Using Transformative Learning to train faculty regarding their Library’s resources

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Problem statement:

Many faculty members at a small state college are unaware of what library resources are available through the school, which creates unnecessary obstacles that prevent faculty and student research. Additionally, each department is allocated a budget for library resources and many departments miss the opportunity to provide useful guidance regarding how each department’s library budget could be spent most effectively.

While librarians understand the process of collection development, the expertise of members of specific departments is invaluable when making purchasing decisions for the library’s collection. After all, the point of the library’s collection is to inspire and support faculty and student research.

Target:

Ideally, the primary target for this training is all faculty members, but due to the nature of the academic schedule and the fluctuating number of adjunct faculty from semester to semester, this may not be a feasible option. The biggest concern with a “required” training: it could become “one more thing” for a faculty that is already overloaded with tasks and required meetings. With this in mind, a survey could be sent out to the entire faculty to identify issues/concerns (with the hopes that most of the faculty would take the time to complete it) from a diverse and large group of faculty. After administering the survey results, small groups of 3-5 faculty members from each department will be selected to participate in the learning activity. This group should comprise of both newer and veteran faculty members. Newer faculty may be familiar with the resources from their previous institution and assume that our institutions will be the same, but this is not always the case. Veteran members of the faculty tend to continue to do things the way they have always done and often have no idea what resources are available in print and online.

Instructional Model:

I chose the Transformative Learning Model, which also includes element of Piaget’s ideas of assimilation and disequilibrium, for this lesson. The target audience is a specialized group adult learners (college professors), but much of the lesson is focused on identifying and transforming a potentially misguided perception of library resources.

Explanation of Instructional Model:

Tsao, Takahashi, Olusesu, & Jain state that “transformative learning does not happen by itself; it takes place when learners face a radically different and incongruent situation or information that cannot be assimilated into their meaning perspective,” (2006). Transformative learning is not limited to simply teaching a skill, it is designed to change the perspective of the learner, thereby changing the learner. Moreover, transformative learning attempts to help the learner assess his/her beliefs and actions to determine the accuracy and validity of said beliefs and actions with the goal of identifying and ultimately changing inaccurate or unfounded ideas.

Adult learners tend to hold on to previous assumptions, habits, and practices because he/she is comfortable with it, not because he/she is utilizing best practices or effective methods (Tsao, Takahashi, Olusesu, & Jain, 2006). Adult learners have acquired what Mezirow (1997) refers to a frame of reference based on a “coherent body of experience” that defines the lives (and therefore learning experiences) of these learners. Mezirow goes on to explain that this frame of reference has two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view, both of which and obstruct the learning process. Habit of mind are likely to be rooted in “cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological” factors that manifest themselves in a point of view that shape how that person interprets information and experiences (Merzirow 1997). Although frames of reference can be durable and long-lasting, they can be transformed by critically reflecting and discussing the assumptions used to form our habits of mind and point of view that create these frames of reference.

Another important aspect of transformative learning is empowering the student to become an autonomous learner. This is especially important in transformative learning because the core of transformative learning is facing and changing often long held beliefs and assumptions, which can certainly create unnecessary conflict if not handled properly.

Relationship of Instructional Model to specific problem:

Despite the development of “Library Liaisons,” i.e. librarians that are assigned to a specific department, the biggest issues are disseminating the information to a faculty that is spread out over five campuses and most importantly, showing the faculty how to use some of these resources. With Transformative Learning, the Library Liaison will function as

While adult learners tend to fiercely hold on to habits and practices, it’s not far fetched to assume that most professors are even more prone to the aforementioned behavior when it comes to research and teaching pedagogies. Using Transformative Learning has the potential to alter this behavior in a positive and effective manner. With a background in academia, professors are certainly familiar with educated and constructive discourse. Furthermore, facing assumptions and beliefs to determine the validity of these ideas should be the core principle of any educated individual.

Statement of Objectives:

1. Reveal preconceptions of library services and resources.
2. As a department/group, discuss and evaluate these preconceptions.
3. The librarian creates a conceptual conflict by outlining specific services, databases, journals, etc. in a presentation.
4. The librarian will assist each department/group in developing a research project that is effectively supported by the resources and services the library has to offer.
5. After the assignment is created, the department will reflect upon the process. Department/group will also make recommendations for collection development for their department, in the process establishing a partnership between the department and the library that will improve the quality of research campus-wide moving forward.

