

Reflective Peer Mentoring: Evolution of a Professional Development Program for Academic Librarians

Janet L. Goosney
Information Literacy Coordinator
Queen Elizabeth II Library
Memorial University Libraries
jgoosney@mun.ca

Becky Smith
Music Librarian
Music Resource Centre
Memorial University Libraries
becky.smith@mun.ca

Shannon Gordon
Liaison Librarian (Pharmacy)
Davis Centre Library & School of Pharmacy
University of Waterloo
shannon.gordon@uwaterloo.ca

Abstract

For librarians engaged in teaching and learning, reflection has the potential to create opportunities to examine one's instructional practice, identify and address challenges, and find new instructional pathways. It can also lead to a deeper understanding of one's teaching. As valuable as it is, it can be challenging for librarians to find time to deeply contemplate instruction experiences. In the fast-paced environment of academic libraries, reflection is too often passed over as we rush from one teaching experience to the next. Recognizing the value of reflective practice, a team of academic librarians at Memorial University created a peer mentoring program for librarians involved in information literacy and other forms of teaching. The goal was to create an inviting and collaborative environment for exploring and developing instructional self-awareness by working with librarian colleagues. The resulting Reflective Peer Mentoring (RPM) program requires minimal librarian time yet offers satisfying opportunities for brainstorming, problem solving, and reflection by bringing colleagues together into small co-mentored learning communities.

This paper explores the successful evolution of this peer-based, collegial approach to reflection. It describes the inspiration and experimentation that led to the eventual creation of the RPM model, including Reflective Teaching & Observation (RTO), an earlier program founded on peer observation and collaborative exploration. It also describes the foundational principles that form the basis for the RPM program as well as

the three-step framework on which it is structured. Finally, the article examines the information gathered and lessons learned from assessment of the program during the first year of implementation.

Keywords

academic libraries; information literacy; peer mentoring; professional development; reflection; reflective practice

Introduction

Reflection is defined by Reynolds as the process of “thinking about past or ongoing experience of events, situations or actions so as to make sense of them, potentially with a view to informing future choices, decisions or actions” (5). For librarians engaged in teaching and learning, reflection creates the opportunity and time to closely examine one’s instructional practice. As Raelin points out, “reflective practice tends to probe to a deeper level than trial-and-error experience. It typically is concerned with forms of learning that seek to inquire about the most fundamental assumptions and premises behind our practices” (66). Reflective practice has the potential to lead to a deeper understanding of our own teaching; it can help identify and address challenges and also find new and innovative instructional pathways for librarians engaged in teaching and learning. Yet, as valuable as it is, reflection is too often passed over as we rush from one teaching experience to the next in the fast-paced environment of academic libraries. These time constraints are certainly not limited to librarianship; practitioners in a variety of disciplines and professions have identified the negative impact that time constraints can have on reflective practice (Otienoh 477, 479, 483, 486; Raelin 66; Roche and Coote 1064, 1067-1068; Webster-Wright 556-558).

At Memorial University in St. John’s Newfoundland, the Reflective Peer Mentoring (RPM) program was developed as a time-efficient strategy for helping librarians reflect on their instructional practice. The RPM program requires minimal time yet offers satisfying opportunities for brainstorming, problem solving, and reflection by bringing colleagues together for small-group discussion. Collaboration is a key element of RPM; by exploring experiences and challenges in a group setting and seeking input from peers, individuals have even greater opportunities to become “unstuck” from a problem or find new directions. As Raelin notes, collaborative reflection can “bring to the surface – in the safe presence of our peers – the social, political, and emotional data that arise from direct experience with one another” (5). Reynolds adds that through reflection “we draw on existing ideas – our own or other people’s – and in applying them to our experience, may confirm these ideas or develop new ones” (5). This article introduces the RPM program and describes its history and founding principles. It describes the experiences that led to the development of this peer-based approach to reflection and examines discoveries made and lessons learned about the program since its launch in fall of 2012. Further directions and other applications are briefly explored.

Background

While the RPM program was launched to colleagues in fall of 2012, the concept was born in 2007. At that time, two instruction librarians identified the need to actively reflect on library instruction experiences at their academic library. In their environment, library instruction commonly took place in a variety of subject areas, including English literature, business administration, education, history, political science, biology, and biochemistry. These colleagues observed that academic librarians often go through the experience of preparing a workshop and delivering content and then proceed to the next project without reflecting on the actual instruction experience. Concerned about this gap in the teaching process, the instruction librarians found inspiration in Dale Vidmar's work which explored the concept of reflective peer coaching. In particular, these observations by Vidmar stood out: "Reflective peer coaching is a process geared toward improving teaching in the classroom through a formative practice of self-inquiry and critical reflection", and this process "differs from the casual conversation that occurs between colleagues in that it is a planned activity between peers" (136, 142).

