Library Public Service Assistants as Instructors

A Survey of Needs

Poster Objective

This meta-narrative highlights some challenges, reminders, and solutions around collecting usable information for training library support staff as scripted information literacy instructors. The poster describes survey and focus group design considerations to yield useful results (some of which are highlighted). The poster also illustrates how mandatory participation (for internal program use) and public research dissemination intentions interacted to create ethical challenges around anonymity/confidentiality/informed consent, mandatory/voluntary participation, and research ethics board approval.

Study Background

The University of Alberta Libraries' Humanities and Social Sciences Library (UAL-HSS) wants to involve Public Service Assistants (PSA) support staff in teaching basic, scripted information literacy sessions. While PSA job fact-sheets usually include instruction, it has not historically been required and some PSAs thus have little teaching experience. Since there is little evidence on how to include and train non-academic library staff for instruction, the researchers used surveys (n=14) and focus groups (n=14) to explore feelings around teaching as well as training needs.

Study Purpose

- Why do PSAs volunteer (or hesitate) to lead tours or instruction sessions?
- What is meant by library instruction (e.g. do library tours count as instruction)?
- What level of detail is necessary in a "script"?
- What knowledge and skills are needed for instructor confidence and success?
  - Information literacy (e.g. discovery tools, search strategies)
  - Library knowledge (e.g. history, services)
  - Classroom management strategies
  - Room features (e.g lighting, projectors, blinds)
  - Presentation skills (e.g. public speaking)

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RBJ2XSK

Methods

Survey Challenges

I. Tour vs classroom.
Feelings towards, and skills needed for, leading small-group tours for 20 minutes are very different than teaching a large group for 1 hour in a classroom setting for both live instruction.
Solution: Created separate sections in survey for conducting library tours and classroom teaching.

II. Acquiring used responses.
While many surveys default to a Likert scale type response (e.g. "rate your knowledge of Boolean logic on a scale of 1-3), an average of 2.3 gives little insight into what size and format of training session is needed.
Solution: Use nominal response options. Although wordy, nominal response options indicate how many individuals need training at a certain level. Knowing that 2 people are not confident about using prepared Powerpoint presentations at all, 5 need refresher training and/or detailed instruction in the script, and 3 can deal with most unexpected glitches indicates we should have two small group sessions and not force everyone to attend a large general one.

III. Ambiguous, unexpected, and unshared responses. Surveys often don't anticipate variations or subtleties that respondents require so responses can be vague and mask subtleties. When respondents don't see the overall results, the subtleties are lost to researchers and the respondents don't see benefit of participating.
Solution: Survey was pre-tested several times then later used as a conversation starter for focus groups where charts of aggregated results were shared to deepen researcher understanding of survey responses and allow respondents to clarify, see themselves in larger picture, and share ideas with colleagues.

Focus Group Challenges

I: External information anxiety.
Between the time the surveys were filled out and the focus groups, more information about changing PSA instruction expectations came from other parties which increased anxiety and uncertainty.
Solution: Allowed group to spend time sharing what they each knew and express their feelings around teaching expectations in a supportive and confidential environment.

II: Project demand changed.
The librarian/researcher's role in designing training sessions for PSAs was discontinued in the midst of the project so there was a risk of respondents' efforts going to waste.
Solution: Focus group became mini-training sessions where participants shared challenges and strategies relating to improving tour and teaching success.

Methods — Insight Bubbles

I. Tours are instructional but different than classroom sessions.

II. Nominal response options (vs Likert scales) help determine how many individuals need a specific type of training.

III. Sharing survey results in focus groups allowed debriefing and informal training.

I. Focus group as venue for sharing and support.

II. Focus group can be training session, too.

Ethics

Ethical Considerations

I: Anonymity/Confidentiality/Informed Consent
Challenge: Collecting honest and useable responses given participant concerns over supervisors using identifiable responses in performance evaluations.
Solutions: Be clear that anonymity and/or confidentiality is not guaranteed and explain measures to minimise concerns. Be sure that participants give informed consent and be sure researchers adhere. For example, when participants know what levels of anonymity or confidentiality are promised in each format, they can choose how to answer.
- Survey: Anonymous collection (no names entered); results presented in an aggregate, non-attributed format.
- Focus group: researchers promised confidentiality themselves but warned there was no control over what other participants later shared (and a transcriber, if used, might coincidentally recognise voices)
- Results shared with supervisors but only general feedback on training needs and the number of staff requiring each type
- Job evaluation concerns: researchers have no supervisory role over participants, survey responses are anonymous, and focus group comments are not attributed.

II: Ethics Approval
Challenge: University of Alberta research ethics board (REB) prefers not to review QA/QI (quality assurance, quality improvement) projects BUT the intention to disseminate results often requires proof of ethics approval from journal or conference organizers.
Solution: Several clarification interactions were needed with REB to explain our desire for ethics approval so results could be disseminated via academic channels (e.g. publications or conference presentations). For example, the UofA REB asked, "In determining whether this project falls within the mandate of the Research Ethics Board (REB), we would like to know if the project would be considered entirely program development and evaluation (which would not normally require REB approval) or if the project involves aspects that are clearly research). In making this distinction, it would be useful to know if you intend to use the data only for internal program use, or if you expect to disseminate the findings in a manner that one would normally use for disseminating research (e.g., publication in academic journals or presentation at academic conferences)."

