

# **Librarians Leading Learning Online: Creating an online professional development programme for staff**

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## **Abstract**

From e-books to World Book and not forgetting Busy Things, customers expect and enjoy an increasing range of technological and digital services from public libraries. However, simply providing these services on their own is not enough - staff need to be confident in using and helping customers with these new tools. To keep up, ever increasing amounts of professional development is required. One potential solution to keep costs and travel time down is to develop online learning programmes. However, workplace e-learning programmes have often suffered from high dropout rates, whilst set up costs can be high.

Christchurch City Libraries (CCL) has developed its own in-house online Reference Skills programme for new staff using existing staff expertise. By using the free Learning Management System, Moodle, and by creating in-house movies, screencasts, quizzes, lessons and forums, CCL has created an effective, low-cost online programme for professional development. In order to ensure staff engagement and completion of the programme CCL has also developed a support network of facilitators and mentors to provide advice and advocacy for participants on the programme.

The presentation will address the challenges and lessons learned from three areas; setting up and working with an in-house team to create an online programme, the practicalities of selecting and working with low cost technology, and providing effective in-house support for online learning.

## **Introduction**

Christchurch City Libraries (CCL) is a public library network consisting of over twenty facilities at different locations delivering library services to the city of Christchurch, New Zealand. It has a staff of approximately 360 employees in a variety of different roles.

Staff professional development has traditionally been provided internally through face-to-face training for staff in a range of topics. However, prior to the 2010/2011 Canterbury Earthquakes it was becoming increasingly apparent that new approaches needed to be explored. The need to develop new approaches to training was driven by a number of factors including:

- Increasing numbers of new IT and digital resources being made available to customers.
- The New Zealand strategic framework requirement for public libraries to be supporting lifelong learning in the community and ensuring that staff have the skills and knowledge to guide digital literacy.

- The implementation of RFID and the change to a Roving model of service delivery which focuses on more on customer service than issuing stock.
- An increase in public programming and events taking place at CCL
- The need for public libraries to remain relevant to the New Zealand public or become subject to budget cuts and closures (as in the US and UK) (e.g. Martelle, 2010 and Page, 2010).

All of the above had resulted in a need for large amounts of professional development, to be undertaken in a short space of time with less time and resources available for staff to travel and attend face-to-face training. Online/blended learning appeared to be a solution that would enable many staff at once to undertake professional development at any time, without travelling to a central location and be able to utilise brief (< 1 hour) off desk time.

## **Change – the new normal**

The Canterbury earthquakes of 2010/2011 put these concerns into insignificance. The loss of life and destruction of many buildings was immediate and devastating. In terms of the library business, the earthquakes created a huge loss of resources, facilities and infrastructure. The city centre of Christchurch was closed to the public for over two years and the central Christchurch City Library was closed permanently. Many community libraries were also closed taking several months to reopen and temporary libraries have been set up. Currently the centre of Christchurch has two temporary central libraries and two temporary libraries are in the suburbs of Linwood and Bishopdale. Mobile library services have been increased and open libraries are busier with some offering extended opening times.

In terms of professional development, the loss of training venues and added difficulties in travelling around the city has given further imperative to put in place a learning initiative that can be undertaken in the learner's own workplace. To explore this further a pilot online learning programme was developed in 2012 with circumstances dictating that only a limited budget and limited technical resources could be provided. The programme was developed in-house with internal "trainers" – qualified staff who had previously had a face-to-face training role. Moodle (Moodle, 2011), a free, open source Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) was used to host the programme.

