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Are librarians teachers? Investigating academic librarians' perceptions of their own teaching roles

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Abstract

Librarian roles in the education sector increasingly include teaching responsibilities, therefore librarians need to know more about teaching theory and techniques in order to provide high-quality information literacy (IL) teaching. There has been little published research into how librarians conceive of their teaching, their skills and themselves as teachers. This research, initially conducted for a Masters dissertation in the Information School at the University of Sheffield, investigates the variation in conceptions of their own teaching skills among academic librarians who teach IL in higher education (HE). It was investigated whether participants would describe themselves as teachers, whether they are influenced by teaching theories (and which ones), and whether they are actually teaching or training. Firstly the literature on pedagogy for IL, approaches to teaching IL in HE, and librarians as teachers, was reviewed before the research and its findings are discussed.

A phenomenographic approach was used. A purposive sample of six librarians who teach IL in HE institutions in the north of England was chosen, selected to ensure maximum variation between participants and the resulting conceptions. Six interviews were conducted using phenomenographic techniques to encourage participants to talk about their conceptions, and the interviews were then transcribed and analysed.

The data gives rise to four categories of description, each of which describes a conception that librarians hold of themselves and their teaching: teacher-librarian; learning support; librarian who teaches; and trainer. The variation between categories is determined by interviewees' conceptions of themselves, their teaching, IL, and other teachers.

The results suggest that further support and training for librarians and library and information science (LIS) students would be beneficial and more in-depth and larger-scale research is recommended to test these conceptions and understand in greater detail the training experience and needs of librarians who teach.

This article is based on a paper presented at LILAC 2015.

Keywords

information literacy, pedagogy, teaching, higher education, phenomenography, conceptions, librarians, UK

1. Introduction

Information literacy (IL), as a concept, set of competencies and an essential student skill, has grown in importance over the last 20 years. Increasingly, UK universities are embedding IL in institutional strategies (Corrall 2008), and it is seen as "a way for college and university libraries to directly support the educational mission of their institutions" (Saunders 2012, p. 226). Its presence in lists of graduate attributes produced by universities demonstrates its recognition as an "essential

student learning outcome" (Saunders 2012), and a recent Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) report emphasised the importance of libraries in promoting and improving students' employability through IL and digital literacy (Wiley 2014).

A plethora of standards, competency frameworks and teaching guidelines (e.g. ACRL 2000; HILT 2009; SCONUL 2011; ANCIL 2011) have been developed to support the teaching of IL in HE. Most frameworks define IL as a combination of behaviour and awareness, such as in the SCONUL Seven Pillars model (SCONUL 2011 p.3), which outlines key skills and attitudes necessary for achieving each of the seven facets of IL. Lloyd (2006) broadens the traditional definition, usually applied in academic settings, to encompass information use outside of an educational context, defining the information-literate person as one who is engaged, enabled, enriched and embodied.

Bell and Shank (2004) identified that librarian roles were changing and adapting in response to changes and developments in the activities of academic libraries, and this has led to a marked increase in the amount of teaching undertaken by academic librarians. The current importance of IL as a core competency for students means that librarians are under greater scrutiny for their teaching skills. However, despite research into where they obtain their skills and which abilities they think are more important (Bewick and Corral 2010), not much research has taken place, especially in the UK, regarding how librarians conceive of their teaching abilities or whether they think of themselves as teachers.

Phenomenography has previously been used as a research methodology to examine academics' conceptions of teaching (Trigwell et al.1994); conceptions of IL in an academic context (Bruce 1997); and conceptions of IL by academics in different disciplines (Boon et al. 2007). Research has shown that librarians engage in reflective practice and research into their teaching (Oakleaf 2011), and are therefore interested in pedagogy and pedagogical development. There have been previous studies examining the professional identity of librarians as teachers (Walter 2008; Austin and Bhandol 2013; Julien and Pecoskie 2009; Julien and Genuis 2011). Julien and Pecoskie (2009) took a phenomenological, grounded theory approach to the analysis of data from 56 interviews of education and public librarians in Canada; however, only one of the papers (Austin and Bhandol 2013) reported research conducted in the UK HE context.

This research aims to address that gap by investigating the variation in UK academic librarians' conceptions of their own teaching skills, finding out whether they feel that they are teachers (as opposed to trainers), what the influences on their teaching skills are and what they do when they teach. This aims to give a picture of the current situation regarding librarians' teaching skills, as well as having practical implications for support and training for academic librarians who teach.

First, a literature review will examine the current literature surrounding pedagogy for IL, approaches to teaching IL, and librarians' professional identity as teachers. The use of the phenomenographic research methods is discussed before presenting a four conception outcome space. The results are discussed in the context of the research questions and the wider literature. Finally, we make some conclusions and recommendations for practitioners.

2. Literature Review

This review will focus on the IL teaching roles of librarians; how librarians develop teaching competence and the literature on professional identity of librarians.

