ROLES OF COACHING AND MENTORING IN ATTRACTING RECRUITS AND SOCIALIZING ENTRANTS TO THE PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

As the library and information profession continues to broaden in scope and the workforce expands, competent and prepared professionals are critical to the success of the profession and users' abilities to receive the services that they need. Library and information science education provides a good foundation for lifelong learning as a practitioner by introducing the basic theories, values, and approaches of the profession. Ongoing professional learning is required to build on that foundation in order that professionals can develop the depth of knowledge required over time and the new knowledge and skills required as information and thus the profession changes. Coaching and mentoring new and prospective professionals provides an opportunity for both new and seasoned professionals to develop and refine the necessary skills to be successful in the diverse and rapidly evolving library and information profession.

INTRODUCTION

As the library and information science (LIS) profession develops and changes, ongoing professional learning and pre-professional education must also evolve to meet the developing and changing needs. Currently, students as well as incoming and mid-career professionals need to develop technology, teaching, advanced specialization, and a variety of non-traditional library and information skills both to advance the profession and to grow themselves as individuals.[1]

It would seem that the numbers of people retiring over the next ten years is accelerating so the recruitment of new professionals is particularly important. The issue of recruitment is a large and complex challenge as the profession is not always recognized as a profession per se much less one requiring graduate level education credentials. Moreover, the LIS profession is unique in the United States in that there are no substantial pre-professional programs at the undergraduate level as compared with the pre-law and pre-med programs that are common in colleges and universities. Exemplifying this challenge is the finding "overall students' perceptions of the social status of the library and record professions seem

fairly low."[2] Lack of awareness of the profession and a perception that it is a low status profession hinder recruitment efforts. In their 1995 study of the perception of LIS professionals in both a law firm and a medical library, Fleck and Bawden noted that "the overall impression is that LIS staff are highly thought of by the respondents, but perhaps stereotyped as a particular type of person who, although effective, intelligent and valuable to their organization, is not, for the most part, ambitious, nor obviously pro-active or dynamic, but there to help others with their needs."[3] At the point at which students are considering a profession, perceptions, such as those recorded by Fleck and Bawden, provide little room students to identify with this professional characterization.

Retirement patterns and recruitment challenges provide evidence of the importance of supporting coaching and mentoring in the library and information science profession. In considering the development of the profession, mid-career professionals whose skills and acquired knowledge are beneficial for new professionals and whose leadership potential can be nurtured should also be recognized as a key component in these coaching and mentoring relationships.

WHAT SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ARE NEEDED?

As the profession changes, the abilities, skills, and knowledge needed by library and information professionals are also evolving. Understanding what is needed is the basis for identifying coaching and mentoring relationships that support professional success and achievement. Various professional associations and scholars have provided statements that can serve as useful touchstones for clarifying what skills and knowledge professionals need.

In August of 2008, the American Library Association (ALA) released the final version of the *Core Competences of Librarianship*.[4] The competencies are organized into eight categories:

- Foundations of the Profession
- Information Resources
- Organization of Recorded Knowledge and Information
- Technological Knowledge and Skills
- Reference and User Services, Research
- Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning
- Administration and Management

Similarly, the Special Libraries Association (SLA) has articulated *Competencies for Information Professionals*,[5] the Medical Library Association has its *Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success*,[6] the Association for Library Service to Children as identified the *Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries*,[7] and the Music Library Association has the statement *Core Competencies and Music Librarians*.[8] Sub-groups of the Association of Col-

lege and Research Libraries also have competency statements, for example, *Competencies for Special Collections Professionals*[9] and *Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators*.[10] The Society of American Archivists has both a *Code of Ethics* and *Statement on Strategic Priorities* which, to a certain extent, guide the professional development of its members.

Related are standards for the education of library and information science professionals. Among these are ALA's *Standards for Accreditation of Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies*,[11] IFLA's *Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs*[12] and ALISE's *Information Ethics in Education*.[13]

Though the particular specialities within the library and information profession differ in their specific priorities and desired skills, there are numerous commonalities, which can be usefully considered through the framework of competencies identified in "CI Soft Skill Competencies" by Neil Simon: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social/organizational.[14]

Intrapersonal competencies are those that "relate to a person's ability to recognize one's own unique way of perceiving and comprehending the world."[14] Does the individual have desire to continue to learn? Can they think independently and adhere to a set of ethical values? ALA *Core Competences of Librarianship*[4] addresses this in various competency categories including Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning which states "the necessity of continuing professional development of practitioners in libraries and other information agencies." The Foundations of the Profession category also address this area by stating "the ethics, values, and foundational principles of the library and information profession" as a core knowledge competency.

