

Abstract

Academic librarians are increasingly charged with providing instruction in conducting research and using library resources to students, faculty, and staff in higher education. In early 2015, the Association of College and Research Libraries released the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* and this new set of guidelines significantly impacts how academic libraries and librarians approach library instruction. However, little meaningful research has been done on how to equip this particular group of educational professionals through job-situated or job-related learning to reframe their instructional practices to fit this new mold. In seeking to best address these changing instructional needs, the author proposes that those involved in designing professional learning for academic librarians – such as conference planning committees, instructional designers, and library leaders charged with providing and supporting professional learning on information literacy instruction – design and deliver learning experiences that incorporate transformational learning theory, use principles of social learning theory, and consider learners’ goal orientation and motivation. Incorporating these theories into professional learning practice, academic librarians can more effectively and meaningfully integrate the ACRL *Framework* into their instruction.

Equipping academic librarians to integrate the *Framework* into instructional practices: A theoretical application

For many educators, ongoing professional learning is an important component of their work. In both K-12 and higher education, those individuals with instructional responsibilities engage in work-centered learning to develop new skill sets, expand or refresh existing knowledge, and explore new ideas related to teaching and learning. In some cases, this professional learning is mandated by local, state, or national certification rules; in other instances, this learning is undertaken by choice. While work-specific learning may be engaged in externally through conferences, professional seminars, or professional organizations, many educational professionals engage in job-situated professional learning to further skills or advance knowledge. Professional learning opportunities that are job-situated refer specifically to the formal and informal programs offered within educational entities to increase educators' knowledge of and experience in different concepts, skills, and topics. These experiences may also be referred to as professional development, continuing education, or job-embedded learning opportunities.

Even though K-12 and higher education professionals are continually engaged in professional learning, these learning opportunities may not impact practice or shape student success. Whether job-embedded or external, professional learning opportunities for educators often seem disconnected from a specific work environment, or they may fail to consider both the big picture and small details simultaneously. This is especially problematic for job-situated learning. Because it exists *within* a particular work context, this type of learning needs to be designed to effectively impact practices. Poorly executed job-embedded professional learning

may result in several undesirable consequences: learning may not appear applicable; educators may not have time or occasion to apply it, or may not see a *need* to apply it in practice based on their current perceptions of their practices; or educators may not have time or interest in even participating in the learning experience.

Job-Situated Learning for Academic Librarians

Academic librarians represent a unique group of educators who need to engage in ongoing professional learning both externally and on-the-job. Libraries of all types have undergone transformational change in the Information Age as resources have become increasingly digital; these transformative changes have impacted those who teach library users information literacy skills, or how to find, access, and ethically use information (Association for College and Research Libraries [ACRL], 2000). Academic librarians are among this group, for they work with undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff in developing information literacy skills and understanding for research, scholarship, and lifelong learning. This instruction most commonly takes the form of course-embedded information literacy sessions, which represent instructional collaborations between academic librarians and subject area faculty. These instructional sessions address the specific information literacy skills students need for a particular course or discipline, such as finding specific types of research in discipline-specific resources, understanding the scholarly conventions of a discipline, or using an academic library's resources more generally.

Academic Librarians' Instructional Roles

These kinds of instructional responsibilities are an increasingly important function in academic librarians' daily work (Bailey, 2010; Bell, 2008). However, librarians' educational experiences do not equip them with the pedagogical and instructional training provided to other

educators. While higher education instructors in general may experience these challenges, discipline-specific faculty engage in different kinds of instruction than academic librarians. Many (if not most) academic librarians do not teach credit-bearing courses over the length of an entire academic semester; moreover, academic librarians must focus on integrating their discipline-specific standards into *another* subject area, which differs from their faculty colleagues. The differences in how instructional responsibilities are structured for academic librarians in comparison with other academic faculty means that campus supports – such as a center for teaching and learning, for instance – may not adequately address librarians’ needs.

