Professional Development and Professional Identity: A Qualitative Assessment of the Art of Teaching Program

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Introduction

When considering professional development, A.N. Hess suggests that academic librarians have different needs based off their educational background, therefore additional professional development opportunities might help address the gaps in education.[1] Numerous studies have shown that instruction has become an integral part of an academic librarian's responsibilities,[2] however, there is a noted disconnect between the centrality of instruction and the training librarians receive.[3] Bewick and Corrall argue for the importance of teacher training specifically for librarians, given the increased importance of information literacy education.[4] Confidence and self-presentation as a teacher are linked to training, professional identity, and applied practice,[5] while fear, insecurity, and feeling underprepared are barriers to adopting teacher identity.[6] Therefore, professional development for librarians is needed to teach instruction skills and prepare them for the level of instruction needed in the workplace.[7]

While work experience in the field plays a large role in developing professional identity,[8] professional development and training programs can also contribute to professional identity and teacher identity, specifically. For example, research conducted by Gammons, Carroll, and Carpenter examined a three-semester teacher training program for MLIS students.[9] In this longitudinal study, they found that a sense of community and applied teaching opportunities encouraged teaching identity and increased efficacy among participants.[10] They identify a limitation in traditional training opportunities for MLIS students, "while internships, field studies, or coursework often prepare MLIS students for one or two of these areas, rarely do they effectively address all three. [The Research and Teaching Fellowship], however, integrates research, teaching, and professional development within a single program."[11] Gammons, Carroll, and Carpenter argue that an effective curriculum-integrated information literacy improves student learning and comprehension, and therefore training academic librarians to be effective teachers is essential to their professional responsibilities.[12]

Training in pedagogy is also important for academic librarians as it bridges the period of insecurity and self-doubt between beginning to teach and seeing themselves as teachers—often lasting two to three years.[13] Training provides librarians with a professional language which lends a feeling of credibility and legitimacy within their organization and an ability to build a community of peers.[14] This may be particularly important in institutions that do not grant faculty status to librarians, who nonetheless may still have formal or informal instruction duties.

To address this issue, in 2016 Harvard Library launched an in-house professional development program, The Art of Teaching for Librarians (AoT). The first iteration was offered in July 2016 as a three-week blended learning experience. Feedback on the program assessment indicated that the time frame was too

compressed, and more time was needed to assimilate concepts and practice skills. A revised program was offered in spring 2019 in a semester long seminar format meeting three hours per week.

While the primary goal of AoT was to develop librarians' practical teaching skills, a secondary goal was to help them develop a sense of teacher identity. This paper will present the results of an IRB-approved research project designed to assess our success in meeting these goals through a comparison of two different versions of the program. Specifically, we ask:

- How well did each variation of the program work?
- How did changes in program structure affect participant outcomes?
- How did the program influence participants' professional identities and teacher identities?

Background: Developing the Art of Teaching program

Harvard University is a highly decentralized institution that includes 12 degree granting schools and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. The wider Harvard Library network includes eight professional school libraries, 15 libraries that serve the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Harvard College, the Harvard University Archives, and several central shared services and administrative Harvard Library units. In 2019 when these data were collected, there were more than 700 staff across all of the Harvard Library repositories and service units. Due to the decentralized nature of the university, curriculum development and teaching support are similarly decentralized and those activities are centered in the schools. As a result, instruction across the libraries is decentralized and school-specific.

The Art of Teaching program at Harvard Library grew out of a series of conversations initiated in 2015 by the Research, Teaching, and Learning Standing Committee (RTLSC), a cross-library governance group. Librarians at Harvard do not have faculty status (with a few exceptions for directors at professional schools), and as such typically do not teach credit-bearing courses. However, the RTLSC recognized that there was still a substantial amount of instruction conducted by librarians across Harvard in a variety of formats, including one-shots, orientations, workshops, and class sessions in special collections repositories. In addition, the RTLSC heard from staff that there was interest in professional development aimed at improving instruction skills. This led to the development of a pilot, "The Art of Teaching for Librarians: Transformative Learning," a two-and one-half hour workshop offered in January 2016. The pilot workshop was developed and taught by the first author in collaboration with two other colleagues: Deborah Garson, then head of Research and Writing Services at the Monroe C. Gutman Library (Harvard Graduate School of Education) and Maura Ferrarini, then learning and assessment designer at Harvard Library. The goals of the pilot were to teach basic skills in learning and instructional design, and also to gauge interest in a more in-depth professional development program.