2.1 Information literacy

Julien (2005) asserts that "Instruction is now truly a core professional activity for librarians" (p. 211). Although librarians are still the experts when it comes to information, their job now includes "facilitat[ing] students' learning process so that they become independent information searchers, managers, and producers" (Torras & Sætre 2009, p. 2). Bell and Shank (2004, p.374) warn that "one area in which academic librarians lag is in our understanding of pedagogy"; however,

evidence has arisen in the ten years since their article was published to suggest that librarians are thinking more about pedagogy. For example, Feetham (2006, p.12) notes that librarians are increasingly required to “have a real understanding of the pedagogy of teaching”, and Moniz et al. (2014 p.110) suggest that “an engaged liaison librarian will be researching learning styles and active learning strategies”. At least four UK librarians have been awarded National Teaching Fellow status (The Higher Education Academy 2014) and projects such as A new curriculum for information literacy (ANCIL) (Secker and Coonan 2011) and Leeds University’s Skills@Library programme (Leeds University Library 2012) demonstrate the commitment of librarians to producing high-quality IL. The LILAC conference, a yearly conference which showcases new ideas and best practice in IL, celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2014 and attracts a global audience (LILAC 2015).

In the current information age, online information is proliferating; students have become “information consumers who can switch instantly” between a vast range of sources (Rowlands et al. 2008). By the time they reach HE, many students born in the 1990s have learned to “get by with Google” (Rowlands et al. 2008). One of the key challenges for these students is critically evaluating the information they encounter (Fernandez-Villavicencio 2010, p.126), a core aspect of IL. Librarians are well-placed to teach IL as an extension of traditional library skills, but it can be a challenge to convince lecturers of the relevance and benefits of extra training for their students. Webber et al. (2005) found that academics in different disciplines held different conceptions of IL. They noted that it was especially difficult for lecturers of English to separate IL from skills they viewed as part of the discipline, such as critical analysis (p. 14), suggesting that some academics might be less receptive to a librarian’s view of IL as an important or different skill for their students to acquire. Mackey and Jacobsen (2005) reported on the benefits of partnerships between librarians and academics, suggesting that academics who recognised the importance of IL and collaborate with librarians would be able to provide vastly improved teaching and support for their students.

There can be confusion around whether IL is something that can be taught, or whether it is just a set of skills to be trained. Coonan (2011) suggests that the convergence of IT services and library services could be partly to blame, as it links IL and IT competence together in people’s minds, and also notes that the increasing identification of IL as a graduate attribute or transferable skill risks downplaying the importance of the critical thinking aspect of IL; she points out that in fact employers value problem-solving and evaluative skills much higher than “functional competencies” (p. 9). McGuinness (2009), citing earlier unpublished research (McGuinness 2004), noted that Irish librarians preferred to use the term “Information Skills Training”, a phrase also used by Sharman and Walsh (2012) in their case study of roving librarians. Several authors have noted that over recent years, or even decades, libraries have moved from library skills (which are trained), through information skills to IL (which is taught) (Cox and Corral 2013; Peters 2009), arguing that IL is “a broader and more complex concept” than solely skills-based training (Forster 2013). It was identified as early as 2002 that librarians who were involved in IL teaching should view themselves as “teachers”, not “trainers”, as the training conception of librarians’ activities was instrumental in framing IL as a lower order “skills” aspect of student learning, rather than as a set of competencies that supports higher-level learning (Lupton 2002).

2.2 Approaches to teaching IL

Librarians are increasingly adopting a variety of pedagogical approaches in their teaching. There are several examples and case studies in the literature of librarians introducing and using new teaching methods in their institutions, either on their own or in partnership with other university departments. For example, McKinney and Levy (2006) described a partnership between the Library and the Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences (CILASS) at the University of Sheffield, which aimed to promote IL using an inquiry-based learning approach. Walsh (2014b) presented a paper at the LILAC conference on using a game-based learning approach for IL, and has run workshops for librarians on how to integrate the approach into their work (Walsh 2014a). Diekema et al. (2011) reported on the introduction of problem-based learning for IL at a US university, noting that this approach was more effective for some students than for

others. Loo (2013) described the use of team-based learning, which is based on active learning and guided learning principles, reporting that the approach promotes collaboration between the librarian and their students.

In recent years, there has been a move towards more formalised, integrated IL teaching, with librarians becoming more embedded in the curriculum (McGuinness 2009). Initiatives such as ANCIL have helped librarians to plan IL sessions in more structured ways, encouraging them to think analytically about the reasons for teaching using particular methods (Coonan et al. 2012). At the University of Manchester, librarians developed an entire module dedicated to digital and IL, which can be taken as part of any undergraduate degree programme, and involves both individual and group assessment (UCIL 2015; Aston and McIndoe 2014).

