Professional Development on a Budget: Facilitating Learning Opportunities for Information Literacy Instructors

Lisa Shamchuk
Diploma Services Librarian
MacEwan University
shamchukl@macewan.ca

Abstract

How do you stay on top of evolving trends and changes to information literacy delivery, especially while coping with shrinking professional development allocations? This article details various in-house, professional development opportunities created for MacEwan University's library staff. Low-cost, practical ideas are given to help jump-start a library's information literacy professional development offerings. Included are details about organizing an Information Literacy Community, internal Library Professional Development Days and an information literacy event open to local library professionals.

Keywords

professional development; information literacy; conference planning

Introduction

Working as a library professional in today's current academic library environment involves balancing constantly developing trends and changing initiatives in information literacy (IL) delivery. It is imperative that library professionals stay on top of such trends and initiatives, but keeping up with the shifting landscape is often difficult as professional development (PD) allocations ebb and flow due to the volatile world of public-sector funding and local budgets. MacEwan University Library in Edmonton, Alberta has responded to the challenge by providing various cost-effective in-house PD opportunities to both librarians and library staff. Budget-conscious, practical IL PD offerings at MacEwan University Library include an IL Community, internal Library PD Days, and an IL event open to local library professionals. All of these events are currently organized by a librarian who organizes and promotes PD to the librarian faculty. These facilitation responsibilities are explicitly stated in a formal annual workload document. All PD opportunities take place at MacEwan University and while the first two activities discussed are for MacEwan University Library staff only, the third is open to the wider library community.

IL Community

In the fall of 2013, MacEwan University Library created an IL Community for all library staff who are involved with IL instruction. A need was identified: the chair of the library's Learning and Curriculum Support team requested more PD for librarians and library

technicians who teach IL sessions. This mandate thus became a responsibility tied to the librarian coordinating PD offerings. The solution was to create a community of practice. With ties to research on communities of practice and professional learning communities in a post-secondary environment (Belzowski, Ladwig, and Miller; Blankenship and Ruona; Cambridge, Kaplan, and Suter), this in-house IL Community provides opportunities to share information, expertise, and insight by acting as a venue for communication, learning, mentoring, and self-reflection.

The goal of a community of practice is to connect learning to experiencing, doing, sharing, and exploring, all in a safe atmosphere that encourages belonging. Communities of practice develop individual skills and capabilities, but also improve group morale and culture. MacEwan University Library's IL Community strives to be a place where new library staff, as well as experienced staff, can share their knowledge and collaboratively improve their teaching. This community of practice is meant to be informal and completely optional. By encouraging such an atmosphere, it is hoped that library staff feel it is worth their time to participate, and are excited to take part in the offerings.

Terms of Reference were created (see Appendix 1) and lines of communication are maintained via email and the intranet. Any library staff member who teaches IL is invited to participate in various meetings and activities, which typically occur at least once a term.

In its first year, the 2013-2014 academic year, the IL community yielded two PD events: a Teaching Styles Workshop and a term-long round of peer observation in the form of Teaching Triangles. The second year included another round of Teaching Triangles, a curriculum mapping session, and multiple opportunities for learning and discussion surrounding the new Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education presented by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL).

Teaching Styles Workshop

The first activity for the newly formed IL Community was a Teaching Styles Workshop, which was used to jump-start reflection on teaching practice philosophy. The librarian coordinating PD offerings created a ninety-minute workshop session around the Teaching Perspective Inventory (TPI) designed by Pratt and Collins. First, colleagues participated in a think-pair-share activity in which they reflected upon what image best describes them as a teacher: ship's captain, tour guide, soapbox philosopher, or coach.

Next, all participants completed the TPI, which was created by Pratt and Collins after extensive research into how people teach. After collecting data about how people teach, the TPI researchers created five perspectives to help better understand personal beliefs, intentions, and actions in the classroom. The online assessment is free, and takes about fifteen minutes to complete. This is an inventory promoted by MacEwan University's Centre for the Advancement of Faculty Excellence (CAFÉ); they suggest using the tool as a reflective activity to think about while writing a teaching philosophy for a teaching dossier or portfolio (librarian faculty at MacEwan University are expected

to have dossiers). Workshop participants were given time to complete the test during the workshop.