Feedback and reflections from the pilot informed the first iteration of the AoT seminar, offered in July 2016. The 2016 seminar was developed and taught by the same three instructors as the pilot. The seminar was organized as an intensive, three-week blended learning experience, which included three four-hour face-to-face sessions (one per week) accompanied by online readings and discussion and group work. Participants were also required to give a short teaching demo in the first class meeting, and present a revised version on the last class. The overall learning objectives for the 2016 seminar are presented in Table I.

Table I. 2016 Art of Teaching learning objectives

Number	Objective
1.	Identify learning theories and frameworks.

Number	Objective
2.	Apply at least one learning theory to library instructional scenarios.
3.	Develop learning objectives for library instructional scenarios.
4.	Develop a toolkit of strategies for audience analysis for library instructional scenarios.
5.	Distinguish between learning and satisfaction assessments.
6.	Distinguish between summative and formative assessments.
7.	Describe appropriate learning assessments for library instructional scenarios.
8.	Describe appropriate instructional strategies and activities to use for different library instructional scenarios.

Participation in the 2016 seminar was through an application process open to the entire Harvard Library community. There were 20 applicants, 15 of whom were accepted and 12 of whom completed the whole seminar. Participant feedback from the end-of course survey was largely positive (see Table II), but many noted the compressed schedule was quite difficult, particularly for being able to reflect on and integrate the readings. Participants were generally interested in more hands-on in class time, and less on doing work online out of class. They also noted that some topics, such as assessment, received very limited coverage due to the seminar schedule. Overall, 73% of respondents strongly agreed that the seminar should be offered again in the future.

Table II. 2016 Art of Teaching evaluation results

Survey Item (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Average
The overall seminar was organized logically.	4.4
The individual face-to-face sessions were organized logically.	4.2
The amount of assigned readings was appropriate.	4.1
The assigned readings were relevant.	4.2
The length of the seminar was appropriate.	3.6
The seminar was intellectually challenging.	4.4
The topics covered in the seminar met my expectations.	4.4
The pod (group) discussion assignments were valuable.	4.3
The individual presentation assignment was valuable.	4.5
I was actively engaged in learning during this seminar.	4.6

Survey Item (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Average
I gained new skills as a result of this seminar.	4.3
The seminar helped me understand how to apply my learning to real problems and contexts.	4.2
The seminar stimulated me to think in new ways.	4.4
The seminar leaders were knowledgeable about the subject matter.	4.8
This seminar should be offered again in the future.	4.6

Additional conversations with RTLSC and leadership led to second iteration of AoT, offered in spring 2019. Modeled on a graduate course, the 2019 version met three hours a week for 14 weeks. There were readings and online discussion prompts each week, but the bulk of the instruction and interaction took place in the in-person weekly class sessions. In addition, the 2019 version differed in that there was no structured group assignment; rather participants worked with their peers in a variety of small group activities each week, with group membership rotating each week. Finally, the 2019 program added two additional instructors (one who replaced the co-founder who had retired, see Appendix) and a practicum experience—a specific instruction assignment (either past or future) that the participants would use as the basis for applying what they were learning over the course of the seminar.

The overall program goals for 2019 were as follows:

- Develop and enhance instructional competencies needed to deliver high quality teaching services across Harvard Library.
- Develop instructional competencies needed to document and communicate the value of the academic library in relation to the institution's goals for student learning and success.
- Strengthen engagement with relevant instructional stakeholders beyond the libraries, including campus faculty, academic administrators, and assessment and technology units.
- Consider instructional assessment as an indicator of the contribution of academic libraries.

A breakdown of the topics and learning objectives for each week in the 2019 program is in the Appendix. Participation in 2019 was once again done through an application, with the addition of a nomination from the applicant's manager. Given the time commitment involved in the revised program, we asked for managers to nominate staff in part to ensure that managers were aware of, and supportive of, participants' using work time to complete the requirements of this training. A total of 12 staff representing nine different libraries or units were nominated, and all were accepted, and 10 completed the entire program.

