



Innovations in Learning and Teaching in Academic Libraries: Alignment, Collaboration, and the Social Turn

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Academic libraries are central to the learning, teaching and research enterprise of their institutions. As emphasised by Brophy (2005, p. 216) “Academic libraries are here to enable and enhance learning in all its forms – whether it be the learning of a first year undergraduate coming to terms with what is meant by higher education or the learning of a Nobel Prize winning scientist seeking to push forwards the frontiers of her discipline”. While, perhaps, in the past our services and facilities have been designed to prioritise library operations and service delivery over pedagogy (Bennett, 2015), and as a profession we have been complicit in being described as “non academics” and accepting our role as “supporting” learning, in the present digital environment it is increasingly clear that libraries and librarians have a major role to play in learning and teaching in a rapidly changing global higher education sector.

Learning and teaching in academic libraries

Learning and teaching have been part of the core mission of academic libraries for decades (Aldrich, 2007; Bangert, 1997; Wadas, 2017), but the way libraries fulfil their educational responsibilities is continually evolving in response to changes in pedagogy, technology, the economy, society, and the policies and strategies of their parent institutions. The “demand for increased flexibility of pace, place and delivery” (HEA, 2015) as a result of financial retrenchment, marketisation and differentiation in higher education (in the UK and elsewhere) and of developments in pedagogies has meant, in theory at least, that a holistic approach to learning and the student experience is now usual practice, as is acceptance that this will involve partnership and collaboration from across an institution. As Elkington (2019, p. 3) notes, in the higher education context, “Learning can and does

happen anywhere”. Yet, while the role of libraries in learning support has been widely recognised and accepted (Arko-Cobbah, 2004; Biddiscombe, 2002; Chanetsa & Ngulube, 2016; Tuamsuk, Kwieciem, & Sarawanawong, 2013), the role of librarians as teachers continues to be contested, questioned and resisted (Austin & Bhandol, 2013; Kemp, 2006; Wheeler & McKinney, 2015; Wilson, 1979).

Having spent our respective careers developing a conceptual understanding of the pedagogical principles underpinning professional library service delivery to inform leadership in the transformation of services and engagement with a wide range of institutional and national learning and teaching agendas, we are interested in developing the growing evidence base for the vital contribution of library practitioners to learning and teaching in higher education. Recently we have observed the focus in academic libraries shifting towards research and scholarship as developments in digital humanities, data curation, and open science have created opportunities for librarians to extend their roles in the research arena, which has resulted in several collections of case studies documenting emergent practices and innovative strategies for research support (Hoffman, 2016; Mackenzie & Martin, 2016; White, 2017). Developments in information literacy, instructional design, peer-assisted learning, and open educational resources have also produced case studies of new and improved library practices (Godbey, Wainscott, & Goodman, 2017; Jacobson & Mackey, 2016; Rinto, Watts, & Mitola, 2017; Walz, Jensen, & Salem, 2016; West, Hoffman, & Costello, 2017), but we have to go back to Brad Eden’s 2015 volume for a set of case studies offering more comprehensive coverage of educational innovations in academic libraries.

The innovation agenda in academic libraries

Innovation “has moved from a consideration to a necessity” for academic libraries operating under the dual pressures of economic contraction and technological developments (Brundy, 2015, p. 22), with many research libraries confirming the innovation imperative in their planning documents (German & Namachchivaya, 2013, p. 11). Much of the discussion here emphasises technology-driven innovation in a competitive economically-charged digital environment, but some commentators have challenged the prevailing narrative. Jennifer Rowley (2011) argues for more focus on *collaborative* and *open* innovation, including *interorganizational* innovation, while Scott Walter and David Lankes (2015, pp. 855, 856) urge library leaders to look “beyond economic indicators to the educational mission of the academy”, calling for a “broader and more contextualised approach” to innovation in academic libraries”, using examples such as rethinking the

instructional roles of librarians, collaborating with other professional services, and contributing to changes in teaching and learning on their campus and beyond. Ronald Jantz (2017, p. 324) argues that *management* innovations “can become the primary enablers of the transformation that library leaders are seeking” to keep pace in a fast-moving environment.

