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Diversity within Unity: Developing Sustainable Information Literacy Teams

Victoria F. Caplan and Eunice S.P. Wong
April 24, 2016

Abstract:
Purpose: The purpose of this paper to show how one medium sized research library sustainably delivers large scale integrated library instruction via team efforts that allow for (and encourage) librarians diverse teaching approaches within a unified team.
Design/methodology/approach: This paper examines an individual case within the context of library and management research literature.
Findings: A self-managed library instruction team, using agreed upon learning outcomes and supported by good infrastructure, communication skills and tools, and within administration supportive of professional development and experimentation can sustainably delivery high volume, high quality library instruction.
Practical implications: This paper may help other libraries learn how to develop their own self-managed teams to deliver sustainable high volume, high quality library instruction.
Originality/value: This paper contributes to the literature on self-managed teams in librarianship and especially self-managed teams to deliver sustainable high volume information literacy. It also contributes to the small pool of literature using the jazz metaphor in library instruction.

Keywords: information literacy; library instruction; self-managed teams; jazz metaphor.

Introduction and Context

The question of how institutions can sustainably deliver high volume and high quality information literacy instruction and assessment is often answered “via collaboration and teamwork”. Yet, staff members differ in their approach, knowledge, as well as their styles of teaching, learning, and assessment. This paper will illustrate how one institution allows a diversity of delivery within unified basic principles over the past 5 years in implementing large-scale collaborative team-based teaching.

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) is a twenty-five-year old mediums sized research university in Hong Kong. A PhD granting institution, it has ~9,000 undergraduates and ~ 4,600 postgraduates (Masters and PhD students). For more than twenty years, our Library offered the usual menu of information literacy instructions: orientation programs, course-related classes, database workshops, web-based tutorials, and for a number of years, even a credit-bearing information literacy course. In the case of the mass orientation sessions and the credit-baring IL course, instruction librarians worked as a team.

Under the impetus of new curriculum change that saw all universities in Hong Kong switch from a 3-year undergraduate education to a 4-year and introduction of a “Professional Development Course” (PDC) for MPhil and PhD students at HKUST the library began to offer large scale, collaborative and integrated information literacy instruction and assessment via team-based teaching. This was not just a challenge
in quantity, but also in quality – what learning outcomes we intended to achieve and how we delivered our instruction. Looking over the data for the past five years, we can say that it is sustainable: instruction and assessment mostly conducted by seven instruction librarians supplemented with e-learning components. It is also sustainable in that the librarians have been able to thrive and develop as teachers, as well as developing in other areas of library work (e.g. outreach, scholarly communication, data services, exhibitions, etc.).

![Graph showing attendee and session numbers from 2010/11 to 2015/16 (in progress)]

Schema of HKUST’s Library Instruction Program:

The undergraduate program is a developing two-tier program, with a foundation of first and second year students taking the mandatory English language writing courses and some scattered one-shots in various parts of the subject curriculum, some of them research methods or capstone project classes (for example, Humanities & Social Sciences writing tutorials, chemistry final year project). The postgraduate program is mainly embedded within the PDC curriculum.
Problem statement: How could we instruct high volume and high-quality sessions, tied into the curriculum? How can we do so sustainably, semester after semester, and sometimes with changing personnel? How did we channel different team members with different strengths, share the work, and allow of individual customization of tasks, to make the most of staff members individuality and strengths? This is hard work. We can only do it as a team, as one person alone could not be responsible for 40 LANG 1002 sessions in 3 weeks.

How We Do It at HKUST: We use self-managed teams, make use of e-tools to foster collaboration in good venues that have useful and appropriate technologies for both instructors and students; and we develop staff continually, and collaborate with each other and our stakeholders in planning and delivering the information literacy instruction.

Self-Managing Teams

There are several different types of teams, for example, manage-led, self-managing, self-designing, and self-governing (Thompson, 2014, p. 8-12). The type of team we describe here is by no means the only or best way to manage teams to deliver sustainable large scale information literacy; for example at Singapore Management University, they have developed and nurtured an effective team by means of what appears to follow a strong manager-led model (Munoo, 2012). In the HKUST Information Literacy Instruction team context, however, the model we have developed appears to be best described as “self-managing”. This is a model in which:

“...a manager or leader determines the overall purpose or goal of the team, but the team is at liberty to manage the methods by which to achieve the goal”. (Thompson, 2014, p. 9).

