Winning Your Instructional Spurs

How academic librarians transform from information experts to expert educators

Amanda Nichols Hess
Oakland University Libraries
nichols@oakland.edu

LOEX Conference 2017
Discuss transformative learning theory and its applications for academic librarians’ instructional practices.

Use two research questions to frame my inquiry into academic librarians’ experiences with perspective transformation.

Share a survey instrument and the accompanying data collection / analysis procedures I used to examine my research questions.

Present aggregate data and highlight important themes.

Identify implications for academic librarians and the profession more generally.

Suggest future directions for additional research on transformative learning and academic librarians’ work as educators.

Presentation “Course”
Fake News

Teaching “stable”

The Framework

Research Questions

These questions guide this presentation and will shape our discussion today.

Do academic librarians experience perspective transformation around their work as instructors or educators?

If so, what influences or experiences help academic librarians work through this process?
Important Considerations

As we discuss my research, it’s relevant for you to know that...

This project is part of a larger-scale research endeavor for a dissertation in Educational Leadership &

This project has been reviewed and approved by Oakland University’s Institutional Research Board (IRB)
Theoretical Foundation: Transformative Learning Theory
Transformative Learning Theory, Defined

- Arose from women’s experiences re-entering education
- Today: Prevailing adult education theory (Taylor, 2008)

Key concept: Adults seek to make meaning from their experiences. But, they can rely on un-evaluated or externally imposed constructs to make sense of the world around them. **Doing this limits awareness, understanding, and individuation.**

Transformation involves using personal biographical, social, or cultural situations to develop one’s own identity and perception of the world.
Transformative Learning Theory, Explained

According to Mezirow (1981, 1994, 2000), transformative learning is an individual, internal process that involves an adult’s:

- **Frames of reference**, or the cognitive structures used to filter experiences
- **Habits of mind**, or the overarching structures used to generate initial impressions
- **Points of view**, or how internal habits of mind are demonstrated to others

**We transform our frames of reference by reshaping our habits of mind, which is then reflected in externally-facing beliefs and actions.**
Two activities foster transformation:
reflection of assumptions
critical discourse
The Perspective Transformation Process

1. Disorienting dilemma
   *Epochal event or gradual accumulation of experiences*

2. Self-examination

3. A critical assessment of roles

4. Recognition that others have experienced, are experiencing, or will experience similar issues

5. Exploration of options for behavior or action

6. Development of a plan of action

7. Acquisition of necessary skills and knowledge

8. Trying on of new roles and integration of feedback into practices / actions

9. Development of competence and confidence in new roles / relationships

10. Reintegration into society with a changed perspective
The ten-phase transformation process
Involving reflection of assumptions & critical discourse

The External World

Individual’s Sense of Self

Frame of Reference
former Meaning Perspectives

Cultural influences

Social influences

Habits of mind

Points of view

This diagram represents how the components of transformative learning theory interact with each other and with external influences to transform adults’ perspectives.

The broken lines represent the permeability of each component.
Phenomenological research approach

How do academic librarians experience the phenomenon of perspective transformation around their teaching?
Sequential explanatory study

Online survey, adapted from King’s (1997, 2009) Learning Activities Survey
followed by
Semi-structured follow-up interviews, with protocol adapted from King’s (1997, 2009) follow-up interviews

in process now!
Data Collection: Instrument & Procedures
Learning Activities Survey

Developed by Kathleen P. King (1997, 2009) and adapted by other researchers to study specific populations and perspective transformation.

Q2-13: Demographic information
Q14-16, 20: Whether perspective transformation had occurred
Q17-19: Impacts on perspective transformation
Q21-22: The role of reflection in participants’ personal / professional lives
Q23: Factors of instructional work
Q24: Willingness to participate in follow-up interviews

Sent to acrlframe-l, ili-l, and lirt-l in February / March 2017
Total participants: 

\[ n = 487 \]

97% (\[ n = 470 \]) had information literacy instruction experience
King (2009) provides specific analysis guidance to researchers adapting the Learning Activities survey to ensure the validity and reliability of results:

Score the questions to identify whether perspective transformation had occurred,

Conduct frequency analysis transformative experiences and inputs (e.g., people, resources), and

Conduct statistical tests to examine relationships between those who experienced perspective transformation and various demographic categories.
Do academic librarians experience perspective transformation around their work as instructors or educators?
Survey Results
Participants’ Transformative Experiences

Have you ever experienced a time when you realized your values, beliefs, opinions, or expectations changed in relation to instructional work?