Vidmar's concept of reflective peer coaching is useful as a method for developing self-awareness as an instructor and as a way to gain insight from colleagues doing similar work. The Reflective Teaching & Observation (RTO) program was created as a proactive response to these concerns with two aims: to provide an opportunity for voluntary peer observation of library instruction classes and to offer an environment for exploring and developing self-awareness of information literacy instruction by working collaboratively with librarian colleagues. RTO was also designed to facilitate high quality teaching and to provide the opportunity for librarians to strengthen their instructional practice through observation, supportive dialogue, and reflection. Through the RTO program, the librarians aimed to create an environment in which "instructors are both teachers and learners—simultaneously engaging in a very personal activity to enable them to construct and reconstruct knowledge and meaning while teaching" (Vidmar 138).

The earlier RTO program involved a two-step process. First, librarians working in teams of two colleagues would each attend a library instruction session taught by the other and would use the *Reflective Observation Worksheet* to record thoughts and observations (See Appendix A). This worksheet provided the observer with questions to consider during the instruction session and explored these pedagogically themed categories¹:

1. Lesson design
2. Content delivery
3. Practicing

¹Categories 3-6 were inspired by Kolb's four-stage experiential learning cycle which involves the following modes: concrete experience ("practicing"), reflective observation ("reflection"), abstract conceptualization ("conceptualization") and active experimentation ("application") (40-42).

4. Application
5. Reflection
6. Conceptualization
7. Engagement

The *Reflective Observation Worksheet* included six questions, such as:

- Are the session's learning objectives made clear?
- What opportunity is given to students to practice what they are being taught?
- To what level are students engaged in their learning?

Second, the same two colleagues met to reflect on the teaching experience following the instruction session. The logic was that "as instructors reflect upon their experience in the classroom with a colleague, they discover important information about the intended results in comparison with the actual lesson" (Vidmar 136). This reflective conversation would ideally take place in a relaxed and informal setting outside their work environment, such as over coffee, during lunch, etc. The colleagues would then use the *Post-Lesson Reflective Conversation Questions* to direct conversation (See Appendix B), including questions such as:

- How do you think the session went?
- What were you most satisfied with? What were you least satisfied with?
- Did the students achieve the learning outcomes that you set for them? How did you know?
- As you plan for future sessions, what parts of the lesson would you retain? What would you change?

These questions were designed to help the instructor reflect on his or her own teaching, with a colleague who had been there in-person and could relate to the experience. As Vidmar acknowledges, "[r]eflection is fundamental to assessment, decision-making, and a deeper understanding of the teaching practice" (138), and it is through active self-reflection that one's teaching practices can successfully evolve. To ensure the efficacy of the RTO instruments, the coordinators sought on-campus expertise from the then-director of Memorial University's Instructional Development Office. A strong library advocate and collaborator as well as an expert in teaching and learning support, her expertise ensured that appropriate questions were asked to address areas of pedagogical interest. Both worksheets were developed to direct observation and reflection, and results were not collected or monitored by the program creators.

When the RTO program was launched to colleagues in fall of 2009, it was received with interest and enthusiasm. Yet despite several attempts to encourage colleagues to adopt the model in practice, uptake was almost non-existent. While the RTO program was in theory a good idea, reality indicated that a redesign of the concept was necessary. Several challenges were identified as having likely contributed to the program's lack of success, including:

- A significant time commitment, particularly during the busy teaching season.
- Unease, conscious or unconscious, with the observational focus and/or the traditional and hierarchical feel of the program.
- Promotion of the initiative to only one division at Memorial University Libraries – a group that worked closely together and already used less formal strategies for talking about instruction.

Although RTO was not intended to be evaluative or based on peer review, it did add unintended pressure during a very busy time of the semester. As Peter Tarrant observes, even though the observation-based model “has many benefits...it also puts a good deal of pressure on the participants, and a lot of significance on a one-off situation where the lesson and feedback take place” (12).

While these challenges did exist, several benefits also emerged. For example, participation was entirely voluntary, which meant that participants had the freedom to dedicate as much or as little time as they liked to the experience. It was also discovered that while the model was not an effective tool for day-to-day reflective practice, it worked well in more traditional mentoring situations: the RTO model is now in use as a tool for training and mentoring new librarians, to prepare them for library instruction at Memorial. Finally, although the RTO program did not result in what the creators initially hoped, it did provide a strong foundational framework for helping librarians reflect on and develop their teaching practice. This, along with constructive feedback from participants and self-reflection by the program creators, eventually led to a successful and more practical program model.

Reflective Peer Mentoring

Following the RTO experience, the question that emerged was “how do we address the main program principles, reflection and peer-coaching, in a way that will work for librarians at Memorial University Libraries?” A new direction was not immediately evident, and the project was placed on hold for some time. Then, in 2012, the project was refocused following a presentation given by Timothy Fletcher based on a paper he had developed with two colleagues (Fletcher, Bullock and Kosnik). Their work describes a group of three teacher-educators with varying degrees of experience who had come together in a collaborative mentoring process to which each participant contributed equally as both mentor and learner. This model was inspirational because it addressed the fundamental reflection and co-mentoring principles of RTO while removing the observational element that was believed to be an obstacle to the success of the program. This discovery was significant.

With this new idea to draw on, the RTO creators revisited the model and redeveloped it into a new program which was re-titled Reflective Peer Mentoring (RPM). What emerged was a community-driven, mutually-supportive program that provides librarians engaged in teaching and learning with the infrastructure to explore instructional self-awareness through collaboration with colleagues.