The TPI returns a personal graph charting the participant's preferred teaching styles. The website provides information relating to each style. After everyone took the test, groups were created based on dominant perspectives, and then participants brainstormed how IL instructors could use their strengths. An open Google Doc was used for groups to record their answers to discussion topics, such as activities the participants liked to use in their classes, and assessment techniques or routines favoured, as they related to their dominant teaching perspective. Multiple groups were able to record their discussions "live," so one person did not have to record or collate any information. As a result, the IL Community now has a document posted on the intranet that is full of ideas for everyone who is teaching IL; they can either use the ideas related to their own preferred style, or dip into other styles to expand their repertoire of teaching techniques.

Eight of the fifteen library staff IL instructors across all campuses attended this workshop. Feedback from colleagues indicated that the Teaching Styles Workshop created an environment where people could explore their personal approach to teaching in a nonthreatening atmosphere. People also liked that the Google Doc was posted on the intranet for future reference. The inaugural activity for the IL Community was thus deemed a success.

Teaching Triangles

A recurring activity for the IL Community is Teaching Triangles. Teaching Triangles are groups of instructors who observe each other in the classroom. This allows the instructors to witness and gather best practices or interesting teaching techniques that could be incorporated in their own IL sessions. Simply put, Teaching Triangles allows a participant to borrow a colleague's good ideas. There is no formal evaluation component to the observation. MacEwan University's CAFÉ facilitates a Teaching Triangles program campus-wide, but the library wanted to offer the experience to library staff alone, so that everyone could feel comfortable with the process before involving other instructional faculty. This also gave the library technicians who teach IL an opportunity to participate.

In order to explain what Teaching Triangles were to MacEwan University Library's IL instructors, the librarian coordinating PD offerings created a short video detailing the process and materials to be used for the library's first round of the event. A video, instead of a meeting, was chosen so that library staff from other campuses could be included, as well as to create a resource for future Teaching Triangles rounds. The video was created using Captivate, and posted to the Library's YouTube channel.

To date, two rounds of Teaching Triangles have been completed, during the Fall term of 2014 and the Winter term of 2014. Nine names of interested participants were drawn out of a hat to create triangles. Participants were provided with charts, checklists, and observation worksheets via the intranet (see Appendix 2). Triangles were encouraged to

meet after their teaching-observation cycle to debrief, and the entire group of participants met at the end of the term to share best practices observed and talk about successes and improvements to the activity as a whole.

Feedback at the end of the first round was positive. One colleague indicated that it was well organized, making it easy for librarians to make the necessary time commitment. They appreciated that it was informal and that paperwork was optional. IL instructors liked that it was not tied to a formal performance review, and that the only objective was to improve their teaching. Surprisingly, even though the Teaching Triangle premise is about observing someone to borrow their good ideas, and not to provide constructive feedback, the majority of participants actually wanted comments from their peers. Paperwork was modified to include optional opportunities for evaluative feedback, and those who participated in the second round agreed Teaching Triangles were a worthy exercise in this vein. The format not only expanded the participants' teaching toolbox, but also provided IL instructors with informal feedback that helped them grow as teachers in a safe atmosphere that did not include the pressure of a formal observation or performance review.

At the end of this second round, the group agreed to wait one full year before conducting another round, so past participants had time to implement all the shared ideas and tips gathered during the first and second rounds. Library IL instructors were also encouraged to sign up for the Teaching Triangles arranged by the institution's CAFÉ, as interacting with the university's teaching faculty could potentially open many doors for future collaboration or promotion of the library's IL programming.

No library funds are spent on any aspect of the IL Community, besides the occasional meeting treat, such as a box of cookies, from the petty cash fund.

Library PD Days

Library-wide internal PD, which often has an IL component, is also available to all library staff. The librarian coordinating PD offerings was asked by the chair of Reference Services to facilitate the library's biannual mini internal PD Days. Twice a year an informal PD half-day, morning or afternoon, is organized at the main campus. These days are open to and geared towards staff of all levels and departments within the library, as it is important to provide opportunities for the library technicians and support staff as well as librarians. These PD opportunities have the added benefit of gathering staff members from various campuses and library departments together for shared learning and networking, which in turn positively contributes to the culture of the library. Attendance at these PD days is voluntary, but the goal is to provide an opportunity for all staff to learn from library colleagues.

