**Type of Contribution: Paper**

**Title: Relegating expertise: The outward and inward positioning of librarians in information literacy education**

**Keywords:** Information literacy; Discourse analysis; Teaching librarian; Positioning theory; Identity

**Introduction**

Teaching librarians have a chequered history within Library and Information Science. While the nineteenth century saw the rise of instructional roles within libraries, the late twentieth century has been marked by the push to legitimise these positions through the development of the field of information literacy (O’Connor 2009), often in the face of faculty opposition (Drabinski 2016). Recently, a number of studies have painted a detailed picture of teaching librarians’ everyday responsibilities and challenges, including a well-documented frustration in the face of what is perceived to form a failure to focus on information literacy instruction within Library and Information Science education (e.g. Davis 2007; Detmering, McClellan & Willenborg 2019; Julien & Pecoskie 2009; Walter 2008; Wheeler & McKinney 2015). While this research offers insight into professional practice and identity, it has typically explored the teaching librarian role in isolation rather than in terms of its relationship to the broader narrative of information literacy (IL).This paper will interrogate these ideas by examining how teaching librarian identities are shaped by discourses of information literacy within the higher education sector (ILiHE). It forms part of a larger programme of research that is exploring how librarians, students and the practice of IL are positioned within the field.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study uses positioning theory (McKenzie 2004; Moghaddam & Harré 2010) to understand how the discourses of ILiHE construct and position teaching librarians within higher education. Positioning theory has been applied in Library and Information Science research (Given 2002; McKenzie 2004) to facilitate an understanding of the interactional relationship between actors and the discursive texts related to their practices. Within the context of this study, positioning theory will frame an examination of the ways in which teaching librarians use professional and institutional narratives to “ascribe rights and claim them for ourselves and place duties on others” (Moghaddam & Harré 2010, p.3). This approach, which builds on work that has employed role theory (Zai 2015) as well as Goffman’s concept of deference (Julien & Pecoskie 2009) to explore the teaching librarian role, will facilitate important insight into the ways in which discourse constrains and enables the shape and the scope of ILiHE.

**Research Questions**

This abstract is the second in a series of three that is designed to interrogate the discourses and practices of information literacy in higher education. The question that guides this section of the ILiHE project is:

* How does the discourse of ILiHE position librarians in professional guidelines, models and texts?

**Methodology**

A discourse analytical approach was employed to examine the discourses that surround the role and shape of librarian engagement within the higher education sector. Texts that were analysed included preambles to the five major English-language information literacy models that have been published since 2010 as well as introductions to books that specifically explore these models (see Appendix A). Book introductions and preambles to institutional models were selected for the work that they do to frame major information literacy concepts as well as to create a manageable initial sample.

**Findings**

Preliminary analysis suggests that the expertise of the professional librarian is obscured and silenced within preambles to institutional information literacy models. In terms of the creation of these documents, emphasis is placed on “experts in the information literacy field” (ANCIL 2011, p.4) and “teams of faculty experts” (AACU 2013), including “those working in curriculum design and educational technologies” (ANCIL 2011, p.4) and “professionals working with different user groups” (SCONUL 2011, p.3) rather than library professionals. Narratives that frame institutional models also reduce librarians’ involvement in teaching for information literacy by positioning the practice as taught by a range of non-library staff, including “instructors” (Metaliteracy 2014), “individuals and teachers” (SCONUL 2011, p.4), with professional librarians only mentioned as part of a long list of “study skills advisors, learning developers, supervisors and lecturers… careers and admissions staff… academic staff” (ANCIL 2011, p.6). While the inclusion of non-librarians illustrates that information literacy instruction is a collaborative endeavour that is shared by an institution, this positioning of teaching librarian labour diminishes the contribution of professionals from outward facing narratives of IL.

In contrast, the position is reversed within introductions to information literacy books where teaching librarians, who are often the authors of this work, are highly evident. While these texts address questions of visibility, they also variously position teaching librarians as under-prepared, lacking in confidence, disempowered and anxious, as well as, more positively collegial and creative. Along these lines, librarians position themselves as under-prepared or lacking in the knowledge they need to teach, as well as unable to understand institutional IL documents. Themes of under preparedness, and uncertainty are illustrated in the following excerpts:

“We are unsure how to begin because we had no background in education”

(Oberlies & Mattson 2018, p.xvi)

“Many librarians have struggled to make sense of the document” (Godbey,

Wainscott & Goodman 2017, p.1).

These feelings of inadequacy consequently mean that librarians see themselves as lacking in confidence as well as being uncertain and anxious:

“our first goal is to address the teaching anxiety and insecurity librarians often

experience” (Oberlies & Mattson 2018, p.xiv)

“[new ways of doing things] can feel daunting” (Harmeyer & Baskin 2018, p.xix)

And, while librarians recognise that their creativity and collegiality help to resolve and resist many of these negative emotions, the sense of incompetence consequently means that they further situate themselves as disempowered on campus as well as from broader conversations on teaching:

“for those lucky information literacy instructors who have the time, the support of

administration and faculty, and the political, pedagogical and personal power to

effect change across campus, this goal is easily accomplished” (Burkhardt 2017, p.5)

**Discussion**

While analysis of this project is ongoing, emerging findings suggest that the discourse of information literacy in the higher education sector is composed of both outward-facing and inward-facing narratives. The outward-facing discourse of information literacy (located in information literacy standards and guidelines), negates teaching librarian expertise by reducing their presence and diminishing their contributions to IL. In contrast, while teaching librarians are central within inward-facing articulations (located in information literacy texts), an emphasis on deficiency means that teaching librarians are positioned and position themselves as lacking the capacity to either recognise or assert their proficiency.

Librarians have typically felt unsure about their teaching identity (e.g. Davis 2007; Detmering, McClellan & Willenborg 2019; Julien & Pecoskie 2009; Walter 2008; Wheeler & McKinney 2015). However, what is striking about the findings from this research is that teaching librarians are not only relegating themselves within professional texts, which form the inward-facing discourse, but they are also being side-lined within institutional documents, which constitute the outward-facing discourse. Together, these findings raise a number of questions about the value accorded to the professional practice of librarians within information literacy discourse as well as the ways in which the practice of information literacy is enabled and constrained within the HE sector. More complexly, they also suggest that librarian-authored information literacy books constitute a form of resistance, albeit an uncertain one, to the othering that is present within institutional preambles. The intertwined shape of these ideas demonstrate that the construction of identity as well as the ways in which librarians define themselves in relation to IL is complicated. The recognition that the issues that surround the development of teaching identity is far broader than expected also means that this study further challenges the claim that Library and Information Science schools are solely to blame for failing to prepare students for IL teaching (e.g. Davis, 2007, p.93; Walter, 2008, p.62).

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**Appendix A**

**Information literacy models**

* A new curriculum for information literacy (ANCIL) (Secker & Coonan, 2011)
* Framework for information literacy for higher education (ACRL, 2016)
* Metaliteracy (Jacobson & Mackey, 2014)
* Seven pillars of information literacy (SCONUL, 2011)
* VALUE rubric (AACU, 2013)

**Books**

Metaliteracy

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* Jacobson, Trudi and Tom Mackey. 2016. *Metaliteracy in practice*. Chicago: Neal-Schuman Publishers.
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Framework

* Burkhardt, Joanna. 2017. *Teaching information literacy reframed: 50+ framework-based exercises for creating information-literate learners*. Chicago: American Library Association.
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Threshold concepts

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Textbooks

* Hosier, Allison, Daryl Bullis, Deborah Bernnard, Greg Bobish, Irina Holden, Jenna Pitera, Tor Loney and Trudi Jacobson. 2014. *The Information literacy user’s guide: An open, online textbook*. <https://textbooks.opensuny.org/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/>