Interpersonal competencies, in comparison to the reflective approach of intrapersonal skills, "focus on our ability to connect with one another. These include our ability to effectively communicate, understand, and empathize with another's position, and to build relationships."[14] Such skills determine our ability to create an ambience where individuals work together to create "an environment of mutual respect and trust" and where everyone "respects and values diversity" as articulated in the SLA *Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21st Century*. Likewise, the Society of American Archivists states in its *Code of Ethics* that "archivists cooperate, collaborate, and respect each institution and its mission and collecting policy. Respect and cooperation form the basis of all professional relationships with colleagues and users."[15]

Finally, social/organizational competencies relate to the "ability to function and contribute within the social structures of an organization."[14] It is these skills which most determine both the day-to-day harmonies of an organization and its long term successes and are the competencies which are most emphasized across the standards in LIS. These competencies speak directly to the individual's ability to understand and function within the organization, its structure, politics, mission and values. The professional must be able to successfully communicate within these

structures, work in collaboration, adhere to organizational policies and standards and take appropriate risks and responsibilities. It is when the professional collective is able to demonstrate these competencies that an organization can effectively operate. As such, it is appropriate for standards such as ALA's core competencies to include "the techniques used to analyze complex problems and create appropriate solutions; effective communication techniques (verbal and written); concepts, issues, and methods related to the management of various collections; the principles involved in the organization and representation of recorded knowledge and information; the systems of cataloguing, metadata, indexing, and classification standards and methods used to organize recorded knowledge and information; techniques used to retrieve, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources for use by individuals of all ages and groups; the methods used to interact successfully with individuals of all ages and groups to provide consultation, mediation, and guidance in their use of recorded knowledge and information; the fundamentals of quantitative and qualitative research methods; and the principles of planning and budgeting in libraries and other information agencies" to name a few.

The professional competency statements and the framework provide by Simon's grouping of general competencies as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social/organization, are useful for understanding what skills, abilities and knowledge information professionals need to develop and become fluent in. While formal education, formal job training and professional development workshops and conferences provide valuable and relevant opportunities for initial professional training and continued professional growth, the supported structure of a mentoring and/or a coaching relationship can also provide individualized approaches to successfully fulfilling such competencies, particularly as needs change over time and through career pathways.

WHAT ARE COACHING AND MENTORING?

Coaching and mentoring are two types of the larger category of professional training and development. Training and development encompasses a broad range of activities that also includes formal coursework, workshops, tutorials, manuals and documentation, and other kinds of learning experiences and activities.[16] *Coaching* and *mentoring* are often used synonymously with one another. They are similar in that both refer to relationships that are typically one-to-one and individually oriented. The benefactor is often conceived as the person who is being coached or mentored but the one who is coaching or mentoring typically benefits to some degree from the relationship as well. Though there are these similarities, it is useful to make a distinction between these two types of activities as well since there are some meaningful differences.

For the purposes of this discussion, coaching is understood as instructing, directing and/or training an individual in regards to a particular task, project or action to ensure needed knowledge and skills are developed for successful performance. Mentoring, in comparison, is conceived as a continuous and evolving and therefore somewhat ambiguous relationship developed for the purposes of personal and professional growth.

As with many attempts to define related terms, these abstract definitions create a juxtaposition whereas in lived experience coaching and mentoring are more likely experienced as a continuum or an iterative process with different levels of emphasis at different times. Similarly, coaching relationships may evolve into mentoring relationships, though not necessarily, and a mentoring relationship does not require first a coaching one. One may also be, for example, a mentor and mentee in different relationships at the same time.

What matters for this exploration of how coaching and mentoring impact the recruitment, education, and professional advancement of library and information science professionals is not making a harsh distinction but rather understanding these terms as representing concepts useful in exploring and understanding the potential impact of coaching and mentoring in the various developmental stages of becoming and succeeding in the profession.

HOW DO COACHING AND MENTORING CONTRIBUTE TO PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION?