2.3 How librarians develop teaching competence

UK library and information students on CILIP-accredited courses are required to learn about teaching and training skills, which form part of CILIP's Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (CILIP 2013). There is also demand from employers and library and information science (LIS) professionals for new graduates to have teaching skills and for them to have learned these during the postgraduate course (Simmons and Corral 2011), but in 2010 just three UK library courses offered optional teaching-related modules (Simmons 2010). Bewick and Corral (2010) found that 15 out of 78 surveyed librarians had gained a formal teaching-related qualification, although only one librarian reported a postgraduate diploma in librarianship as the source of their teaching skills. Others had gained teaching-specific qualifications such as aBTEC or postgraduate certificate. The PGCHE, offered at most UK HE institutions to new lecturers, can provide a space in which librarians can develop their pedagogic knowledge (Austin and Bhandol 2013)

As well as learning some skills during their LIS qualification, librarians in the US report that they acquire most teaching skills on the job or through self-teaching, although they would have preferred to learn more of them at library school than they actually did (Westbrock and Fabian 2010). Bewick and Corral (2010) found a similar picture in the UK, with the majority of respondents learning skills on the job or via "peer interaction" (p. 107). In general, librarians prefer not to learn new skills on their own, with just 18% of Bewick and Corral's respondents reporting that they had not attended any conferences, peer support groups or committees related to teaching (Bewick and Corral 2010). Houtman's (2010) interviewees identified examples of "bad teaching" by librarians who seem to have no awareness of the quality of their performance; Houtman suggests that this could be because "they have no model, [...] they are self-taught and working in isolation" (p. 31). The value of support, good training and reflective practice is emphasised as a way of avoiding poor teaching.

Some librarians try to improve their skills through continuing professional development activities and further education, although a lack of time often prevents them from doing so (Houtman 2010). Many see the responsibility for learning to teach as falling to the individual, rather than to library schools or employers, although some think more should be done to support librarians in developing their skills. One participant in Houtman's (2010) study is quoted as saying, "where do you develop those skills? [...] I think we're supposed to miraculously know it" (p. 36), highlighting the perceived lack of interest some employers have in helping staff develop new skills. Westbrock and Fabian (2010) advise that librarians should "have access to effective methods for acquiring these skills as they need them" (p. 590), placing the responsibility with libraries to support and educate their staff.

Julien (2005) warns that, despite the various ways in which librarians can acquire teaching skills, "these must rest on a deeper foundation of theoretical understanding" (p.212). This good grounding in pedagogy is vital in order to ensure that "the quality of the teaching of information literacy [is] excellent by everyone involved" (Peters 2009). Research has shown that some librarians feel that teaching is central to their role, and that teaching permeates many other aspects of their job, for example while on the reference desk (Walter 2008)

Houtman (2010) believes there is “an underlying attitude of uncertainty”(p. 37) about teaching within the librarian community, and that a lack of support and education will have an impact on the quality of their teaching, as well as contributing to “role stress” (Farison et al. 2008 p.198). McGuinness’ (2011) study of 38 Irish librarians found that a significant portion of respondents had not felt confident about teaching at the beginning of their careers. However, with practice and support, the overall confidence of the surveyed group had improved (p. 192).

2.4 Librarian professional identity

It is asserted in the literature that teaching is a core activity for many librarians (Julien 2005; Walter 2008). A national survey of Canadian librarians found that were that 78.8% of respondents saw teaching as an integral part of their professional identity, and this was particularly true if they worked in the education or public library sector. Librarians reported enjoyment of the teaching role due to such factors as observing positive student outcomes, and reflections on their own personal and professional development. However, librarians experienced challenges in their teaching role due to faculty (and learner) buy-in to IL development. They also experienced personal challenges relating to their own perceived skill as educators and a feeling that they lacked teaching expertise (Julien and Genuis 2011). Unequal power relationships between faculty and “subordinate” librarians leads to feelings among librarians that they do not have the necessary expertise to be full partners in teaching; and are not considered to be “real” teachers by the academic faculty staff, leading to a situation where faculty support for librarian teaching is seen to be a factor in ensuring success. (Julien and Pecoskie 2009). Librarians can feel as though co-workers in other departments and faculty staff do not have a good understanding of their roles (Walter 2008)

Some librarians see teaching as an activity that permeates a lot of what they do when they offer “support” to users in many contexts of library work, such as at an information desk (Walter 2008); and Jacobs (2008) asserts that librarians should have broad conceptions of pedagogy that encompass teaching in different sites and activities. However there was recognition that teaching is somehow more different and more complex than simply providing support to students as at an information desk, and this can lead to a problematic relationship with pedagogy; previously successful information desk strategies have to be redefined to new teaching environments. (Austin and Bhandol 2013). Librarians can feel as though they are pressured by multiple demands of their roles and find that teaching is just one extra activity that is an added burden combined with their other responsibilities (Walter 2008) and have reported that they are “on the edge”(p.23) of teaching, and being “pushed” (p.25) into a teaching role.(Austin and Bhandol 2013) Conversely librarians can find it stimulating and interesting to have varied roles which can lead to a higher profile for libraries and librarians. (Julien and Genuis 2011). This brief discussion of the literature highlights that there are a range of perspectives and opinions regarding the centrality of teaching to the librarian role and also that there are varying levels of confidence in pedagogy and teaching in librarians.