Such teams can

“...build commitment, offer increased autonomy, and often enhance morale. The disadvantage is that the manager has much less control over the process and products, making it difficult to assess progress”. (Thompson, 2014, p. 10).

However, that is where assessment comes in – both quantitative assessment (number of sessions taught, number of students attended, number of hits on learning objects), and qualitative (assessment of individual sessions by students, feedback from partners; self-assessment by the instructors; and sometimes assessment of students’ work by course partners).

Self-managed teams does not exclude the very important work that an “external leader” executes, in this case both the head of the department and especially the University Librarian’s whose essential roles – relating, scouting, persuading, and empowering (Druskat & Wheeler, 2004) provides the ends and the means for the Library’s instruction program. It does not happen in a vacuum.

Different from “self-directing” teams which determine own objectives and methods (as defined by Thompson (2014, p. 10), these self-managed teams help avoid this issue of “Free riders” (Thompson,
2014, p.33-34). By having different team members be responsible for organizing different collaborative IL sessions (e.g. science librarians for Lang 2010) the temptation to free-ride is diminished (not a problem at our institution, where team members are highly self-motivated; but useful to note as a general rule). Especially important has been our regular, somewhat informal team performance reviews & feedback – both among ourselves and with our collaborators. (Thompson, 2014), p.32.

While at HKUST we do not have a complete team-based collegial leadership model (McKinzie, 2000) it shares some aspects of it; and McKinzie’s point, that although in many ways libraries resemble business enterprises, libraries also resemble labs or classrooms, the academy itself and that form of management – department, chair, collegiality, rotating responsibilities is an important one. By working as colleagues and learning and sharing together, we develop our “team spirit” and share out different work we increased the ability of our team to cope with unexpected situations, all members know how to set up a class, gather others to help teach, and if someone cannot do a task (sick leave; busy-ness; or even leaving to work at another institution) we can cope resiliently.

Self-Managed Teams and individuality

One fear that many have when they hear that they must work in teams is that their individuality will be subsumed, they will have to march in lock-step with others. It could be described as a “fear of the Precision marching Band”. However, teaching is best done in a way is right for each person, that allows their individuality to blossom. The metaphor of jazz or “jam band” can be successfully used to explain how a diversity within unity in large scale library instruction can be maintained.

The Jazz metaphor

Jazz and other band musicians often long-lived; a band or jazz ensemble plays together, members support each other, creating a unified sound. Jazz metaphor has been explored and used in management literature since at least the mid-1990s, among its earlier authors was Mary Jo Hatch (Hatch & Weick, 1998) and (Hatch 1999).

We can envision, understand, and run our teams as jazz bands (Barrett, 1998); but at the same time we should not get too wrapped up in the part about jazz- lots of other musical forms and human endeavors use improvisation; group sharing and work (Kamoche & Vieira da Cunha, 2003)

How does this metaphor work in describing the functions of our self-managed team?

- Team = dance band (jazz band or rock band or “jam band”)
- Instructors = the musicians
- Band Leader = Library Director (in some cases); Head of Reference or Information Literacy Coordinator (in others)
- Classes & ILOs = the songs/ standards; which the students learn, dance to, and also learn to play
- How we deliver the “standards” = up to the instructors; and even one instructor is free to change a bit depending on the class.
- Students = the audience, the dancers, and musicians who make the “music” or “standards” their own.

The Jazz or band metaphor has also been used in teaching. The instruction program can be developed and continued with existing staffing levels; teaching tools could be re-used in other sessions or courses (Tooman & Sibthorpe, 2012); not be so time intensive as to push all other work to the side; and by other instruction librarians who were team teaching. However, the metaphor of a band that plays improvisational dance music also works, because it gets to the idea that the students are also our collaborators: they are doing things as well (listening, understanding, responding, or in unhappier scenarios, staring off into space, sleeping, or playing unrelated games) and this too it has an impact on information literacy instruction.