III: Mandatory vs Voluntary Participation
Challenge: Survey and focus group participation were mandatory for staff for operational improvement reasons. However, research usually dictates voluntary participation. In addition, did participants view this as innocuous research or a vanguard for getting them to do something they weren't comfortable with?
Solution: While the initial requirement was for mandatory participation to provide useful and needed training opportunities, participants were allowed to opt-out of having their responses used in possible academic dissemination.

Ethics — Insight Bubbles

I. Honest informed consent is sufficient when anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

II. Perseverance may be required to get institutional research ethics approval to allow dissemination via academic channels.

III. Ethics approval may require voluntary participation for research but not necessarily operational purposes.

Insights

Insights

Although the focus of this poster is on challenges and solutions around methods and dealing with external forces, here are some useful big-picture insights.

I: Use collected information
Anonymized findings were passed on to the public services manager to help provide training opportunities and staff counselling.

II: Public speaking is a big hindrance
While the survey suggested some people were just shy or nervous about presenting (i.e. indicating that public speaking training might be valuable), the focus group discussion highlighted that no amount of training would help some people get over this (i.e. training might be a waste of time).
Other examples:
- "I'm quite happy in an informal setting to speak spontaneously but it's when I have a script that I get nervous it's when I have something I have to go through and cover the areas."
- "That's why a lot of choose not to be teachers ... we like the interaction, we like the helping aspect ... the one-on-ones work for us but the larger groups ..."
In summary, some participants shared their insight that, in reality, not everyone in an audience necessarily cares enough to be actively engaged or don't blame yourself if a session goes "bad".

III: Classroom and tour instruction are very different
In the survey, only 7 of 14 responded they don't/wouldn't volunteer to lead tours but 7 of 14 said they don't/wouldn't volunteer to lead scripted instruction sessions. On the other hand, one person said in the focus group, "I find that so interesting, the hesitation [to lead a class], because I feel we do this on the desk everyday."

IV: To teach or not to teach uncertainty
A nuance that arose in the focus group in response to ambiguous survey options was uncertainty over instructional expectations. This elicited much discussion. For example:
- "It's not part of our expectations." "Oh, it is ... but it's kind of loose, isn't it."
- "I think it [job fact-sheet] says something to the effect that we're expected to participate in tours and scripted instruction."
- "Previously that was assisting in classes or doing tours, it was not leading a class before."
- "But nobody ever formally enforced it."
- "The gist of what I got was that this was always an expectation but it doesn't necessarily happen?"
- "I don't know if I should say this but if it was such 'this is an expectation', then I would do it but I would not be pushed into it."
- "I always felt I was overstepping my boundaries because I'm not a librarian, I have not teaching experience so it could be a disaster if I actually volunteered for one without any formal training."

V: Script doesn't replace knowledge and comfort
A bit of discussion occurred on what a script should look like.
- "So much detail can take so much time in some sessions (e.g. students very engaged and questioning) but it is important to have enough detail for quiet groups."
- "On teaching, I think, basically, what you have to know is the material ... and then it doesn't matter what the script is, if you know it and can internalize it then you can blah blah."

Insights — Bubbles

I. Utilise findings.

II. Public speaking training might not help.

III. Delivering instruction library tours is very different from classroom instruction.

IV. Teaching "is like eating kale – it's good for you, but I don't want to eat it."

V. The best script does not replace material knowledge and comfort.

Conclusions

Transforming an operational or staff development project into a research project with an ethics component provided researchers with a sturdy framework from which to make recommendations to supervisors and managers in a safe and confidential environment.

12. Overall training opinions. List five topics (in order of importance) you'd like to see training on and whether each would best be done in a large group lecture (15-20 people) or small group hands-on workshop style (3-4 people).

1. Prezis - large group
2. Teaching tips and tricks. lecture
3. Presentation methods (power point, prezi, etc.)
4. Public speaking (small groups / dealing with nerves

1. Discovery tool familiarity - large group
2. Presenting specific subject areas/databases. lecture
3. Public Speaking
4. Exploring delivery styles/finding your authentic voice (small groups)

1. nature of academic research - large group
2. Learning styles (visual versus verbal versus Literal)
3. Teaching adults (large group)

1. Evaluating source credibility - large group
2. More complicated search techniques (proximity searching etc.)
3. Student/professor expectations (large group)

1. Types of resources - large group
2. Room set up (where is the light switch?!) workshop
3. Advanced searching (large group)

3. Reasons you HESITATE to lead library tours (check all that apply)

	Response Count
I find the library tour boring myself	1
Worried that group doesn't really care	1
Worried about keeping control of the group	1
Too shy; uncomfortable speaking in large groups	1
Doesn't really factor into my job evaluation; don't really get credit for doing it	0
I don't hesitate and enjoy doing tours	10
Other (please specify)	1

1. conflicts with desk time/other duties

3. Reasons you HESITATE to lead a scripted instruction session (check all that apply)

	Response Count
Not comfortable with various skills and knowledge (see below)	8
Worried that group doesn't really care	1
Too daunting, too rigid, too flexible	1
Worried about keeping control of the group	2
Too shy	2
Doesn't really factor into my job-evaluation, don't really get credit for doing it	0
I don't hesitate to do instruction and enjoy doing it	0
Other (please specify)	2

1. not shy, but tend to get really bad stage fright (shakey hands, distracted, etc.)
2. Never done it before
3. Already have a full workload
4. don't enjoy teaching
5. I am very apprehensive about public speaking

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