchers found that an employee's work environment had an impact on an individual's development of an intention to engage in informal or formal job-related learning. These environmental impacts included an organization's culture, policies, and size, as well as the individual's financial and employment status within the organization.

While antecedents to intention are certainly important to consider in designing and promoting meaningful work-specific learning opportunities, Kyndt and Baert (2013) also examined the literature for micro-, meso-, and macro-level antecedents to actual *participation* in such activities. Their findings can help those who design learning experiences, or who may encourage participation in such experiences, for academic librarians in particular. At the micro level, the researchers found that, as with employee intention, participation was also impacted

- Authority is constructed and contextual;
- Information creation [is] a process;

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