Evolution of library instruction

Discovering the Facilitator Within
Speaking Notes: Ashley Edwards & Dawn Smaill
AALT 2018

Slide One
We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta.
Thank you to AALT organizers and SFU

Slide Two
Introductions

DAWN --Why A doesn't lead to B

I created these images to convey visually the education and work experiences that came before my Library Technician position. I was a "mature student" when I was doing my BA and really was too sure what I was going to do post-degree. When I look at this image and reflect on what it represents, I've come to understand, of all that I've done, the work I've found the most rewarding is that which involves continuous learning--which I think everyone who works in libraries can relate to.
Shortly after creating these work/education history visuals, I attended a presentation on "*Why A Almost Never Leads to B: The Realities of Modern Career Launch*" which resonated with me so strongly that I was a little distracted during parts of the presentation while I reflected on my career path. I think, considering the varied work I've done that my own path would be long and winding with a few switchbacks. I confidently state that I am in my dream position right now and part of the reason why is what I get to share with you today.

Slide Three
ASHLEY

In 2016 I gave a lightning talk at WILU, titled the Instructional Library Technician. This brief presentation, I had approximately seven minutes, I attempted to describe the work and education of library technicians, and the role we can play in information literacy programs. A little ambitious, and I ran out of time before I finished talking about everything I wanted to. What it did though was encourage me to delve a little deeper into this topic. As an academic library technician I work primarily on our Research Help desk and delivering first year undergraduate workshops. I went from someone terrified of public speaking to being passionate about teaching, and wanting to empower more technicians to be in similar positions. While in public libraries it is more common to technicians facilitating programs, in academic institutions technicians are often regulated to the circulation desk or processing department.

While reading on this topic, I found very few resources that actually discuss library technicians as program or workshop facilitators. There's some literature about technicians

staffing an information or research desk, and literature about staffing those service points with graduate students rather than anyone with a library education. It made me wonder: how unique is my position at SFU? Surely we aren't the only library technicians facilitating workshops? Why aren't library technicians talking about this?

[Passion]
Both of us have a passion for teaching info lit, and finding teachable moments while working both on the Research Help desk and AskAway (BC's virtual chat reference program). However neither of us had formal training or education in our library tech education/program, and are learning on the job. We have found anecdotally that the majority of ACADEMIC library technicians are NOT involved with library instruction, or even reference work.

Slide Four
ASHLEY

Our library technician programs prepare us for a wide range of library activities, and while many of these skills transfer across library sectors it's my opinion that graduates are really set up to work in public libraries. However the 2013 employment survey conducted by the Library Technician/Assistant Section of the BC Library Associate found that nearly forty percent of technicians find employment in academic libraries, whereas thirty-six percent work in public. The same survey shows that nearly thirty-eight percent of technicians also have their bachelor's degree. The survey also shows that many technicians help with reference, orientations, event planning, and patron training.

What is interesting about where library technicians find employment, and subsequent job duties is how little we are prepared to work public services in an academic institution. I distinctly remember my reference services class having us look up information in the Canadian Who's Who, and memorize types of resources used to answer informational type questions. I learned how to conduct a reference interview, but wasn't taught how to find teachable moments to empower patrons to find information on their own. Even in the one class where I needed to facilitate a storytime program, I wasn't taught presentation skills. And this isn't specific to my education. Out of the twelve English speaking schools offering library technician programs, identified by the Ontario Association of Library Technicians, only four offer a course on instruction yet all except one have a course relating to management or supervision. It seems like a huge oversight and disservice to not be preparing technicians to be instructors.

So how can we prepare ourselves to facilitate, or grow our skills?

Slide Five
ASHLEY

Simon Fraser University has three campuses in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, and Fraser Valley. Each campus has a library, and while I recognize that instruction and reference happens at our branches, I'm focusing today on the activities happening at the WAC Bennett Library, where both of us are located.

There are approximately ten liaison librarians with their admin home being L&I - this doesn't include our Teaching & Learning Librarian, Hope. I say approximately because there are more than ten librarians at SFU, but some report to our Research Commons or are based at a branch. We also hire Reference Librarians for each semester, and Bennett typically has

four to six librarians during the Fall and Spring semesters, with a SLAIS co-op student during the summer. The division also has three library assistants, who have their library technician diploma.

Our Research Help desk hours differ depending on the semester, with Summer hours being slightly shorter than Fall or Spring. We also staff AskAway which is BC's virtual chat reference consortium, and again the hours differ between the Fall and Spring, and the Summer. What may be unique about our model is that liaison librarians no longer staff either of those service points, though are available to help out as needed. Beginning with the summer semester of 2016, our Library Assistants and Reference Librarians became the primary public service staff. I think it's relevant to understand how our Research Desk is staffed because of the teachable moments that occur when helping our patrons. Library and literacy instruction is not confined to the classroom.

Beyond the Research Help desk, L&I works with the General Instruction program in collaboration with our Teaching & Learning Librarian. Like our desk scheduling, the workshops that fall under our General Instruction program are facilitated by our Library Assistants and Reference Librarians. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe this is a unique situation. It is my understanding that library technicians in an academic library do not regularly provide reference service - in person or virtually - nor do they facilitate information literacy workshops. I'm hoping by talking about this type of collaborative instruction program I can inspire other academic institutions to try something similar.