To further complicate these issues, various studies have revealed that academic librarians have generally limited or inadequate exposure to information literacy in library school. This often occurs because of course sequencing, academic load, or curricular inconsistencies (Bailey, 2010; Corral, 2010; Sproles, Johnson, & Farison, 2008). Perhaps resulting from this underpreparedness, reports of academic librarians in the literature assert that on-the-job learning is both expected and desired. In their study of new academic librarians, Sare, Bales, and Neville (2012) found that new professionals enter the field expecting to engage in job-specific training. New librarians saw these opportunities as ways to enhance their skills and gain knowledge not addressed in their academic experiences. However, because of their unique instructional roles on campus, these experiences may only exist within the academic library or at external events (e.g. professional conferences or workshops).

Academic Library Instructional Standards and Guidelines

Evolving standards and benchmarks used for designing and delivering information literacy instruction also present challenges for academic librarians seeking to become instructional experts. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published its

Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education in 2000, and this document, with five standards and accompanying performance indicators and outcomes, provided academic librarians with a structure around which to craft information literacy instruction sessions in, and independent of, subject-specific courses in higher education. These standards were reviewed cyclically, and in 2012, an ACRL task force recommended revising the *Standards* (ACRL, 2015). As a result, the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* was crafted and officially adopted by ACRL in 2015 as “one of the constellation of information literacy documents” academic librarians should use in informing their instructional practices (ACRL, 2015, p. 1).

The *Framework* presents a shift in how academic librarians need to think about instruction, because it moves away from “standards, learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration of skills” and toward “a cluster of interconnected core concepts, with flexible options for implementation” (ACRL, 2015, p. 2). These core ideas also introduced threshold concepts more widely into the discipline of information literacy. The new *Framework* guidelines asserted that students in higher education who are developing their information literacy skills and knowledge should understand that:

- Authority is constructed and contextual;
- Information creation [is] a process;
- Information has value;
- Research as [a process of] inquiry;
- Scholarship [is a] conversation; and
- Searching as [a process of] strategic exploration (ACRL, 2015, p. 2).

At the most basic level, the terminology of these concepts differs from the standards of finding, evaluating, and using information ethically (ACRL, 2000). More significantly, though, the *Framework* asked academic librarians to shift how they design and assess information literacy instruction. While the ACRL (2000) *Standards* provided specific performance indicators and outcomes, the *Framework* (2015) offered knowledge practices and dispositions but noted that, “each library and its partners on campus will need to... [design their own] learning outcomes” (ACRL, 2015, p. 2). While ACRL has asserted that the *Framework* and *Standards* documents are not mutually exclusive, shifting and integrating the new threshold concepts into everyday practices may require professional learning and training opportunities, both external and job-embedded.

Antecedents to Engaging in Job-Specific Learning

As these opportunities are developed, it can be instructive to consider why adult learners in general may choose to engage in job-embedded or work-related professional learning. Kyndt and Baert (2013) examined these issues in a systematic review of the scholarship relating to employees’ involvement in work-related learning; while not specific to education professionals, their findings provide insight that may be useful to those designing professional learning on the *Framework*. In this study, the authors defined work-related learning “as the engagement in formal and informal learning activities both on and off the job, whereby employees and groups of employees acquire and / or improve competencies... that change individuals’ present and future professional achievement... and organizational performance” (Kyndt & Baert, 2013, p. 275). This definition captures both the informal and formal learning aspects that exist as part of work-related learning, and both components exist for academic librarians.

Kyndt and Baert (2013) specifically examined the scholarly literature for three levels of antecedents in the contexts of both *intention* to participate in such learning and actual participation in such learning. At the micro level, the researchers found that employees' sociodemographic characteristics, such as age or gender, and personal characteristics, including attitudes toward work-related learning and self-efficacy, pre-empted the development of their intentions to participate in job-specific learning. At the meso level, the researchers found that the types of learning activities had an impact on employees' levels of intention; their perceptions of the benefits or outcomes of participation, as well as the content to be learned and the perceived missed opportunities from participating in professional learning also shaped how they felt about engaging in such learning activities. And finally, at the macro level, the researchers found that an employee's work environment had an impact on an individual's development of an intention to engage in informal or formal job-related learning. These environmental impacts included an organization's culture, policies, and size, as well as the individual's financial and employment status within the organization.