Indeed, we are not the first people to have these thoughts in terms of information literacy instruction, (Barnes, 2008). Barnes asks us to ask ourselves do we consider teaching like a garden, a string quartet, or jazz (p. 54); and Ellen Hampton Filgo explicitly thinks of jazz in her embedded teaching (Hamilton, 2012),

“The class discussion was the music and the melody was happening in another classroom across campus. Every once in a while, the students would throw out a note or two, or a stray chord, which I would pick up through Twitter. I had to improvise, tossing out my own chords and riffs back into the Twitter stream, hoping that they would add to the music being made…”

It’s not just jazz, rock bands can also be seen as possible models of self-management and instruction. For example (Kattan & Fox, 2014, p. 113) see:

“The two dominant leadership styles are the participative and achievement-oriented styles… participative leadership a leader allows others to participate in the decision making process, consulting with them about ideas and listening to their suggestions. Likewise, with achievement-oriented leadership, the leader aims toward establishing the best performance possible by setting high standards of excellence ...This combination seems to work well with a rock band, first because a band is a collective entity where tasks and roles are usually participative and distributed among the members, and also because the aim of bands is to produce a great performance whether on stage or during practice.”

(Sorensen, 2013) posits these characteristics in looking to and at jazz leadership:

“...encouragement of respect, mutuality, self-sufficiency, and autonomy amongst staff members. Each person’s individuality is honoured, as are the unique qualities each brings to their work. Leadership as an activity is shared among the group, with individuals taking turns according to their skills or the demands of the moment. Finally, leadership is viewed as a supportive activity as much as a directive activity.” [emphasis mine]
This metaphor matches the reality of the self-managed team in information literacy; it appeals to the authors in both the performative aspects and the teaching and learning and mentoring aspects. If we as Information Literacy Instruction librarians are experts in this area (like good jazz or jam-band musicians) then our students are novices – just coming to learn the music, the moves, and when we are teaching and learning well – it makes great music, we get in a “good groove”. Sometimes we are in a good groove for part of the session, but then we stumble – but it’s no disaster. We learn from our mis-steps and our mistakes and then improve.

Sustainably, meaning that we can keep it going, having fun, cope with the ups and downs and mistakes and opportunities as they come along; say goodbye cheerfully to old members who move on and incorporate new team members as they join.

**Nitty Gritty - Making it Work**

Metaphors are useful in conceptualizing our goals and how we hope to achieve them, but it is important to understand the methods and tools useful in implementing the goals.

**Communication with partners (CLE, PGSO, Departments, faculty members, students**

Since 2012, we have held regular meetings and sharing of resources with our major collaborators: instructors from the Center for Language Education (CLE) mass classes. They share the semester’s textbook (which they create); the research assignments that the students need to; and we discuss and agree upon general intended learning outcomes for the face-to-face classes. These meetings usually include the Information Literacy manager and at least one other team member – for example, for 2nd year required English classes for Science undergraduates, the two science subject librarians (who also teach) participate, and are the principal liaisons for communicating with the English instructors on scheduling sessions, etc.

After the sessions (usually at the end of the semester) the Information Literacy Manager gathers the data (number of classes, dates, attendance, and assessment feedback) and share it with our CLE counterparts. Then, in between semesters, when preparing for the next, we often have at least one “touch base” meeting to go over previous results, and then discuss plans for the future.

The Library has similar interactions with other partners, such as the Office of Postgraduate studies; the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and individual faculty member, although because of smaller numbers, most communication happens by email and telephone and less via face-to-face meetings.

**Communication within the Team & Staff Development**

We also have our regular, informal team performance reviews & feedback among ourselves; sometimes just casual intra-office chat of “how it’s going” or “how it went”. Other times it is more formal in meetings of the Library’s “Information Services Committee”; or as we prepare to meet our counterparts from other units in the University.
Since 2013, we have also instituted a “Learning Circle”, where at least once a semester, teaching librarians gather to share on their teaching: both what they have tried that works well and problems or questions on their teaching that they have faced. We have also used it to do self-learning on important innovations in information literacy. For example, the Learning Circle met twice to go over two drafts of the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education in 2014 and provide written feedback to ACRL. A more recent effort is for instruction librarians attending at least one of the other’s sessions and think about what new & different things our colleagues do could be brought to her or his own teaching.

Instruction Librarians have also increased their skills in teaching and assessment by taking advantage of the Library’s strong commitment to professional development. For example, HKUST Library hosted the JULAC ACRL Information Literacy Immersion Program in June 2013 and all instruction librarians were able to attend. The Library continues to support librarians to attend local and overseas conferences as well as seminars and workshops hosted by other university units (e.g. the Center for Education Innovation).

Communication skills and communication networks (especially decentralized) are very important for a successful de-centralized team (Stewart, et al., 1999, p. 41). They can be used to channel different team members’ different strengths, share the work, and allow of individual tailoring of tasks, to make the most of staff members individuality. Good communication (fostered by skills and networks) can also foster “Team Think” and avoid “Group think” (Stewart, et al., 1999, p. 87). Our instruction team has an open communication culture, to share ideas and opinions face-to-face, via email or WhatsApp, rather than keep information and ideas close to the chest, or in a small circle.

