

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

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Alison Hicks  and Annemaree Lloyd 

University College London, UK

## Abstract

Previous research has demonstrated that professional narratives reference discourses that shape the practice of information literacy within higher education. This article uses discourse analysis method to identify how information literacy discourses construct and position teaching librarians within higher education. Texts analysed include four recent English-language models of information literacy and 16 textbooks. Analysis suggests the existence of two distinct narratives related to the role, expertise and professional practice of teaching librarians. In the outward-facing narrative librarian work is typically absent from guidelines for practice. In contrast, book introductions, which constitute the inward-facing narrative, centre professional librarians yet simultaneously position them as incompetent, or as lacking the skills and understandings that they need to be effective in this setting. These narratives constitute a form of othering that threatens professional practice at a time when the professionalisation of librarianship is being drawn into question. This article represents the second in a research programme that interrogates the epistemological premises and discourses of information literacy within higher education.

## Keywords

Information literacy, positioning theory, discourse analysis, teaching librarian, higher education

## Introduction

As a practice, information literacy (IL) is shaped, reproduced and transformed by social and public discourses. These discourses influence the language and activities that compose the practice. They also impact the roles that are ascribed to practitioners of the practice as well as professionals who contribute to related work processes. The study reported in this article investigates how the discourses associated with IL shape and position teaching and instructional librarians, who form one of the key participants in IL practice within the higher education sector. The goal of this article, which specifically focusses on examining IL models and key professional texts in the field, is to unpack the various ways in which these discourses act to construct and give meaning to professional identity and performance.

This research forms part of a larger programme of study that is exploring how librarians, students and the practice of IL are positioned within the higher education sector (Hicks and Lloyd, in press). This segment of the research is guided by the following research question:

- How does the discourse of IL in higher education (ILiHE) position librarians in professional guidelines, models and texts?

In this study, the discourse of ILiHE is explored through an examination of key documents from the sector, including IL models and professional texts. IL models play a particularly prominent role within higher education. Created to promote ‘shared academic library values and principles of performance’ (Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, n.d.)), these documents establish standards for IL programming. Their frequent endorsement by professional associations, who carry the knowledge and traditions of professional practice (Kemmis, 2010), means that these documents also articulate teaching librarian expertise both within and beyond the immediate profession (Hicks and VanScoy, 2019: 34). Documents can further be seen as influencing workplace culture through their impact on job descriptions, ongoing training opportunities and performance evaluation criteria. While IL models have traditionally taken a skill-based focus, recent years have marked the emergence of a new, second wave of constructivist focussed guidelines and recommendations (Hicks and Lloyd, 2016).

## Corresponding author:

Alison Hicks, Department of Information Studies, University College London, Foster Court, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK.  
Email: a.hicks@ucl.ac.uk

Professional texts play an equally important role within IL instruction. Referring to educational materials, such as textbooks, professional texts are typically written by and for teaching librarians to provide practical suggestions for ways in which IL models can be used and adapted in practice. In recent years, the implementation of new IL models has led to the establishment of what Seale (2016: 4) refers to as a mini-industry of professional texts designed to support librarian engagement with changing ideals of practice.

The range of professional texts that are implicated within ILiHE means that IL discourse can be understood as composed of inward and outward-facing narratives. The inward-facing narrative of IL is constituted through the educational texts that support the implementation of ILiHE. These texts, which are often written by and for teaching librarians, constitute the internal account of the professional practice and focus on issues of interest to practitioners. The outward-facing narrative is constituted through IL models themselves. Designed to outline key values and understandings, these documents comprise the 'story of information literacy' or the ways in which IL is represented outside the profession. Together, these narratives shape the operationalisation of IL within the higher education sector.

The importance of instruction within academic library positions (Austin and Bhandol, 2013; Hall, 2013) means that teaching librarians play a vital part within the operationalisation of practice. However, while teaching librarian professional practice and identity has been studied in detail, the practitioner role has typically been examined in isolation rather than connected and in relation to the broader practice of IL. This study will interrogate these ideas by exploring how the discourse of IL shapes and positions teaching librarians within the higher education sector. Findings from this study will facilitate a more complex understanding of IL practices within academic libraries as well as the ensuing impact on professional practice.