While antecedents to intention are certainly important to consider in designing and promoting meaningful work-specific learning opportunities, Kyndt and Baert (2013) also examined the literature for micro-, meso-, and macro-level antecedents to actual *participation* in such activities. Their findings can help those who design learning experiences, or who may encourage participation in such experiences, for academic librarians in particular. At the micro level, the researchers found that, as with employee intention, participation was also impacted by sociodemographic and personal characteristics, but that an individual's job characteristics -- including one's occupational level, job satisfaction, workload, managerial aspirations, and tenure in one's position -- influence participation in work-related learning. At the meso level, the

researchers found that the learning activity in particular influenced whether individuals chose to participate in work-related learning; the most influential factors included what the activity's expected benefits or outcomes were perceived to be, as well as if individuals had participated in prior activities, and whether individuals expected to receive feedback, support, and / or recognition for participation. And at the macro level, the researchers found that individuals' participation was influenced by their respective work organization's structure. This component was further divided into more discrete parts: whether an organization was in the public or private sector; the level of organizational support for work-specific learning; perceptions of internal mobility within an organization; and the organization's climate or culture as it related to learning. Interestingly, Kyndt and Baert also found that the broader context influenced learners' participation at the macro level. This context included external support outside of work (i.e., from family and friends) and institutional support frameworks that exist external to any one organization.

In the specific context of job-embedded professional learning for academic librarians, this research provides several important points for consideration. First, Kyndt and Baert (2013) concluded that “[p]rior participation enhances the learning intention of the employee, which in turn predicts future participation” (p. 303). For those responsible for providing formal learning opportunities for educators, whether job-embedded or external but job-related, this conclusion suggests that designing learning experiences that encourage participation will foster future participation in professional learning. It is important, then, to consider how academic librarians who have not participated in job-related learning in the past may be motivated to do so around the *Framework*. Kyndt and Baert also noted that the most consistent variables that impact work-related learning, both in terms of intention and actual participation, are an individual's attitude,

sense of self-efficacy, perception of support, sense appreciation for learning, and expected benefits or outcomes. By considering and planning for these factors, then, perhaps library leaders can engage academic librarians in job-embedded professional learning opportunities around the *Framework*.

Applying Adult Learning Theories to Academic Librarians' Professional Learning

For academic librarians to avoid doing what they have always done and seeing the same outcomes in practice, those involved in designing professional learning opportunities need to consider how professional learning around the *Framework* can be most effectively constructed. This involves identifying adult learning motivations and incorporating important adult learning theories, including social learning theory and transformational learning theory, into professional development. As the ACRL (2015) guiding documents note, the new *Framework* intended to help learners to “build conceptual understandings” while “extending the arc of learning through students’ academic careers” (pp. 2-3). This document accomplished this goal by presenting interconnected and non-hierarchical ideas critical to understanding information in 21st century academic, work, and personal environments. This non-linear presentation of concepts to learn, rather than skills to be tested, may prove challenging to those academic librarians used to highly structured learning objectives, one-shot instructional sessions, and fixed assessment techniques. Because of the issues academic librarians may face while integrating the *Framework* into their practices, theories that address how adult learners can make sense of disorienting concepts, how individuals make meaning in socially constructed environments, and how library leaders can motivate academic librarians to continue to hone their instructional knowledge can significantly impact professional learning programs and initiatives. By incorporating theories that consider transformative learning, principles of social learning, and adult learners’ goal orientation into

practice, academic librarians will be able to more effectively and meaningfully integrate the ACRL *Framework* into their instruction.

Transformative Learning Theory and the *Framework*

Jack Mezirow, the pioneer of transformative learning theory, defined it “as the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference... -- sets of assumption and expectations -- to make the more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change.” (Mezirow, 1998, p. 92). Mezirow (1998) went on to outline these frames of reference, calling them “the structures of culture and language through which we construe meaning by attributing coherence and significance to our experience” (p. 92). Importantly, these frames impact how learners interact with other learners, and with the broader world; in the context of job-specific or job-embedded learning, educators’ frames of reference may impact their engagement or participation. Another important component of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory are learners’ habits of mind, which he called the “broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling and acting, influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes” (Mezirow, 1998, p. 92). We can think of these “habits” as shaped by social, cultural, psychological, educational, and other influences. This theory seems to specifically refer to individuals’ learning that impact their sociocultural status and their perception of others or other groups (e.g. different ethnic groups, different genders, individuals with different sexual orientations), but this theory can also be applied to learning in work-related contexts when a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1994, p. 224) arises. Integrating the *Framework* into instruction guided by the *Standards*, or designing new instruction based solely on the *Framework*, present such dilemmas.

Simply considering these components of transformative learning theory can have an impact on how job-embedded or job-related professional learning opportunities about the

Framework are provided for academic librarians. First, academic librarians may have a set of assumptions about what “information” is, or “information literacy” means, and they may bring with them expectations of what their post-secondary learners know, or need to know, or do, or need to do, with information. In light of changes in information structure and availability in the digitally rich 21st century, these frames of reference may no longer be correct, either in part or in sum. What academic librarians expect students to need to do with information may differ from what students actually *do* with information in academic coursework, real-world experiences, or in work environments. These frames of reference are shaped by academic librarians’ habits of mind, though. These habitual ways of thinking, perhaps developed from graduate school, on-the-job experience, or sociocultural perceptions, influence how academic librarians construct their work as educators. The *Framework* represents a new lens through which information literacy can be seen and presents a departure from prescriptive learning standards, outcomes and performance indicators. To best transform academic librarians’ habits of mind and frames of reference vis à vis information literacy instruction, then, professional learning around the *Framework* should employ principles of transformative learning theory.

Transformative learning theory can help adult learners to engage in critical self-reflection and reform their meaning-making structures (Kegan, 2009; Mezirow, 1998). Consider the ten phases of transformative learning, which Mezirow (1994) asserted shape how frames of reference and habits of mind are changed:

1. A disorienting dilemma occurs;
2. Individual engages in self-examination (including shame / guilt);
3. Individual engages in a critical assessment of one’s assumptions;

4. Individual acknowledges that others have undergone transformation in similar ways;
5. Individual explores new options for roles, relationships, or actions;
6. Individual plans a course of action forward;
7. Individual acquires the necessary knowledge and skills to implement plans;
8. Individual tries out new roles;
9. Individual renegotiates existing relationships and renegotiates new relationships;
and
10. Individual reintegrates into one's life the conditions as dictated by the new perspective (p. 224).

Academic librarians may have experienced a disorienting dilemma through the *Framework's* development, release, and early implementation attempts. What do these new instructional guidelines mean for how library instruction has always happened? Also, do these newly formalized ideas cause librarians to feel professional shame or guilt if they have only begun to effectively implement the *Standards* and now must address additional instructional ideas? Moreover, the *Framework* explicitly states that instructors *outside* of academic libraries should implement these threshold concepts. What does this new document do, then, to the role of the instructional librarian in the 21st century academic library?

Here are where Mezirow's other phases come in, and where instructional designers and educational administrators can help to facilitate the transformation process. Mezirow (1994) notes that learning can occur "by refining or elaborating our schemes, learning new meaning schemes, transforming meaning schemes, and transforming meaning perspectives" (p. 224); those involved in delivering or supporting professional learning on the *Framework* can help

academic librarians engage in one (or more) of the four transformative learning iterations, as appropriate. While leaders may not be directly able to assist with individual learners' self-examination or critical self-assessment, they can provide structured or unstructured environments that help learners grapple with these two stages. For instance, an informal discussion group among peers about the *Framework* and its impacts on individuals' job perceptions may assist librarians as they make sense of what the new information literacy guidelines mean for their work, their assumptions about libraries, and their understanding of information literacy. This type of learning experience could occur in a face-to-face or online environment; learning management systems such as Blackboard, Moodle, and Canvas provide a discussion board or forum feature so that participants can engage in asynchronous conversation around these issues. These discussions may also assist academic librarians work through Mezirow's fourth phase, because shared issues and common concerns will be more visible. Moreover, providing these kinds of opportunities may help academic librarians feel that professional learning is more supported within the organization, thereby engaging an important motivational variable in work-related learning.