## **Creating the Pilot – Doing things differently**

Traditionally, for new staff a 5 X 3 hour programme was delivered in the first 3-6 month of appointment with modules as below:

- CCL Library Website
- Web Searching skills
- Dewey and MARC records
- Reference interview
- Premium websites/databases

The earthquakes had caused disruption to the usual delivery of reference skills training with none being delivered for over a year and the Moodle environment offered the opportunity to create something new and also something different. The “Roving” model of service delivery requires library staff to approach customers, rather than waiting for them to approach the desk – it focuses on customer service rather than issuing books, on answering queries rather than just providing resources. Thus, this became the starting point for the new reference skills programme, with the focus changing from learning about the resources we can provide to learning about the queries we can answer. (Cruickshank, 2012 and Cruickshank, 2013)

The new programme was developed with the following structure – with face-to-face sessions at the beginning and the end, with the remainder being online modules:

- Introduction - face-to-face session – 3 hours
- Getting started with Reference Skills - online module completed during face-to-face session
- Information Navigator –online module – 2 hours
- Homework Helper –online module – 2 hours
- Local Legend –online module – 2 hours
- Reader’s Advisor –online module – 2 hours
- History Guide –online module – 2 hours
- Final Fling - –online module – 2 hours
- Wrap up – face-to-face session – 3 hours

Instead of lectures and readings the Moodle environment used videos, quizzes and lessons. The majority of the videos used a combination of filming “real-life” scenarios using actors and screencasted video demonstrating solving the problem using the catalogue and other online resources. The two videos were then edited together to make a single movie - switching between customer and screen views as required.

## **Creating the Pilot – Lessons Learned**

The 2012 pilot programme took place over a six week period with two face-to-face sessions at the beginning and end of the programme and the expectation of 2 hours per week online learning. One concern around offering online learning was the high dropout rate often associated with workplace e-learning (e.g. Frankola, 2001) and special consideration was given to this element when analysing the feedback. Findings from the pilot programme included:

- Online course development requires a different skill set than face-to-face training.
- Focusing on the workplace task rather than the resource provided good transference of skills to the workplace.
- Participants enjoyed having a variety of different online programme elements including videos, quizzes and lessons particularly when they featured local examples.
- Finding enough time and being able to negotiate enough time to do the programme was a major concern.

## **Developing the Programme – Librarians Leading Learning**

The pilot programme had demonstrated that different skills were needed to develop an online programme than to deliver it. Thus, instead of expecting trainers to both develop the programme and deliver it – two roles were created; Online Course Developer to develop the programme and Face-to-Face Facilitator to deliver the programme. Both Developers and Facilitators were selected through an Expression of Interest process where staff from across the library network applied to become involved in the project. Requirements for Course Developers were strong reference interview skills, sound knowledge of CCL resources, being comfortable working in an online environment; with teaching or training experience an advantage. The expectation was that Course Developers would typically be in qualified roles and that 3-4 developers would dedicate 8 hours a week to the project over an 8 week period. This would enable developers to work together intensively in a series of “Working Bees” to collaborate and build on knowledge. In practice a number of experienced but non-qualified and part-time staff applied for the role which resulted in a total of seven developers being selected each able to give varying amounts of time to the project. This enabled a wider range of staff to have input into the development of the programme.

Filming workplace scenarios to use as examples in the programme took place over the Easter weekend – with hired filming equipment and staff (and their families volunteering) to be movie stars and take on the roles of customer and librarian. The scenarios were sketched out but not scripted allowing for more “natural” conversations. Thus a wide range of staff appeared in training videos.

### **What is the name of this course?**

To ensure that the programme was seen as “belonging” to library staff a competition was run to choose the name of the programme with a spot prize. Suggestions were made by the Developers group and others and then an online SurveyMonkey form was used to ask staff to vote on their favourite. Staff could also add other suggestions and these were added to the possible choices. Over a third of library staff voted including team leaders and managers. Although the working title had been “from Aardvarks to Zulus” The final selection as chosen by library staff was **Online Reference Skills Modules (ORSM)**. From this idea an ORSM superhero logo was created using free public domain vector clipart (Clker, 2013).