**Tools for Communication and Coordination**

*Shared drive & Owncloud & LibGuides for sharing the teaching docs*

Sharing powepoints, worksheets, and LibGuides lies at the heart of our collaboration, and is one of the reasons the authors have chosen the “jazz metaphor”- these are our standards. The person or people who have main responsibility for team-teaching sessions make a LibGuide and PowerPoint and shares with the group for feedback and suggestions. The LibGuide usually then remains static during the semester, but how the individual instructors use the LibGuide in the session varies. The PowerPoints too are subject to variation. Different instructors may like particular slides that others have first created, and use and/or modify them; others may do something completely different, and then create their own. Here are some examples from the largest mass class, LANG 1002. These are slides from four different instructors (part of our largest 7 person team) were used in part of the session when we discuss evaluation of results.
These slides are from a LANG 2010 (English for Science I) from the part of the session where we introduce more sophisticated sources for scientists to use, Specialist Encyclopedias.

The PowerPoints are shared with other instructors and shared with the students (in pdf). Individual instructors, can feel free to adopt or modify what other team-members have created for their own teaching. The slides have joined our group repertoire as a “standard” and we can then use and improvise from it freely. The unity comes from the agreed-upon and shared ILOs and LibGuide, the diversity comes from how we choose to teach these session, and how much we want to adapt and use what our colleagues have created. When someone new joins the teaching team, they can also use the LibGuides and PowerPoints as a “fake book”, which can be defined as “a book of music showing basic chord sequences for jazz or other music” (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). Similarly we share and modify worksheets and other in-class aids.

The LibGuide platform provides storage and group editing for the LibGuides used in class and for colleagues and students to access current teaching materials. We share non-current materials or works-in-progress via a shared staff-cloud drive, which is administered by Systems staff. However, similar arrangements could also be done via Drobox or other such sites.

Excellent Teaching Venues & Online venue booking

The Library is fortunate in having created and developed and in currently maintaining 5 different teaching venues: The IC Learning Space; The Tutorial Spaces; E-Classroom A & B (combined have 74 desktops arranged in teaching islands), and the Multifunction room. They all have instructor AV, such as computers and projectors, screens, and microphone capability. If we continue with the jazz band metaphor, we could say that these are our ballroom/dancehall/concert-hall where we work with students in practicing the arts and skills of information literacy.
In addition to computer connections and AV, these spaces are also set up with a locally developed personal response system ("clicker"), where students can download a free app called iPRS, which provides interaction with the students, test their understandings, collect feedback and so on; other librarians have utilized similar technologies (McDonald & McDonald, 2010).

Library instruction takes precedence in these Library managed spaces and all teaching librarians can reserve them via an online calendar booking system. As the booking system prevents double-bookings, instructors can reserve classes for individual sessions arranged with particular faculty members immediately, without having to seek permission or needing to get another colleague to modify the schedule.

**Self-scheduling via shared Google-doc**

To arrange the mass sessions, the Information Literacy Manager, or other coordinator will schedule the sessions times and venues and then create an online Google document for all the instruction librarians to fill in. This too allows diversity within the unity: colleagues sign up for times that match their own needs and if they have concerns about timing, they can see who is teaching in a slot they need and arrange swaps among themselves. This is another example of sharing work via self-management: while one person has to create the blank schedule, the team members fill out the schedule themselves.

**Registration, Reminder, Attendance & Assessment**

Software (also maintained and developed by Library Systems staff) provides a combination of class scheduling and registration for the students, along with reminders. For the mass-classes, the coordinator and/or the Information Literacy Manager schedule sessions for students to sign-up. This registration and scheduling software also automatically sends reminders to those who have signed up. Individual instructors can also email attendees ahead of time, for example, with instructions to view certain e-learning videos before a face-to-face session ("flipping" instruction) or afterwards, to "close the loop" in answering questions that may have been asked after the session of emerged in the online assessment.

The assessment shows our instruction is of good quality. For example, in 2014 the e-learning component of the LANG 1002 citation quiz, students achieved an 87.4% mean. In other team teaching (e.g. LANG 2010) sessions, students agree or strongly agree that they have achieved the learning goals, and rate their instructors between 75-98%. Their “one minute paper” of most important things learned often match the ILOs.