Lesson Plan Details:

1. Send out a simple survey (using Google forms, SurveyMonkey or a similar service) regarding library resources and services to each department on campus. This survey will include a mixture of multiple choice and short-answer questions, some of which will be the same across departments, some of which will be department-specific. A specific time period should be given to allow as many faculty members as possible to take the survey, but a deadline of no more than a month is recommended.
2. Survey results will be divided and distributed to specific librarians based on his/her liaison responsibilities. The librarian will then evaluate this data to identify each department’s preconceived notions of the Library’s resources and services
3. Each Library liaison will set up a meeting with his/her department, identifying a group (Group New/Veteran) from each department comprised of new and veteran faculty members, to discuss the survey data. Part of the presentation will include graphs/pie charts (easily done with multiple choice data) and some anonymous short answer responses in an effort to highlight misconceptions in library services. For example, if a history professor states that he/she has had difficulty finding primary sources for student research projects; the librarian could highlight a primary source subject guide or several digital archives. In this example, highlighting library resources that the professor did not know or think was available will create a disorienting dilemmathat will begin to transform the faculty member’s perception of library services.
4. Next, the librarian will work together with Group New/Veteran to design a research project for an entry level class in that department, e.g. "English 1101" or "U.S. History before 1865," that effectively utilizes the library resources. The first step of this process is for the department to clearly identify the desired learning objectives for this project. The next step is for the librarian to make suggestions for resources for this project (databases, journals, government websites, archives, etc.). This process could take place in one long meeting or over the course of a few, shorter meetings. After the librarian identifies appropriate resources, Group New/Veteran will discuss these choices and collectively decide which resources will be most appropriate for the project.
5. After collectively deciding on appropriate resources, Group New/Veteran will design the research project. The librarian will be available to address resource-related questions/concerns that may arise during this design process, including taking suggestions for resources that may need to be added in the collection in the future. This will serve two purposes: facilitate a process that enables the librarian to continue to assist with resources for the project while facilitating a process for Group New/Veteran to identify department-specific needs for collection development and a means to directly communicate these needs to the librarian.
6. After completing the design of the research project, the department and the librarian will reflect upon this process. Was it effective? Were the library’s resources adequate? Are there journals and/or databases that the department would like to purchase with their department library budget?

Evaluation and Assessment:

This training calls for three evaluations/assessments: an initial survey that is sent to all faculty members, the development and completion of a department-specific research project by a small group of faculty (referred to as Group New/Veteran), and a final evaluation/reflection upon library resources. The first evaluation, the initial survey, will be sent out to the entire faculty. Realistically, this survey will not receive one hundred percent participation, but it should provide a wide and varied perspective regarding library resources. The main goal of this initial assessment is to determine preconceived notions regarding library resources. The second evaluation is the development and completion of a research project that will be utilized by members of the department for an entry-level class, e.g. English 1101. The department and the librarian will evaluate the effectiveness of this research project at the end of each semester, allowing for updates and changes to occur as needed. This will accommodate for changes in technology, the library collection and most importantly the needs of students. Lastly, reflecting upon this whole process will allow the members of the department to evaluate the effectiveness and depth of the library’s collection. While librarians are trained in collection development, this evaluation provides these faculty members with a platform to share useful insight and experience with the librarian regarding the library’s collection. Additionally, this helps the librarian and Group New/Veteran’s department form more educated decisions regarding collection development, which promotes a more effective use of the department’s yearly library resource budget.

Defense of Instructional Model:

Tackling the issue of library resources using Transformative Learning is effective for a number of reasons:

1. It faces the misconceptions head-on without being aggressively confrontational. The library cannot meet the research needs of faculty and students if the needs are not expressed and the faculty cannot disseminate information to their students regarding library resources/services if these services are unknown.
2. This method encourages collaboration between specific departments and that department’s library liaison in a manner that’s much more effective than periodic emails or an isolated lecture from the librarian.
3. Transformative Learning gives the librarian the flexibility to cater training to databases and resources specific to each department and the members of that department’s research capabilities, specifically with reference to technological abilities. Some senior faculty may only want to use print resources, and for better or for worse, most libraries are scaling back their print journal subscriptions, often opting for online versions for a number of reasons. With this in mind, if the professor is unable to use (or unaware that they exist) these resources, how can a student be expected to understand how to utilize them properly?
4. Potential problems:
   1. Faculty buy-in of the initial survey. More often than not, we are all bombarded with innumerable emails on a daily basis and most are lost in the shuffle and the content never reaches it desired destination. Establishing a solid relationship between library liaisons and their individual departments may assist with this.
   2. Effectively establishing Group New/Veteran within each department. Faculty members are busy enough with teaching obligations, research, meetings, etc. and convincing them to attend a series of training session on library resources, especially when many of them already think they know everything they need to know about these resources. This might be combated with a marketing campaign prior to the initial survey that showcases specific resources within the library collection.

References

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