The primary goals of RPM, as with the original RTO concept, are to create opportunities for reflective practice and promote collaboration and idea-sharing in order to facilitate professional growth and to strengthen the instructional practice of individual participants. The most significant difference is that unlike the original RTO idea, RPM does not include an observational element; with RPM, co-mentors are welcome to attend each other's classes through mutual agreement, but they are in no way required to do so. Instead, the goals of reflection and co-mentoring are achieved through supportive, reflective conversations within small, three- or four-person learning communities. This new element is what makes RPM particularly unique. Also, by removing the scheduling commitment associated with class observation, participants are free to arrange RPM activities whenever it is convenient to do so. This change reduced the time pressures that interfered with adoption of the original RTO idea.

Structure and Participation

The Reflective Peer Mentoring program is participant-driven, with members deciding when and how meetings are to take place. There is, however, a basic three-step framework on which the program is structured (see Figure 1). The first step is for each participant to join a small learning community (LC). The second step is for each learning community to decide when and where they will meet. Although the groups are largely autonomous, it is recommended that each LC meet at least twice in an academic term. While some LCs do meet more often, the majority find that two meetings are the most they can manage without the process becoming too great a burden on their time. A set of *Reflective Conversation Questions* (see Appendix C) was created and shared with all LC members in order to facilitate discussion. However, use of the questions is optional, and many LCs opt to base their discussion instead on whatever instructional topics are of greatest interest or concern at that time. Finally, the third step is for LCs to share experiences with the broader RPM community and provide feedback to program coordinators through large-group meetings and other communication channels, such as online surveys.

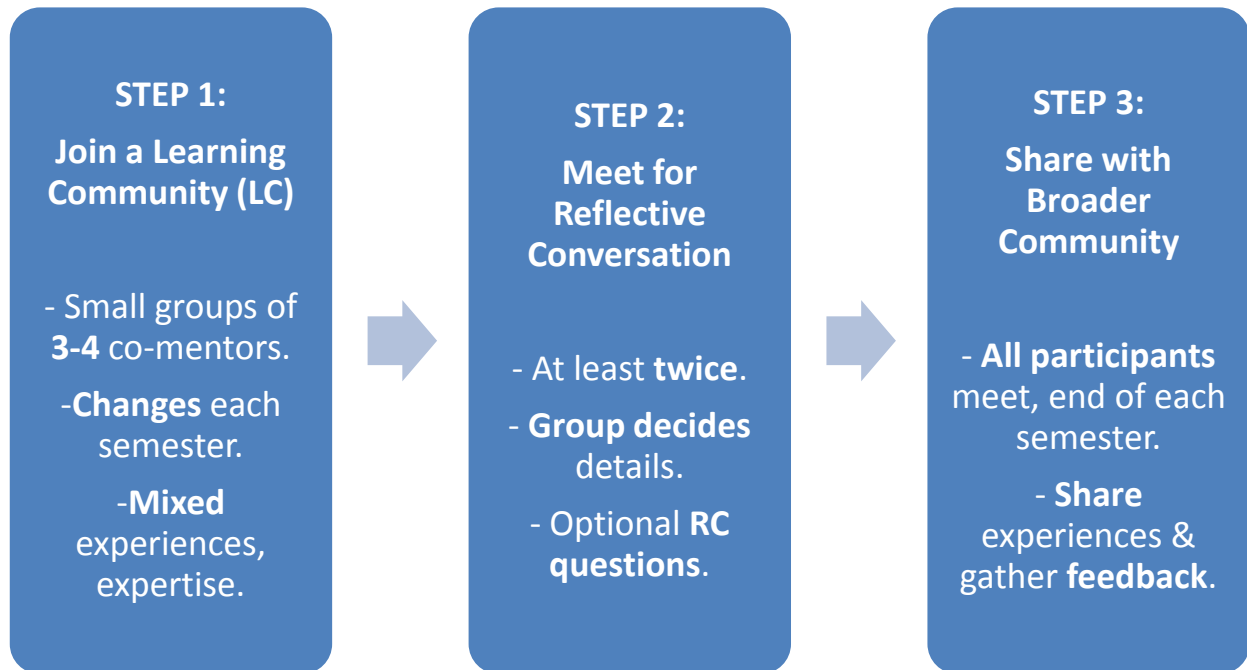


Figure 1: The Reflective Peer Mentoring process

Learning Communities

The goal of a learning community, as described by the Encyclopedia of Education, is to “advance the collective knowledge and, in that way, to support the growth of individual knowledge” by promoting “a culture of learning in which everyone is involved in a collective effort of understanding” (Bielaczyc 1162). In the RPM program, participants are organized into small LCs consisting of three to four co-mentors, each co-mentor being a librarian engaged in teaching. The coordinators place the members in LCs using the principle of instructional diversity as the main criterion for group formation. With this principle in mind, each LC brings together librarians with different teaching and subject backgrounds as well as varying levels of experience. Librarians who work closely together on instructional matters on a day-to-day basis are rarely placed together in the same learning community.