Wendi Arant Kaspar (2019, p. 422) promotes a more nuanced analysis of technology-related change, using examples such as open access and social media to support her argument: “More than technology, society is the driver of change. It is people, individually and collectively, whose decisions and actions incorporate the changes into their daily lives”. Others have similarly acknowledged the human dimensions that mean technological change in academic libraries is above all a *social* process that can “contribute to economic and social improvement” (Katsirikou & Sefertzi, 2000, p. 705). Our call for examples of innovative developments in library contributions to their educational mission did not define what we meant by “innovative” as we recognised the subjective and contextual nature of innovation, and we also made it clear we were open to different types of innovation, including new processes and relationships, as well as novelty in products, services and programmes.

Motivated by gaps in the literature as well as our personal interests in tracking innovations in learning and teaching in academic libraries, we decided to put together our own collection of innovative developments in library contributions to the educational mission of their institution. We were interested in discovering both *what* innovations librarians were implementing and evaluating, and *how* they were conceiving and approaching their projects; e.g., which activities and/or audiences are the focus for their innovations? Are their innovations primarily technological/technical, managerial/administrative, collaborative/interorganisational, or another type of innovation?

Sources of contributions and key themes

We distributed our call for proposals internationally in summer 2018 via email discussion lists targeting academic librarians, information literacy practitioners, educational developers, and learning technologists. We received 48 abstracts from six countries spread across three continents and following a double-blind review process we accepted 24 proposals. Seven proposers were unable to proceed with their contributions, resulting in a total of 17 submitted manuscripts, which increased to a final total of 18 after we decided to commission a literature review to complete our collection. [Table 1](#) gives the full geographic breakdown of proposals and

Table 1. Geographic breakdown of submissions.

Country	Proposals received	Abstracts accepted	Final submissions
USA	30	14	9
UK	13	7	6
Ireland	2	2	2
Netherlands	1	1	1
Sweden	1	0	0
Singapore	1	0	0
Total	48	24	18

submissions, showing the final contributions were evenly divided between the USA and Europe.

Beyond the geographic breakdown, our contributions share perspectives and practices from a wide variety of higher education institutions, ranging from a community college in Long Island, New York through colleges and institutes whose focus is wholly or mainly on teaching to leading research universities in the UK and USA. Overall, our case studies represent a roughly equal balance between teaching-oriented and research-intensive institutions, indicating that a commitment to excellence through innovation in teaching and learning is shared across traditional divisions in tertiary education, or at least among their libraries.

The initiatives reported by our contributors and the methods used to evaluate their impact are similarly varied, but we can point to several recurring themes that reveal common trends in the direction of travel for academic libraries in the 21st century higher education landscape, most notably continuing the well-documented strategy of working with other members of their communities in *collaboration* and *partnership* (Atkinson, 2018; Doherty, 2016; Melling & Weaver, 2013), a strategy which in the cases that follow is particularly evident in the ways libraries are extending the scope and reach of their information literacy education and related activities to meet the personal, academic, professional and employability needs of students throughout their learning journeys in line with institutional agenda. *Strategic alignment* of library initiatives with institutional goals is another related theme here, which has also been emphasised in recent academic library literature from the UK, Australia and the USA (Cox, Pinfield, & Rutter, 2019; Harland, Stewart, & Bruce, 2018; Walter, 2018). Finally, *engagement* – critical and reflective, with academics, students, and communities – featured prominently in our studies, confirming a trend evident in the literature over the last five years (Díaz, 2014; Eldridge, Fraser, Simmonds, & Smyth, 2016; Schlak, 2018).

Our set of contributions opens with Anne Llewellyn's thematic synthesis of around one hundred articles, which examines the changing nature of the academic library in the context of wider societal and educational changes, and identifies seven descriptive themes: diversification of the academic

librarian role; changing pedagogies; digital/e-learning; information literacy; partnership and co-creation; student experience; and space and learning. Working in collaboration with academics and students emerges as a particularly strong element of innovative practice. Important subthemes include academic integration and embedding, student engagement and success, and supporting transitions and wellbeing in the context of universal concerns about student mental health, which all feature in our collection. Approximately one-third of Llewellyn's discussion considers the development, expansion and diversification of the library's core role in *information literacy* education in response to the continually changing environment.