The librarian coordinating PD offerings sends out a request for topics to all staff in the library, and solicits ideas from the dean, chairs, and managers. Either a call for presentations goes out, or speakers are solicited based on requests. These PD Days usually occur during quiet periods of the academic year: during finals, intersession, spring and summer terms, or before the fall term has started. This makes it possible to

book space in one of the library learning labs, and allows as many people to attend as possible. Save-the-date emails and poster schedules are sent to all staff and posted in library staff common areas. The librarian ensures the library space is set up appropriately, and that there are snacks in the lunchroom for break times. Besides introducing speakers and timekeeping, the librarian also sends a follow-up email to all staff when presentation materials are posted to the intranet, and solicits feedback using an evaluation survey.

Past PD days have consisted of technology-related sessions such as software or app demonstrations, updates on initiatives, and a technology showcase. There have been project or research updates, discussions about copyright concerns, and external guests (such as a university counsellor who discussed helping students in distress, writing services representatives who regularly deliver citation workshops, or librarians from the local public library specializing in digital services, who facilitated an e-reader show-and-tell). Every August, before the academic term rush, there is usually a reference reboot session that includes database demonstrations, legal research processes, or tips for finding statistics. Although these PD days are not directly tied to IL, aspects of the sessions could be used in teaching: for example, applying new technology to classroom instruction, or updating content based on changes at the library. Often, a fun staff-bonding and morale-boosting activity is coordinated alongside PD days, such as a potluck or the "welcome back" barbeque for library staff, which normally occurs during the fleeting weeks of summer before the fall term commences.

There is no budget for these PD offerings, though external guests are usually presented with a small gift, and often coffee break cookies or snacks are provided from the petty cash fund.

IL Palooza

Wanting a venue to continue the rich IL discussions that began when MacEwan University Library hosted the Workshop for Instruction in Library Use (WILU) 2012, MacEwan University librarians created and organized a local IL workshop, which they named "IL Palooza." Open to internal and local librarians, this free half-day workshop combines lightning talks that highlight recent instruction innovations with a forum for robust discussion on a variety of IL themes. After two successful years, IL Palooza has affected local IL collaboration in a meaningful way by enhancing knowledge sharing and partnerships across local post-secondary and library institutions.

In 2013 there were about thirty-five attendees; in 2014 this rose to almost sixty-five. Attendees came from local post-secondary libraries, as well as those up to two hours out of town. Library staff from public, government, and special libraries have also attended, and, in 2014, a large group of K-12 school library workers registered. Participants like these evidence the need for and importance of PD and networking opportunities in the community. Or, perhaps people just appreciate the word "free."

This is a big endeavour and is organized by the librarian coordinating PD offerings, along with help from other staff members when available. They start in the fall by

confirming dates and budget with the dean. The librarian designs a logo and theme, then works with the University's IT department to update the look of the IL Palooza website, which is updated until the event each April (MacEwan University Library). A call for proposals is sent out via local listservs three to four months before the event. Additionally, a call for a committee to review and decide on the proposals is sent to library staff, and a schedule is created once a program is decided upon.

As it is an interactive afternoon, the event promotes local networking through icebreakers at the beginning, and discussion questions which are created and facilitated after the presentations, in order to build on the content presented. After sending out notices of registration, contact information is collected using Google Forms. Much of the organizing involves sending well-timed emails to the community at large, the registered attendees, and the chosen presenters. The organizing team makes signage, programs, thank you cards, name tags, and door prize packs. They host the event by staffing the registration table, keeping time for the presenters, and facilitating the flow of the schedule, including transitions between presentations, coffee break, and discussion session. To wrap it up, attendees are asked to complete evaluation forms via a paper survey, as this method gathers more feedback than relying on attendees to complete an online form after the fact. The organizing team also makes reservations at a local pub for an unofficial "after party."

Topics covered by previous lightning-talk presenters include: creating engaging PowerPoint slides, using humour in the classroom, Google Docs for teaching, IL assessment, video tutorials, and library orientation videos. The theme for IL Palooza 2015 is "Open the Doors to Education" for library professionals to learn about current innovations in open educational resources, open data, open-source software, Creative Commons licensing, and predatory publishing, and to discuss how these topics can be incorporated into IL instruction.

The feedback from the first two events has been overwhelmingly positive. People appreciate the quick sessions as well as the discussion portion. Many library professionals of all levels commented that they like the social aspect of the afternoon. Coffee and light snacks are provided at a cost of approximately $200, which is covered by MacEwan University Library.