More than just a principle for group formation, instructional diversity is a foundational element of the RPM program. Unlike the original Reflective Teaching and Observation model, which was limited to librarians who already worked closely together in a single division, RPM is open to all librarians involved in teaching and learning at Memorial University. This group of librarians is involved in a wide range of instructional modalities, including “one-shot” library instruction, curriculum-integrated information literacy, web-based instruction, and subject-based credit-course instruction.² Participants also bring a diverse range of subject knowledge as well as varied levels of experience, from those who are very new to teaching to those with a long history and/or considerable

² In fact, one participant’s primary teaching experiences were not within the library at all, but in her other career as a dance instructor!

pedagogical expertise. In a learning community, “diversity of expertise among its members, who are valued for their contributions” (Bielaczyc and Collins 272) creates opportunities for participants to experience new perspectives and to look at instructional practices and challenges through new and different lenses.

Peer Mentoring and Co-Mentoring

Another important aspect of RPM is that it follows an unconventional model of mentorship. Traditional mentoring focuses heavily on the idea of hierarchy: a teacher/student-type relationship in which a more senior or more experienced individual guides and supports a more junior or less experienced individual (Bona, Rienhart and Volbrecht 118). While learning is a primary focus of both types of mentoring, learning in traditional mentoring situations typically flows one way, with the mentor imparting wisdom or knowledge to the mentee. Peer mentoring, the mentoring modality practiced in RPM, can indeed follow a traditional structure. For example, in situations where a new librarian enters the workplace and is mentored by a more experienced colleague, peer mentorship has occurred, yet that experience follows a conventional process whereby learning primarily travels in one direction: from the more to the less experienced individual.

Co-mentoring, or collaborative mentoring, is a form of peer mentoring that is based on reciprocity rather than on hierarchy (Mullen 4-5). Co-mentoring is not based on a traditional teacher/student model but rather on the principle of equal, mutually beneficial relationships in which each member of an LC functions as both mentor and mentee: bringing knowledge, questions, and ideas to the group and benefiting equally from discussion, reflection, and exploration. With RPM, all members are equally engaged as co-mentors within their LCs; each co-mentor adopts a dual role, functioning as both guide and learner. Bona, Rinehart and Volbrecht make the observation that traditional mentoring is a “two person relationship” in which there is “a presumption of hierarchy” (118). One of the ways that RPM has moved away from the original RTO model is by changing the structure of the LC from teams of two individuals to small groups of three or four co-mentors. This change was made to reduce the possibility that members would unintentionally fall into traditional mentor/mentee roles, particularly in situations where seniority and experience varied greatly between co-mentors.

Avoidance of hierarchy is essential to RPM. In a traditional model, the mentor may find that they have little time to learn from the relationship or reflect on their own teaching – for that person, reflection would have to be a follow-up process. For the mentee, an “imbalance of power” between learner and teacher may actually limit reflection, as s/he may experience “little sense of autonomy or freedom to experiment and develop. Indeed, it may inhibit reflection if the reflector feels that honest reflection might be judged to be inadequate for a successful outcome to the interaction” (Tarrant 12). Alternatively, co-mentoring “assumes that everyone has something to teach and something to learn” (Bona, Rinehart and Volbrecht 119).

Voluntary Participation

To establish a co-mentoring culture in which participants are fully engaged in a shared process, the coordinators viewed it as essential for all individuals to willingly choose to participate; mandatory participation was perceived as having the potential to undermine collaboration. It is for this reason that participation in the Reflective Peer Mentoring program is voluntary; no librarian, no matter how immersed in teaching as part of their day-to-day role, is required to participate.

In addition to promoting openness and collegiality, the program's voluntary aspect is also flexible. For example, if participants feel the need to withdraw from RPM due to competing demands (or for any other reason), they can step down and re-join at any time. On-going participation is not a requirement.

Typically there have been between thirteen and sixteen voluntary RPM participants each term, divided into four learning communities. Although some participants have maintained continuous involvement since the program commenced, others have opted to participate only during selected semesters. Although not originally envisioned as a summer program, two learning communities were formed in the summer of 2013 at the request of participants, with four co-mentors in each LC.

Reflective Conversation Questions

A set of *Reflective Conversation Questions* (RCQs) was developed to provide the learning communities with meaningful topics to guide and focus their discussion. Adapted from the original RTO *Post-Lesson Reflective Conversation Questions*, the questions are divided into two categories: "Teaching Methods" and "Theory into Practice" (see Appendix C). It should also be noted that this set of questions is not static but rather a living document that has already been revised several times based on participant feedback and changing perspectives.

While the RCQs were designed to give structure to the learning community meetings by providing a basis for discussion, they are not a requirement of RPM, and many groups reported limited use. Upon reflection, it may have been naïve of the coordinators to believe that members would need guidelines in order to talk about their teaching; in practice, participants had no difficulty moving their conversations forward and tended to have ideas ready to share, questions to ask, and challenges and issues to discuss. Nevertheless, participants did indicate that they saw the questions as a valuable component of the program.