## **Working with low cost technology –opportunities and challenges**

A number of technical changes took place between the pilot programme and the roll out of the new programme in 2013. The version of Moodle was updated and the host was changed from being an external “cloud server” to an internal Library server. This had a dual effect – the learning environment was much faster and easier to work with, however the learning environment was now only accessible from within the library walls using library PCs. A new technical support person was employed to provide ongoing technical expertise. Despite these technical improvements the budget for actually developing the programme was limited. Camtasia a reasonably affordable screencasting and video editing software had been purchased and installed on a limited number of PCs. The software not only allowed recording of the action on the screen but also enabled zooming into a particular area of the

screen and highlighting different areas. Access to the PCs was limited, but some MacBook Pros purchased for public programmes were available at certain times and enabled iMovie and Quicktime Player to also be used for screen casting and video editing. Youtube was used to stream the video and use was also made of Prezi to create presentations and GoogleDrive to host surveys. We also experimented with a demo version of interactive software, Articulate to create some on screen interactive tasks. As well as creating video and presentations that could be viewed, learners were also required to try things out for themselves. Again using scenarios as a basis – we created multiple choice quizzes and longer lessons using the features in Moodle. The group of developers made a number of changes to the content and objectives of the pilot modules with the new overall programme having 8 online modules and two face-to-face sessions.

- Introduction - face-to-face session – 3 hours
- Getting started with Reference Skills - module completed during face-to-face session
- Information Navigator –online module – 2 hours
- The Dog ate My Homework –online module – 2 hours
- Local Legend –online module – 2 hours
- Let's Read –online module – 2 hours
- The Sound of Music – 2 hours
- Finding Our Past –online module – 2 hours
- Final Fling –online module –module completed during face-to-face session
- Wrap up – face-to-face session – 3 hours

The programme was thus devised to offer variety in terms of both content and delivery method, focusing on local examples and “real life” scenarios that would offer good transference of skills to the workplace.

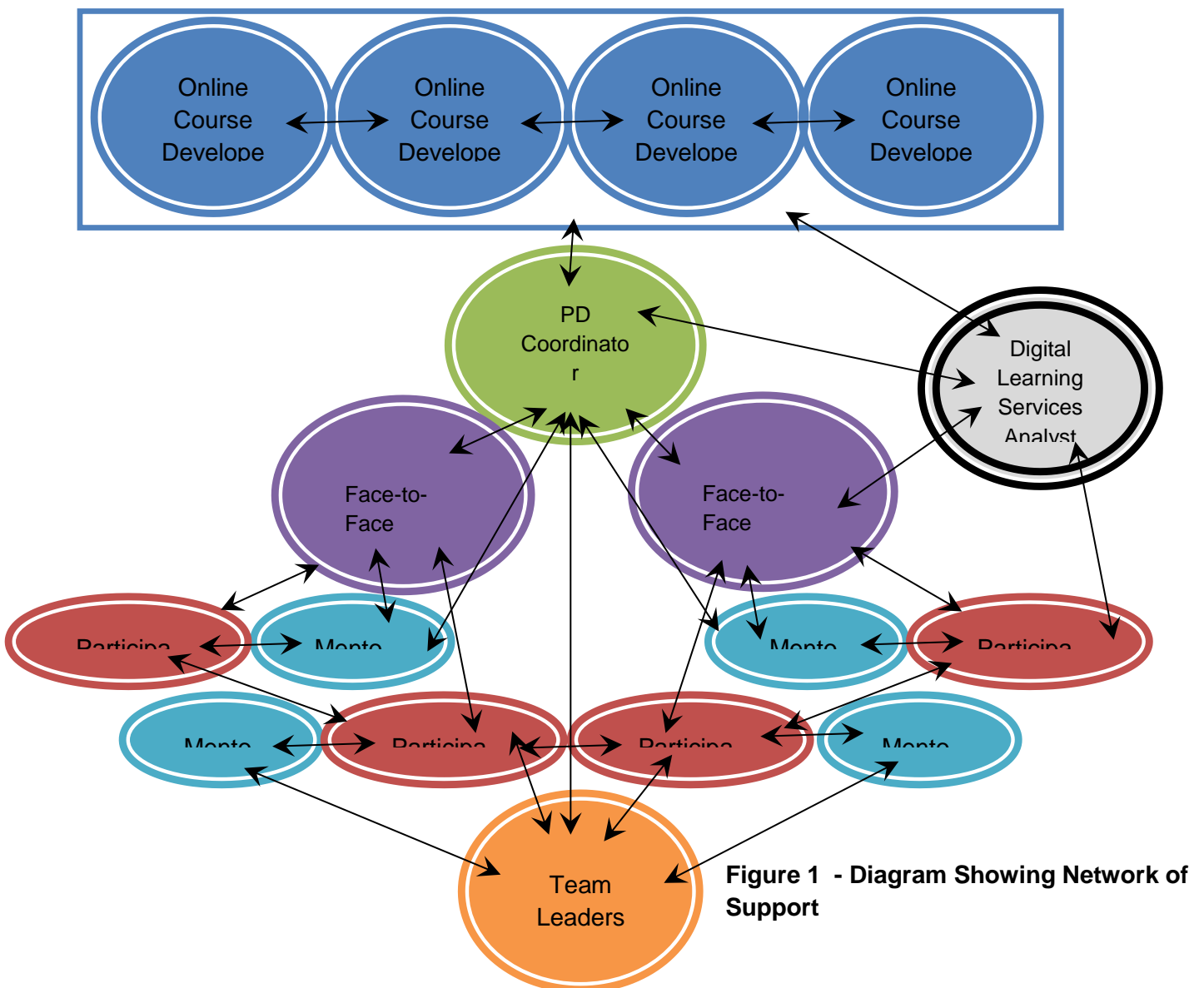
More attention was also given to the face-to-face modules to ensure that they were engaging, supportive and fun, to develop collegiality within the group. Developing collegiality also encouraged more use of the programme forum. Examples of activities included items entitled the Food Game, The Source Race and Storyboarding. Photos of participants were also published in the weekly libraries’ newsletter.

