

Faculty and Librarian Perspectives on Collaboration and Information Literacy in Higher Education: Implications for Leadership and Practice

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Abstract

There is a dearth of scholarship about what motivates faculty members and librarians to collaborate, and about how these professionals experience collaboration as a social and interprofessional phenomenon in higher education. Moreover, extant research suggests that professional silos and other factors can hinder faculty/librarian collaboration. This session presents several findings from a 2013 dissertation study entitled *Faculty/Librarian Interprofessional Collaboration and Information Literacy in Higher Education* (Franklin, 2013) in which interprofessional collaboration was used as the conceptual framework for understanding faculty/librarian collaboration in the information literacy context in higher education. Three topics from the findings are presented: (a) faculty and librarian motivations for integrating collaboration and information literacy into their professional practice, (b) interprofessional factors that facilitate and hinder faculty/librarian collaboration, and (c) faculty and librarian perceptions of the impact of their collaboration on students. Implications of these findings for leadership and professional practice are identified.

Introduction

The Association of College and Research Libraries (2003) identifies collaboration as a best practice characteristic of information literacy programs in education. In the library and information science literature, there are numerous books and articles about faculty/librarian collaboration and information literacy projects; however, this literature is often written from a “how we did” it perspective (McGuinness, 2006, p. 574). There is a dearth of knowledge about faculty members’ and librarians’ perceptions and experiences of collaboration as an interprofessional and social experience. In the dissertation study, interprofessional collaboration is defined as a “process of communication and decision-making in which faculty members and librarians use their separate and shared knowledge to integrate information literacy into teaching and learning in higher education” (Franklin, 2013, p. 8). The interprofessional framework highlights the challenges—and more importantly, the value—of bringing together the separate but shared knowledge of different professional groups (i.e., librarians and teaching faculty) in pursuit of the shared goal of integrating information literacy into teaching and learning.

Professional practice is defined in the study as “the way in which professionals perform and carry out their professional responsibilities, especially within the context of their knowledge, skills, expertise, and the standards and values of their professional field or academic discipline” (Franklin, 2013, p. 8). In the study, practice is discussed in terms of (a) motivations or reasons for integrating collaboration and information literacy into teaching and learning, (b) use of the term “information literacy” in the classroom with students or in written course assignments, and

(c) the role of librarians in assessing information literacy in student work. Wildemuth (2009) noted the importance of researching matters of professional practice in libraries in order to identify areas for improvement. Investigating faculty/librarian collaboration as a professional practice is especially important for understanding how these partnerships impact student learning, given that collaboration is a best practice for information literacy. The impact of collaboration itself is rarely if ever explored in the information literacy literature. Why does or should faculty/collaboration matter for student learning?

Literature Review

Martin-Rodríguez et al. (2005) identified interprofessional facilitators of and hindrances to collaboration. Motivations for faculty/librarian collaboration as it relates to information literacy are discussed in the library and information science literature, and reasons that faculty engage in collaboration in higher education more broadly are discussed in the literature (e.g., Austin & Baldwin, 1991; Baldwin & Austin, 1995; Eddy, 2010, p. 63; Manuel, Beck & Molloy, 2005; Manuel, Molloy & Beck, 2003). An extensive review of the literature on faculty/librarian collaboration and information literacy, on faculty collaboration in higher education, and on interprofessional collaboration is available in the dissertation study (Franklin, 2013). The benefits and challenges of collaboration in higher education, and theories and conceptual frameworks that have been used in research and scholarship on information literacy and collaboration are discussed in the literature review.

Methods

Data Collection

Quantitative: Online questionnaire

- Descriptive statistics, e.g., demographics (age, race/ethnicity, number of years in profession)
- Faculty and librarian opinions about and experiences with collaboration and information literacy

Qualitative: Telephone interviews

- Interview protocol with core and follow-up questions
- Transcript sent to each participant
- Transcripts coded for salient themes

Participants

- Recruitment
 - 2012: call for participants sent to CALIBACA-L and ILI-L email lists
 - LIS literature, Google and Google Scholar search for examples of faculty/librarian collaboration
- Criteria for librarian participation
 - Employed in a public or private two- or four-year accredited higher education institution in CA

- Collaborated with a faculty member at least one full semester or quarter, 2006-2011
- Recommend a faculty collaborator for the study
- Number of participants in study
 - 18 librarians and 17 faculty members in 2-year or 4-year public or private higher education institutions, primarily in California
 - 29 (83%) female, 26 (74%) White/Caucasian
 - 51% in their profession 20+ years
 - Librarians: 2 Tenure track, not yet tenured; 9 Tenure track, tenured; 7 Other
 - Faculty members: 0 Tenure track without tenure; 10 Tenure track, tenured; 7 Other

Results

Facilitators and hindrances

During the coding and analysis of transcripts, three categories of interprofessional factors that hinder and/or facilitate faculty/librarian collaboration in the context of information literacy were identified: organizational, professional, and interactional. Martin-Rodríguez, et al. (2005) categorized factors that facilitate and hinder interprofessional collaboration as organizational, systemic, and interactional determinants of collaboration. These labels were adopted for the dissertation study, and thus the findings include the following categories of facilitators and hindrances (Franklin, 2013):