The process of internalizing the culture, values, beliefs, and norms of a profession and thereby becoming part of and identified with the profession is a process of socialization,[17] specifically professional socialization, and is related to work socialization, which encompasses processes and structures related to the workplace.[18] Unfortunately, there is relatively little in the library and information science literature to provide a model of this process for the library and information science profession though there are studies of what libraries do to assist in socialization, though primarily related to new hire orientation and workplace acculturation.[19]

Without a formal model, it is still possible to suggest general components of a socialization process: discovering and gaining awareness of the profession, exploring educational and career possibilities, developing professional identity, and committing to leadership and relationship development within the profession. This conceptual framework can serve as a set of lenses for exploring the roles of coaching and mentoring in the professional socialization process for library and information science. The framework is presented below in a series of tables that organize the examples according to the components of professional socialization that we have identified. Each component is explored through examples of current and past practices experienced or observed by the authors against the background of professional and general communication competencies discussed previously. Table 1

addresses discovering and gaining awareness of the profession, the process by which one investigates the opportunities of the profession, correlates their strengths and interests with professional competencies, and pursues information relating to the education and professional requirements. While this is more often than not the first step one takes to enter the profession, this is also undertaken by a mid-career librarian looking to either expand their professional horizons or take a new direction in their career.

Table 1: Discovering and Gaining Awareness

Sharing Information	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a supervisor to an undergraduate student employee relationship, the supervisor provides constructive feedback to undergraduate student who has just completed a reference interview. Student is not currently directed to the LIS profession, but is being provided with professional LIS practice tips in regards to a particular transaction.	In a school media specialist to high school student(s) relationship, the school media specialist provides information regarding the LIS profession to students who volunteer in the library with or without prompting.
Asking Questions	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a law librarian to lawyer relationship, the lawyer asks questions regarding research skills as they directly relate to the preparation of a particular case.	In a supervisor to an undergraduate student employee relationship, the student repeatedly takes advantage of the opportunity to ask probing questions of the supervisor in regards to the LIS profession. The supervisor answers the questions with encouragement.
Observing Talent and Aptitude	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a supervisor to hourly employee relationship at a digital archive, supervisor acknowledges employee's adherence to and precise implementation of archival standards during a large scale digitization project.	In a director to reference librarian in a public library, the director discusses the natural leadership qualities they possess in regards to future management opportunities.

Table 2 addresses exploring educational and career possibilities and opportunities, the process by which one investigates the educational requirements both for the profession in general (e.g., master's degree in library and information science) and/or the additional competencies required for specific areas of the profession. In this stage of the continuum, prospective and current students and professionals in their mid-career may be found.

Table 2: Exploring Career Options

Sharing Information	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a supervisor to page relationship at a public library, supervisor assists page with library school application. Supervisor discusses opportunities within the profession in order to help the page with focusing their application essay.	In an advisor to student relationship, advisor meets regularly with student, determines student's interests, continually shares and encourages student to take advantage of practical skill opportunities such as practicum and internships that would further develop their professional aspirations.
Write Letters of Reference & Recommendation	
Coach	*Mentor*
In an library school faculty to a student relationship, faculty agrees and/or offers to write letters of reference and/or recommendation for jobs, scholarships, internships, awards, conference proposals, etc.	In a senior faculty librarian to a junior faculty librarian, colleagues use informal times of conversation to discuss successes and failures that can be used in the content for future letters of reference and/or recommendation and encourages and helps develop writing and communication skills with junior librarian to write effective reference and/or recommendation letters for others.
Review Personal Statements & Resumes	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a corporate librarian to intern relationship, librarian offers to review job application, resume and corresponding professional statements.	In a community college librarian to graduate student intern relationship, librarian and graduate student meet on a regular basis to discuss and analyse the practical work in relationship to professional goals. These parallels prove beneficial when writing and reviewing personal statements and resumes.

Facilitate Job Shadowing & Internships	
Coach	*Mentor*
In an LIS faculty member to under-graduate student relationship, faculty calls on professional relationships for job shadowing opportunities for undergraduate student within the larger context of professional exploration.	In a public library director to library school students relationships, providing pre-professional and thought provoking opportunities for students to relate their coursework with practical opportunities.
Provide Informational Interviews	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a city archivist to an interested student or professional relationship, city archivist takes time and provides opportunities for students and other professionals to have productive and formal dialogue regarding the archive profession.	In a public reference library to student relationship, advertising formalized informational interviews, forums for discussion with students. Librarian would also actively participate in network building with library schools and volunteer as a professional resource for local library school students.

Table 3 addresses developing a professional identity, the process by which one attains a sense of oneself as a professional and identifies oneself as a professional to others. This stage of the continuum may be revisited over the course of one's career as specializations change or responsibilities evolve.