## **Setting up the support network of Mentors and Facilitators**

Course Facilitators were selected through an expression of interest process. They were required to have strong reference interview skills, a sound knowledge of CCL resources and teaching or training experience; with being comfortable working in the online environment an advantage. The expectation was for course facilitators to work in pairs and deliver 2-3 rounds of the programme per year. A total of 6 course facilitators were chosen in total – all with a qualified role within the organisation.

For the participants themselves it is important to ensure that Team Leaders and teams are able to support staff members going through the programme. Each participant is assigned a Mentor to further assist this. The mentor is usually a library qualified staff member working in the same library as the participant. Their role is dual fold – to provide support for the course

content if needed and also to ensure the participant finds enough time and resources to complete the modules. The Mentor can also act as an advocate for the participant, discussing any issues with the Team Leader/ Time Tabler if necessary. Participants meet with their mentor before the programme starts, during the programme (ideally weekly) and 4-6 weeks after the programme has completed to discuss their progress. During the programme participants can contact the facilitators, the PD coordinator and the Digital Learning Services Analyst directly if they have questions about the course content, access or technical issues. Participants are contacted weekly by the course facilitators and the facilitators also contact the mentors directly to check that they are happy with their mentee's progress. Using the Moodle reporting system participants can be tracked to discover if they have completed the assignments and also the amount of time they have spent logged into the system can be monitored. A diagrammatic view of this network can be seen below (fig 1) Although this may seem like a substantial network – it uses existing workplace relationships between mentors and participants and provides important support to the participant. It also requires only a little extra time on the part of the mentors beyond their usual role in supporting junior staff. The network also has the benefit of making the programme more visible and has encouraged use of some of the programme materials beyond the programme – enabling other non-participating staff to also upskill.