More formal professional learning opportunities may help academic librarians work through phases five through nine of Mezirow's (1994) transformative learning sequence. What may be of the most use to learners would be regular and consistent learning opportunities that provide academic librarians with opportunities to test out and apply their learning in contexts where experimentation is encouraged and failure is supported. Specifically in the context of potential failure, educational leaders supporting such initiatives can help to create or reinforce an organizational culture that views failure or limited successes as opportunities for learning and growth rather than opportunities for reprimands or punishment. Also, providing collaborative

environments where academic librarians can learn from each other may help them to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills required to embody a new instructional role, or develop a plan to enact change in their teaching practices, or determine how to renegotiate or build relationships around their new understandings of information literacy instruction.

It is also important to note the role of a lead educator in this transformative learning process. Mezirow (1997) believed that instructors needed to act as “facilitator[s] and provocateur[s] rather than as... authority on subject matter” (p. 6). In a professional learning situation, where the instructor may be a colleague or fellow practitioner from another institution, it is important that the leader of a professional development initiative take this perspective. In such a role, Mezirow (1997) indicated “the facilitator works herself out of the job of authority figure to become a colearner by progressively transferring her leadership to the group as it becomes more self-directive” (p. 6). This may be a shift in practice, or in thinking, for the learning facilitator and library leaders alike. However, by engaging *in* the transformative process, facilitators of professional development around the *Framework* can also hone and shape their practice around these new ways of thinking about information literacy instruction.

Engaging in Shared Learning through Social Learning Theory

To foster and encourage these kinds of collaborative learning environments, library leaders should also see the *Framework* through the lens of social learning theory. As we think about learning, it is important to note that learning exists in the contexts of a specific time and space, and “[w]here we are situated... affects the experiences we have from which we learn” (Jarvis, 2006, p. 54). Because learning is *always* situated, it carries with it cultural understandings, social implications, and sets of expectations (Jarvis, 2006, pp. 64-65). Therefore, how academic librarians will make sense of the *Framework* and allow (or *not* allow) it to

transform their thinking is contextually constructed and bounded by time, space, and social situation. To impact change and encourage meaningful learning to occur, library leaders should consider these factors as they provide support for meaningful learning experiences that allow academic librarians to better understand and use the *Framework*.

Bandura's social learning theory. Albert Bandura's social learning theory can help library leaders involved in *Framework*-focused professional development to foster transformative learning among academic librarians. Social learning theory asserts that, through modeling, observation, and imitation, learning can most meaningfully and effectively take place (Lyons & Berge, 2012). Bandura noted that learning can occur through observation of others as well as through first-hand experiences, and by watching others, we can develop guides for how we should act (Lyons & Berge, 2012). This theory has several implications for designing transformational learning experiences related to the new *Framework* guidelines.

First, it may benefit academic librarians to engage in learning with someone who has already experienced the transformation process first-hand, or who is undergoing the transformation but is several steps ahead. For instance, if a group of academic librarians is grappling with their new options for roles, relationships, and actions in light of the *Framework*, it may be useful to engage in learning with a librarian who has worked through that transformative phase and is now working to negotiate or renegotiate relationships based on this transformation. This could be done in person, virtually, or in some combination thereof. By providing academic librarians the opportunity to observe how a more learned or advanced "other" works through the transformative process, library leaders can help facilitate learners' transformative processes. In this case, this more knowledgeable "other" may be able to identify which motivational variables impacted work-related learning, as outlined by Kynd and Baert (2013); for instance, the

facilitator's own experiences may help him or her to address others' senses of self-efficacy or attitudes about new instructional practices.

Also, though, social learning theory can be employed in a transformative learning environment by creating groups of learners that intensively engage in the transformation process together. In the context of the *Framework* and academic librarians' instructional responsibilities, this could mean developing groups of equal peers who concretely work with Mezirow's (1994) ten phases in their instructional practices, and observe each other as they work to integrate the *Framework* into their instructional practices. This observation and modeling structure could help academic librarians to develop guides of how they may act in future instructional interactions, or in negotiating relationships with subject-area faculty members, or in helping to build students' understanding. Here, too, Mezirow's (1997) idea of facilitator as colearner can take shape.