Program Evaluation

Methodology

Due to the participant-driven design of Reflective Peer Mentoring, program evaluation was designed to gather as much participant feedback as possible. To achieve this, the

program coordinators developed a nine-question online survey to gather thoughts and insights from program participants (Appendix D). The survey was formatted to collect standardized responses and free-form comments. Upon analyzing the results, the coordinators observed that some of the feedback led to more questions rather than to firm answers and decided that follow-up focus groups would be appropriate to obtain more detailed information. At the end of the fall and winter semesters, participants had the opportunity to give anonymous feedback through the survey and/or by attending one of two focus groups. The survey and focus groups gave participants two opportunities to contribute and emphasized the peer nature of the program, helping to ensure that it was the participants, not just the coordinators, who shaped RPM.

Prior to initiating the RPM program in 2012, the coordinators applied to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University for ethics review of the proposed program, evaluation of the program, and dissemination of findings. The ICEHR classified the project as "quality assurance and quality improvement" as defined in article 2.5 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes 20) and, as such, deemed it unnecessary for ethics review. Nevertheless, the coordinators distributed statements with the survey (see Appendix D) and by email to ensure that contributors understood that survey and focus group participation was optional and that non-identifying results would be disseminated.

Survey and focus group response rates were high, with the surveys showing a 67% and 72% response rate after the first and second semesters, respectively. Focus group attendance was similarly high, with 67% and 85% attendance during the first and second semesters. Attendance was also aided by efforts to find meeting times where all who wished to give feedback could attend. Though it cannot be confirmed, the coordinators hoped that colleagues unable to complete the survey would be able to take part in the focus groups, and vice versa. It is possible that some participants did not provide feedback through any of the opportunities offered.

Results

Collegiality and Diversity

Analysis of data from the first survey revealed a high level of overall participant satisfaction with the RPM program. A number of aspects of the program were especially well-received by the participants, with the core benefit identified as collegial conversation. Other well-received aspects were the opportunities it created for collegial interaction and collaboration, and the diversity of the learning communities. In fact, those two elements were very much interconnected, as the LCs created possibilities for interaction between colleagues who may not otherwise have had regular occasion for collaboration or to discuss teaching practice. Both the survey and focus group feedback indicated that participants appreciated the diversity of the LCs achieved through the coordinators' efforts to mix participants based on pedagogical experience and library division/branch. Another component that added to diversification was the change of LC

membership after each semester to give participants more exposure to others' thoughts and experiences. Logistically, this was also necessary because some participants did not wish to continue for the second semester due to varying schedules and commitments, while other new members wished to join. Feedback about this change was generally positive, as the participants liked the shift in perspectives that came with different and new co-mentors. However, some participants indicated that the rate of change made them feel as though they were starting anew each term and wished they had a longer time in each LC.

Semantics

One thing suggested by the survey responses was a semantic disconnect between the program coordinators and some respondents. For example, while generally the survey feedback was quite positive, one particular question did not provide as high a rating as originally expected. The question "on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being very poor, and 10 being very valuable), how do you rate the RPM program as an instructional experience?" had six responses where three participants chose 6 on the scale, two participants selected 7, and one participant chose 8. The coordinators took this question to the focus groups to look for further insight and offered an alternate phrasing as follows: "Without revealing how you responded, do you think you would you have answered this question differently if we had asked: 'how do you rate RPM as an instructional DEVELOPMENT experience?'"

Responses to the change in wording were mixed, with some expressing the opinion that it was not really a different question. Others, however, did agree that the problem was in the question, with some disliking the word "experience", finding it hard to quantify, while others argued that the question seemed too concrete, given the reflective nature of RPM. From this discussion, the coordinators determined that vocabulary used to talk about teaching and learning varied among participants. No suggestions were put forward to reduce variability in the response to the question.

Similarly, when survey respondents were asked what was most beneficial about the program, the coordinators were surprised to find that the word "reflection" was not used. To further investigate, coordinators followed up in the focus groups by sharing a definition of reflective practice, asking participants how this definition related to their RPM experiences. Although participants clearly described what the coordinators would define as reflective experiences, many objected to the word "reflection", stating that they found the term to be too "backward looking", or offering alternative terms such as "retooling".

For a small number of participants, the pedagogical vocabulary used by the coordinators appeared to cause even greater concern as they felt unable to relate to the language used to discuss the program. This was perhaps due to varied levels of experience and training in teaching and pedagogy. Indeed, a few participants even expressed discomfort at being identified as "teachers," and found it difficult to relate to questions that described them in this manner. In addition, some participants identified

an unintentional, yet evident, classroom-specific bias in the language used in the *Reflective Conversation Questions*. Revisions were made to the document based on this feedback.

Scheduling

Although RPM was designed with time constraints in mind, some participants still reported that scheduling was a challenge. This was not entirely surprising given the demands on everyone's schedule and workload. Despite this challenge, the majority of participants expressed interest in participating in a single learning community for a full academic year rather than joining a different LC in January. Participants also liked the semi-structured nature of the LCs, which included guidelines for a minimum of two LC meetings per semester and discussion topics in the form of the *Reflective Conversation Questions*.