This review has introduced some of the debates present in the librarian literature surrounding librarians’ roles as educators of IL, and has highlighted some of the tension experienced by librarians in developing themselves as teachers and in developing the pedagogical knowledge needed to function effectively as a teacher.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research aims and objectives

The aim of this project was to investigate the variation in academic librarians’ conceptions of their own teaching, specifically looking at whether they conceive of themselves as teachers, whether they make use of teaching theory in their IL activities, and whether they are “teaching” or “training”.

Through analysis of the data collected, we reveal the conceptions that participants have about their teaching and make recommendations for improving and supporting the development of teaching skills for librarians.

Due to the small scale of this project, the research focused specifically on academic librarians who teach IL to students at HE institutions in the UK. Conducting research with a broader focus (for example, librarians in any educational establishment, or HE librarians across more than one country) would not have been appropriate or achievable.

3.2 Choosing phenomenography as a research approach

It was felt that the best method for answering the research questions was to use semi-structured interviews, where participants are encouraged to give longer answers to questions, rather than a survey or questionnaire, which tend not to elicit in-depth detailed answers. Phenomenography was identified as an appropriate method for this research, as it is a qualitative research approach which aims to identify the range of different ways of experiencing a phenomenon (Marton and Booth 1997). It is most frequently used in an educational context to understand and identify approaches to learning and teaching (Bowden 2000), although it has been used successfully in other contexts to investigate issues in everyday life (Yates et al. 2012), or to understand “information experiences” such as information seeking (Yates, Partridge and Bruce. 2012).

Despite Marton and Booth’s (1997) assertion that phenomenography is not a method but rather an approach to research, most phenomenographic studies use the same method of interviewing a purposive sample of participants and analysing the transcripts to identify variation in ways of conceiving of a phenomenon (Bowden 2005). Although phenomenographic studies are carried out with a group of individuals, the resulting categories of description describe the conceptions of the group as a whole, rather than any one individual’s conception on its own; the findings enable the researcher “to differentiate between a number of different ways of seeing the phenomenon that are apparent” (Bowden 2000). It is important to note that, as Bowden (2005) warns, “no outcomes from phenomenographic research can be regarded as generalisations or universal statements”. The research outcomes simply describe variation in conceptions within a group of people at a certain time and in a certain place.

3.3 Sampling procedures

The number of participants in phenomenographic studies is usually between 10 and 30 (Stenfors-Hayes, Hult and Dahlgren 2013), allowing the researcher to ensure there will be a good level of variation within the group. However, for this small research project, a smaller group of participants was used, with just six interviews being conducted. Participants were identified by the researcher from among her personal contacts. Åkerlind (2005 p.103) highlights the importance of selecting as varied a sample as possible, in order to increase the chances of identifying a wide range of conceptions. To this end, the participants for this research were selected because they had varying lengths of career and levels of experience, worked in different institutions, and were not all of the same gender. The sample included librarians working at traditional, long-established or “red-brick” universities and those working at institutions that were given university status in 1992 (“post-1992”). The demographic variation can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic details of the study participants

Length of career as professional librarian	3 0-3 years 1 4-7 years 1 7-10 years 1 10+ years
Type of institution	1 red-brick 5 post-1992
Gender	3 female 3 male

Participants reported delivering IL teaching/training in a variety of situations, including small and large groups and one-to-one situations. The main limitation of this sample is the fact that the selected participants all work at institutions in the north of England. This was an unavoidable limitation for this research due to the amount of time it would have taken for the researcher to travel further afield.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Sheffield Information School ethics panel.

The interview questions for this research were based on examples from the literature, including those given by Åkerlind (2005), Bowden (2005) and Diehm and Lupton (2012). The questions covered three main themes: background information about the librarian and their teaching experiences; a description of a particular teaching intervention; and questions designed to elicit the librarian's conception of teaching. The full set of interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

For this project, one pilot interview was carried out. It was felt that the questions and interview structure worked well during the pilot, and therefore the remaining interviews were conducted without changing the questions at all, and the transcript of the pilot was included in the final analysis.

Each interview was conducted face-to-face at the participant's workplace, and recorded using an audio recording device. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and each interview was transcribed by the researcher as soon as possible after it had taken place. Hesitations and vocal tics were recorded but body language or other environmental aspects of the interview were disregarded because this would have been too time-consuming for a project of this size.

The transcripts were imported into qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package *NVivo* for analysis. As is common in the literature, the transcripts for this project were analysed as a whole, ensuring that the researcher would not be tempted to take comments out of context and infer different meanings than the intended ones.

