

## **Developing librarians' teaching practice: a case study of learning advisors sharing their knowledge**

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### ***Abstract***

Increasingly, tertiary librarians are required to teach as part of their role. There is recognition that ongoing professional development (PD) is required in teaching and learning as this is not generally provided as part of formal library qualifications. Using an education design-based research approach, this collaboration aimed to enhance the teaching practice of liaison librarians to enable more consistent review, planning, and design of information literacy workshops. As part of a wider PD programme for liaison librarians at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), learning advisors developed and taught three workshops. The learning advisors were chosen by the library leadership due to their teaching expertise and adaptability. They provide embedded, academic literacy support for students tailored to specific assessment guidelines and marking criteria. The aim was to share examples of learner advisor practice underpinned by relevant theory and applied directly to an information literacy context. Liaison librarians were exposed to workshop strategies to develop appropriate learning outcomes, content, and pedagogical approaches for planning ongoing teaching. They had opportunities to assess and evaluate their current knowledge and skills and consider new approaches. These sessions enabled the team to go forward with shared knowledge to guide their workshop design to create more consistent, sustainable, and measurable content. Another outcome was the co-development of workshop design principles which have been applied to the redevelopment of workshops. As this process is replicable, the value of sharing knowledge and expertise between teams such as learning advisors and liaison librarians is worth exploring further.

**Keywords:** information literacy; academic libraries; professional development; liaison librarians; learning advisors; teaching practice.

## ***Introduction and methodology***

This case study outlines implementation of a PD initiative to develop librarians' teaching practice. This initiative was framed by an education design research (EDR) approach (McKenney and Reeves, 2018) which involved analysis of a research issue, design of an intervention to address this issue, and implementation of the intervention. Evaluation is a further stage in the EDR process which is yet to be explored.

Identification of the research issue, analysis of potential interventions and their implementation is based on a series of claims, developed as a result of engagement with research literature on this topic.

The initiative took place over an eight-week period as part of a wider workshop review and redevelopment programme.

## ***Claims***

### **Claim 1: library leadership need to facilitate professional development of teaching and learning**

From reviewing the literature, it is possible to see that librarians globally engage in PD in teaching and learning (Hall, 2017; Namaganda, 2020). This is achieved through continuing education, or specific postgraduate qualifications in teaching and learning or higher education. However, for the liaison librarian team at AUT, ongoing and specific information literacy teaching and learning opportunities seem to be mostly external workshops, in house initiatives, and conferences.

Due to these inconsistencies in formal upskilling in combination with a response to the changing landscape of teaching and learning (Osborn, 2017), such as increased online provision, more suitable PD intervention is required. Library leaders need to foster excellent, instructional practice and empower librarians to develop confidence in teaching

(Standards and Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators Revision Task Force, 2017). Furthermore, library leaders are in a good position informally and formally to support their teams' needs.

Through regular informal and formal discussion, and strategic plans, team leaders can analyse needs and direct learning individually and collectively. By engaging in PD as a group, teamwork can be strengthened, and change can be facilitated (Wall, 2013).

### **Claim 2: librarians may not be best placed to deliver this professional development**

In assessing teaching and learning capability development, in the current information literacy context, it seems there is a need to design professional learning, either through individual development plans or learning on the job by teams or departments. Increasingly, librarians want offerings that are tailored and flexible not just standard (Corrall, 2010). The PD programme established by team leaders, based on feedback from the team, highlighted several areas which were beyond the scope of liaison librarians (Hensley, 2015, Wheeler and McKinney, 2015) and led to conversations around engaging suitable in-house, accessible, professional educators for some of the sessions. The objective was to find adaptive teacher educators, in this case learning advisors.

Sourcing in-house professionals can be complementary (Appleton, 2018) and can add alternative perspectives, strategies, and knowledge. As members within the same institution, the liaison librarians and learning advisors are familiar with the work of each team and often work alongside each other. In supporting these connections and collegiality, the learning advisors had a willingness and flexibility to listen to the liaison librarians' needs and customise learning specifically to the liaison librarian team requirements as research by Bewick and Corrall highlighted (2010).

### **Claim 3: learning advisors can work collaboratively to create teaching and learning initiatives with an understanding of specific information literacy needs**

With a focus on both teaching and learning and students' specific academic and information literacy needs, learning advisors have knowledge and understanding of the

trends in academic literacy teaching and learning approaches in tertiary education, and of the issues and technological challenges facing libraries and learning support services (Gurney and Grossi, 2019; Wingate, 2019). Further, the work of learning advisors has evolved into a community of practice contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning, with a particular focus on using models and frameworks to teach academic literacies (Chanock, 2007; Charlton and Marton, 2018). In recent years, at this institution, faculty lecturers, learning advisors and liaison librarians have begun to collaborate more closely to embed information and academic literacy support in faculty papers. This has led to a strengthening of relationships and a closer understanding of the different roles, and thus, highlighted opportunities for skill sharing across teams.

A key feature of this collaborative PD initiative was the careful tailoring of teaching so that liaison librarians could review and refine their teaching practice. This included using both face-to-face and online teaching methodologies as well as provision of asynchronous digital resources. Research suggests that the more carefully resources are tailored and relevant to specific student needs, the more useful and accessible they may be for students (Dianati and Collings, 2020).

Thus, the motivation to develop tailored teaching capabilities within the liaison librarian team, through this PD initiative, aimed to further develop existing practices.

### ***The process***

Learning advisors designed these workshops, based on the need for a consistent, team-based approach that is easily understood and allows an easy measuring of workshop quality. The content used for the workshop were existing information literacy workshops and other resources were adapted and tailored accordingly. Throughout the workshops, learning advisors explicitly modelled best practice for in person, online, and hybrid delivery. Three core teaching elements were identified: workshop design, effective pedagogies, and lesson planning. It was decided to focus on these aspects as they are recognised as requisites for best teaching practice in higher education and are readily adaptable to information literacy scenarios (Pasquinelli and Strauss, 2018).

## ***Workshop design (theory and principles)***

In planning the first face-to-face workshop design session, there was a considered balance between theory and practice, so learning could be applied to the liaison librarian's actual teaching experiences. The rationale for the staging and use of specific pedagogical approaches was made explicit which modelled good practice. Underpinned by learning theory and, in particular, a constructivist theoretical approach (Fosnot, 2005), liaison librarians were guided through a learning process from understanding learning theory, and teaching and learning cycles to planning learning outcomes.

Emphasis on the constructive alignment of assessment, content, and outcomes enabled a clear framework for reference when reviewing existing workshop content (Biggs and Tang, 2007). From this perspective, liaison librarians could view the materials through the eyes of both teacher and student to see how activities could be edited and refined to be more constructively aligned. Undertaking a review in groups enabled a collective approach to negotiating and decision making on sustainable, reusable, meaningful content. During the session, when reflecting on constructive alignment, it was possible to see liaison librarians identifying irrelevant or redundant tasks when relating them to content and outcomes. In reviewing backward design (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998), student centredness and the facilitation of learning, the importance of learning outcomes was highlighted.

In a guided task, using Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, liaison librarians were able to refine and justify the learning outcomes of an existing information literacy workshop. In turn, they were able to better refine and choose more appropriate taxonomic verbs for the outcomes. To ensure learning outcomes were achieved, at the end of the PD session, liaison librarians, as learners, were asked to revisit and evaluate the session's outcomes to see if they had been met. This consolidated the teaching point that there are likely to be different perspectives when comparing what is taught and what is learnt.

Since co-created design principles were a desire from team leaders, a checklist of review criteria, focussing on structure and content, was a useful tool that could be adapted and applied to the liaison librarians' workshops going forward (authors happy to supply on request).

## ***Effective pedagogies (active learning)***

The second online workshop in the series focused on effective pedagogies supported by evidence-based practice for teaching and learning with a particular focus on active learning strategies (Goodsett and Schmillen, 2022; Hunter, 2020). The key strategies that were relevant for liaison librarians were outlined, focusing on the importance of using a range of techniques, including whole-class and structured pair/group work activities, guided learning, and individual activities. The intention with these strategies is to develop higher order thinking and meta-cognition, chiefly through the use of dialogue and questioning (Goodsett and Schmillen, 2022).

Core guidelines for active learning techniques were described:

- Keep activity purpose and instructions clear and simple.
- Tailor and link to students achieving LOs.
- Design regular activities to foster peer learning and collaboration.
- Have a clear plan for active tasks in class and have a backup plan.
- Keep it simple; less is more.

The benefits of using active learning pedagogical approaches in an information literacy context, as identified in the literature, were highlighted. These included providing increased opportunities to partner with lecturers to focus on key disciplinary related information literacy skills (Osborn, 2017; Schachter, 2020). Also, students' experience of active information literacy activities shows that they learn to use information with more complexity and versatility which is associated with more readily achievable learning outcomes (Detlor et al., 2012). It was also found that active learning approaches contribute to increasing learners' abilities to think critically and solve real-life problems supported with appropriate information literacy skills (Goodsett and Schmillen, 2022; Hunter, 2020).

To further cement the importance of active learning to information literacy teaching and learning, liaison librarians considered a cline of appropriate active learning activities and identified those that were familiar, and which could be applied to their own practice. Liaison librarians were also asked if there could be challenges with adapting them for an IL workshop. Then, they were given an existing information literacy workshop activity and asked to choose a suitable active learning activity to enhance student learning.

With the awareness that a lot of teaching takes place in a digital environment or a blended setting (Shank and Bell, 2011), it was important that liaison librarians also evaluated digital tools to promote active learning. Careful consideration was given to the tools that were introduced to ensure these were easily accessible and readily applicable.