The case studies that follow confirm the trajectory revealed through analysis of the literature, particularly in illustrating the various ways academic librarians are rethinking and repositioning information literacy education, drawing on broader interpretations of the concept promoted by professional associations (ACRL, 2015; ACRL & SAA, 2018; CILIP, 2018; DLF, 2019), and leading information literacy scholars, such as James Elmborg (2005, 2017) and Annemaree Lloyd (2011, 2012), and strategically aligning their learning and teaching activities with institutional goals. Significantly, while around half of our studies focus on novel approaches to information literacy teaching, the concept features explicitly in the title of only one contribution, Sarah Pittaway's account of the learner journey project at the University of Worcester, which explores academics' perceptions of the academic literacies (study, information and research capabilities) needed by students, and it is referenced (indirectly) in the title of just one other contribution, Alison Lehner-Quam's and Wesley Pitts's study of using the ACRL (2015) *Framework for Information Literacy* with science education students.

Strategic alignment with institutional agenda

Our first six case studies all exemplify the trend towards the strategic alignment of library teaching with institutional goals. Pittaway foregrounds the concept in her subtitle, "Aligning academics and librarians through pedagogic research" and explains how their research initiative resulted in a new "teaching menu" which changed the delivery of information and research skills by aligning student needs to suggested interventions, and strategically repositioned library services in the institution. In the next contribution, Derek Stadler and Alexandra Rojas explain how they redesigned a semester-long library credit-bearing course to align their pedagogy with LaGuardia Community College's overall educational programme goals, in this case by embedding digital communication (collaboration and interaction) abilities in their information literacy instruction and assignments,

which they argue strengthens information literacy. Then Alison Skoyles, Nicola Bullock and Kathy Neville describe how Information Skills Librarians and Digital Skills Trainers at London South Bank University collaborated to develop information and digital literacy workshops enabling students to create a professional online presence in response to institutional adoption of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). Building on existing provision, they were able to attract more students by aligning their activities with an institutional initiative, and explicitly linking information skills to digital literacy and employability.

Collaboration and partnership also underpin the next three contributions, which again extend library teaching into areas beyond information skills in order to support institutional goals. Stephanie Evers Ard and Franklin Ard describe how the Library and Writing Centre at the University of South Alabama collaborated at the request of an institutional committee to develop a new online academic integrity course giving students a theoretical understanding of the academic conversation around integrity, in addition to teaching practical knowledge and skills (including time and stress management as well as citation and referencing), enabling them to participate successfully in an academic culture. Alison Valk's case study from Georgia Tech discusses the Library's unique *Communication through Art* programme, which operates through a framework that allows librarians to work as equal partners with not only academics, but also a community centre with a DIY culture and local artists on the design, development and delivery of courses that support institutional goals by integrating visual arts into STEM subjects to improve student engagement, develop communication skills and encourage critical thinking and creativity.

Valk also picks up on another theme emerging from several studies when she describes the *remix* culture that characterises the pedagogy of their programme, based on a team approach using experimental methods and open educational resources (OERs). Helen Murphy and Elizabeth Tilley also reference a remix culture and open educational practices in their account of developing a pre-arrival OER at the University of Cambridge for taught Master's students regardless of discipline, background or mode of study as part of their libraries' commitment to supporting institutional goals for teaching, learning and student wellbeing through a collaborative Information Literacy Network. Murphy and Tilley identify the transition from undergraduate to taught postgraduate as a gap in learner support and explain how their practice-based approach to information literacy informed by sociocultural theories of learning resulted in a resource covering academic, information and digital practices, reinforcing the trend towards the broader scope and reach already noted.