Conclusion

By delegating the responsibility and providing a workload time commitment to one librarian, MacEwan University Library's IL Community, internal Library PD Days, and IL Palooza have succeeded in providing internal and other local library IL instructors with low-cost, desirable PD alternatives. All three avenues of IL PD are sparing with university resources, notwithstanding the librarian's time. Incorporating ideas from MacEwan University Library's IL PD offerings may jumpstart the learning of not only the IL instructors at other libraries, but could indeed facilitate the growth of local IL discourse and future partnerships. This in turn will further promote IL knowledge, skills, and abilities to students and other library patrons or clients. This is an ambitious goal, but the way forward starts simply with an email, a meeting, and a box of cookies.

References

Association of College and Research Libraries. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." *ACRL*. 2 Feb. 2015. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Belzowski, Nora F., J. Parker Ladwig, and Thurston Miller. "Crafting Identity, Collaboration, and Relevance for Academic Librarians Using Communities of Practice*." Collaborative Librarianship* 5.1 (2013): 3-15. *OmniFile Full Text Select* (H.W. Wilson). Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Blankenship, Selena S., and Wendy E. A. Ruona. "Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice: A Comparison of Models, Literature Review." *Online Submission* (2007): *ERIC*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Cambridge, Darren, Soren Kaplan, and Vicki Suter. "Community of practice design: A step-by-step guide for designing and cultivating communities of practice in higher education." *EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative*. 1 Jan. 2005. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

MacEwan University Library. "IL Palooza." *MacEwan University Library*. 2015. Web. 24 Mar. 2014.

Pratt, Daniel D., and John B. Collins. *Teaching Perspectives Inventory*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Recommended Resources

Colgan, Mark, and Matt DeLong. "A Teaching Polygon Makes Learning A Community Enterprise." *PRIMUS: Problems, Resources and Issues in Mathematics Undergraduate Studies* 25.1 (2015): 41-49. *PsycINFO*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Guo, Shu. "Developing Effective Professional Development Programs: A Case Study." *New Library World* 115.11/12 (2014): 542-557. *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Haave, Neil. "Teaching Squares: A Teaching Development Tool." *Teaching Professor* 28.10 (2014): 1. *Education Research Complete*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Hook, Sheril J, et al. "In-House Training for Instruction Librarians." *Research Strategies* 19. (2003): 99-127. *ScienceDirect*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Lo, Patrick. "Empowering Your Library: Training And Professional Development, A Library Imperative!" *International Journal Of Learning* 14.12 (2008): 41-52. *Education Research Complete*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Mount Allison University. "PCTC Programs: Teaching Triangles." *Mount Allison University*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning. "Teaching Squares." *Quality Improvement Agency*. 2008. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Willey, Malia. "Library Instructor Development and Cultivating A Community Of Practice." *Advances in Librarianship* 38. (2014): 83-100. *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text*. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.

Appendix 1
Information Literacy (IL) Community Terms of Reference

Created by Lisa Shamchuk for MacEwan University Library

Purpose:

The Information Literacy Community will be a forum for professional development for any interested MacEwan University Library staff members who are involved with or interested in the provision of information literacy programming at any campus. This community will stimulate learning by acting as a venue for communication, learning, mentoring, coaching and self-reflection. It will provide opportunities to share information and expertise, build understanding and insight, and foster a stronger sense of professional identity among participants.
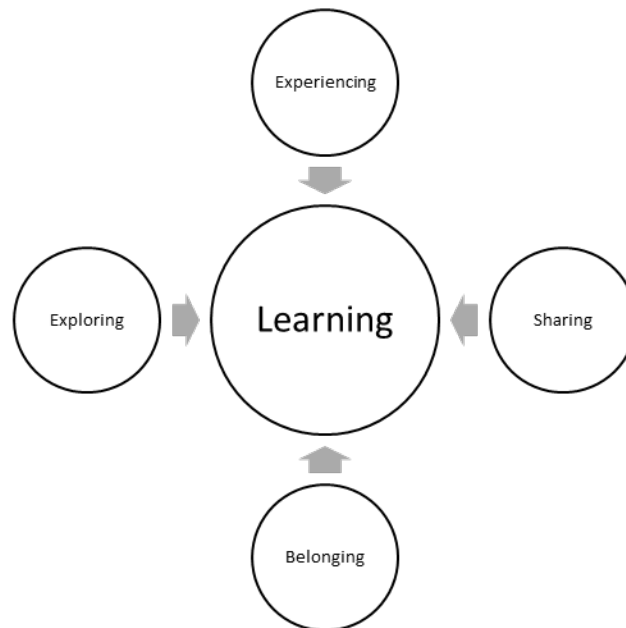
Membership: One organizer and anyone else who is interested in the content. This will include library staff at Macewan University, and possibly other MacEwan University faculty or external library professionals.