Method

In order to understand both how well both programs worked, and how the changes in the program structure from 2016 to 2019 might have affected their outcomes, we recruited participants for this study from the 2016 and 2019 AoT cohorts ($N = 21$) to participate in semi-structured interviews. Thirteen agreed to be in the study, six from the 2016 cohort and seven from 2019. The 2019 participants also completed pre- and post- surveys. The 2016 participants completed an identical survey after they signed up for an interview slot. The survey included a self-assessment of skills related to the course, participants' agreement with 10 statements related to teaching and professional identity, and in the post-test, subjective ratings of the seminar and facilitators.

Because the first author was one of the developers and instructors for the Art of Teaching program, all interviews were conducted by the second author, who is not affiliated with Harvard University. In addition to questions about the program and about teaching and teaching identity, the interviews also included more general questions about professional and organizational identity, reported in a related study.[15]

Interview transcripts were de-identified and were coded by two trained graduate assistants, based on the qualitative content analysis process outlined by Margrit Schreier.[16] Initial coding themes were developed based on the research questions. In particular, for this study we focused on whether participants positively, negatively, or neutrally embraced a teacher identity and saw teaching as part of their professional identities.

Results and Discussion

Overall, participants rated librarianship as highly important to their professional identities, particularly the 2019 cohort, whose ratings for this survey item increased from 6.8 to 7 (strongly agree). Similarly, for the statements "Teaching is an important component of librarianship" and "Librarians are educators," the 2019 cohort's ratings increased from the pre- to post-test, and were also slightly higher than the 2016 cohort. However, for the item "Teaching is an important part of my professional identity," the 2019 cohort rating dropped from 5.7 to 5, putting it below the 5.5 rating from the 2016 cohort. In addition, the 2019 cohort's rating for the item "Library instruction is an important part of the teaching mission of higher education" also decreased, although in this case the 2019 cohort rated that item higher than did the 2016 group.

Table III. Teacher identity survey results

Survey Item 1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree	2016 Cohort	2019 Pre-Test*	2019 Post-Test
1. Teaching is an important component of librarianship.	6.2	6	6.5
2. Conducting research is an important component of librarianship.	5.7	6.2	6
3. Librarianship is an important part of my professional identity.	6.2	6.8	**7**
4. Teaching is an important part of my professional identity.	5.5	5.7	5
5. Librarians are educators.	6.3	6.2	6.5
6. Being a member of the higher education teaching profession is important to me.	4.8	5.3	6
7. I read research on teaching and learning.	4.7	5	5.2
8. I talk to my colleagues (librarians and other members of the higher education profession) about teaching and learning questions.	5.8	5.5	4.8
9. Other people think of me as a partner in higher education.	5.2	4.7	4.7
10. Library instruction is an important part of the teaching mission of higher education.	5.7	6.7	6.3

*One participant went on family leave immediately after the interview and was unable to complete the post-test survey. That participant's pre-test scores are omitted from this table.

Overall, the interviews contained far more comments coded as positively embracing teaching and the teaching identity. Many of those participants called out that teaching was their favorite or one of their favorite parts of their jobs, with a number of participants explicitly stating that they "loved" teaching. A lot of the joy of teaching was linked to the students—participants talked about how they liked their students and liked working with and helping students. Participants who felt positively about teaching also expressed that it was either a large part of their role, in terms of time, or that it was an important (or the most important) part of their work, even if it made up a smaller amount of their time.

The negatively and neutrally coded interview comments were few enough in number to be discussed as a group. Overall, for participants who did not positively embrace teaching, many of them also focused on the quantity of work, in that they did not see teaching as a big part of what they did. These participants were more likely to explicitly reject a teacher identity, with some focusing more on their identities as librarians, or saying that teaching was "just what librarians do." Some of the negatively coded comments also drew a distinction between "pure" teaching and their work, noting that teaching was what "real faculty" did. They were more likely to describe their instruction work as "presenting" or "answering questions." This discomfort in the interview responses mirrors the responses to the survey, where item 4 for example is rated lower than item 1. While our participants embraced teaching as an aspect of librarianship, they were not uniformly ready to embrace teaching specifically as part of their identities.