Collaboration and partnership in disciplinary settings

Our next four cases explore collaborations with faculty and other internal and external partners in different disciplinary and professional educational settings, showing how library staff are integrating information and archives/primary source literacy with discipline-specific academic and digital literacies in both library-led and co-taught interventions. Alison McKay, Tasha Cooper and Caroline Plaise discuss their experience of working as a hybrid library/academic support team with part-time nursing associate students at the University of the West of England, highlighting a change in focus for the team from training to teaching, the move to supporting wider academic literacies, and the empowering role of continuous reflection and reflexivity in their practice to cope with change and uncertainty, which included regular 30-minute “shut up and reflect” sessions after their teaching. Barry Houlihan describes the blended source-centred reflective pedagogy developed at the National University of Ireland Galway for a bespoke archives literacy module embedded in a new interdisciplinary degree in Children’s Studies that enabled collaborative learning through interaction with internal and external print/manuscript and digital primary sources, including open resources, and contributed directly to the development of skills and dispositions defined in the institution’s transferable graduate attributes.

We then have two studies co-authored by librarians and their faculty collaborators, illustrating the value of long-term partnership building based on shared pedagogical values. Pamela Lach and Elizabeth Pollard describe their two-year partnership at San Diego State University, characterised as an *intellectual* collaboration, in which they used scaffolded instruction in digital humanities research methods, information literacy and cutting-edge visualisation tools to enable hands-on creation of collaborative public-facing artefacts by undergraduate history students. Lehner-Quam and Pitts of Lehman College, New York also describe a two-year co-teaching collaboration using the ACRL (2015) *Framework* with two cohorts of graduate science education students in a year-long ePortfolio project, which was successful in developing their information literacy competencies, supporting their professional development as both teachers and researchers in preparation for employment, and enabling them to participate in scholarly conversations.

Library support for open educational resources

The focus shifts for our next two cases, which both return to library-led development of OER. In a second case study from Lehman College, Stacy Katz discusses how her library implemented a Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) initiative supported financially by their parent institution and later by the state governor, which incentivised faculty to redesign their courses using

only free open resources. Librarian roles here included searching for open materials and educating faculty about OER by providing asynchronous online training based on remixing training materials from other institutions. In contrast, Michiel de Jong, Michiel Munnik and Nicole Will describe how Delft University of Technology launched an open textbook publishing programme that produced seven titles in its first year, with the Library supporting authors through the whole process of creation from writing and layout of material to copy-editing and final publication. de Jong and his colleagues use insights gained from their experience and research to provide recommendations for other institutions interested in adopting OER, highlighting important roles for academic libraries in quality control, community building, educator training, and policy development.

Collaboration and partnership in library spaces

Two studies offered novel perspectives on library spaces as sites for collaboration, interaction and tacit knowledge exchange with students. Dale Larsen, Shane Wallace, Adriana Parker and Lis Pankl used the emergent concept of *fourth place* (Morrison, 2018) to redesign an area of the main library at the University of Utah as a nurturing social learning space to facilitate tailored support and counteract library anxiety, which they evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively using critical incident questionnaires. Anna Sandelli and Sojourna Cunningham used whiteboards to conduct longitudinal ethnographic research in different types of spaces to investigate student experiences and needs at the University of Tennessee Knoxville and the University of Richmond, and identified *transitional spaces* – communal areas, such as thoroughfares, not designed for academic use (Bryant, Matthews, & Walton, 2009, p. 14) as particularly productive sites for gathering participatory research data and hearing student voices. Sandelli and Cunningham conclude that enabling students to create their own spaces engenders feelings of ownership and community and thereby shapes environments that facilitate more meaningful learning.

Reorganising around the engagement agenda

Despite the observed trend in academic librarianship towards continual reorganising (Corrall, 2014), and unresolved debate around the merits of replacing subject-based liaison librarians with mission-based functional specialists and engagement teams (Eldridge et al., 2016; Hoodless & Pinfield, 2018), we received only one proposal with a restructuring focus. In another contribution emphasising strategic alignment, multidimensional partnerships and embedded support with a broad scope, Tamasine Ashcroft, Lisa Bird, Stephen Bull, Polly Harper, Ann-Marie James and Catherine Robertson use

internal and external survey data and four case studies to inform a first-year assessment of the value and impact on learning and teaching of their new Library Engagement Team at the University of Birmingham. The concept of engagement was a prominent theme in around half of our cases, but the Birmingham study assigns engagement a central role. Their findings indicate that in their case having a team dedicated to engagement activities as well as separating advocacy from delivery has enabled a more consistent service across the full spectrum of library activities, and enhanced relationship building and social capital, although they acknowledge that team size and skill sets may also have been important factors.