## **Literature review**

Teaching and instruction have a long but contentious history within libraries. As Drabinski (2016: 31) argues, librarians have traditionally been understood outside their own field as guardians of knowledge rather than as teaching figures with significant knowledge about how information is organised, used, disseminated, evaluated, produced, reproduced and circulated. Closer examination of the literature, however, demonstrates that teaching has played an important part of a librarian's daily activities since the 17th century (Ewert, 1986). Limited to pedagogical 'exhortations' in these early years, a focus on education developed in the 19th century when Melvil Dewey, as the founder of the first library school, and other key figures of the time, including architects of ALA, argued that rapidly

expanding collections necessitated instruction in bibliography (Lorenzen, 2001). Eventually, these ideas culminated in the creation of teaching librarian roles in the 20th century. Driven, in part, by the growth of the information society, which neatly mirrors the push for user education after the expansion of libraries in the 19th century, library teaching initiatives swiftly became consolidated through the creation of professional competency documents (e.g. ALA, 2009; ALIA, 2012; CILIP, n.d.). Most recently, the increasingly established shape of teaching librarianship can be seen through the prevalence of IL and teaching in academic librarian jobs, with research demonstrating that up to 50% of librarians have a teaching role (Austin and Bhandol, 2013; Hall, 2013; see also Aharony et al., 2020; Julien et al., 2018).

Librarian engagement in teaching has not, however, always been straightforward. While teaching librarianship and its various iterations, which include bibliographic instruction, user education, and IL teaching, have become enshrined within professional documents, many librarians have found it hard to adjust to new expectations and educational roles. Research by Wheeler and McKinney (2015) demonstrates that although some UK academic librarians have enthusiastically adopted a teaching librarian identity, others remain uncertain, positioning themselves in a support or a training role rather than on a par with academic colleagues. Similar ambiguity is noted within Hays and Studebaker's (2019) research, which notes that even participation in scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) communities does not always facilitate the creation of a teaching identity. These tensions play out more specifically in terms of teaching anxiety within North America, with a handful of publications illustrating that librarian teaching activities are accompanied by physical and mental symptoms of unease (e.g. Davis, 2007; Julien and Genuis, 2009). While respondents in Davis' survey go on to indicate the coping strategies that they employ to mitigate the effects of stress, other research studies more specifically link librarian teaching stress with emotional labour, or the need to manage emotions as part of a teaching role (Julien and Genuis, 2009). This research demonstrates that teaching librarianship is marked by complex challenges within the higher education sector.

One of the main culprits that is often blamed for librarian anxiety is a perceived lack of preparation for teaching. A documented dearth of instruction classes in Library and Information Science (LIS) programmes (only half of English-speaking LIS programmes with a website offered library instruction courses by 2005, according to Julien's (2005) research meant that early literature was swift to highlight how a shortage of formal education initiatives was leaving librarians under-prepared for teaching (e.g. Mandernack, 1986; Meulemans and Brown, 2001; Shonrock and Mulder, 1993; Walter, 2008). On closer inspection, however, this narrative is harder to substantiate.

While studies from the 1980s and 1990s indicate that up to half of librarians felt unprepared to teach (e.g. Mandernack, 1986), these issues were not widespread, with 50% of librarians in Patterson and Howell's (1990) study reporting a background in teaching. More noticeably, the number of unprepared librarians had plummeted by the 2010s, with only 3.6% of teaching librarians stating that they felt minimally prepared and nearly 50% stating that they felt completely prepared to teach (Julien and Genuis, 2009). Research in the United Kingdom put the figures even higher, with Bewick and Corral (2010) suggesting that over 70% of teaching librarians had sufficient knowledge and confidence to teach, even though participants in Wheeler and McKinney's (2015) study shy away from talking about specific educational theories. These figures are substantiated by the growth in LIS programmes that offer teaching courses, which had reached 86% by 2008 (Mbabu, 2009), although Inskip (2015) notes a surprisingly low number of relevant modules in the UK. In effect, it appears that librarians who graduated later are most satisfied with their preparation for teaching (Johnson and Lindsay, 2006). Literature also shows increasingly sophisticated approaches to how instruction is approached in LIS, including a focus on practical and academic elements (O'Connor et al., 2012; Hensley, 2015), the development of a teaching identity (Hicks, 2017), and the important role that workplaces play in nurturing teaching librarian development (Nichols Hess, 2020a, 2020b).