Phenomenographic transcript analysis is usually carried out as an iterative process, with the original coding being checked and refined on each re-reading of the transcripts until a set of categories have been identified, as described by Lameris et al.(2011). For this project, the transcripts were read through, with codes being assigned to any comments that seemed relevant, and then read through a second time to check the coding, adding new codes or consolidating codes where necessary. The codes were then arranged into themes or categories, with re-reading of the transcripts helping to identify which category a code belonged to, until a set of distinct categories emerged. The findings will be described in more detail in the next section.

4. Results

Four different conceptions of teaching were identified from the data and these are presented as categories of description in the outcome space. In this section, we describe each category in detail, supported by quotes from the interviews. Participants and any places or people referred to in quotes have been anonymised to protect the identity of anyone involved.

The categories of description each correspond to a conception of teaching, and each is different from the other three according to one or more dimensions of variation. As stated earlier, the conceptions revealed in the data do not relate to any one individual, but instead describe conceptions held by participants. One participant may hold more than one conception depending on the situation or context discussed. The outcome space is presented in Table 2:

Table 2: The four categories of description

	I teach	I do not teach
I am a teacher	Teacher-librarian I am a teacher AND I do the same teaching as other teachers	Learning support I am a teacher BUT my teaching is not the same as other teachers'
I am not a teacher	Librarian who teaches I am not a teacher BUT I do some teaching	Trainer I am not a teacher AND I don't teach

As can be seen from the outcome space, the variation between categories is based on how librarians conceive of not just their teaching, but also of themselves. Which category a librarian will identify with at any given time also appears to depend on their conceptions of other teachers and their conceptions of IL. This is explored in more detail below.

4.1 Teacher librarian

This category describes a conception of librarians as teachers, as equals with other teachers, and as practitioners of theory-based teaching. Librarians who hold this conception believe that their teaching is exactly the same type of teaching as that which other teachers do.

I am a teacher

When asked if they conceived of themselves as teachers, some participants responded very positively. Participant 3 said "*I definitely would*" refer to themselves as a teacher, and later used the word "*teacher-librarians*" to refer to themselves and their colleagues. Participant 4 believed that they were a teacher on a par with other teaching staff, stating: "*I think we're really important, and I think that we should be up there and have the same kind of, you know, level of respect ... as the academics*". Several interviewees mentioned feeling that they were perceived as equals by other staff, which strengthened their conceptions of themselves not just as teachers but as valued members of the teaching staff. Participant 5 mentioned that in their dealings with academics, "*you feel as though you're one of them, you're included*". They also mentioned qualifications or memberships (e.g. of the Higher Education Academy (HEA)) which, for them, were an acknowledgement of their competence and validity as teaching staff.

Respondents also talked about teaching being a central focus of their role. Participant 4 told the researcher that "*I think it is like an integral part of being a librarian, in whatever you do, that you're teaching someone how to do something*", an idea echoed by Participant 1, who said: "*I actually believe that one-to-one interactions that I have with students or with researchers are potential mini teaching sessions*".

I do exactly the same teaching as other teachers do

Librarians with this conception demonstrated an understanding of teaching theory and a belief that librarians' teaching should be as deliberate and considered as other teachers'. Interviewees mentioned specific theories and techniques that they used in their teaching, suggesting that they believed that what they did was exactly the same as what other teachers do. Some participants mentioned aspects of teaching such as gathering feedback, planning lessons, behaviour management and reflection, while others talked about using specific theories. For example, Participant 2 said that "*feedback will inform how I go about making up- doing my practice and what I teach them*". Participant 4 mentioned ways in which, like other teachers, they seek out more information about teaching, constantly trying to improve their skills: "*I do do a lot of CPD, I am active on Twitter, I go to events, I do stuff in my spare time etcetera*". Participant 3 framed their teaching in constructivist terms, saying: "*you can't force knowledge from one head to another*", and later explicitly referenced theories they base their teaching on: "*I do stuff with games and game-based learning that is essentially, it's just active learning with a particular spin on it*", suggesting they are knowledgeable about teaching and conceive of their own teaching as important and worth

researching and refining. Participant 1 talked about using inquiry-based learning specifically while Participant 2 had a more generalised learner-centred approach.

Another aspect of the teacher-librarian conception is the librarian's view of IL as something that is complex and conceptual, which is taught rather than trained. Participant 3 stated: *"I would describe what we do as teaching, because it's- lots of the stuff we do is about helping people learn about difficult ideas and concepts, and helping them to develop themselves, and that's what I'd see as teaching"*.

4.2 Learning support

This category describes a conception of librarians as "the same but different"; although they still conceive of their activities as teaching rather than something else, they feel that it is a different type of teaching, with fewer facets, than that which other teachers do. They also believe that, while they teach, they are not equals with their academic colleagues or other teachers that they know, and are not perceived as such by them.

