

Academic Librarians Develop Their Teaching Identities Differently Depending on Their Years of Instructional Experience

Nichols Hess, A. (2020). Instructional experience and teaching identities: How academic librarians' years of experience in instruction impact their perceptions of themselves as educators. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 14(2), 153–180. <https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2020.14.2.1>

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[See table of contents](#)

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Evidence Summary

Academic Librarians Develop Their Teaching Identities Differently Depending on Their Years of Instructional Experience

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To examine how an academic librarian's years of instructional experience impacts how they think of themselves as instructors.

Design – Survey questionnaire.

Setting – American academic library profession.

Subjects – 353 participants selected from 501 respondents.

Methods – A Qualtrics survey was sent via email to members of several American Library Association discussion lists. The author selected a subset of respondents for further analysis based on how they answered key questions on the survey. Selected participants were those who believed they had experienced perspective transformation around their teaching identities. The author used principal

component analysis and confirmatory factor analysis to identify twelve transformative constructs across three sub-themes: relational, experiential, and professional inputs. The author then labelled each construct based on its respective component parts. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were then conducted using SPSS.

Main Results – Statistically significant differences were found between experienced and inexperienced instructional librarians. Participants with *more* instructional experience tend to believe their teaching identities are influenced to a greater extent by these factors:

- Interpersonal relationships
- Feedback from colleagues outside of librarianship
- Self-directed learning opportunities

Participants with *less* instructional experience tend to believe their teaching identities are influenced to a greater extent by these factors:

- Feedback from those within librarianship
- Library-centric inputs such as their formal library studies

Conclusion – Different types of professional development opportunities will appeal to different librarians based on their level of instructional experience. Less experienced librarian instructors may find mentoring and informal collegial relationships within the library to be beneficial. More experienced librarian instructors may prefer to seek out relationships with colleagues outside the library to further develop their teaching identities.

Commentary

The paper is part of a series of five publications by the author, reporting the findings from a single survey questionnaire, such as (e.g., Nichols Hess, 2020 and Nichols Hess, 2019). This work explores how a range of factors influence academic librarians' teaching identities, with various sub-findings reported separately. It is grounded in Mezirow's (1978) concept of transformative learning.

The study was evaluated using Glynn's (2006) critical appraisal tool.

The literature review provides a useful summary of the theoretical constructs underpinning the research. However, it is not readily apparent how this paper connects to the other papers in the series (Nichols Hess, 2020, 2019). Further, the author does not clearly articulate why one would read this latest paper as opposed to the others in the series. In fact, these other related papers are barely mentioned in the literature review.

To get a complete understanding of the methodology and practical implications of this work, readers must consult all the other papers in the series. The author notes "the findings should be considered with the other statistically significant relationships from this research" (p. 167–168). This makes it difficult for readers to understand the overarching significance of the study. It can also be a burden on readers' time (Elsevier, 2019).

The author has made good use of a previously validated survey (King, 2009). The author provides the survey in full in the appendix, allowing for replication.

Respondents were self-selected, so they may not accurately represent the wider population. Further, this analysis considers only those respondents (353/501, approx. 70.5%) who experienced instructional

identity transformation. Comparing the practices of those who have not experienced transformation to those who have may have been useful.

The author provides useful discussion around the study's limitations and gives reasonable suggestions for future research.

The study will be of interest to academic library administrators looking for ways to support staff development. Readers, however, would benefit from having a single, overarching publication detailing the key findings and most important recommendations resulting from the study.

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