Discussion Tool

The *Reflective Conversation Questions* (RCQs) were identified as another important component of RPM, and the program coordinators considered assessment of these questions worth exploring. Because RCQ use was optional, the coordinators wished to determine the extent of use, which seemed to vary greatly from one group to another. Feedback from the surveys and focus groups showed that concepts drawn from the RCQs were used primarily as a "jumping off point" for conversation rather than the questions functioning as structured guides for discussion. Participants indicated that they were able to discuss topics as they desired without the need to focus solely on what the RPM coordinators provided. This aspect allowed for broadened learning opportunities which were applicable at the time of need while the RCQs also offered a means of keeping on topic, if needed. The groups often reported using the questions in creative ways not envisioned by the coordinators. Participants also indicated that while their groups may not have started by using the questions for discussion, they found they were able to match their conversations with either specific questions or general topic areas. In this respect, the *Reflective Conversation Questions* could also be used as a tool for reflection following a discussion. Thus, while the *Reflective Conversation Questions* were optional, they were still seen as valuable and were clearly being used, even if not as originally intended.

Moving forward with RPM

Several suggestions provided by participants were extremely useful for the program coordinators to consider as RPM moves forward. One unanticipated comment was the suggestion to continue the RPM program beyond the fall and winter semesters into the summer term. RPM was designed to provide participants with the opportunity to discuss pedagogy and obtain new ideas; the addition of the summer term provides a time when participants may be developing instructional strategies for the fall semester and seeking new ideas to incorporate. Different work load demands in the summer may also create more time for active reflection for some librarians. However, different summer schedules

may also lead to reduced participation, and having fewer participants may limit diversity within the learning communities.

Other suggestions that emerged from participant feedback included an even more flexible model whereby any RPM participant could sign up for pre-scheduled small-group meetings, so that LCs formed depending on who was interested and available. A similar suggestion was to have regularly scheduled large-group meetings which could be open to all RPM members on a drop-in basis.

While the coordinators did not want to discontinue the on-going learning communities in their existing form, these suggestions did lead to the development of a new component of the RPM program: RPM Dialogue Sessions. Designed to supplement the small-group LC meetings, Dialogue Sessions take the form of large group drop-in sessions open to all members of the RPM program who wish to participate. In the spirit of the RPM program as a whole, Dialogue Sessions are participant-driven conversations based on a particular theme or question suggested before the meeting by the coordinators or individual RPM members. These sessions are intended to take place only once or twice a semester, usually around mid-term, and help to maintain the momentum of the program as well as giving participants an opportunity to engage with the larger RPM community.

Another suggestion involved creating a means for sharing discussion content between the learning communities. While no concrete examples were given of how to achieve this, participants frequently expressed curiosity about the discussions taking place in other groups and a desire to share ideas more widely. While the coordinators did not want to impose on LCs to take notes, feeling that this would only create more work for participants and might negatively impact the LCs as a safe environment for openness and problem-solving, they did wonder if there was some other way that this might be achieved. Reflecting on reports of less structured use of the *Reflective Conversation Questions* (RCQs), the coordinators realized that it would be possible to restructure them in order to increase their value and usability while also creating quick opportunities for LCs to retain what was discussed without resorting to minute-taking. This led to the idea of an *RPM Teaching Concepts Checklist* based on themes explored in the RCQs (Appendix E). LCs can draw on this checklist either to inspire discussion or to encourage post-conversation reflection by checking off the topics that have been explored. In addition, a “one minute paper” section, in which participants are asked to quickly note something they learned or found helpful from the discussion, adds to the process by helping members to engage in still deeper reflection. It should be noted that the checklist is not a replacement for the RCQs but rather another optional tool that may better meet the needs of some LCs.

As the RPM program moved into its second year, many of the above-noted suggestions were implemented. The most important of these were the extension of the program into the summer term, implementing Dialogue Sessions, and encouraging use of the *Teaching Concepts Checklist*. These additions will be evaluated as the program continues.

Conclusion

Developed out of the Reflective Teaching and Observation program, Reflective Peer Mentoring offers an adaptable model for enhanced professional development by combining the strengths of personal reflection with the benefits of reciprocity through peer mentoring. With the use of a co-mentoring structure, all participants have the opportunity to learn from their colleagues and benefit from a variety of perspectives and experiences. The diversity of the learning communities supports opportunities for collegial conversation, collaboration, and problem solving. The program allows for flexible involvement through voluntary participation, flexible scheduling, and guiding support materials that create opportunities for broader discussion and deeper reflection.

At Memorial University Libraries, the RPM program has been designed and adopted by instruction librarians as a practical approach to promote professional growth and development in teaching. However, as a means of evaluating past and current practice to improve future choices, reflection is not limited to the areas of teaching and learning. The RPM program offers a highly adaptable model that can easily be applied to any area where librarians can benefit from reflection and learn from each other, such as collections development, reference, or liaison librarianship. Another possibility is cross-institutional collaboration, which would create group diversity for small libraries and allow librarians to form learning communities based on narrow areas of focus, such as subject librarianship. It should also be kept in mind that co-mentoring does not necessarily have to take place in person. For example, in the case of Fletcher, Bullock, and Kosnik, collaboration took place via conference calls, email, and reflective journaling (3). Finally, the participant-driven nature of the Reflective Peer Mentoring model provides many opportunities to obtain feedback and make improvements which can then be used to evolve and further customize the program according to the needs of the particular group of librarians. As a professional development experience, RPM provides a useful way for participants to slow down, reflect, and gain a fresh perspective on teaching and learning in the fast-paced academic library world.