392 of 413 reported experiencing at least one phase of perspective transformation in relation to their instructional work.
Academic librarians DO experience perspective transformation around their teaching.
So, then, what influences or experiences help academic librarians work through this process?
Scholarship on Transformation around Teaching

Faculty development regularly focuses on transforming teaching practices and developing a **teaching identity**. Overarching themes include:

- **The important role of reflection**
  - Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Koch et al., 2002; Niehaus & Williams, 2016; Post, 2011

- **Instructors shift from teacher-centric to student-focused classrooms**
  - Dee & Daly, 2009; Haviland & Rodriguez-Kiino, 2009; Major & Palmer, 2006; Malik, 2015; McHenry et al, 2009; Post, 2011

- **Intra-faculty connections shape teaching identities**
  - Balmer & Richards, 2012; Eib & Miller, 2006; Gallagher et al., 2011; Samaras et al., 2014
  - Especially important: **non-evaluative** feedback from peers and mentors
    - Gallagher et al., 2011; King, 2004; Persellin & Goodrick, 2010

- **Inputs including technology and institutional culture/structure affect personal pedagogical development**
  - Camblin Jr. & Steger, 2000; Frost & Teodorescu, 2001; Georgina & Olson, 2008; Herman, 2012; Horvitz et al., 2015; Kushner Benson & Ward, 2013; Marek, 2009; Quinlan & Akerlind, 2000; Shea & Knoedler, 1994; Whitelaw et al., 2004
Conceptual Model: Teaching Identity Development through Transformation

Disorienting dilemma
Internal / external event

Focus on student learning instead of instructor’s teaching

Using technology in teaching may occur

Non-evaluative feedback from peers, mentors, facilitators, supervisors

Interpersonal connections Within / across discipline areas

Reflection

Internal

External

Recursive

Institutional culture

Teaching Identity

Instructional technology changes / developments

Institutional support systems

Initiates

Informs
Does this conceptual model reflect academic librarians’ experiences developing teaching identities?
Survey Results
Interpersonal Inputs & Perspective Transformation

Did interactions with any individual(s) impact this change? Check all that apply.

Most frequently selected options:

- Students: 247
- Support from another librarian: 146
- Support from a colleague: 136
- Support from a subject area faculty member: 129
- Support from a supervisor: 75
- No individual influenced change: 15

But also of note: n=303
Comments about interpersonal inputs and perspective transformation:
Oneself as an important influence in perspective transformation:

- *Myself*: self-awareness and reflection
- *my own interest* in critical theory, social justice, and pedagogy
- *my own impulse* to embrace ‘blended librarianship’
- *upon self reflection* and evaluating what student’s (sic) needed to hear most during an instruction session
- *my own experience*

Role of lack of support:

- *Leadership denying* meaningful support
- *Lack of support* of my library/institution

Institution-level teaching resources:

- *support* from my university’s *teaching center*
- *center for teaching/learning*
"my own interest in critical theory, social justice, and pedagogy"

"The political climate in the United States during the 2016 presidential election"

"I took a course on critical library instruction"

"Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Practice"

"Switching to an institution with a higher caliber of student body academically speaking"
Experiences / Resources & Perspective Transformation

Did any experiences or resources impact this change? Check all that apply.

Most frequently selected options:

- Reading scholarly literature on IL instruction: 209
- Professional meetings, conferences, workshops: 194
- Teaching face-to-face: 182
- Observing other academic librarians: 179
- Reading scholarly literature on teaching & learning: 177

n=304
Comments about experiential / resource inputs and perspective transformation:
“as noted above, reading non-scholarly literature on teaching/learning”
“Interacting with other librarians on social media”
“relevant blog posts”
“following what librarians write on the ILI listserv”
“Reading blogs on the scholarship of teaching & Learning and on information literacy instruction”
“reading instruction list serves (sic)”
“ili-l listserv”
“listserves (sic)”

“I’m part of a contemplative pedagogy group on my campus. Mostly faculty, Also very involved in the mindfulness for librarians emerging movement.”
“therapy”
“Attending ACRL Intentional Teaching Immersion Program”
“Attending ACRL immersion”
“Attending ACRL Teaching Immersion”
“Immerssion program (writing my teaching philosophy)”

“Not being able to teach for 3 years.”
“Lack of support of my library/institution”
“There is no change, other than me losing optimism”
Professional Events & Perspective Transformation

Did any professional event(s) impact this change? Check all that apply.

Most frequently selected options:

- No professional event: 123
- Change in job responsibility or duties: 70
- Change of job: 56
- First professional job after graduate school: 48

n=288
Comments about professional events and perspective transformation:
“Change of supervisors”
“went back to school to get out of library due to dean/admin’s... [lack of perceived value of] library instruction/info lit”
“Longtime instruction librarian left which allowed us to change our strategic directions”
“new Dean”
“New Associate University Librarian brought about change and focus on instruction”

“Gaining faculty status”
“Taking on assessment projects and attempting to be authentic”
“receiving tenure and then promotion to full professor”


Sense of a profession in flux

“multiple factors - my professional life is **constantly changing**”

“Not so much an event, but since the beginning of my career I’ve been afraid that my job (academic instruction librarian) **might become obsolete or financially unsustainable** at some point. So by **expanding my skills beyond traditional instruction librarianship** and into instructional design, I hope to **make myself more valuable** in the academic workplace”
Influences that are important in academic librarians’ perspective transformation around teaching:
• Interpersonal connections with colleagues / faculty and students
• Reflection
• Reviewing the literature - scholarly and non-scholarly, information literacy and SoTL-focused
• An institution’s culture, environment, and structure
Influences that are less important in academic librarians’ perspective around teaching:
• Work-related “epochal events”
• Technology
• Formal feedback from others on instructional practices
• An institution’s culture, environment, and structure
Revisiting the Conceptual Model
Original Conceptual Model: Teaching Identity Development

- **Disorienting dilemma**
  - Internal / external event
  - Initiates

- **Institutional culture**
  - Informs

- **Focus on student learning instead of instructor’s teaching**
- **Using technology in teaching may occur**

- **Interpersonal connections**
  - Within / across discipline areas

- **Non-evaluative feedback from peers, mentors, facilitators, supervisors**

- **Internal / external event**

- **Recursion**

- **Teaching Identity**

- **Instructional technology changes / developments**

- **Institutional support systems**
REVISED Conceptual Model: Academic Librarians’ Teaching Identity Development

Disorienting dilemma
Internal / external event

Focus on student learning instead of instructor’s teaching

Considerations of sociocultural and critical issues

Scholarly & professional reading on information literacy & SoTL

Teaching Identity

Library / institutional culture

Initiates

Informs

Broader cultural / profession-based shifts (i.e., Framework)

Library-specific and institution-wide support systems

Reflection

Internal

External

Recursive

Interpersonal connections with colleagues, faculty, and students

Students
Some alignment with conceptual model of teaching identity development

- Reviewing literature & critical pedagogy: emergent!

Respondents feel they are moving instructional identities and practices forward, but some feel left behind

The Framework was not a central concern

Research Implications

What does this initial analysis of survey data suggest to us as academic librarians interested in instruction?
Key Individual Takeaways

What can we do with this survey information in our own practices and work environments?

- Engage in self-reflection / examination
  - Read information that is interesting, contrary, or challenging to you

- Find ways to talk with others about instructional issues
  - Colleagues (conversations?)
  - Other librarians (conferences?)
  - Discipline faculty (campus centers?)

- Identify professional development or learning options to push pedagogy further
  - Formal or informal
Encourage / foster environments where academic librarians can:

- Reflect on their practices
- Engage with others around instructional issues
- Pursue professional development or training

Talk about these transformative experiences whenever possible!

- In professional / scholarly literature
- On blogs / listservs
- In 1:1 conversations / at conferences
Next Steps & Future Research
These Data

Conduct additional analysis to determine:

Are there relationships between demographic factors and the inputs (people, experiences or resources, professional events) in academic librarians’ perspective transformation?

Interview Data

Analyze and code semi-structured interview data to:

- Understand this phenomenon in more depth
- Further hone the revised conceptual model
- Identify recommendations / ways forward for individual academic librarians and the profession
Consider these ideas in your own life.
Do they reflect reality?
Do they offer a starting point for complementary or contrary research?
Questions & Discussion

References:


Herman, J. H. (2012). Faculty development programs: The frequency and variety of professional development programs available to online instructors. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 16*(5), 87-106.