In addition to professional and teacher identity generally, we were interested in how the AoT program might have affected their skills acquisition and their identities. Overall, the participants from the 2016 cohort tended to report the highest level of impact of the training on their skills. For some, they learned new techniques, and for others, the training gave them a framework to organize what they had previously been doing. Across both cohorts, participants generally agreed that the training helped them become more confident in their instruction work. Participants from the 2019 cohort were a little more mixed on the impact of the training. This may be in part because the interviews took place shortly after the last class session of the program, and thus participants did not have much time to reflect on how they would incorporate what they learned into their practice. These participants did not always see the connection between what they saw as "teaching," the techniques taught in the program, and their actual work. While some participants expressed that they had gained new skills or the training had bolstered their confidence, others were not sure how to put into practice what they had learned, given the informality (i.e., one-shots) of much of their instruction work. This also played into the resistance to adopting the identity of "teacher," with that being reserved for people who had formal qualification as a "teacher," such as a faculty rank or a certification.

By contrast, several participants from the 2016 cohort explicitly embraced a teacher identity and noted that they had already thought of themselves that way before participating in AoT. In this case, the training served more to reinforce, rather than extend, their identities. The differences between the two cohorts may be explained in part by the difference in program structure. In 2016, participants self-selected into the program, and therefore the cohort may have represented more staff who were intrinsically motivated to improve their skills and who, as they noted, already possessed some level of teacher identity. In 2019, staff applied after being nominated by their managers. This was done to help ensure that staff had adequate protected work time to participate, but it may have had an unintended effect of bringing more staff who were ambivalent about their instruction roles into the program. There is also the possibility that in responding to the suggestions from 2016 to expand the length of the program, we went too far in the other direction, and participants were overwhelmed with information. That may be why some of the 2019 participants expressed uncertainty about the program outcomes.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to compare two different versions of a professional development program designed to enhance instruction skills and teacher identity for academic librarians. Overall, we find support for the idea that such teacher training programs can help librarians increase their skills and confidence, particularly when participants self-select into the program. However, it is still unclear if these programs can contribute positively to a sense of teacher identity, particularly in the absence of a formal instruction program at the institution. Despite teacher identity being a strong theme in the training, some participants were still ambivalent about this aspect of their roles, drawing a distinction between the *act of teaching* and *being a teacher*. The timing of our assessment meant that participants in the first cohort had three years of space between the training and the interviews, whereas the 2019 cohort had only just completed the training. It is possible that an assessment conducted six months or a year after the training might have revealed changes in attitude toward the training, participants' professional practice, and their professional identities.

In a related project we found that institutional factors such as librarian faculty status can influence how librarians communicate their professional and organizational identifications.[17] It is also possible that the lack of faculty status and other organizational hierarchies at Harvard contributes to a diminished sense of teacher identity, irrespective of the amount of instruction work the librarians actually engage in. Any future iterations of this or similar programs might use these findings to help bridge the gap between participants' perceptions of their work and concepts related to effective teaching.

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Kris M. Markman (PhD, The University of Texas at Austin) was the Director of Organizational Learning at Harvard Library from 2018 to 2020, having previously served as Director of Digital Learning and UX and Online Learning Librarian. She co-founded the User Research Center at Harvard Library in 2015. Her research interests revolve around communication, collaboration, and teaching and learning with technology. She joined the Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute in October 2020.

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Kumi Ishii (PhD, Kent State University) is a Professor of the Department of Communication at Western Kentucky University. Her research interest is organizational communication in the global age including communication among diverse members and communication behavior with technology.

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Hannah Arnow completed her MA in History and MLIS at Simmons University in 2021. Currently she works as the Information Governance and eDiscovery Program Manager at Textron in Providence, Rhode Island. Previously, she served as a Project Manager at the Center for Digital Innovation in Learning at Boston College, a Graduate Intern for the Research Data Management Program at Harvard Library, and

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Endnotes

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Appendix: Art of Teaching Spring 2019 Curriculum and Staff

Week 1: Introduction to the Art of Teaching

Introduction to the class and the fundamentals of learning & instructional design model.