Works Cited

- Bielaczyc, Katerine. "Learning Communities." *Encyclopedia of Education*. Ed. James W. Guthrie. 2nd. ed. Vol. 4. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003. 1163-1164. Print.
- Bielaczyc, Katerine and Allan Collins. "Learning Communities in Classrooms: A Reconceptualization of Educational Practice." *Instructional Design Theories and Models: A New Paradigm of Instructional Theory*. Ed. Charles M. Reigeluth. Vol. 2. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999. 269-292. Print.
- Bona, Mary Jo, Jane Rinehart, and Rose Mary Volbrecht. "Show Me How to Do Like You: Co-Mentoring as Feminist Pedagogy." *Feminist Teacher* 9.3 (1995): 116-24. *JSTOR*. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.

- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. Web. 20 June 2014. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/archives/tcps-eptc/docs/TCPS%20October%202005_E.pdf>.
- Fletcher, Tim, Shawn M. Bullock, and Clare Kosnik. "An Investigation into Collaborative Mentoring Using Self-Study: Our Processes and Our Learning." *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices*. Eds. Janet R. Young, Lynette B. Erickson, and Stefinee Pinnegar. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2012. 102-105. Print.
- Kolb, David A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984. Print.
- Mullen, Carol A. "Constructing Co-Mentoring Partnerships: Walkways We Must Travel." *Theory into Practice* 39.1 (2000): 4-11. *JSTOR*. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.
- Otienoh, Ruth Ombonya. "Reflective Practice: The Challenge of Journal Writing." *Reflective Practice* 10.4 (2009): 477-89. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.
- Raelin, Joseph A. "'I Don't Have Time To Think!' Versus the Art of Reflective Practice." *Reflections* 4.1 (2002): 66-79. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 12 Dec. 2013.
- Reynolds, Michael. "Reflective Practice: Origins and Interpretations." *Action Learning: Research and Practice* 8.1 (2011): 5-13. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.
- Roche, Aisling, and Susan Coote. "Focus Group Study of Student Physiotherapists' Perceptions of Reflection." *Medical Education* 42.11 (2008): 1064-70. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.
- Tarrant, Peter. *Reflective Practice and Professional Development*. London: Sage Publications, 2013. Print.
- Vidmar, Dale J. "Reflective Peer Coaching: Crafting Collaborative Self-Assessment in Teaching." *Research Strategies* 20.3 (2005): 135-48. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.
- Webster-Wright, Ann. "The Eye of the Storm: A Mindful Inquiry into Reflective Practices in Higher Education." *Reflective Practice* 14.4 (2013): 556-567. Web. 23 Oct. 2013.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: RTO Reflective Observation Worksheet

Appendix B: RTO Post-Lesson Reflective Conversation Questions

Appendix C: RPM Reflective Conversation Questions

Appendix D: RPM Program Survey

Appendix E: RPM Teaching Concepts Checklist

Appendix A

REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION WORKSHEET

Below are several questions to consider while observing a session.

LESSON DESIGN: Are the session's learning objectives made clear?

CONTENT DELIVERY: What methods are used to teach lesson content? Are they effective?

PRACTICING: What opportunity is given to students to practice what they are being taught?

APPLICATION: What opportunity is given to students to apply what they are learning in a new context?

REFLECTING: What opportunity is given to students to reflect on what they are being taught?

CONCEPTUALIZATION: What opportunity is given to students to demonstrate or discuss their understanding of what they are being taught?

ENGAGEMENT: To what level are students engaged in their learning? What are the indicators?

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Appendix B

POST-LESSON REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Below are several reflective questions to help direct your conversation.

1. How do you think the session went? What were you most satisfied with? What were you least satisfied with?

2. How satisfied were you with the way you led your students through a full learning cycle in that lesson? Things to consider include:
 - a. The way that you introduced the content.

 - b. The opportunities you gave them to process and practice.

 - c. The strategies you used to encourage them to demonstrate and articulate their understanding of the lesson's general principles.

 - d. The activities you used so they could apply the new knowledge/skills in a new context.

3. To what level were your students engaged in learning? What indicators did you observe?

4. Did the students achieve the learning outcomes that you set for them? How did you know?

5. Did you gain any new insights about your teaching from this lesson?

6. As you plan for future sessions, what parts of the lesson would you retain? What would you change?

Appendix C

RPM: REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Revised January 2013

The following questions can be used during learning community meetings to facilitate discussion and to help participants to reflect on their practice and to generate new ideas. Keep in mind that use of this guide is optional, and LC discussion can take whatever form and direction participants find to be most useful.