Systems colleagues have also developed an attendance-taking method, by which instructors prime a barcode scanner ahead of the class, students scan their student ID’s to record attendance, and after the class the instructor or a support staff member can upload the attendance data to the registration system. This saves the time of the instructor (no need to print-out sign-in sheets) and the students (no need to search for their names on a registration sheet and sign their names) –suggest to delete, too nitty gritty. The system then allows us to share the attendance data with those university units which require students to attend various Library sessions for credits (suggest to delete for example, HKUST’s
Student Affairs Office for gives credit for some Library sessions via HLTH 1010 credit; and the Post Graduate Studies Office for PDC credit hours, etc.

Integrated Assessment Tool (or Function)

As one can see in the image above, there is a link to feedback form for each session. Here too, Systems colleagues have enabled the instruction team to share and modify feedback form templates and use them at will. All the instructors teaching mass sessions (e.g. LANG 1002,) can use the same form, to provide consistent assessment of teaching and learning. Forms can also be cloned and modified for other mass classes (e.g. LANG 2030); or for specific sessions organized and taught by a smaller team (two librarians) or alone. Given at the end of a session, the instructor can get immediate feedback as to what worked, and what didn’t, and find out specific questions that students have asked (often by a “muddiest point” or just open comment box) and then close the loop with emailed follow-up. However, this need not be a uniquely HKUST development; more broadly used systems like Qualtrics could provide similar functions for other institutions.

Conclusion
If we want to teach with our whole selves, in a way that is honest to us, we cannot teach like another person, no matter how much we may like or admire their teaching (Parker, 1998). By embracing the idea of a “standard” (as in a standard or common tune that we all know how to play) and with our ILOs and basic PowerPoint as our “fake book”; we can then personalize and improvise and make the individual session our own. By making use of good venues and e-tools, librarians can teach as teams and as individuals, to groups large and small. This is the diversity within the unity fostered by shared goals, methods, and good communication, and continued learning and professional development that sustains the team members, the team, the teaching, and ultimately, the instruction program.

Summary Chart: Self-Managed Teams & the Jazz metaphor for Sustainable Information Literacy Teams & Programs at HKUST Library

<table>
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<th>Self Managed Teams</th>
<th>Information Literacy at HKUST</th>
<th>Jazz, “jam band” analogy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction</strong></td>
<td>Provided by the Institution-(HKUST – for Outcome Based Education) and then within the Library – ISC Chair (Head of Ref) and University Librarian.</td>
<td>Style of music Types of music Repertoire</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can the team members articulate a clear direction? Yes.</td>
<td>A multi-night run A Performance • Songs • Dance tunes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team task</strong></td>
<td>Collective responsibility in delivering team teaching (multiple sessions under the same course), but with individual members taking primary responsibility based on their subject liaison work. Librarians work as a team, able to help each other teach &amp; each able to liaise.</td>
<td>Applause, more gigs; more employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team rewards</strong></td>
<td>Students learn; work done well; sense of accomplishment; better teaching, larger numbers</td>
<td>Concert hall Bar Ballroom Dance club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical resources</strong></td>
<td>Meeting spaces (1/F Meeting Room); IC Learning Space. Teaching spaces under control of the Library (E-Learning Classroom A &amp; B, IC Learning Space (used for Orientation), Multifunction Room, Tutorial Space)</td>
<td>LibGuides platform Powerpoints, worksheets Paper, pens, photocopy, e-forms E-learning videos iPRS Registration &amp; room reservation systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling Resources</strong></td>
<td>Music &amp; Instruments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority to manage the work</td>
<td>Dispersed</td>
<td>Musicians Each takes lead sometimes (soloing, or taking the lead of the song) Band manager</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Librarian/Department Head/Information Literacy Manager – set directions &amp; guidelines and oversee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject librarians – liaison, primary instructional design &amp; planning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching librarians – teach &amp; assess multiple sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Goals</td>
<td>For specific team-teaching, we can agree upon:</td>
<td>Music Repertoire Individual songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Goals (ILOs)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Means (articulate what to cover &amp; how to achieve the ILOs)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ends (deadlines, assessments)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy Norms</td>
<td>• We openly discuss what different strengths different team members bring</td>
<td>Open to experimentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We encourage experimentation with new teaching styles, new delivery methods, and new assessment formats or tools</td>
<td>• Willing to try new music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Willing to try old songs in new or different ways</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Accepting that sometimes it will not be perfect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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