I am a teacher but I play a support role

Participants talked about their role in their institution as a supporting role, rather than an equal teaching role. Some talked about this in relation to their own conception of themselves and their librarian colleagues, and identified with learning technologists and other "support staff" (participant 2) who also teach. Other interviewees spoke about others' perceptions of them; Participant 2 said (of academics), *"they see us as support staff, or auxiliary staff, you know, they're- we're there to support their teaching"*, while Participant 5 said (about students), *"I don't know whether they actually make the distinction between academic and support staff to be honest"*. Besides suggesting that others' perceptions of them influences how they view themselves, the natural and easy way in which participants refer to themselves as "support staff" demonstrates the strength of this conception.

At times, participants compared themselves to teachers that they were friends with, or related to, showing an unwillingness to label themselves as identical or as important as those other teachers. Speaking about an acquaintance who taught in a school, Participant 4 told the researcher: *"I don't think of myself as a teacher in the same way that he's a teacher"*, and Participant 6 made a distinction between themselves and *"my teacher-teacher friends"*. Although these comments refer to teachers in schools rather than in HE, they still demonstrate a conception of librarians as something other than "proper" teaching staff.

My teaching is not the same as other teachers'

Participants felt that, as well as their role being different, their activities were different too. Participant 6 stated: *"teaching as a librarian is very different to teaching as a teacher"*. Interviewees highlighted the differences between their teaching and the teaching that other teachers do, mentioning some of the aspects that, they think, don't feature in librarians' teaching as much as they do in others'. Assessment was identified as an activity outside their remit, and relationships with students were singled out as being different for librarians. Participant 1 asserted that librarians had little to no chance of developing a teacher-learner relationship due to the little amount of face-to-face contact they had with students. This conception of librarians being less involved with some facets of teaching contrasts with the previously mentioned teacher-librarian conception, where librarians are able to take part in all aspects of teaching.

Interviewees tried to articulate their sense that IL teaching was different from "academic" teaching. Participant 2 said: *"We're not academic teachers, we're more skills-based teachers, so that's... that's different, I think"*. This distinction between "academic" and "skills-based" was picked up on by other participants as well; as Participant 6 put it, *"its skills teaching, it's not topic teaching if you know what I mean"*. It is interesting to note here that even though the interviewees suggest that there are types or degrees of teaching, they all still refer to it using the word "teaching".

Interviewees regarded their teaching as more practical and less theoretical than academic teaching. Participant 2 acknowledged that theory underpinned their work, but said *"I don't get bogged down with the theory too much"*. This attitude contrasts with the "teacher-librarian" idea that new concepts and theories can improve their teaching and be more effective for students.

4.3 Librarian who teaches

This category covers librarians who are reluctant to refer to themselves as teachers, while still calling their activities "teaching". They are careful to emphasise the other parts of their role, showing the reduced importance they place on teaching.

I am not a teacher

Librarians holding this conception see themselves as "not just" teachers, or "more than" teachers. They feel that the "librarian" part of their role is much more important than the "teacher" part, as it acknowledges the other activities that they undertake. Participant 1 said of their colleagues *"I probably wouldn't ever refer to any of them as teachers, I'd- I'd refer to them as erm, you know, librarians who've got teaching responsibilities or who engage in teaching and supporting learning"*. Participant 1 later stated *"I do tend to think of myself perhaps as... a supporter of learning and a facilitator of learning rather than somebody who teaches"*. The reluctance to label themselves a "teacher" is not because of any negative connotation with the term, but rather because of the desire to keep their role as a librarian separate and distinguishable from the other teaching staff at the institution.

I do some teaching, but it's not central to my role

Interviewees also talked about how they viewed teaching with regard to their role. While acknowledging that they do teaching, some participants made the case that it is just one part of a librarian's role, whereas it is more central for teachers.

As well as holding a conception of teaching as less of a focus of librarians' roles, interviewees also suggested that they viewed their teaching as not as important as academics' teaching. Participant 5 told the researcher, *"Obviously it's not as important as the academics that are obviously teaching them the content,"* while Participant 6 suggested librarians' teaching has less impact on students, *"because we're not teaching them everything, it's just an introduction"*. Again, this conception of librarians and their teaching as less important or valuable within the institution is markedly different to the teacher-librarian conception, which puts librarians on an equal footing with academics.

4.4 Trainer

This category describes perhaps a more negative conception than the others, in that people holding this conception do not want to label themselves "teachers" or call their activities "teaching". They feel this way because of a conception of teaching as requiring high-level qualifications and being technical and complex, ascribing a certain amount of prestige to teaching and teachers that they do not feel they share. This category also involves a conception of IL instruction as being closer to skills training than knowledge teaching.

I am not a teacher

The main reason for participants being unwilling to describe themselves as teachers seems to stem from a conception of teaching as a very advanced ability, requiring training and qualifications before earning the title of teacher. Participant 1 suggested that teaching required a high-level qualification, and participant 5 stated that the librarianship qualification didn't count as a formal teaching qualification.

Participant 6 talked about their lack of qualification in terms of their perception of themselves in relation to their academic colleagues. They noted that they are hesitant to call themselves a teacher because *"I think it's because I don't have a qualification. If and when I get one, I'll probably be a bit more happy about it, because then when I go to talk to departments and talk about teaching, I can go 'well I've got actually the same or a very similar qualification to you', so it's that*

keeping up with the Joneses". Participant 3 talked about a perceived lack of confidence among librarians regarding their unqualified status, saying: *"And I suspect for librarians, PGCE would be a nice badge to have, [...] they're not necessarily doing anything differently, but because lecturers would then see them slightly differently, it then helps their own perception of themselves. It's like they're taking me seriously because of this, perhaps I am more serious"*.

The conception of the librarian as "not a teacher" partly stems from the institutional environment; participants talked about job titles having an impact on how they viewed themselves and their roles. Participant 3 explained how the organisational structure of their institution affects librarians' job descriptions, saying: *"people who are described as "teaching" here start on [pay grade], people that are described as "training" start on scale- well, they can- there's no scale they have to start on, I don't think. So officially librarians are described as "training" here, purely because there's pay issues involved."*

I don't teach, I train

In the same vein, interviewees were at times uneasy about calling their activities teaching, preferring other terminology instead. Participant 6 told the researcher: *"I think it's training, erm, I don't think it's teaching"*, later describing their search for alternative vocabulary: *"I went for a long time of calling it workshopping, but then that got a bit weird."* Again, the institutional environment probably affects how librarians speak about their work; even if they don't believe they are teaching, if it is the word most commonly used, then they will grow accustomed to using it themselves. Participant 6 suggested this was the case for them, saying: *"I do call it teaching all the time, when I refer to it I call it teaching, but it's sort of through gritted teeth"*. Participant 4 felt that "trainer" was a better description of their role.

Participants appeared to conceive of teaching as something superior or prestigious at times, painting a picture of a technical and complex world that they were not properly part of. Participant 3 spoke about techniques they used, while labelling teaching theory as "posh": *"the play and game-based stuff that- I'm not sure have posh learning labels"*. It appeared that participants often wanted to acknowledge that they were not "proper" teachers, with less knowledge and skills than their academic counterparts, whether or not this is actually true.

5. Discussion

This section examines how the results answered the research aims as set out in section 3.1, with reference to the literature.

5.1 How do academic librarians' conceptions of their teaching vary?

The four categories of description focus more on librarians' conceptions of themselves as teachers, rather than their conceptions of their teaching. However, the ways in which librarians conceive of their own teaching are integral to the four categories and help to differentiate each category from the others. These conceptions of librarians' teaching can all be seen in the literature. The vast body of literature discussing teaching theory and pedagogy for librarians supports the conception that their teaching is exactly the same as others'; however some (older) models of IL (for example, the Big Blue model) do refer to IL "training" rather than teaching (McGuinness 2009 p.263).

The study by McGuinness (2009), notes that participants in her research were more comfortable talking about "training" activities than labelling them "information literacy teaching"; however, the distinction between the two activities is not well defined. The link between IL and IT instruction at many institutions, as discussed by Coonan (2011), could be partly to blame for a conception of IL teaching as being different to other teaching; the more conceptual IL skills, such as critical thinking and evaluation, are often taught alongside IT skills such as navigating the library website and using bibliographic database search engines, blurring the distinction between them and casting library instructional activities in a very different light to traditional academic teaching.

5.2 Do librarians describe themselves as teachers?

Despite Feetham's (2006) and Moniz et al.'s (2014) assertions that nowadays liaison librarians are (or should be) engaged with the pedagogical research world, the interviews show that some librarians do not see themselves as teachers, let alone active researchers of teaching and learning theory. There is a certain downplaying of their abilities, knowledge and activities evident in some of the categories of description which emerged from this research, which chimes more with Houtman's (2010) report of librarians' uncertainty around teaching.

Part of the reason behind librarians' conceptions of themselves as "different" teachers, or non-teachers, was to do with their level of qualification, and their conception of teaching being a complex and high-level skill. Several participants commented on their lack of qualifications, despite all being qualified librarians, suggesting that the findings reported by Simmons (2010) and Bewick and Corral (2010) are still true: few librarians learn teaching skills on their library degrees, and few go on to gain teaching-related qualifications afterwards. Participants see teaching qualifications and having membership of professional bodies (such as the HEA) as having positive impact both their perceptions of themselves and of others perceptions of them as teachers. Lupton (2002) is very clear in her assertion that viewing IL education as "training" is reflective of a "tick box" approach that focuses on the acquisition of very specific skills that can be applied in one specific context. This leads to surface learning and an inability to link IL to wider educational concepts. Much preferred is for IL educators to view their activities as "teaching" and to engage with constructivist pedagogies that enable deep learning.

