
Technology, Lifelong Learning and I (or We)

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I am both excited and a little daunted to know that our office will soon have two new tablet computers for use in our work with the library catalog, the library website, and user access to electronic resources. More and more of our users are bringing these with them to campus, and in many ways they work differently from the computers I know. We are also testing Windows 8 and Internet Explorer 10. I have had a Twitter account for more than a year but have never used it. One of my 2013 New Year's resolutions is to get started because my colleagues find that Twitter is a great way to learn about new research and new library services. All of these things have led me to think about what kinds of training—particularly, but not limited to, technology training—we who work with the public in libraries need to have to stay current and about how RUSA might help.

There was a great deal of discussion a few years ago about the 23 Things technology training program created by Helene Blowers that began in 2006 at the Public Library of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County in North Carolina (PLCMC).¹ Blowers developed the program to help her colleagues learn about web-based tools. She later wrote a set of tips to help other libraries get started, tips that are a wonderful source of advice for any technology training program.² Since then, libraries across the globe have set up such programs, some with fewer than “23 Things” and others with more. The Indiana University Bloomington Libraries, where I work, had a successful program a few years ago, but I have always regretted that I did not have time to fully participate.

Recently, Christa Burns talked about the Nebraska Learns 2.0 program at the Library 2.012 Worldwide Virtual Conference.³ One of the important things about the Nebraska program is that it has been given more than one time and has now been updated to both add new information and skills and use a different schedule to be accessible to library staff who do not have a great deal of time. As the Nebraska Learns 2.0 website points out, the first program ran from October 2008 through January 2009.⁴ The second edition covers additional issues and, instead of “23 Things” in a sixteen-week period, offers a new “Thing” each month. In addition, there will be a BookThing each month beginning in February 2013 with books to read and questions to answer. Participants will receive continuing education credits each month they finish the assigned learning task.

The fact that technology training programs based on the concept of 23 Things are successful in libraries has been noted in several places. Stephen Abram talked about these programs in his blog in 2010. He stated that these programs were not irrelevant and expressed his opinion that programs

like the 23 Things program were good ways to “address the problem of large scale training for professionals who choose to invest their time in their own development.”⁵ Such programs, then, provide a workable process that is easy to update as libraries and the environments in which library staff work change.

A recent study by Michael Stephens and Warren Cheetham, titled “The Impact and Effect of Learning 2.0 Programs in Australian Academic Libraries” was published in 2011. The same authors also published a study about public libraries in Australia, “The Impact and Effect of Learning 2.0 Programs in Australian Public Libraries,” in 2012. Stephens and Cheetham conducted national surveys and, for academic librarians, focus groups to learn about the impact of a 23 Things program on the participating library staff and on their libraries. In both cases, participating staff noted that the changes were more personal than institutional in nature. Academic library participants felt more confident with new technologies and more comfortable exploring new technologies. They understood more about the tools students were using, and some respondents stated that their libraries were implementing these new tools in library services.⁶

In the public library study, participants also felt more comfortable in learning about and using new technologies. They used the new tools to enhance their work. Their libraries have adopted the new tools with varying degrees of success primarily because of time and resource barriers, but the participants felt empowered to continue to learn.⁷

I believe one of the reasons that these programs have been so successful is that they conform to important theories about adult learning and to research-based best practices for teaching adults, often called andragogy. The programs are hands-on, self-directed, and practical. Learning by doing is important to adult learners because it provides an opportunity to incorporate one’s own experiences into new learning, making that new learning both meaningful and more likely to become part of the learner’s toolkit for living. This is powerfully motivating. Knowles, in his important work *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, describes the andragogical model as based on several assumptions gleaned from decades of research:

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something.
- The self-concept of adults that they are responsible for their own decisions requires that learning experiences for adults allow them to be self-directed learners.
- Adults bring with them a variety of experiences. Techniques of experiential learning that tap into adult experiences (group discussion, problem-solving, peer-helping, etc.) work best to engage adult learners.
- Adults become ready to learn in order to cope effectively with their own real-life situations.
- Adults are motivated to learn on the basis of their belief that such learning will help them perform tasks or solve problems in their own lives.
- The most important motivators of adults are internal

pressures, such as the desire for job satisfaction or to increase their own self-esteem.⁸

Librarians, particularly those of us who provide instruction for users, have long talked about the concept of lifelong learning. As we think about lifelong learning for ourselves, a set of learning habits originally developed at PLCMC and later made available again at the Nebraska Learns 2.0 site, can be a powerful tool. They emphasize personal responsibility for our own learning and active participation in that learning. These are the “7 ½ Habits of Highly Successful Lifelong Learners.” While they were developed for technology learning, they easily apply to other learning topics, and they can serve as a good basis for the personal philosophy of lifelong learning we each develop for ourselves and use for motivation to learn. The habits are the following:

1. Begin with the end in mind.
 2. Accept responsibility for your own learning.
 3. View problems as challenges.
 4. Have confidence in yourself as a competent, effective learner.
 5. Create your own learning toolbox.
 6. Use technology to your advantage.
 7. Teach/mentor others.
- 7½. Play.⁹

RUSA AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ LIFELONG LEARNING

In 2011, RUSA members noted that their top priority for a desirable RUSA service was opportunity for professional development. A new task force, Learning Outcomes and Knowledge Coordination, is charged to develop a coherent plan to tie together professional development, programming, the hybrid programming that is partly professional development and partly programming, and the resources of the website to provide better learning opportunities for RUSA members. The task force will develop a vision that will guide the work of RUSA and concrete plans that will create sustainable efforts in programming, virtual professional development, and information delivered through the RUSA website.

The new vision will guide RUSA activities in the area of lifelong learning for library employees over the next three to five years.

An important pillar in the plan will need to be to build on the motivation to learn uncovered in the membership survey by providing active learning opportunities.

AN ACTION PLAN FOR EACH OF US

Each of us also has a role to play in our own professional development. Technology and other knowledge and skills are

crucial to our ability to serve our users well. Library patrons expect that we will know how to use electronic books and their readers, tablets, and smartphones, and then teach such skills to users. They expect that we will know the best tools and use them to answer their questions about bat migration or French literature or how to fix a flat tire.

As librarians and library professionals, we have an important responsibility to continuously learn to meet our users' information needs. At the same time, learning and growing in new knowledge is a strong confidence-builder and I believe will over time lead to lasting changes in library services. I would suggest that we all should do the following:

- Develop an attitude that leads us to value lifelong learning.
- Seek out opportunities to learn new things. Make it part of our own daily routines.
- Work together to share learning and to find learning that helps us to be more effective in our work and our interactions with users.
- Encourage our employers and our professional organizations to help us develop as professionals and as library workers in ways that serve our communities.

After all, learning is fun and is something we do for ourselves, too.

References

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