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THE IMPACT OF CPD WORKSHOPS ON LIBRARY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE (Paper)

Abstract or Résumé:

This paper focuses on the impact that the flow and exchange ideas during Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Workshops has on the professional practice of librarians. Participants in four CPD workshops were invited to participate in surveys at three and six month intervals after attending CPD workshops. Most participants implemented the ideas gained from the workshop in ways that benefited personal practice, library services, and the organisation, transferring the knowledge and skills from the workshops into their professional practice.

1. Introduction

A recent survey of mid-career librarians in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States found that 97% of librarians participating had attended workshops or similar events, and that face-to-face delivery was the preferred method for 50% of the sample (Campbell-Meier et al 2018). 75% also noted that, with face-to-face delivery, they favoured a combination of presentation, group/interactive work and discussion. There was a clear preference for short-term, in-person courses using a variety of techniques to engage participants and facilitate learning. The CPD literature suggests that this type of intervention has advantages. Workshops can be tailored quite specifically to participants' existing skills and needs and they also provide valuable opportunities for networking with fellow professionals. The effectiveness of short workshops in changing practice has been questioned, however (Lydon and King 2009), and the difficulty of assessing the impact of this type of CPD has been noted (Nicolaidou and Petridou 2010). Evaluation usually takes the form of one-off participant self-reports of their reactions to the event and self-assessment of their learning immediately afterwards. Evidence of participants' use of knowledge gained is more difficult to gather and can only really be evaluated after they have returned to the workplace and have applied their learning. More general concern about the positive transfer of training to the workplace is widespread (Baldwin and Ford 1988) but there has been little focus on the "transfer problem" (Michalak 1981) in the librarianship literature with discussion focused primarily on whether library users transfer their learning from workshops. This research will, therefore, make a contribution to our understanding of whether and how learning from CPD workshops for library professionals is transferred to the library workplace.

This paper investigates the impact of CPD workshops for librarians on their practice in the library and information workplace. The question that the paper will address is: How do library professionals implement the ideas gained from CPD workshops in their professional practice?

Guskey's (2000) five level framework for evaluating teacher CPD is adapted for use in a library service context exploring:

1. Participants' reactions
2. Participants' evaluation of their learning
3. Participants' views of organisational support for change in the CPD topic area
4. Participants' use of new knowledge and skills in the workplace
5. Participants' views of the impact of their learning on library users

Levels 1-2 require an immediate or early response from participants following the workshop while levels 3-5 are longer term and can only be gathered once the participants have returned to their work and have had a reasonable amount of time to practice skills or implement any changes in their practice.

2. Methodology

To address the research question, four workshops were offered by a post-graduate information studies program in 2018. Two half-day library services workshops on "Design" and "UX" were delivered in two different cities. Both UX and Design were identified as areas of current interest for librarians' continuing professional development (CPD) and were attended by 13 and 18 participants respectively. Two full-day early childhood literacy workshops, "Play" and "Transforming", were delivered at two different locations. There are not many opportunities for early literacy professional development in Aotearoa New Zealand and both workshops were well attended with 55 participants between the two sites.

Following the workshops, participants were asked to complete a Qualtrics survey, addressing levels 1-2 of the framework above. To gain a longer-term view of how the workshop impacted participants' professional practice in the library workplace (levels 3-5), a follow-up questionnaire was administered 3 months after the workshops. This paper focuses on the open-ended responses from the two surveys.

While still using a self-report format, the open-ended responses provide additional detail and evidence of the impact the CPD had on both the individual and their workplace. The survey consisted of several questions about the workshop, followed by open ended questions which allowed participants to discuss their experiences in more detail. Inductive coding was developed from the open-ended question responses. The authors reviewed and discussed a preliminary coding schema that was applied to the open-ended questions.

3. Findings

The survey results indicate that participants did use skills gained in the workshops and most agreed that the knowledge and skills gained from the workshops were useful in their jobs. Participants implemented the ideas gained from the workshop, noted in open-ended questions, through:

1. Changes to individual's professional practice;
2. Service development;

3. Organisational/structural changes;
4. Increased organisational knowledge/CPD.

Most of the participants directly applied the new knowledge and skills to their own professional practice. This may have occurred through the use of a technique in a meeting or workshop within their organisation, but it may also have involved the use of a specific prop, story, song, or the development of a resource. In addition, several participants noted that they had initiated changes to services offered by the library. One early literacy participant shared *“Since our training, the 4 of us who went have been working together to transform our Funtimes sessions. Coincidentally we launched this week with our newish programme - with more reading less songs, so it is early days, but we think it is going to work”*. Workshop content was also used at an organisational level to redesign librarian positions. A Design workshop participant noted *“We have just been through a large restructure, and have been redeveloping the services we used to offer. There is a dedicated position called “Service Design Adviser” and we have been waiting for them to be employed as we think they would help us apply design thinking principles in the development of these services”*. In addition to the application of knowledge and skills, participants also noted training colleagues or sharing workshop information with others in their organisations.

While most participants had implemented some ideas from the workshops, a minority noted no change to their practice. Some felt that the four-hour workshops were too rushed, *“more like a lecture than a workshop”*, and that there had not been enough time to dive deeply into the topic. In fact, the lack of time was noted in open-ended responses by participants in both the four-hour and full-day workshops, though more so in the four-hour workshops. Organisational issues were also identified as obstacles hindering the implementation of new ideas. Several participants had not made changes because they were waiting for a new manager or management change. One participant noting *“My workplace is slow to take up new ideas, but we are getting there”*.

4. Conclusion

This study was an initial foray into the impact of CPD on the professional practice of librarians. With evidence of transfer of knowledge and skills from the workshops into professional practice, the authors plan to continue exploring the longitudinal impact of CPD. Overall, the participants identified specific ways that they applied the knowledge or resources gained from the workshop. While there was some discussion within the surveys about the immediate usefulness of some of the workshops, the majority of participants had used skills gained in the workshops and most agreed that the knowledge and skills gained from the workshops were useful in their jobs. These broad categories were not mutually exclusive but appear to overlap based on individual and organisational factors. It was noteworthy that the workshops had wider applicability beyond the participants’ individual positions and led, in some cases, to service developments, changes to employee roles, and the diffusion of skills within the organisation through additional training sessions.

Reference List:

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