Teaching Methods

7. Reflect on a **class you have taught** (either in the classroom or online) **or another teaching experience** you have had. Tell your co-mentors about it, and discuss one or more of the following:
 - a. Satisfaction: How do you think it went? What were you most and least satisfied with?
 - b. Design: how do you typically develop a class? How do you define and articulate your learning objectives?
 - c. Delivery: what methods do you typically use to teach lesson content?
8. **“Fail club”**: think of a **challenge or frustration** that you have grappled with in the course of your teaching, and present it to the group. Each participant should consider and discuss the following:
 - a. Have you had similar concerns or experiences?
 - b. What strategies might one use to address these issues?
9. **“Victory club”**: tell your learning community about an instructional experience that you feel particularly happy about. What about it was particularly satisfying? What do feel was achieved?
Participant should consider and discuss the following:
 - a. Have you had a similar experience in your own teaching/instruction?
 - b. What can we learn from this success that we can each carry forward into our own instructional practice?
10. Describe or demonstrate an **activity, exercise, or learning technology** that you have used or are hoping to try out with students. As a group, consider the following questions:
 - a. How could this be applied to other instructional contexts? For example, how might it be adapted for use in another subject area or for a different mode of instruction?
 - b. How might one go about assessing the effectiveness of this activity or tool for learners?
11. Describe your **personal strategies for planning** instruction, organizing your teaching, **and/or reflecting** on your classes and instructional methods. As a group, discuss the following questions:

- a. What are the biggest challenges you encounter when trying to plan, organize, and/or reflect on instruction?
- b. What new approaches might you adopt to help with instructional planning, organization, and reflection?

Theory into Practice

12. Consider one or more of the following **learning-related terms** (either individually, or together in a row), adding your own terms to the list if desired. What do these words mean to you? Do they have any bearing on your own instructional practice?

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Information literacy | Library instruction | Bibliographic instruction |
| Library skills | Research skills | |
| Teaching | Learning | |
| Teacher | Instructor | |
| Motivation | Engagement | |
| Critical thinking | Critical information literacy | |
| Reflective practice | Evidence-based teaching | |

13. Reflect on your current teaching practice. Explore what strategies you use to guide students through the **experiential learning cycle** (Kolb 40-42). and/or consider what new things might you try in order to enhance this process, by discussing one or more of the following:
- a. Experience: what strategies and activities do you/might you use to engage students in the learning experience?
 - b. Reflection: how do you/might you encourage students to reflect on what they have learned?
 - c. Generalization: how do you/might you encourage students to make inferences about what is being taught and connect it with other aspects of their experience?
 - d. Application: what strategies might allow students to apply what they have learned by independently using knowledge in a new way?

Appendix D

RPM Program Survey

Introduction:

The following survey is intended to gather feedback from participants in the Reflective Peer Mentoring (RPM) Program at Memorial Libraries. We expect that it will take ten to fifteen minutes of your time to respond.

The feedback you provide will be used to review and adapt the program and in dissemination of the RPM model to the wider library community through articles and/or presentations. Individual participants will not be identified during this dissemination. Please note that participants in the RPM program are in no way required to respond to this survey. If at any point while responding to the survey you wish to withdraw, you may do so simply by not submitting your responses. If you choose not to take part in this meeting, or if you decide to withdraw from the meeting once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future. All responses that are submitted will be anonymous; you will not be asked to identify yourself in any way.

If you have questions or would like more information about this survey, please contact Janet Goosney (jgoosney@mun.ca or 864-3166), Shannon Gordon (sgordon@mun.ca or 777-8951), or Becky Smith (becky.smith@mun.ca or 864-7829).

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Please tick the following boxes to indicate agreement with the statements provided. By indicating agreement, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

By responding to and submitting to this survey, I am indicating that I [*will appear as tick boxes on survey*]:

Have read and understood the above information.

Understand what the survey is about and how I am contributing to this research study.

Have had an opportunity to ask questions about the survey and am satisfied with any answers I may have received.

___ Agree to the use of my survey responses in articles and/or presentations about the RPM program, understanding that my name or other identifying information will not be used.

Questions:

1. Considering your involvement with teaching and learning, was participating in the RPM Program a worthwhile experience? (Y/N)
2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being very poor, and 10 being very valuable), how do you rate the RPM Program as an instructional experience? (scale)
3. How would you describe your experience as a participant in the RPM Program? (open)
4. In your learning community, were the Reflective Conversation Questions a useful tool for generating discussion? (Y/N)
5. Did your learning community come up with any relevant topics or questions that were not part of the Reflective Conversation Questions? (Y/N)
 - a. If yes, please specify: (open)
6. What elements of the RPM Program worked well? (open)
7. What elements of the RPM Program could be improved? (open)
8. Do you plan to participate in the RPM Program in Winter 2013? (Y/N)
9. Do you have any other thoughts or comments on the RPM Program? (open)

Appendix E

RPM TEACHING CONCEPTS CHECKLIST

Instructional Design

- Goals and objectives
- Lesson planning
- Activities and Assignments
- Assessment
- Technology / Social Media
- Faculty involvement

Mode of Delivery

- Classroom
- Online (ex. D2L)
- One – on – One
- Impromptu (ex. Reference)
- Asynchronous

Content

- Critical Thinking
- Active Learning
- Organization
- Challenging content
- Transferability to other context/discipline

Students

- Engagement
- Motivation
- Connecting to content
- Achievement
- Classroom management

Teacher

- Successes
- Frustrations
- Challenges

Other _____

One Minute Paper – What I learned...

Reflect and briefly write on something you learned or found helpful from your discussions.