A second culprit that is often blamed for instructional challenges is teaching faculty. Teaching faculty has historically limited librarian engagement in educational initiatives by arguing for the maintenance of traditional collection development roles (Lorenzen, 2001). Since then, educators have become more reconciled to librarian involvement in educational initiatives, as the integration of IL into curricular documents (e.g. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2003) and research that explores teaching faculty attitudes and perspectives demonstrates (e.g. Saunders, 2012; Thompson, 2002). At the same time, teaching faculty continue to exert significant influence over the ways in which librarians view and understand their engagement in teaching. Librarians are seen to participate in assessment practices, for example, to assert their legitimacy to campus faculty as well as to validate their teaching identity (Detmering et al., 2019). These findings echo those of Julien and Pecoskie (2009), who use Goffman's work on gift-giving to illustrate that librarian relationships with teaching faculty are characterised by dependence as well as deference and disrespect. Providing insight into the ways in which librarians position themselves in relation to practice, Julien and Pecoskie's findings also illustrate the influence of power relations on library teaching initiatives. These ideas are mirrored in Julien and Given's (2003) earlier work, which employs positioning theory to examine postings on a teaching

librarian mailing list. Demonstrating how perceived faculty attitudes lead librarians to characterise themselves as 'caring individuals' as well as 'comrades' with shared experiences, Julien and Given's work further hints at the ways in which professional discourse shape teaching identities and practices.

Uneasy relationships with faculty also reveal a number of questions related to the role that librarians perform within instruction. External collaboration has long played a key role within IL education, with Breivik and Gee arguing as early as 1989 that effective teaching practice lies in shared responsibility for educational programming. A growing focus on embedded and disciplinary models of IL education (Grafstein, 2002) mean that educational technologists have been credited with improving British models of IL practice (Martin, 2013). Whitworth (2011: 316) even argues that the exclusion of the library from the *Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning* as evidence that IL instruction is a cooperative endeavour. At the same time, a growing emphasis on collaboration jars with research carried out by Tuominen (1997: 362), who illustrates how an emphasis on monologic and ignorant users positions the librarian as an all-knowing counsellor who can 'diagnose the user's mental states and propose treatments on the basis of the diagnosis'. Creating an expert position that uses physician-patient analogies as well as adult-child positioning to advertise librarian expertise (Tuominen, 1997: 364), these interventions establish a user-librarian power relationship that contrasts with the one that defines faculty-librarian interactions. The juxtaposition of these two conflicting narratives suggests that the role of teaching librarians remains open to interpretation.

In sum, literature that explores librarian engagement in teaching practices has focussed on exploring librarians' professional education as well as relationships with faculty. However, while these studies have examined instruction librarian mailing lists (Julien and Given, 2003) and instructional textbooks (Mbabu, 2007) as well as carrying out more traditional surveys and interviews, there has been little focus on the narratives that are presented in documents about professional practice. This means that research has typically explored the teaching librarian role in isolation rather than in terms of its relations to the broader narrative and practice of IL. These oversights form an important rationale for this work.

## Theoretical framework

The study employs positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990; Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999) to understand how the discourses of ILiHE construct and position teaching librarians within higher education. Positioning theory has been most comprehensively developed through the work of Davies, Harré and van Langenhove, who argue that

social interaction is shaped through the ways in which people locate themselves within a specific narrative, story or conversation. Drawing upon the idea that people speak and act from a position, which is defined as ‘a cluster of rights, duties, and obligations’ (Harré and Slocum, 2003: 108), positioning emerged in contrast to the idea that people performed fixed or prescribed roles (Davies and Harré, 1990: 48). In further demonstrating that people establish their coherency through reference to their own subjective histories as well as their knowledge of narrative forms and social structures (Davies and Harré, 1990: 42), positioning is also recognised as reflexive, where people position themselves, and interactive, where people are positioned by others. This work eventually led to the elaboration of positioning theory, where the establishment of subject positions was reconceptualised in terms of first- and second-order positioning (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999: 20), as well as encompassing more specific forms of discursive work, including moral and deliberate positioning. The emphasis on how people understand their personhood means that positioning is seen as produced in the moment (McVee et al., 2019: 383) as well as encompassing symbols, actions and spoken interactions (McVee et al., 2019: 388).

