

Development of Research Competencies among Academic Librarians

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ABSTRACT

Academic librarians are often expected to do research, and research is one of the ALA core competencies of librarianship. But most librarians take at most one class in doing research. Therefore, academic librarians may not be prepared for researching and publishing. This dissertation asked the question: How do academic librarians develop competencies necessary for success in their initial efforts to do research? Two subquestions emerged: (SQ1) how do academic librarians experience their early research projects, and (SQ2) what personal attributes and contextual factors help academic librarians succeed in their research?

This study interviewed academic librarians who had succeeded in research. Secondary interviews with peers and supervisors explored librarians' research contexts. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was the theoretical lens for thematic analysis. The analysis used both deductive and inductive passes through the data for methodological triangulation, then aligned the codes to the CHAT framework for structure.

This study built a CHAT-informed view of the researching activities of academic librarian researchers. Many of the constructs are similar to what one might expect in "traditional" research, but are experienced differently in the practitioner environment. Key differences occur in the Subject's mindstate and in the Division of labor of the researcher-librarian.

This study also found that the experience of being a researcher-librarian one of learning while doing, shaped by the library context. The practitioner must make several successive attempts at research and then synthesize the understanding they have created with each attempt into a whole understanding of how research happens. The learning is not complete with a single success in researching, so successive attempts bring in new experiences as the librarian again approaches and works through uncertainty in their researching activities.

TOPICS

research methods; academic librarians; scholarly communications; continuing education