The importance of environment. The social environment in which learning occurs is another important social learning perspective that library leaders need to consider as they work to foster transformative learning around the *Framework*. According to Rotter, we can only understand behavior by considering both the individual and the environment (Mearns, 2015). Furthermore, he asserted that we can make sense of individuals' behavioral choices by considering the components that construct these decisions: the expectancy, or the perceived likelihood that a chosen behavior will result in a specific outcome; the reinforcement value, or how desirable an individual considers potential outcomes of behavioral choices to be; and the individual's psychological situation and experience in their environment (Mearns, 2015). Considering these factors of behavior can help identify an individual's behavior potential, or the likelihood that one will act in a certain way under certain circumstances (Mearns, 2015). This theory of social learning is especially useful to consider if framed in the context of antecedents to

engaging in professional learning. Library leaders can work to build an organizational culture that helps academic librarians feel that choosing to engage in professional learning will be reinforced in meaningful and desirable ways, or that fosters an atmosphere of support for ongoing learning by encouraging participation in external and internal learning initiatives. This in turn will influence the variables that impact work-related learning, as stated by Kyndt and Baert (2013), including perception of support and expectation of benefits / outcomes. These steps can impact the meso- and macro-level factors surrounding academic librarians, and may help them to engage more readily in transformative learning about the *Framework*.

Learners' Goal Orientation and Motivation

In the context of both social learning theories and transformative learning theory, it is important for library leaders to consider and employ their learners' motivations for engaging in professional learning. One way to conceive of this motivation is through theories of goal orientation. While Kyndt and Baert (2013) considered the antecedents to intention or participation in relation to professional learning, goal orientation theories specifically consider “*why* and *how* people are trying to achieve various objectives” (Kaplan & Maehr, 2006, p. 142). Moreover, goal orientation refers to the overarching purposes that guide learners' behavior (Kaplan & Maehr, 2006). For example, a learner may seek mastery or a specific performance level; conversely, they may seek to avoid work, academic alienation, or performance. Learners may also be driven to accomplish a goal for extrinsic (i.e., a pay raise) or social (i.e., acceptance into a group) reasons.

As library leaders in particular work to develop learning initiatives that help academic librarians to better understand and use the *Framework*, they need to consider these different goal attainment perspectives and how they may be met or addressed. For example, librarians in

leadership roles may identify that social situations have given rise to specific goal orientations within their organization; designing a transformative learning experience that incorporates social learning theory principles but engages this particular goal orientation can help the other librarians to achieve their desired goals and objectives *while* engaging them in meaningful professional learning. Or, if library administrators identify that academic librarians resist participating in learning experiences around the *Framework* for fear of being overloaded with additional work or undergoing additional scrutiny, they need to consider how the values of the organization are reflected in this goal orientation. By better understanding academic librarians' goal orientation and from where this stems, library leaders can work to design more effective and meaningful learning opportunities, both internally and externally.

Conclusions & Future Directions

The ACRL (2015) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* represented a sea change in how academic librarians conceive of information literacy instruction in post-secondary educational environments. While there is little research on meaningful job-embedded or professionally-focused learning for academic librarians, there is even less research on how this group can be equipped to design and deliver instruction using these new professional guidelines. In this paper, the position has been presented that, by using transformative learning theory, various social learning theories, and goal orientation, academic library leaders can more effectively provide professional development in designing and delivering meaningful 21st century information literacy instruction.

However, the application of these theories is still conceptual. In the future, research on how transformative learning theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and goal orientation in motivation have been adapted in specific professional learning environments would help

academic library leaders to determine best practices in the area. Ideally, a diverse body of research in this area needs to develop, with examinations of formal job-embedded (i.e., institutional professional development initiatives), external job-related (i.e., professional conference programs), and informal learning experiences. Such an examination would help academic librarians and academic library leaders alike to identify the most meaningful ways to engage in continually developing professional skills, knowledge, and practices.

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