

University of Cape Town Library and Information Studies Centre

To teach or not to teach?: the question of the
academic librarian's pedagogical competencies in the
digital age

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Overview

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Introduction

- **Research context:**

- rapidly evolving technology-driven academic library environment - digital age
- technology (Internet) – has shifted the focus from the librarian to the end-user
- parallel development – transforming academy – shift in focus from teacher centred learning to learner centred/self-directed educational practices
- herein lies the question of the pedagogical competencies of the academic librarian



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Introduction

- To what extent:
 - *is the academic librarian “well versed in” and practises “the elements of educational theory, curricular learning goals and student learning assessment”* (Hensley 2015: 315)
 - *in order to promote self-directed learning towards the emancipation of the end-user* (Raju 2015: 28)
- Are LIS schools adequately preparing graduates for emerging teaching roles in academic libraries in a highly digitized higher education environment?



Research question

- Notion of ‘librarian as teacher’ – long history of discussion – literature
- Paper revisits this issue in the literature and sources empirical evidence in response to the **research question:**
 - What are the pedagogical competency requirements of the academic librarian in South Africa in the current digital age





Mixed methods research approach

- **This secondary research question – part of:**
 - **a wider NRF funded mixed methods research project spanning 2014-2016**
 - aiming to develop a national LIS professional competency index for the HE sector in SA
 - grounded in pragmativist epistemology allowing for the use of both quantitative and qualitative philosophical assumptions
 - interviews, job advertisements (content analysis), national online survey of academic libraries

Conceptual framing

- **Bell and Shank (Bell & Shank 2004; Shank & Bell 2011) – evolving concepts of:**
 - “disruptive innovation” (evolving technologies)
 - blending of traditional librarian skills with IT and pedagogical skills
- **To address the study’s research question**
- **Blended librarian:** “an academic librarian who combines the traditional skill set of librarianship with the information technologist’s hardware/software skills, and the instructional or educational designer’s ability to apply technology appropriately in the teaching-learning process” (Bell & Shank 2004; Shank & Bell 2011)





Literature

- Chiware 2007; Mathews & Pardue 2009; Riley-Huff & Rholes 2011; Shongwe 2015; Musangi 2015; Baro & Godfrey 2015; and many others:
 - have shown increase in demand for IT skills in LIS services – traditional library services – now being delivered with the use of evolving digital technologies – “**disruptive innovation**” (Shank & Bell 2011)
 - this is mirrored by an increase in job ads seeking instructional skills (Shank 2006)
 - Shanks’s (2006) study concludes – librarians with both technology and pedagogical skills – becoming critical to a digitized academic library environment



Literature

- **Bell and Shank (2004)**: “many members of our profession are woefully deficient in their knowledge of how learning takes place, how structures for effective learning are designed and how learning outcomes are assessed”
- **Miller (2007)**: critical of LIS schools’ over-emphasis on IT skills and neglect of instructional design and teaching and learning theories – to empower end-user to navigate complex digital information terrain
- **Sinclair (2009)**: argues for a blended approach as a response to the “marginalization of the academic library” in the face “the growing popularity of [disruptive innovations such as] Amazon, Google....and a host of other competing commercial services”



The big question is ...

Is the academic librarian in a position to exercise pedagogical skills?



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Literature

- **Walter's study (2008):**

- academic libraries – making serious efforts to integrate their services into the broader teaching and learning missions of their universities
- hence academic librarians have become “increasingly responsible for a variety of activities directly related to teaching and learning ... expanded in recent years to encompass instruction delivered in the library, across the campus, and in online learning environments”
- however, personal narratives of a librarians have lamented – despite increasing teaching responsibilities – they are provided with very little training in their professional education on how to teach
- often “unceremoniously thrust into the classroom” – make do with what is learnt on the job – underprepared for teaching roles
- “simple mastery of basic instructional competencies – will not help them to develop ‘teacher identity’ and credibility in this role from students, faculty staff and other university constituencies