5.3 What teaching methods and theories are librarians influenced by, if any?

The participants were forthcoming about their ideas and influences. It was interesting to note the variation in influences and viewpoints on this subject, with some respondents appearing very theory-oriented, and others preferring to work from their own ideas and experience. Several participants mentioned using, or learning about, teaching approaches and theories in their work. Inquiry-based learning, game-based learning and active learning were all mentioned specifically, showing that constructivist theory and approaches are inspiring for librarians, who often conceive of themselves as supporters and facilitators of learning. The variety in approaches reported by librarians validates the suggestion in the literature review that librarians' teaching is diverse and impossible to pigeonhole.

Other participants shied away from talking about specific theories, asserting that they did not know much about pedagogy and did not have the technical knowledge to talk about such things. This attitude matches Bell and Shank's (2004) warning that librarians are lacking in pedagogical knowledge, as well as Bewick and Corral's findings that librarians do not rate theoretical knowledge as useful or important as practical knowledge and skills. One participant almost quoted McGuinness (2011) word-for-word when they told the researcher, *"I think librarianship is very practical, and whilst theory is good, sometimes it doesn't have connection to the practical"*.

5.4 What are librarians actually doing when they "teach"?

A number of interesting answers to this question were drawn from the responses. Librarians' conceptions of their teaching appeared to be closely linked with their conceptions of themselves as teachers and also of IL; either they were doing teaching because they conceived of themselves as teachers and of IL as a teachable concept, or they were doing teaching despite not feeling like "proper" teachers, or they were not doing teaching because they considered IL to be something that is trained, not taught.

Despite what the literature says about IL being a combination of behaviour and awareness (SCONUL 2011) and about the need to teach students to critically evaluate information (Fernandez-Villavicencio 2010), sometimes participants appeared to conceive of IL as a solely behaviour-based mechanical skill, perhaps because they in fact spent more time teaching students to use complicated databases than they did teaching evaluative skills. Others fell more in line with

the idea that IL is conceptual and something that must be taught in a constructivist way. Overall, it seems that although the literature states that libraries have moved forward from library or information skills to IL (Cox and Corral 2013; Peters 2009), this may be in name only in some institutions.

It appears that, as well as Coonan's (2011) suggestion that the convergence of library and IT instruction are causing confusion around teaching and training, the institutional environment also influences the way librarians think and talk about themselves and their "teaching". Participant 6, who stated a strong belief that they were training students, not teaching them, admitted to calling their work "teaching" in day-to-day life, because their colleagues did the same.

6. Conclusion

Four categories of description were created from the data collected, each describing a conception librarians hold of their teaching and of themselves as teachers. These were:

- Teacher-librarian
- Learning support
- Librarian who teaches
- Trainer

Each participant held more than one conception during the interviews, as the conversation moved between different contexts and ideas, and it is clear to see that the categories of description hold up to the phenomenographic ideal of describing the variation apparent in the group, rather than the variation between specific individuals.

Although this study took place in the context of a time-limited Masters dissertation, the data obtained is valid and interesting, and the resulting outcome space is useful and brings new knowledge to the field.

6.1 Recommendations for practice

One of the main themes arising from the research was the idea that some librarians feel less confident about their teaching and less willing to acknowledge that they are teachers, or that they teach, even if it is obvious that that is what they are doing. Attending more teaching-related CPD events and training would help librarians feel more informed about good teaching practice and more able to speak with authority on the subject within their institutions. An example of teaching development available to librarians is the *Pedagogy for Librarians* residential course that took place in June 2015 (see *Resources*).

Library managers should consider providing more training or supporting their librarians to undertake qualifications, such as a PGCert in Learning and Teaching, or Fellowship of the HEA, to further help ameliorate the problems around self-confidence in terms of teaching and also to improve the professional recognition of librarians as teachers within institutions.

Universities providing LIS qualifications should consider including more (elective) pedagogy and teaching-related instruction and it is vital that new professionals feel that they have received a good grounding in teaching theory and techniques at library school.

Resources

Pedagogy for Librarians residential course website:
<http://www.informationliteracy.org.uk/2015/03/pedagogycourse/>

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Appendix – Interview Questions

Introductory questions

How long have you been working as a librarian?
How long have you been teaching IL?
How often do you teach IL?
In what context – small groups, lectures, etc – do you teach?
Have you got any qualifications in teaching?
What about ongoing CPD?

Specific scenario

Tell me about the most recent IL session you ran...
How did you decide what to do?
Did it go well?
How do you know?
Did you do any evaluation or assessment?
Did you get any feedback from the learners?
How do you think the learners responded to what you were teaching?
Would you do anything differently next time?

Conceptions of teaching

What do you understand by the word “teaching”?
Do you base your ideas on any specific theories or pedagogy?
How would you describe your approach to teaching IL?
How would you describe your role as a teacher?
How have your views about teaching changed since you first started?
How have you changed as a learner since you started teaching?