Table 3: Developing Identity

Encourage Professional Risk Taking	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a library director to new librarian relationship, the director explains the process for volunteering to chair a committee and offers ongoing advice on creating group agendas, project management, and managing committee member conflicts.	In a professional association leader to new member relationship, regularly discussing association policies, procedures and culture and opportunities for becoming involved in new projects and initiatives.
Demonstrate Faith	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a head of technical services to cataloguing staff member relationship, the head reviews a complex procedure	In a librarian to librarian relationship, where they are colleagues and not in a reporting line, mentor librarian is con-

with the staff member and then makes public that questions about the procedure and those needing assistance should ask the staff member. Head also tells staff member not to refer questions where the answer is unclear but instead meets privately to review issues and then has staff member communicate to others.	scious of recognizing mentee librarian accomplishments, encourages additional risk-taking, and listening to concerns in order to shore up mentee confidence.

Offer to Partner and Collaborate

Coach	*Mentor*
In a librarian to practicum graduate student relationship, librarian suggests proposing a poster session to a national conference about a project the student is working on. When the student expresses anxiety about presenting by himself, the librarian offers to be the second author on the proposal and work with the graduate student on preparing the poster.	In a head of public services to teen services librarian relationship, the head observes the desire to start a teen gaming program and offers to work with the librarian on staffing the events, securing permissions, and articulating the alignment of the gaming program with the library's strategic plan.

Challenge

Coach	*Mentor*
In a library technology manager to new hire relationship, the manager assigns the new hire to investigate unfamiliar technologies and provide a recommendation to the library director but also provides templates for technology evaluations and a draft outline for the recommendation report.	In a library school advisor to advisee relationship, the advisor identifies an area of weakness for the advisee and recommends that the advisee do an independent study with the advisor in order to fill in the gaps for the advisee.

Celebrate Successes

Coach	*Mentor*
In a rare book library head to graduate student intern relationship, the head invites the student to lunch after the launch of a new digital collections website.	In a library unit head to new librarian relationship, the head posts to the institution listserv and ensures the preparation of press releases about an award received by the librarian identifying her as a library leader to watch.

Reflective Conversations	
Coach	*Mentor*
In an academic librarian to undergraduate student workers relationships, the librarian inquires as to the students' passions and interests and as appropriate shares information about librarianship career paths.	In an academic librarian to undergraduate student worker relationship, when the student has identified librarianship as her intended career, the librarian regularly shares how he is approaching professional tasks and responsibilities, the values and ethics involved, and the decisions that are reached.

Table 4 addresses committing to leadership and relationship development in the profession, the process in which one begins to develop a sense of one's self as a professional leader and coach or mentor to others in the profession. The focus is on enhancing one's personal influence and building the community of professional practice. This stage of the continuum is typically the domain of mid to late career professionals.

Table 4: Commitment to Leadership and Development

Stepping Back	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a children's librarian to library director relationship, where the director is showing signs of professional burn-out, the children's librarian asks the director about her career path, accomplishments and purpose.	In a retired senior archivist to almost-retiring senior archivist relationship, a mutual conversation extends over a span of time about the impact of one's career, accomplishments, and disappointments.
Develop Interdependence Relationship	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a rare book librarian to rare book vendor relationship, the librarian and vendor meet annually to share the most interesting items examined in the previous year.	In an academic librarian director to new librarian relationship, weekly meetings reveal shared philosophies of librarianship but generational differences that are probed for deeper understanding of share purpose and mission and how different approaches can be used to work toward the same ends.

Nomination and Invitation for New Roles and Responsibilities	
Coach	*Mentor*
In a head of a professional association to mid-career member who has volunteered for his first association project, the head recognizes the experience of the member in chairing committees in his library and asks him to serve as chair of a new working group. The head also provides documents of best practices and procedures for leading groups in the association.	In a corporate librarian to colleague librarian relationship, the mentor librarian talks with the mentee about areas of skills and knowledge that are not used in her current work assignments and suggests the mentee as lead for a new initiative to their shared supervisor that are a good match for her skills and abilities.

CONCLUSION

The library and information science professions are evolving and professionals are no longer always employed in organizations that are purely defined as information institutions. Rather, library and information sciences professionals are employed in every facet of the workforce and must be prepared with dynamic and effective communication and collaborations skills as well as with information organization and dissemination skills that are transferable across work situations. It is imperative that this preparation is not cavalier but rather done with purpose and rooted in professional competencies and successful practices. Coaching and mentoring relationships are integral components of developing competencies for new and mid-career information professionals and are ideal for professional learning opportunities. It is through these relationships that these shared standards can permeate the ever-expanding profession and workforce.

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