Week 2: Learning theories and frameworks

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify at least three learning theories and frameworks.

2. Distinguish between key features of major learning theories.

3. Apply at least one learning theory to library instruction scenarios.

Week 3: Putting theory to work: Developing learning objectives

Learning Objectives:

1. Apply the Teaching for Understanding Framework to library instruction scenarios.

2. Identify characteristics of effective learning objectives.

3. Develop specific, measurable, observable learning objectives for library instruction scenarios.

4. Describe the relationship between learning assessment and learning objectives.

Week 4: Understanding your learners I

Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as they relate to learning.

2. Describe the relationship between learning objectives and learner motivation.

3. Explain why understanding audience motivation is important for library instruction.

Week 5: Understanding your learners II

Learning Objectives

1. Identify techniques for conducting formal and informal audience analysis in different library instruction scenarios.

2. Demonstrate proficiency in creating and adapting messages in response to a given audience's needs, motivations, and goals.

3. Demonstrate how technology can aid in audience analysis.

Week 6: Instructional strategies for engaging learners I

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the major differences in how experts and novices learn.

2. Describe appropriate strategies and activities to use for different library instruction scenarios.

3. Identify instructional activities that promote engagement.

4. Identify at least three benefits of active learning.

5. Adapt a general instructional activity to a specific library instruction context.

6. Describe relationship between instructional strategies and learning objectives.

7. Describe relationship between instructional strategies and audience analysis.

Week 7: Instructional strategies for engaging learners II

Learning Objectives

1. Describe at least three benefits of using technology in instruction.

2. Articulate at least three essential strategies for effective technology use.

3. Select an appropriate technology for a specific library teaching scenario.

4. Articulate at least three benefits of using small groups for learning.

5. Articulate at least three challenges of working with small groups in the classroom.

Week 8: Communicating before, during, and beyond the classroom I

Learning Objectives

1. Define key features of active listening.

2. Demonstrate proficiency in active listening techniques.

3. Define key features of effective feedback.

4. Articulate strategies for connecting audience analysis to communication in the classroom.

5. Describe strategies for negotiating with different stakeholder groups (i.e., faculty, administrators, etc.).

Week 9: Communicating before, during, and beyond the classroom II

Learning Objectives

1. Describe at least three best practices for creating presentation slides.

2. Demonstrate proficiency in handling presentation slides.

3. Demonstrate confident handling of technology in presentations.

4. Demonstrate confidence in extemporaneous speaking in teaching contexts.

Week 10: Assessment I

Learning Objectives

1. Distinguish between learning assessments and other uses of assessments in libraries.

2. Identify types of assessment data that can be collected.

3. Describe appropriate learning assessments for library instruction scenarios.

4. Distinguish between examples of learning and satisfaction assessments.

5. Distinguish between examples of formative and summative assessments.

6. Select appropriate formative assessment techniques for given learning objectives.

Week 11 (April 19): Assessment II—Writing Good Questions

Learning Objectives

1. Adapt various classroom assessment techniques to different library instruction contexts.

2. Demonstrate ability to incorporate formative assessment into instructional strategies.

3. Describe the relationship between assessment, learning objectives, and instructional strategies.

Week 12 (April 26): Assessment III

Learning Objectives

1. Select appropriate summative assessment techniques for given learning objectives.

2. Critique different types of learning assessment question types.

3. Select appropriate assessment question types for library instruction scenarios.

4. Define at least three benefits of using rubrics for learning assessment.

5. Distinguish between types of rubrics.

6. Describe how assessment data can be used to provide evidence of results to different audiences.

Week 13 (May 3): Teaching vs. Presenting

Practicum class in delivering engaging teaching moments—revisiting informing vs. transforming. Practice delivering "teaching snippet."

Week 14 (May 10): Reflections: Risk taking, experimentation, failure, and adaptation

Challenges for teaching in Harvard Library. Discussion of how to take risks and adapt to failure. Failure showcase! Practice adapting to different failure scenarios. What can we learn from failure?

Program Instructors (2019)

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