Professional development tools for teaching librarians

Our final two contributions return to the academic library's primary role in information literacy education, but with a specific focus here on the teaching roles of library staff, and strategies for developing their competence and confidence as teachers and learning facilitators, an issue that has challenged academic librarians worldwide for several decades (Austin & Bhandol, 2013; Bell & Shank, 2004; McGuinness, 2011; Raju, 2017; Walter, 2006; Wheeler & McKinney, 2015), and also surfaced in our case study by McKay et al. Both of our concluding studies report on concerted team efforts over a two-year period working with professional development tools designed for teachers in higher education and evaluating their potential for libraries. Both projects also demonstrate how a combination of communities of practice, evidence-based reflection and action/practice-based research can facilitate a step-change in the development and professionalisation of teaching in academic libraries (as advocated recently by Carroll & Klipfel, 2019).

At the University of Oregon, Mary Oberlies, Kristin Buxton and Annie Zeidman-Karpinski selected three widely-used peer observation tools (Teaching Squares, the Teaching Practices Inventory and the Classroom Observation Protocol for Undergraduate STEM), adapted them to fit the unique features of library instruction, and are now making the tools available to the academic library community to extend the process of testing and customisation. From Ireland, Mary Delaney, Ann Cleary, Philip Cohen and Brendan Devlin describe how the librarians of three Institutes of Technology (Carlow, Dundalk and Dublin) won national funding to field-test a new *Professional Development Framework for All Staff who Teach in Higher Education* (including educational developers, learning technologists, librarians and teaching assistants, as well as academics). Delaney et al. explain how the flexible and inclusive scope of the framework encouraged broader and deeper exploration of their teaching selves and identities, including their individual and collective goals, values, and philosophies,

and motivated development of their knowledge and skills in reflective practice, action research and academic writing, through teamwork, seminars and workshops. The project outputs include an open access book sharing their experiences and insights (Cleary, Cohen, & Delaney, 2019), as well as a website offering learning resources for others to use.

One profound insight shared by the Irish team is the changed understanding of library teaching and learning that emerged from their reflections, along with a renewed sensitivity to use of language. While the project enabled them to clearly situate themselves in the wider higher education context, both nationally and internationally, their reflections also prompted them to redefine its scope in more inclusive terms, after concluding that all library work could be viewed as teaching or facilitating learning and hence *all library staff* should be explicitly included in the project. The promotion of not only reflective practice, but also educational research, including the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), as an integral part of professional development is another key feature of the Irish framework, which links nicely with growing recognition among academic librarians globally of the contribution of SoTL to their own professional development, the enhancement of student learning, collaborative relations with faculty, and innovations in library practice (Hays & Mallon, 2017; Mallon, Hays, Bradley, Huisman, & Belanger, 2019; McClurg, MacMillan, & Chick, 2019; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2015).

The social turn in library innovation

Returning to our questions about the kinds of learning and teaching innovations being introduced in academic libraries, if we focus on the substance or *content* of the innovations, then information literacy development (increasingly broadly interpreted, going well beyond traditional conceptions and pedagogies) was confirmed as a central concern for academic librarians; but the key trend here is the way librarians are being more strategic, more ambitious, and more collaborative in their educational efforts, usually placing information literacy (including primary source literacy) in broader conceptual and practical contexts of academic and/or professional competencies (such as digital abilities and tools) often connected with explicit institutional agenda, represented by core/mission-critical competencies, graduate attributes, employability skills and the like. Appreciation of *context* was further evidenced by specific attention to educational transitions (into higher education, from undergraduate to postgraduate, from higher education to employment and society); nuanced discussion of how varying types of space can affect community development and enable both individual and collective empowerment; and, similarly, awareness of subtle differences in faculty motivations for adopting OER.