1. Organizational
 - Organizational culture: Collaboration is facilitated by an organizational culture in which collaboration is valued, central to the mission, and encouraged or expected
 - Administrative support and leadership: Administrators and leaders who value collaboration and lead by example by engaging in collaboration themselves facilitate collaboration.
 - Resources: Availability of resources, such as time for planning, facilitates collaboration.
2. Systemic
 - Value and awareness of information literacy: Valuing and being aware of the need for students to receive information literacy instruction facilitates collaboration.
 - Understanding partner's academic discipline or professional field: Partners don't necessarily have to have expert knowledge of their teammates' discipline or field, but collaboration is facilitated when an interest is shown in a partner's field of expertise.
 - Insularity and resistance: Resistance to change, or an unwillingness to look outside of one's field of expertise to consider other perspectives can hinder collaboration.
3. Interactional
 - Librarian outreach to faculty: Faculty appreciate librarians who reach out to faculty rather than waiting for them to come to the library. This is a facilitator of collaboration.
 - Common goals: Having a common goal for student learning facilitates collaboration.
 - Personal characteristics: Being easy to work with or to talk to, having a positive attitude, and being a willing collaborator facilitates collaboration.

Professional Practice

In the interviews, faculty and librarians were asked about the ways that their professional practice impacts faculty/librarian collaboration in the context of integrating information literacy into teaching and learning. Their responses indicated that professional practice was related to three concepts (Franklin, 2013):

1. Motivations for collaboration
 - Organizational culture: Their willingness to collaborate was influenced by a culture that values and encourages collaboration.
 - Participants were motivated by a desire to improve student research and writing skills.
 - Evidence-based practice in the health sciences: Health sciences faculty and librarians integrated faculty/librarian collaboration and information literacy into their practice in order to prepare students to make patient care decisions based on evidence in the literature and not solely on intuition or medical knowledge
2. Use of the term “information literacy” in teaching practice: Faculty and librarians expressed different opinions about using the term “information literacy” in the classroom with students or in course materials such as syllabi. Some librarians and faculty said they use the term and some did not. Some said they use it when talking with each other or with campus administrators about student learning outcomes, but they do not use the term with students. Some use the term explicitly with students. Some referred to the term as jargon, or as a term that implies illiteracy.
3. Roles of faculty members and librarians in assessing information literacy: The librarian’s involvement and role in assessing information literacy in student work was a somewhat contentious issue in the study. Librarians’ involvement in assessing student learning depended on the relationship between the collaborators and on the faculty member’s or librarian’s expectations for collaboration. Some faculty viewed their discipline expertise as the factor that makes them more equipped than librarians to assess how students use information in their writing, research, and assignments.

Impact of collaboration on students

The following themes emerged from faculty members’ and librarians’ comments about the impact of their collaboration on students (Franklin, 2013):

1. Interdisciplinarity: Faculty and librarians perceived that collaboration gives students an opportunity to engage learning from an interdisciplinary (i.e., library/information science and subject discipline) perspective. Collaboration can demonstrate to students that learning is multifaceted and that there is not just one authority or viewpoint on an issue. Participants viewed faculty/librarian collaboration as an interdisciplinary practice.
2. Modeling collaboration: Participants perceived that their collaboration exposes students to professional models for collaborative teaching and learning that students can emulate in their own future professional work.

3. Career success, graduation or transfer to a four-year institution: Faculty/librarian collaboration and information literacy prepares students for academic transitions, such as graduation or transfer from a 2-yr to a 4-yr institution.
4. Student information-seeking behavior
 - Faculty/librarian collaboration encourages librarian/student relationships.
 - Faculty/librarian collaboration changes how students seek information and seek help, especially for students juggling multiple responsibilities such as work, school, and family.
 - Collaboration influences student perceptions of librarians; it helps students to see that librarians are part of the educational process.

Implications for Practice and Leadership

The results of the dissertation study (Franklin, 2013) have several implications for professional practice and leadership:

1. Expectations for collaboration: What do collaborators want and expect from the collaboration for themselves and for the students? This can help determine professional and student outcomes. Perhaps faculty and librarian collaborators should consider writing outcomes for collaboration, and not solely student learning outcomes.
2. Negotiating roles and responsibilities in collaborative practice: Who's responsible for what? What are the conditions and boundaries and how will the collaborators articulate this to each other, and if warranted, to students?
3. Graduate student education and development: What roles should graduate schools play in educating and training librarians and discipline faculty for collaboration? Is there a role for preparing future faculty programs to play in preparing graduate students for information literacy instruction and collaboration in the academy?
4. The increasing role of interdisciplinarity in teaching and learning in higher education: Faculty / librarian collaboration is an interdisciplinary practice. It helps students to see that professionals from different schools of knowledge and expertise can collaborate to create and facilitate the achievement of student learning outcomes.
5. Leadership
 - Stakeholders : Deans, presidents, librarians, student affairs leaders, others
 - Create the conditions for collaboration
 - Provide resources and encourage a climate/environment for collaboration
 - Consider reward structure for collaborative work (Kezar & Lester, 2009)
 - Understand complexities (i.e., part-time employment and time for collaboration)
 - Brokering collaboration (top down and bottom up)
 - Share outcomes and experiences of collaboration (research, writing, presentation)
 - Lead by example; administrators as collaborators (Kezar, 2005)
 - Create social vehicles (Walsh & Kahn, 2010) for learning about collaboration and information literacy: learning communities, workshops, colloquia

- Take a risk, be willing to fail and learn in partnership
- Do more than just one-shot BI's

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