### ***Lesson planning***

The focus of the third workshop (also online) centred on the importance of using lesson plans to meet students' needs more appropriately. Key planning elements to consider first were introduced, for example, student level, assignment task and opportunity for collaboration. Gagné's (1973) model of the nine events of instruction was then outlined, highlighting active learning opportunities in the plan. A sample lesson plan template was introduced and a workshop brief with an IL context. The template highlighted the importance of achievable learning outcomes, active learning opportunities through co-construction, and peer to peer learning with authentic tasks.

To model an online learning environment, participants were put into breakout rooms to co-create a lesson plan. This was followed by the opportunity to share their lesson plans with the wider group. Participants were encouraged to add constructive comments as part of feedback and to foster engagement. As well as modelling good teaching practice, this demonstrated the challenges of using digital tools such as breakout rooms.

A final reflective activity focused on key questions:

- What considerations impacted on your choice of input and activities?
- What challenges did you find in choosing appropriate AL activities?
- What do you think are the benefits of planning?

The importance of including feedback in a lesson plan was emphasised in the learning process as a way to enhance learning and increase confidence.

## Impact

The use of a tailored and project specific approach to developing teaching competencies for librarians has not only allowed librarians to upskill or refresh their teaching practice, but it has also contributed to the creation of updated information literacy workshops and, hopefully, a more active learning experience for students attending them.

In order to quantify the learning or improvement in teaching, as well as the perception of impact from the liaison librarians, further research would be required. However, anecdotal observation indicates that this initiative has had a positive impact. For example, the liaison librarian team has reflected on the content and modelled delivery from the three sessions on workshop design to develop a set of core principles which will be used to redesign the generic and research workshops offered. This has been a collaborative process, with the whole team considering how their acquired learning can be translated into specific workshop re/design principles. The adopted principles indicated in Table 1 below, specifically align with the learning gained during the PD initiative. It is important to note that these principles were co-created, and terms used are based on the team's shared understanding.

**Table 1: Table showing a selection of the principles created by the LL team and their alignment with PD workshops.**

Selected Principle	PD workshop
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All workshops have LOs with appropriate verbs.</li> <li>• All workshops are constructively aligned to LOs.</li> <li>• Workshop builds content or knowledge in a logical and scaffolded way.</li> </ul>	Workshop design.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops are student-centred.</li> <li>• All workshops use active learning techniques.</li> <li>• Relevance or context of the tasks or activities is made explicit – i.e., how does this relate to study, practice, or real life.</li> <li>• An icebreaker is included – for example, checking for current level of understanding.</li> </ul>	Effective pedagogies.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All workshops incorporate checking for understanding.</li> <li>• All activities have clear instructions.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content is 'just enough' and encourages further exploration.</li> <li>• Students are given the opportunity to participate and engage with the facilitator and other students.</li> <li>• All workshops have a lesson plan and teaching notes.</li> </ul>	Lesson planning.

These will not only serve to foster best practice in workshop design and pedagogical approaches, but they will also foster a shared understanding and consistent approach to information literacy workshop development, moving forward. It is hoped this will improve both the quality of the offerings and the experience of students participating in these workshops.

With the principles developed, the next step was for team leaders to redesign one existing workshop using these principles as an exemplar. The exemplar was presented as a lesson plan based on a template provided in the lesson planning workshop. After engaging with both the exemplar and the principles, liaison librarians will use the principles to redesign workshops assigned to them.

It should be noted that a key weakness of the initiative was that not every liaison librarian could attend all live sessions. However, the learning resources and content from this PD initiative have been added as modules to a PD hub, housed on Canvas, AUT's learning management system. This means that they can engage with the learning materials at any time, increasing the potential for them to be viewed, considered, adopted, and applied.

## **Conclusions**

The content and delivery of the three workshops resulted in a set of emergent design principles which can be practically applied to teaching practice and workshop design moving forward. A further advantage is that this initiative can be easily replicated or

adapted for other contexts or for those wishing to develop teaching and learning practice and foster cross-team, collegial collaboration. Moving forward, it is hoped that the workshop design sessions will encourage an innovative approach to workshop planning and development. By providing specific examples of pedagogical and active learning approaches, learning advisors have also provided a suite of readily available tools and approaches which liaison librarians should be able to easily employ or adopt for their workshops. It is hoped that this will make implementing effective teaching practice for novice teachers straightforward, while also serving as a refresher for those in the team who are more experienced teachers. There is also the potential benefit for onboarding new liaison librarians.

It is also important to note that although this PD was specifically tailored to our generic workshop redesign project, the skills learned should be readily adaptable and applicable to all teaching undertaken by liaison librarians, either generic or embedded.

Future research following the EDR approach could be undertaken to evaluate the potential impact of the initiative on student learning and experience as well as any demonstrable changes in teaching practice within the liaison librarian team.

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