**Figure 1 - Diagram Showing Network of Support**

## Results from the first round of programme participants

The expectation was that participants would spend approximately 16 hours online in total including the online time spent in the classroom and done independently. From analysing the electronic record the total amount of online time ranged from (13 hours 22mins to 25 hours 45mins) with an average of 16hours 50mins.

Evaluation of the programme revealed an overall increase in confidence by participants in a number of different areas:

### Comparing Pre-Course and Post-Course Confidence Levels



**Figure 2 - Chart showing pre-course and post-course confidence levels with customers' queries in general**



**Figure 3 - Chart showing pre-course and post-course confidence levels with using Bibliocommons to answer customers' queries**



**Figure 4 - Chart showing pre-course and post-course confidence levels with using the Library Website to answer customers' queries**



**Figure 5 - Chart showing pre-course and post-course confidence levels with using The Source to answer customers' queries**



**Figure 6 - Chart showing pre-course and post-course confidence levels with using The Internet to answer customers' queries**



## Transference of skills to the workplace

Participants were also able to describe ways in which they had used their new found skills in the workplace:

*I don't normally use Newspapers and Current Affairs tab and only found about it earlier this year. So, when I came across it again during the training I learned a thing or two. And luckily I remember it because yesterday a student came up to me looking for a newspaper article on The Press from 2005. I used the skill and knowledge that I learnt on the course to look for it and even gave him an option of either printing it or emailing it (I remember that one because it's one of our tasks). He was really excited that it could be emailed to him and he got the full text, as well :). So, yeah one happy customer there and one proud library assistant here. **Course Participant***

*A customer came in and asked where she could find a book on a particular topic. I asked if she could give me a bit more info and was able to narrow down the topic and found that we did have a couple of relevant books (which she wanted). I asked if there was anything else she needed help with and she mentioned another area she was interested in and we were also able to find relevant books. I also noted that some of the items were available as e-books which she was interested in as she had an e-book reader so I was able to explain Overdrive (she didn't have time to set it up then) and explained how she could call FTL if she wanted to try it at home. While it was a relatively simple reference enquiry - it was successful and gave me an opportunity to talk to the customer who had only moved down recently and explain a lot of services that the library could offer her. I think the course definitely gave me the confidence and knowledge to help this customer. **Course Participant***

This demonstrated the value of focusing on workplace tasks rather than resources to improve skill transference.

## Conclusions and Reflections

Feedback from the first round of the programme demonstrated success for the participants in terms of confidence around reference skills and being able to transfer them to the workplace. The support network provided participants with sufficient encouragement to continue with the course to completion and participants appeared to have sufficient time to work online. Time, however, and lack of access to the programme from outside the library were still the most significant barriers to engaging with the programme. It is hoped that a solution to this latter issue will be found in the near future.

By involving the whole library through expressions of interest, filming, the name that course competition and regular updates in the staff newsletter, the ORSM course is visible to the library network and there is a waiting list of people for the next intakes.

Working with the development group presented a number of issues – because many of the staff were part time the expected face-to-face working bees did not take place and concentrated time together did not take place. This problem was further exacerbated by sickness of both developers and the Professional Development Coordinator leading to little contact between the group during the development phase and a protracted development time. This lack of collaboration resulted in some content areas being duplicated, and some development work going off track and having to be altered or remade. Despite collaboration tools such as using a wiki, face-to-face time proved essential during the development stage and this was the time when most problems were solved. Organisations considering developing online programmes should ensure that developers can work together face-to-face and for selecting future developers at CCL this consideration will be a major priority.

In addition to pedagogical improvements to the programme, continuing changes to the library's website and databases means that updates to the content of the programme need also to be continuous. This requires a considerable ongoing commitment to development time, however, staff now have the knowledge and experience to work more effectively and the programme has also provided a template for future online learning.

The programme would not have been possible without the staff of CCL enthusiastically embracing the change – giving up their time to be movie stars, putting forward suggestions and ideas and supporting and engaging with the programme. Thus ongoing internal marketing of the programme is vital to gain continued support.

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