Reports to: Organizer reports to the chair of Reference Services.

Meetings: One meeting per term. May include ongoing participation throughout the term.

Communication:

- IL Community page on the intranet will host community documents.

- Meeting summaries will be written by organizer (or other as delegated) and posted to the intranet.
- Organizer will communicate with interested participants via email.
- Discussion may occur on the intranet blog or over email.
- Video conferences will occur as necessary.

Time commitment: One meeting/activity per term (approximately 2 hrs), and/or ongoing participation as required

Key Tasks:

- Gather interested participants face-to-face once a term for professional development.
- Promote discussion on an ongoing basis via online channels.
- Implement avenues for self-reflection and peer-evaluation of teaching skills.
- Plan and host IL Palooza (subcommittee).
- Administer IL Award (subcommittee).

Roles & Responsibilities:

Organizer will:

- Facilitate one meeting/activity per term.
- Facilitate ongoing communication of interest or discussion as necessary via online channels.
- Oversee any ongoing activities, including self-reflection or peer-evaluation throughout the term.
- Create and facilitate IL Palooza and IL Award subcommittees as needed.

Participants, if interested, will:

- Attend any face-to-face professional development opportunities.
- Participate in online discussion.
- Participate in self-reflection or peer-evaluation opportunities.
- Join subcommittees.

Possible Meeting Activities:

- View a webinar.
- Discuss a journal article.
- Show & Share during a roundtable.
- Teaching Triangles (ongoing).
- Discuss postings on the intranet.

- Present lightning strike topics.
- Attend IL Palooza.
- Observe demonstrations.

Appendix 2a
Teaching Triangles Checklist
Created by Lisa Shamchuk for MacEwan University Library

Pre Observation

- ☐ Email organizer to indicate I want to participate in a Teaching Triangle
    - ☐ Request specific partners (optional).
- ☐ Receive email from organizer listing my two partners.
- ☐ Work with my two partners to schedule observations during the term. Schedule three total - I will teach one class, and observe two.
- ☐ Share session materials with my partners prior to teaching my class.

Observation

- ☐ Teach my session.
- ☐ Observe a session from one of my partners.
    - ☐ Record/reflect on my observations.
- ☐ Observe a session from the other one of my partners.
    - ☐ Record/reflect on my observations.

Post Observation

- ☐ Decide on what strategy(ies) I will incorporate into my own teaching.
    - ☐ Make an action plan/timeline (optional).
- ☐ Incorporate strategy(ies) in one of my sessions.
- ☐ Meet with Teaching Triangle partners to debrief.
- ☐ Attend Teaching Triangles wrap up meeting.

Appendix 2b
Teaching Triangles Observation Chart
Created by Lisa Shamchuk for MacEwan University Library

Observer:	Library Instructor:	Date:
Course & Instructor:	Topic/Objective:	

Describe the setting (lab environment, class size, student characteristics, etc.):
Describe how the library instructor began and ended the class:
Describe instructional strategies that enhanced the class (engagement, activities, etc.)
Describe instructional tools used by the library instructor (Internet, powerpoint, demos, etc.)
What tips did you pick up on classroom management?
What did you observe that you'd like to incorporate into your classes?
Does the library instructor want to receive formative feedback about their teaching? Yes/No (circle) Does the library instructor want to receive formative feedback on a certain area of their teaching? Yes/No (circle). If so, what would they like you to watch for and comment on? What formative feedback will you give to the library instructor?
Comments:

Appendix 2c
Teaching Triangles Observation Worksheet

Created by Lisa Shamchuk for MacEwan University Library

Observer: _____   **Library Instructor: _____**

Course & Instructor: _____   **Date: _____**

During visit:

Examples of good teaching and learning practice I've seen in this session: What I have learned from observing this session:

Things I might try out as a result of observing this session:

Does the instructor want to receive formative feedback about their teaching? Yes/No (circle)

Does the library instructor want to receive formative feedback on a certain area of their teaching? Yes/No (circle). If so, what would they like you to watch for and comment on?

What formative feedback will you give to the library instructor?

Follow up to visit:

Things I have tried since observing the session:

What worked well:

What I might do differently: