CHAPTER 10

TEACHING IN LIBRARIES: NOT AN ELECTIVE PART OF THE JOB

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This chapter argues that graduate-level library science should develop a robust teaching curriculum.

Approach – This chapter is an argumentative paper relying on secondary research.

Findings – Teaching is a significant component of the modern library profession.

Originality – This chapter calls for librarians not only to acknowledge the centrality of teaching in their profession but also to anchor graduate-level library science curriculum to it.

Keywords: Teaching; instruction; training; graduate education; curriculum

INTRODUCTION: THE DEMANDS OF TEACHING WITH ANOTHER NAME

Each year brings new challenges and responsibilities to librarians. Everyone notices when the tools of literacy change, but librarians witness more subtle
evolutions: how expectations of students and workers alter, what barriers arise, and which professional roles no longer function and which new ones must be assumed. As the shape of literacy changes, so must our profession – librarians assume responsibilities that were not always “part of the job,” from building dynamic websites to troubleshooting domain networks to organizing, marketing, and delivering creative programming. Teaching, I will argue, is one of these new vital roles. It has always been with the profession in one degree or another; we cannot deny that librarians must now teach, more than ever before.

The needs we see, and the reality of what we do, makes attention to pedagogical training imperative. Our profession must recognize that the instructional behavior in which we engage should be called “teaching,” should be treated as teaching, and should be assessed as teaching. Librarians who teach, and I will argue the majority of them do or certainly will, must understand learning theory, pedagogy, and how to best address the needs of their learners and situations. For example, how can reference librarians, public or academic, draw on tutoring principles to conduct effective one-on-one sessions? How can academic librarians tasked with one-shot sessions – or public librarians with one-off workshops – make the most of their limited time? The extensive research on teaching provides evidence-based solutions.

The need for teacher training appears to be especially pertinent for academic librarians, who stand to gain not only necessary skills but also positions of strength when advocating for dedicated for-credit courses – a critical move to advance research and information literacy education. Public librarians also need a solid foundation in teaching skills, as public libraries operate as free, accessible sites of further education and can help people develop new skills for the changing expectations in our society and its labor market.

This reframing of identity, and the extensive training inherent within it, requires concentrated effort. Our library and information studies (LIS) departments provide valuable sites to foster teaching abilities in the next generation of librarians while supporting ongoing development to working professionals. Information schools in particular afford excellent and transformative educational opportunities.

In this chapter, I support claims for the centrality of teaching through historical and contemporary research, demonstrating how teaching is both a traditional and continually growing part of our profession. I hope to show that teaching is neither a historical burden nor a contemporary quirk but rather a deeply embedded principle in librarianship – one demanding our full attention.
LIBRARIANS HAVE ALWAYS TAUGHT, THEY JUST DON’T CALL IT THAT

Historical evidence suggests that professional American librarians, in some form, have almost always taught – or, as is often phrased, offered “bibliographic instruction.” Evidence of librarian teaching dates to Harvard College in the 1820s (Salony, 1995). Early American academic librarians were mostly faculty who developed collections to compete with European universities (Saunders, 2011). As university curricula expanded beyond the classics, students found themselves at a loss to research this new subject matter. Librarians responded by helping students navigate card catalogs, indices, and related searching tools, becoming “precursors to the modern reference and instruction librarians” (Saunders, 2011, p. 3).

From that point forward, many prominent voices (such as Melvil Dewey) aligned librarianship with instruction, “asserting the centrality of the library to education” (Saunders, 2011, p. 3). And, indeed, librarians answered the call, as by 1912 over half of the American Library Association’s (ALA) surveyed libraries offered “some degree of instruction” (Salony, 1995, p. 35). These numbers vacillated over the years, however, as librarians struggled to understand their professional responsibilities, not only with instruction but also elsewhere in an evolving university landscape.

Although librarians developed more robust instructional methods throughout the early to mid-20th century (such as an emphasis on faculty and librarian collaborations), instruction gained importance for academic librarians in the 1960s (Hardesty, 1995), a decade “typically regarded as the beginning of modern library instruction” (Saunders, 2011, p. 5). Technology and literacy needs boomed, as did college attendance rates, and academic librarians responded by teaching more; for example, an estimated 65% of academic libraries offered instruction in 1987, a large increase from 1979s estimated 24% (Salony, 1995).

The landscape of library-based instruction changed further due to the “growing use and acceptance of the term [information literacy] within and outside the library profession” (Snively & Cooper, 1997, p. 12). In 1989, a Presidential Committee feared the creation of an “information elite” and encouraged librarians to help manage this information crisis by disseminating skills and knowledge to the general public (American Library Association, 1989). Indeed, information literacy technologies brought major change. Researchers, students, and the general public were now presented with tremendous amounts of information and were unsure of how to find, process, and evaluate it. Traditional library-based skills, like database searching, went
mainstream almost overnight through Internet searching. The increasingly vague term of information literacy has only managed to grow in scope and significance (Snavely & Cooper, 1997), and interpretations continue to this day; Hicks (2013), for instance, outlines a term called “Information Literacy 2.0,” meant to capture the manifold technologies used by students and the public.

Noticeably absent from the history of library instruction is the term “teaching.” Vocabulary has a strong connection to professional identity, and librarians seem reluctant to identify as teachers despite having engaged in long-standing teaching practices (Walter, 2008). Having extensively studied librarian attitudes toward teaching, Walter (2008) concluded that teaching is a librarian “responsibility that has historically been less than fully appreciated” (p. 60). Indeed, some authors and organizations have rejected the very notion of a librarian teacher. Pauline Wilson (1979) labeled it an “organizational fiction” that “librarians are teachers...[deterring] the development of a consistent professional self-image among librarians” (p. 146). Much more recently, Library Journal’s notorious Annoyed Librarian (2011) argued that librarians should not “corrupt an educational nomenclature 2,500 years old and [call themselves] ‘teachers’ ” (para. 14). The sensitivity of this issue has led some researchers to examine whether students consider academic librarians to be teachers (Polger & Okamoto, 2010). This controversy extends even to school librarianship – a specialization in which librarians often identify as teachers – as demonstrated by the Los Angeles Unified School District’s recent reclassification of school librarians as non-teachers (Chappell, 2011).

This confusion stems, at least in part, from a verbal dispute, as a librarian is not a classroom teacher. But this narrow interpretation of “teaching” invites a restrictive employment- and site-based framework. Teaching transcends space and title; the appropriate framework for teaching, I argue, is role-based, and librarians often assume the appropriate role. The misplaced insistence that librarians are not teachers, from within and without the profession, limits their development and effectiveness; Walter (2008) found that an incoherent professional identity has legitimate drawbacks: “how one thinks of oneself as a teacher affects everything from successful induction into the profession to effectiveness in the classroom to the ability to cope with change and to implement new practices in one’s instructional work” (p. 55). The stakes are high for the library profession to own its extensive teaching responsibilities. Public librarians’ educational efforts, in parallel to academics, can be easily diminished or disregarded. If public librarians are seen as
offering no classes but only informal workshops, then administrators might not afford them sufficient time to plan lessons and assess outcomes, time-consuming activities that drive good education.

**TEACHING DEMANDS HAVE ONLY INCREASED**

More than ever before, librarians must teach. Fister (2013) concluded that virtually all academic libraries have made information literacy instruction a “critical part of their mission.” According to one report, the second most common librarian-related duty is “instruction” (San Jose State University, 2017). Similarly, Triumph and Beile (2015) found that “instruction” was the third most common public service library job, second to “reference” and “liaison,” two positions that also entail teaching responsibilities. Walter’s (2008) analysis of three universities found large increases in instructional demands over a 10-year period. These increased teaching demands have also materialized in job advertisement requirements (Bychowski et al., 2010; DeArmond et al., 2009; Kennan, Cole, Willard, Wilson, & Marion, 2006). Academic librarians may even find themselves managing entire classrooms, as some librarians have written about their experiences teaching for-credit courses (Cook, 2014; Douglas, 1999; Eland, 2008; Wang, 2006); Polger and Okamoto (2010) believe that this growing literature “suggests that teaching credit-bearing classes is an extension of [librarians’] duties” (p. 3).

While public librarians may not be required to teach, they often must do so. Hoffman, Bertot, and Davis’s (2012) comprehensive analysis found that most surveyed public libraries initiated a wide range of technology training platforms. Over 40% of public libraries offered “formal technology training classes,” and over 80% offered informal “point of use training.” The ALA’s *State of American Libraries* report corroborated these findings: 98% of public libraries offered some manner of “technology training,” and almost 80% offered help with “job applications, interview skills, and resume development” (Rosa, 2015, p. 10).

Librarians have assumed these manifold teaching responsibilities because they are needed. Public libraries serve underserved populations in need of training; Singer and Agosto (2014), for example, argued that technology training helps maintain patrons’ digital literacy. Academic instruction is no less vital. Faculty likely, and understandably, does not wish to take on information literacy within their already stressed curriculum.
As evidence of this, The Project Information Literacy Study (PILS) found that, in spite of the

seismic changes in the way that information is now created and delivered, 83% of instructors’ handouts for research assignments PIL analyzed in 2010 called for the standard research paper…Sixty percent…of the research handouts PIL analyzed in 2010 recommended that students go directly to the librarian shelves – a place-based source – more than to scholarly research databases, the library catalog, the Web, or, for that matter, any other resource. (Head, 2013, p. 475; emphasis hers)

Unsurprisingly, PILS found that many students cannot manage college-level information literacy and research demands.

**READY, WILLING, BUT UNPREPARED**

Despite a proliferation of teaching responsibilities and an increasing recognition of the complex nature of literacy, librarians remain unprepared to teach. In 2005, Scott Walter argued that “a review of the literature will…present the findings of studies demonstrating the lack of attention to teaching training as part of the professional education of librarians” (p. 364). Sobel and Sugimoto (2012) reviewed the history of library instruction to find widespread evidence of underprepared academic librarians. Julien and Genuis (2011) surveyed hundreds of librarians to find that only 43% of academic librarians and 28% of public librarians received formal teacher training. And, alarmingly, Saunders (2015) examined the LIS curriculum to learn that only a few programs offered robust teacher training.

Librarians are not alone in this lack of formal preparedness. Despite long-standing acknowledgment that university faculty is hired with inadequate teacher preparation (Boerer & Sarkisian, 1985; Cahn, 1978), many faculty still lack formal teacher training. As examples, Polger and Okamoto (2010) noted that most teaching faculty at the City University of New York “do not have formal training in education” (p. 8); in a survey of Florida higher-education faculty, Robinson and Hope (2013) found that almost 80% of participants took no graduate courses designed to develop teaching skills. Like librarians, much faculty teacher training comes on the job. Even K-12 teachers, who undergo extensive degree-level training, express dissatisfaction; one in three feel unprepared on their first day of teaching, and more than half state that on-the-job training had more value than formal training (American Federation of Teachers, 2012).

Nevertheless, faculty neglecting their teaching responsibilities does not mean librarians should follow suit. Evidence that trained teachers feel
unprepared further supports the case that librarian teacher training must involve more than one graduate-level elective course. If we are to take seriously the reality that librarians teach, then LIS departments must develop substantial and sustained training in education theory and skills. Classes devoted to learning theory and instructional design can serve all librarians. Courses that provide practical training in teaching will sharpen our ability to serve patrons and students across library types; the same holds true for tutoring models, which research shows should not be conflated with traditional teaching methods (Eldredge, 2004; Waite, Gannon-Leary, & Carr, 2011).

Improving librarian training in teaching affords additional advantages. For-credit courses are rarely considered the domain of academic librarians, who must, whether fairly or not, work that much harder to justify formal teaching responsibilities. The ramifications are clear; without recognition of librarians’ teaching capabilities, their classroom involvement remains limited to the largesse of their faculty colleagues, who ultimately control the students’ exposure to library instruction (Hensley, 2015). Some librarians even recommend publishing outside of area to convince faculty of the library’s instructional value (Boff & Johnson, 2002; Tomaszewski, MacDonald, & Poulin, 2012).

This reliance on faculty results from the course-integrated academic instruction model. Fister (2013) notes that “ad hoc” course-integrated delivery methods — one-shot sessions, multiple library visitations, online integration — are “the most common approach libraries take, and the easiest to implement” (“Approaches to Information Literacy Instruction,” para. 2). Very often this method materializes in the ubiquitous “one-shot session.” One-shot sessions have been decried since at least 1988, when Engeldinger reported that they were “universally lamented by instruction librarians” (p. 47). Librarians generally understand that one-shot sessions reify poor practice; these sessions persist from a lack of credible alternatives. Absent dedicated courses, librarians must take what they can get from faculty, all too often meaning one general instruction session per semester to first-year students. Librarians do, however, try to do more by offering “embedded librarianship” programs, whether online or in-person.

Unfortunately, scant evidence suggests that library teaching improves student learning, especially longitudinally. Welty, Hofstetter, and Schulte (2012) responded to the PIL data to argue that librarians should shift their teaching focus and “be held accountable for their pedagogical methods when teaching information literacy skills” (para. 2). Other authors were disappointed to find that library projects, when formally assessed, did not demonstrate
longitudinal learning (Hufford, 2010; Teagarden & Carlozzi, in press; Walker & Pearce, 2014). What success does exist tends to indicate superficial bibliographic gains (Heathcock, 2015; Sapp Nelson & Van Epps, 2013). Furthermore, hardly any research at all attends to the efficacy of public libraries’ educational success.

The problem is that, without proper teacher training and dedicated courses, librarians are set up to fail. Why should we expect great strides when the dominant mode of library instruction remains ad hoc? Eland (2008) argues that the model of course-integrated instruction ultimately “will not work in higher education” (p. 108). Course-integrated instruction, he argues, does not facilitate “assessment of student learning in a meaningful or comprehensive way...[librarians are] unable to teach anything but basic skills (Eland, 2008, p. 108). We can extend the same idea to public or school librarians; so long as our teaching work is viewed as supplemental, voluntary, or occasional, it will not receive the necessary support. It is hard to imagine meaningful assessment or curriculum planning when librarians are so thoroughly marginalized.

The academic model of course-integrated instruction – from one-shot sessions to embedded librarianship programs – assumes that effective teaching can occur without much effort. Student learning and transfer are difficult enough to achieve in dedicated courses that meet regularly throughout a semester. Teaching is too demanding to believe in the efficacy of one-shot instruction, and many embedded library programs frankly appear to replicate one-shot sessions. Of some relevance, research by Heathcock (2015) suggested that limited-duration librarians were just as effective as full-semester librarians. What does it say about the state of library instruction that librarians can teach superficial bibliographic skills just as effectively in two weeks as in four?

Formal teaching responsibilities, I argue, are the profession’s best opportunity to teach meaningful research and information literacy training to students – in K-12 and college settings as well as to support the co-curricular and further education objectives of public library patrons. Without our field’s intervention, the value of library instruction remains at the whim of faculty and school administrators. This argument is not new; in 1928, Charles Shaw, librarian at Swarthmore College, remarked that the “haphazard, unscientific teaching librarians now undertake must be scrapped,” envisioning dedicated bibliography departments and for-credit courses (Salony, 1995, p. 37). The history of library instruction has several of these examples, such as Louis Shores of the George Peabody College of Teachers, who in 1935 supported a “library-college,” whereby “every faculty member would be library trained and every librarian would be a teacher” (Salony, 1995, p. 39). Much more
recently, Loesch (2010) argued that librarians should become full-fledged teaching faculty, acknowledging that they have “have always been teaching” and now must “take command of the classroom” (p. 31). Dedicated courses, as Eland (2008) claims, allow for comprehensive curriculum, meaningful assessment, and professional clarity.

**A CASE FOR DEVELOPING CURRICULUM**

Many librarians rightly argue that their universities will not allow them to teach for-credit courses (Fister, 2013). So even if librarians acknowledge that course-integrated instruction fails to enhance student learning, they cannot really do much else. This is true. Librarians are constrained by their institutional climates, and many of these climates unfortunately will not entertain their classroom aspirations.

My argument here, however, focuses on library training. By developing formal teacher training programs in LIS departments, librarians become prepared not only to teach but also to advocate for teaching responsibilities. With stronger preparedness in graduate schools, academic librarians should have a stronger case in convincing university officials to integrate librarian-led teaching into the university curriculum. Librarians can teach vital information literacy and research-related skills, something that PILS suggests many faculty seem unwilling to tackle. Public librarians could demonstrate the need for and efficacy of library classes, from technology basics to advanced training in order to make the most out of makerspaces. Librarians across the country have no doubt illustrated the excellent education we can foster. Individual cases can inspire, but they are not enough.

The battle cannot be won in individual libraries – it must begin in graduate school. To quote Hensley (2015), “How do we continue to elevate faculty members’ perceptions of librarians as teachers? We become better teachers” (p. 321). And that transformation starts in graduate school. We cannot afford to relegate teaching to an elective. We need a comprehensive core curriculum that attends to learning theory, instructional design, and assessment methodology and also provides practicum opportunities for both teaching and tutoring experience.

Information schools provide an excellent platform to develop strong teaching practices. Rather than reinforce traditional assumptions about librarians, information schools challenge those assumptions by imagining a different kind of information professional. O’Connor (2009) outlined the extensive struggle of librarians to legitimize their professional jurisdiction. Originally conceived as a bit of a housekeeper when information became too
burdensome for faculty to maintain, librarians have transformed into information gatekeepers, ad hoc teachers, curators, administrators, program coordinators, web designers – the list trails on. Information schools mercifully offer the profession an almost “clean slate.”

When designing graduate-level curriculum, teacher training should extend beyond school library media specialists. One instruction course – often an elective – cannot teach graduates anything substantive. As Saunders (2015) observes with many current LIS curricula, students may be limited to taking one elective in teaching wherein “actual practice in designing and delivering instruction sessions is usually limited to one or two opportunities within those courses” (p. 18). Hensley (2015) finds this situation untenable and “detached from the application of the theories of learning” (p. 321).

What each school does is idiosyncratic, but I advocate that, in general, librarians should centralize teacher training in their discussions of professional goals. Individual schools can work as experimental sites, adapting teacher training from other institutions and creating uniquely suited sequences and foci for librarians. Their case studies can generate future plans and expectations, shaping accreditation standards and hiring expectations.

A professional grounding in teaching, I have argued, holds value for all manner of librarian, even for those who pursue careers in public service. Public librarians must teach and guide library patrons; just because patrons do not pay for library services does not mean they should receive inadequate teaching. Individual librarians have long recognized the centrality of teaching in their duties; now is the time for the profession to acknowledge it as well. Information schools show that the field of library and information sciences can respond to a changing world. Their attention to data-driven approaches corresponds to teaching’s attention to assessment. By introducing comprehensive training and practice in LIS departments and information schools, we pave the way for all library programs to incorporate similarly sustained preparation. In our age of literacy upheaval, librarians can provide desperately needed education – it is as much our privilege as our responsibility. Our training programs must move beyond teaching as an elective and recognize, for our profession and our time, that the role of teacher is universally required.

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AQ3: Please provide the volume number for reference Polger & Okamoto (2010).
AQ4: Please update the reference Teagarden & Carlozzi (in press).