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DAWN

Library Assistants are responsible for the logistics of the workshops that fall under the general instruction programme. We receive the requests, book library labs, schedule who will be teaching, enter stats for those that we teach--all of which can require updating multiple documents/software platforms (spreadsheets, scheduling software, our own calendars, statistics software). We do try to be fair when scheduling so that no one person is doing the majority of teaching--however LAs seem to teach the majority of these workshops.

The number of workshops vary between each semester with the highest number occuring in September--our fall semester. The majority of workshops fall in the second month. There are three core groups in our general instruction programme, they include international students attending the two-year Fraser International College (FIC) before transferring to SFU, current SFU students who are enrolled in a mandatory Foundations of Academic Literacy (FAL) course to improve their English skills for university courses (FAL), and high school students from across the Lower Mainland enrolled in an International Baccalaureate program (IB).

As you can see with the graph, the annual numbers are fairly steady for IB and FAL classes, while FIC has some ups and downs--and there is an explanation for that large bump. As an international college, FIC has multiple intake streams for students based on their levels of English. That large bump in the FIC line is due to accommodating requests for both a library-facilitated tour and research workshop for two separate FIC groups with large numbers of students. This proved to be unsustainable and required a rethink for how we deliver library tours. What the graph can't show is that the tours still take place as self-guided scavenger hunts which <u>were adapted</u> from our materials. So even though we are not actually facilitating

the scavenger hunts, we still are a valued support in providing needed materials.

And what about these materials that we use for instruction? As library assistants we are unable to create the content for any of these workshops/tours. This is a job description limitation, and therefore the content is written by our Teaching and Learning Librarian in consultation with liaison librarians as needed, for subject specific assistance. That doesn't mean we don't have input!   We meet regularly with each other and Hope, our Teaching and Learning Librarian--even impromptu chats in offices after the first class-- to let each other know when things aren't working, any logistical issues that come up, or when something grabs student's attention and we have amazing engagement. Hope is always open to our ideas, or brainstorming ways to encourage participation. Our experiences as facilitators are valued, and our input is considered.

This is a process that we go through each semester. Teach, meet to debrief, any changes necessary made by Hope, and then gearing up for the next semester's instruction period repeats all year. Some semesters very few changes are made, while sometimes a single class may have lots of changes.

Slide Seven
DAWN

[Warning: personal anecdote coming] In the last semester of my Lib Tech diploma, I worked casually as a circ assistant and I am grateful for that experience--it helped me to figure out what area of a library I wanted to work in. After starting at SFU, I went and visited my previous co-workers (who were ecstatic that I had got on at SFU) and I remember clearly when answering questions about what responsibilities were part of my position-- and as I listed each, one person responded to each one with "You do ____?" because many are not done by techs (at least new techs) at that library. What I realize now, is that I didn't talk about my previous teaching experience...or play up that aspect of my work, while I was there--but I had taught for nearly eight years! Teaching was not foreign to me...only the approaches to teaching used in academic library for Information Literacy instruction. Which is why we here today. Getting this conversation--about Library Technicians teaching--happening more broadly. I believe that wanting to teach comes from a desire to help--something that is at the core of all libraries and those who work in them.

Of course, not everyone feels comfortable teaching. But, we could say that about many of the skills we've learned as Library Techs--presentation skills for example. If instruction skills are not being taught in our programs, how can we become facilitators?

Of course, formal education is just one way of gaining, or refining, teaching ability. By considering these other avenues, maybe you'll find that you already have skills related to teaching.

When Ashley and I were talking about **Informal Training**, we saw it as a way group all those activities in which skills are learned/developed disparately but are utilized together when teaching: organization, time management, interpersonal communication, and public speaking.

What past experiences do you bring to your current work? Can you see in any non-library work skills that can be transferred to a teaching setting?

Think about classroom management skills--anyone participate in field trips? How do you manage large groups of people?

Those who've had to train staff in other workplaces? Customer service jobs with any technology element? Volunteer positions in which
- you took on the role of leader--Girl Guides/Scouts?
- involved some form of teaching?
- Junior lifeguard? Tour guide?
- convenor at a professional association event/conference?

Peer Mentorship provides a low-stakes opportunity to meet and be supported by someone who shares similar goals. BCLA has a mentorship programme and that is how I met Ashley--she was my mentor! [elaborate without getting weepy]

Personal groups formed during Lib Tech program.

For those of us involved in instruction at SFU Library, we have the Instruction Interest Group who meet regularly, plan workshops, and a type of mentorship with the aim of helping to improve our teaching.

There can be financial barriers to accessing **Professional Development** resources--employer support can vary widely across libraries. We're fortunate to have a Learning Opportunities Fund through our union, as well as the ability to apply for learning funds through the Library. SFU as an employer also provides PD opportunities through their HR dept.

There are also many resources freely available:
- Lynda.com is database of training videos (while available at the SFU Library, it's also offered at many of the public libraries throughout BC)
- Webinars offered through online resources like TechSoup
- MOOCs
- Conferences
- Readings

Slide Eight
Thank you for your time this afternoon.
We welcome any questions, and please feel free to contact us if you have questions in the future.