While the innovations described generally had a learner-centric focus, many were evidently designed to engage and mobilise multiple beneficiaries (including teaching faculty, academic administrators, library staff and external stakeholders, as well as students). Also, in many cases, the collaborative strategy and *process* adopted was not only a fundamental aspect of the project, but also represented a new or significantly strengthened relationship or partnership. The majority of the innovations were technology-related in that they used a digital platform, emphasised digital tools or capabilities, or were dependent to some extent on digital resources (notably the OER projects), but categorising them as *technological* or *technology-driven* innovations fails to acknowledge their important *social* dimensions, just as it would be a misnomer to describe the open-source software movement, or open access initiatives, in this way. Technology has clearly facilitated such developments as new ways of doing things, but the real significance of these altered practices is *social* rather than technical, and derives from the way they have expanded and changed interactions, transactions and communications in their respective communities (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2011).

Our studies thus provide evidence of a shift in the type and focus of innovation implemented by academic libraries in the direction suggested by Rowley (2011) and Walter and Lankes (2015), which is consistent with a more general trend towards the practice of *social innovation*, particularly in public services (Harris & Albury, 2009). Social innovation is not a new concept, but it has gained fresh impetus from other social movements and generated a substantial literature more recently, particularly from work funded by the European Union. There is no universally accepted definition: it is a complex and multi-faceted concept, which can emphasise one or more different aspects (e.g., the content, process or empowerment dimensions of an innovation). It can take place on different scales or levels (e.g., individual, organisational, or consortial; incremental, institutional, or political) and, significantly, can originate or be developed by public, private or third-sector organisations, or by service users and communities (Harris & Albury, 2009; Nicholls, Simon, & Gabriel, 2015).

Nicholls et al. (2015, pp. 2–3) identify two “meta-definitions” of social innovation that focus either on new social *processes* or on new social *outputs and outcomes*. However, others promote a both-and view (rather than either-or): the Young Foundation, 2010 (pp. 18–19) definition for the European Commission is widely cited, especially its opening sentence (emphasis in original):

Social innovations are innovations that are social both in their ends and in their means. Specifically, we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) *and* create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society *and* enhance society’s capacity to act.

Social innovation is thus a more complex and powerful concept than *collaborative* innovation, but is arguably a perfect fit for academic libraries, given the social justice mission of our profession, and recent emphasis in academic librarianship on communities, relationships, and engagement (Díaz, 2014; Eldridge et al., 2016; Walter, 2018). Social innovation has been adopted as a conceptual foundation and practical model for user-driven and co-designed innovation in public libraries as they move from collection-based to community-oriented service models (Andersen, Delica, & Frandsen, 2013; de Moor & van den Assem, 2013), and was recently the focus of a themed issue in *Library Quarterly* (Gorham & Bertot, 2018) as a nascent research area for public librarianship. We contend that academic librarianship would also benefit from further study of the theory and practice of social innovation to fulfil its educational mission.

The range of theory and variety of evidence-based practices embodied in these studies illustrate well Lankes's (2011, p. 15) contention that "The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities" and that librarians and libraries are key partners in the learning experiences of students. Compiling and editing this collection has provided new insights into the developing roles of librarians and the integration of their practice into the learning and teaching enterprise of higher education institutions. We are indebted to all the authors who contributed their scholarship to create an informed, interesting and inspirational collection on the contribution of libraries to the work of their institutions and the success of their students. We also gratefully acknowledge the assistance and support given by Dr. Graham Walton, Editor-in-Chief, and other members of the Editorial Board for the *New Review of Academic Librarianship* who formed the panel of peer reviewers for this set of case studies, and whose thoughtful comments and suggestions significantly improved the quality of the final publication.

Note

Due to space limitations, the final three articles of this special issue by Ashcroft et al., Oberlies et al., and Delaney et al., will appear in the first issue of Volume 26.

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