New Skills, New Challenges: CPD in the Information Profession

Introduction

Library staff are enthusiastic participants in professional development opportunities, something that is no real surprise in a constantly changing profession. As we move into 2018 changes in technology and service models show no sign of slowing down, but undertaking formal re-education is not always a practical solution for library staff who are experiencing decreasing budgets. Career and professional development (CPD) is seen by many as the ideal solution, offering a wealth of activities to inform and educate and it also provides inspiration for many of the articles which appear in the New Review of Academic Librarianship (Gwyer, 2015). The following selection of articles showcase a range of international perspectives on professional development, representing over a decade of research published in the New Review of Academic Librarianship and highlighting common themes, problems and solutions for those looking to learn.

The role of mentoring

In ***The resource team model: an innovative mentoring program for academic librarians*** (2010), Bosch, Ramachandran, Luevano and Wakjii outline a mentoring programme for new library faculty. Staff are assigned a group of three senior librarians to mentor them through their initial six months in the role. As well as helping with adjustments the program aids the professional development of both new and existing staff through a cyclical arrangement. New starters can take advantage of the knowledge of established staff who can in turn develop their understanding of newer areas through those entering the profession. CPD is traditionally perceived as one-way learning with senior staff seen as having little role in learning but this article demonstrates that they have much to gain from mentoring and that it actually results in their increasing professional development.

Library staff mentoring users can enhance their own professional development. In ***Writing for publication and the role of the library: "Do have a cow, man!" (Don't have a cow, man! - Bart Simpson)*** (2010), Gannon-Leary and Bent describe their research project which investigated how libraries could better support those undertaking academic writing. Initially developed as a way to inform a potential workshop, the research came to the conclusion that the best support would be to establish the titular CoW in the form of a community of practice for writers. The authors asked groups of journal editors, experienced researchers, students and librarians for the "one thing" they would offer as a piece of advice to writers. The result is an excellent collection of tips for those looking to involve themselves in undertaking or supporting academic publishing.

Fallon builds on this by outlining her approach to helping librarians develop the skills needed to write for publication. ***Using a blended group learning approach to increase librarians' motivations and skills to publish*** (2012) showcases a program delivered at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth which aims to to take library staff from idea to publication. As the author acknowledges, writing can be a lonely process and working in a group can help to overcome this barrier. The blended learning approach used by the program also helped to address barriers such a lack of time. Although some of the sessions were scheduled many allowed learners to determine their own workflow whilst providing a structure and a support system. Whilst this might not be a panacea for all the challenges of professional development it does offer some solutions librarian and emphasises the importance of community - although CPD can be self-directed, it doesn't have to be isolating.

Managing the management
In ***Different approaches, common conclusions: the skills debate of the twenty-first century*** (2006), Fisher, Hallam and Partridge attempt to address the issue of the management view of CPD by comparing the UK and Australian perspective. Employers provide some interesting insights into the issues they face in ensuring their works have the knowledge they need whilst acknowledging that the issue of cost influences their decisions. They highlight the issue of contract staff who need to be trained but leave at the end of their term which represents a low return on investment. With the increasing number of short term contracts in the information sector this is a legitimate concern. One solution to this is to provide local training but this can lead to a narrow perspective, something the article argues is true of self-directed learning in general. One of the benefits of CPD is its ability to showcase a range of perspectives and challenge thinking which helps to break the barrier of being too inward looking.

NoWAL: Developments in staff development and training and procurement of e-books (2004) outlines a local, consortial approach to training which may help to preclude the issue of a narrow viewpoint. Offering a case study of the North West Academic Libraries Consortium it showcases a scheme which aims to offer training to fill in the gaps between those with a formal qualification and paraprofessionals. Libraries work together across the region to offer a credit-bearing development program leading to a qualification. In addition to providing a broader perspective on local issues, the program answers a common criticism of CPD programs by offering something concrete to show for the effort participants put into learning.

The wider impact of CPD
Perhaps no phenomenon has impacted librarian professional development over the last decade as much as '23 things' programs. Developed in the United States in 2006 these programs offer a twist on the online course model where participants undertake twenty-three lessons and reflect on what they have learnt. In ***The impact and effect of learning 2.0 programs in Australian academic libraries*** (2011) Stephens and Cheetham discuss the effect of these programs on library staff development.The study highlights several advantages for staff undertaking these programs including a high level of personal learning as well as disadvantages such as a lack of time and management support to complete. This support is cited as crucial to

the success of professional development as it allows CPD to be undertaken during working hours and if this is not possible many librarians will struggle to complete the program. The study demonstrates the impact of individual learning on the wider organisation with participants more likely to seek involvement in wider initiatives, promoting the library within the institution.

Lastly, **Re-skilling for research: investigating the needs of researchers and how library staff can best support them** (2012) highlights the next big change for academic libraries - moving towards helping researchers to undertake their work. The article demonstrates that although there has been an increase in demand for these skills the LIS profession has been slow to respond, leading to many turning to CPD to fill the gap. For the study the authors have analysed several job descriptions to build up a list of thirty-two skills librarians would need to work in this area. This results in a very useful list which library staff interested in pursuing a career in academic libraries can use as the basis for a skills audit and a plan for their future CPD activities.

Conclusion

Although these articles cover a range of approaches to and a global view of professional development it is interesting to see that there are so many common themes which remain largely unchanged over time. Whilst there are many barriers to undertaking CPD it can be seen that there are also many common solutions, no matter the challenges facing the profession. By working to develop themselves and engage with new developments librarians can help to ensure that both they and their libraries are well placed for the changes to come.

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