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Literature

- Literature reflects serious criticism of LIS schools – for neglect – area of teaching and learning:
 - where are librarians learning the skills necessary to be competent and effective teachers?
 - are library schools preparing future librarians for their roles as classroom instructors?
 - are librarians primarily learning these skills on the job through trial and error?
- Walter (2008); Westbrook & Fabian (2010); Hall (2013); Davies-Hoffman et al. (2013); Brecher and Klipfel (2014); Raju (2015); Saunders (2015); Hensley (2015), etc. - undertaken studies with empirical evidence showing:
 - while librarians would prefer to learn teaching skills in LIS schools – left with little choice but to rely on CPD
 - sluggish response from LIS schools, globally, to this skills need – evident in course descriptions – curricula for professional preparation



Literature

- **Hall (2013)**: found it disconcerting that employers relied on observation and on-the-job training as methods for “new hires to get the training they need for instruction” – “**how much is lost by having an instruction librarian who is not at least grounded in the rudiments of pedagogy**”
- **Davies-Hoffman (2013)**: despite criticisms in the literature “for over 30 years” – in a context of growing importance of information literacy in a complex digital environment
 - there is still a lack of pedagogical training for new librarians” – where there has been a response – not required courses – electives or minor inclusions in a broader reference course (UCT – case in point)
- **Saunders (2015)**: study shows – despite efforts to increase coverage – ACRL’s (2008) proficiencies for instruction librarians – “underrepresented in most courses”
- **Hensley (2015)**: professional development opportunities – while embraced by librarians – “simply isn’t broad or deep enough to train librarians for the reality of classroom needs”



Literature



- Corrall (2010):
 - writing from the perspective of LIS schools
 - “library education has been a contentious issue for several decades ... problems identified are not easily resolvable as there are complex forces at work, multiple constituencies to satisfy and competing values to reconcile”
 - refers to blurring of boundaries between professions and the growth of hybrid and blended information based roles” in “complex pluralist information environments awaiting our graduates”
 - resonates with Bell and Shank’s (2004; 2011) “blended” approach to academic librarianship in response to “disruptive innovations” – digital era

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Methodology

- This study - an aspect – wider the mixed-methods study – responding to the research question: **What are the pedagogical competency requirements of the academic librarian in the current digital age?**
- Content analysis of job advertisements (main data source)
 - job advertisements (2014-2016)– 108 professional level advertisements (26 academic libraries – South Africa)
- Content analysis – job advertisements – well established method of researching work place requirements in a particular sector (Orme 2008)
- **Baseline list of pedagogical knowledge and skills – gleaned from the international literature reviewed - used as a basis for data mining the job advertisements:**
 - iteratively adjusted as the job advertisements were qualitatively reviewed
 - competency list also informed by Bell and Shanks’s (2004; 2011) evolving concepts of ‘disruptive innovation’ and consequent need to ‘blend’ traditional librarian skills with IT and pedagogical skills



Methodology

- **Highly specific nature of skills set (teaching & learning) and relatively small size of targeted data** – did not warrant use of software application in data mining - as done in previous (Raju 2016) LIS job advertisements studies
- Further – data mining ‘by hand’ - allowed for capture of finer nuances in the data – e.g. clustering of related competencies
- Results – tabulated – frequency distribution – *Microsoft Excel* (Tables 1)
- **For validity purposes - triangulated findings – from job advertisement analysis:**
 - with relevant aspects - national online questionnaire survey (23 university libraries – South Africa)
 - senior LIS professionals targeted
 - 68% return rate (207 potential respondents identified – 140 responded) - used *SurveyMonkey* (survey software)
 - between 5 and 15 responses from each university library
 - Qualitative findings from websites of SA LIS schools – for a ‘more complete picture’

Table 1: Pedagogical competency requirements of the academic librarian in the digital higher education environment

Pedagogical competency requirements	Freq.	Relat. freq. (%)
Generic communication skills		
Communication skills (written and verbal)	61	20.07%
Interpersonal skills	55	18.09%
Presentation skills	24	7.89%
Public speaking	0	0%
	140	46.05%
Library instruction & training (Bibliographic instruction) knowledge and skills		
User education	7	2.30%
User instruction	13	4.28%
Information literacy instruction	11	3.62%
Collaborate with academic staff to develop subject related information literacy programmes	6	1.97%
Reference experience	1	0.33%
User-interface design skills	1	0.33%
	39	12.83%
Generic instruction & training skills		
Training and developing staff	13	4.28%
Teaching/Training and coaching/mentoring skills	35	11.51%
Facilitation skills	1	0.33%
	49	16.12%

Table 1 Continued: Pedagogical competency requirements of the academic librarian in the digital higher education environment

Pedagogical competency requirements	Freq.	Relat. freq. (%)
Pedagogical knowledge and skills		
Instructional design (lesson plans; learner-centred content; learning outcomes)	9	2.96%
Lesson planning	0	0%
Assessment of student learning	3	0.99%
Assessment methods	0	0%
Teaching methods	1	0.33%
Learning theories	0	0%
Learning styles	0	0%
Programme management	0	0%
Classroom management	0	0%
Creating instructional material	5	1.64%
Instruction related experience	0	0%
Reflective practice/Critical reflection of teaching	0	0%
	18	5.92%
Research related knowledge and skills		
Research instruction/training	3	0.99%
Research skills	16	5.26%
Research support	29	9.54%
	48	15.79%

Table 1 Continued : Pedagogical competency requirements of the academic librarian in the digital higher education environment

Pedagogical competency requirements	Freq.	Relat. freq. (%)
Blending LIS skills with IT skills and pedagogical skills (Bell & Shank 2004; Shank & Bell 2011)		
Educational technology skills	2	0.66%
Instructional technology skills	1	0.33%
Research related technology skills	1	0.33%
Developing online/web resources/tools (e.g. modules, materials, guides)	6	1.97%
Online courseware skills (e.g. CMS, LMS)	0	0%
Multimedia applications to learning	0	0%
	10	3.29%
TOTAL	304	100%



Findings & discussion

- **Table 1 – captures findings – content analysis of 108 job advertisements:**
 - immediately evident – ‘**disruptive innovations**’ (evolving digital technologies) – as described in the literature - has led to an increase in the instructional role of the academic librarian
 - instruction and training related knowledge and skills (generic, library, research related) – **frequency count of 135 (45% of the total)**
 - this trend – supported – in the 2015 online survey of university libraries – **89% of 102 academic librarian respondents** rated teaching & learning as important/very important
 - same survey – *T&L knowledge and skills become necessary for LIS professionals to teach higher education users how to navigate the digital information terrain* – achieved a high mean score of 4.64 in a range of weighted average scores from 3.82 to 4.66



Findings & discussion

- **Table 1:**

- Research related knowledge and skills of academic librarians:
 - ❑ sharing research methodology skills
 - ❑ providing research support & instruction (referencing management, bibliometrics/altmetrics for research impact reporting, data management planning, etc.)
- notched up a **significant frequency count of 48 (15.79%)**
- indication – teaching/instructional work – current digital age – not confined to IL instruction for undergraduates – includes postgraduates, researchers, academics
- this trend – supported – in the 2015 online survey of university libraries - *Research support librarianship*, *Research data services* and *Research skills* – enjoyed high mean scores of 4.66, 4.40 & 4.40, respectively



Findings & discussion

- **Table 1:**

- not difficult to miss – generic communication skills (verbal and written, interpersonal and communication skills) – received a **frequency count of 140 (50% of the total)**
- obvious – this generic skills set – critical to the T&L role – not surprising – prioritised - job advertisements – requiring an instructional role
- 2015 online survey – 90% and 92% of 102 senior librarian respondents considered *Communication (written and oral) skills* and *Interpersonal skills* as being important/very important to their academic libraries
- the literature too – reports studies – showing the primacy of this skills set in librarian teaching and instructional roles



Findings & discussion

- **On a less upbeat note - Table 1:**
 - shows meagre (sometimes nil) frequency counts – cluster labelled **Pedagogical knowledge and skills (relative frequency percentage of just 5.92%)**
 - this cluster – includes knowledge & skills – embrace the pedagogical foundations of teaching & learning – see Table 1
 - the literature is very clear – despite increasing need for teaching skills in academic libraries in the digital age – many studies – questioned – whether academic librarians have the necessary pedagogical grounding to seriously take on these roles – or are they simply thrust into the role to do the best they can
 - **findings in Table 1 mirror exactly this**
 - 108 job advertisements analysed – liberally threw up a preponderance towards generic level instruction and training knowledge and skills – but failed to articulate deeper level pedagogical knowledge and skills
 - in view of the ongoing lament in the literature – about the troubling disconnect between the increasing importance of pedagogical knowledge & skills in public service academic library positions and the sluggish response from LIS schools to this skills demand – not surprising that this knowledge & skills void exists in academic libraries – even at the senior levels at which job advertisements are crafted
 - view of the researcher – this is a direct result – of the historical neglect by LIS schools (in SA and globally) – of pedagogical training in professional preparation of LIS graduates for the work place



Findings & discussion

- **Perusal – curriculum pages of websites – nine active LIS schools in SA:**
 - revealed a marked absence – of evidence of required modules in teaching & learning
 - possible that pedagogical skills training – embedded in general courses offerings (Reference, User education, etc.) – but the absence of T&L as a discrete skills set – is an indication itself of neglect of this area in SA LIS schools curricula (as is common internationally)
 - exception – one school – offers modules in “Teaching & Learning for LIS Professionals” and “Research Librarianship” – which directly address knowledge & skills development in teaching and instruction in academic libraries
 - but these are **specialisation elective offerings in a master’s degree** – and are not offered as required education and training in the professional programme of the school in the preparation of new graduates for the work place

Findings & discussion

- **Blending LIS skills with IT and pedagogical skills (Table 1):**

- here too frequency counts are meagre (or nil)
- an indication that Bell and Shank's (2004; 2011)
 - ❑ evolving concept of academic librarians embracing a blended role
 - ❑ to “more proactively advance their integration into the teaching and learning process”
 - ❑ to avoid being marginalised in an environment of “tumultuous change” caused by disruptive technologies
- is yet to take form in the South African academic library work place
- that is, the blending of cross-disciplinary skills in a pluralist information environment such as an academic library is yet to reflect itself in academic library job advertisements – and hence in its recruiting processes





Conclusions

- What are the pedagogical competency requirements of the academic librarian in SA in the current digital age:
 - disruptive innovations - resulting from rapidly evolving technologies in SA, like in other parts of the world – will continue to increase teaching responsibilities of public service position academic librarians
 - while these librarians will continue to enthusiastically embrace these teaching roles thrust upon them – they remain underprepared to take on these roles with full pedagogical breadth and depth **as reflected in the pedagogical competency list presented in Table 1**
 - because they lack fundamental pedagogical grounding in T & L – arising from a global disconnect between increasing teaching responsibilities of especially academic librarians and a sluggish response to this need from LIS schools
 - while instruction librarians have relied on on-the-job training and other CPD opportunities to grow their pedagogical skills – this is not a satisfactory situation and perpetuates their ‘teacher identity’ issue – hence always begging the question: **To teach or not to teach?**

Recommendation



- **Further research:**

- needs to be undertaken to ascertain how sustainable Bell and Shank's (Bell & Shank 2004; Shank & Bell 2011) evolving concepts of “disruptive innovation” and “blended librarianship” are in taking forward the pedagogical role of the academic librarian
- while this study - which was part of a wider mixed methods study - used job advertisements as its primary data source, supplemented for triangulation purposes by other sources
- this paper recommends that – for a fuller picture of findings gleaned from this study
- a detailed study be undertaken – using a phenomenological design involving interviews with LIS schools, personal narratives of academic librarians and other relevant university stakeholders (students, faculty staff, etc.) and a detailed study of course descriptions of LIS professional programmes in SA



Thank you!

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