Positioning theory has been applied within a variety of health and education contexts (e.g. McVee et al., 2019) and within LIS, where it has been used to study the implications of interaction upon information seeking and behaviour (Given, 2002; McKenzie, 2004). Noting that the ways in which classmates and instructors positioned mature students reduced information opportunities, Given’s (2002) research provides a vivid illustration of the ways in which categorisation impacts and shapes professional practice. Along the same lines, McKenzie (2004: 692) and Rivano Eckerdal (2011) demonstrate that positioning contributes to the legitimisation of competent professional practice through the establishment of suitable and unsuitable discussion topics. More relevantly for this study, Julien and Given (2003) have used positioning theory to examine the ways in which teaching librarians and faculty are positioned on a professional mailing list. Drawing attention to the discursive constructions that structure librarian engagement with teaching, this research demonstrates how positioning theory helps to reveal the prevailing discourses that structure what it means to be a professional. Within the context of the current study, positioning theory will facilitate an examination of librarian positioning within professional and institutional IL documents. This approach builds on research that has employed role theory (Julien and Genuis, 2009; Zai, 2015) as well as Goffman’s concept of deference (Julien and Pecoskie, 2009) as a lens to explore the teaching librarian role.

## **Methods**

A discourse analytical approach was employed to examine the discourses that surround teaching librarian

engagement within the higher education sector. Discourse analysis refers to ‘a cluster of related methods for studying language use and its role in social life’ (Potter, 2008: 218). Drawing upon the idea that people use language to construct their social worlds, discourse analysis centres on identifying and examining the ways in which discourse, which is defined as covering ‘all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 7), mediates human meaning-making. The emphasis on language in use means that discourse analysis presupposes the important role that language plays in creating and sustaining social life (Potter, 2008: 219). From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse analysis also provides the means to challenge the impact of power relations on the production of understanding, including the ways in which ‘texts themselves have been constructed, ordered, and shaped in terms of their social and historical situatedness’ (Cheek, 2008: 357). In the present study, discourse analysis is employed to facilitate an exploration of the discursive frames or understandings that structure teaching librarian professional practice, including the rules and the unspoken assumptions that underscore activity. The recognition that institutional documents, like competency standards (Hicks and VanScoy, 2019: 41) codify professional expectations and knowledge, mean that a discourse analytical approach further generates insight into the ways in which librarian teaching practices are both constrained and enabled by narrative constructions.

Discourse analysis is not a method that has been widely used within scholarship that explores IL. Aiming to capture ‘socially and culturally shaped ways’ of understanding IL, discourse analysis has been highlighted as forming one of three prominent theoretical approaches within IL research (Limberg et al., 2012: 110). However, while a number of studies have explored IL discourses (e.g. Kapitzke, 2003; Pawley, 2003; Tuominen et al., 2005), there has been far less research that has specifically employed discourse analysis as a method to examine IL practices and professional texts. Exceptions include Walton and Cleland (2014) and Cope (2009), who used discourse analysis to explore power relations in an IL classroom, and Sample (2017), who examined popular definitions of IL. Discourse analysis has also been used to examine implicit assumptions within broader user-centred LIS research. Frequently used to examine the roles of users themselves (e.g. McKenzie, 2019), discourse analysis has also drawn attention to the hidden structures that underscore professional practice within specific texts (e.g. Tuominen, 1997). Discourse analysis methods have further been used to explore unstated values within official documents, such as mission statements (e.g. Crawford Barniskis, 2016). Of particular interest to this study is the work done by Hicks and Vanscoy (2019), who highlight dominant and missing discourses within competency guidelines for reference services. The emphasis on expertise underscores the important role that



institutional documents play in shaping and controlling professional practices.

### *Sample and data analysis*

The study reported here examined representations of librarians in recent IL models as well as in professional texts. The IL models selected for this study include the four major English-language documents that have been published since 2010; the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy* (ACRL, 2016), Metaliteracy (2014/2018), SCONUL's *Seven Pillars of Information Literacy* (SCONUL, 2011) and the *ANCIL* model (Secker and Coonan, 2011a, 2011b). These models were nominated because of the key role that they play within professional discourse in higher education (e.g. Gross et al., 2018; SCONUL, 2009). They were also selected because they were perceived to emerge from and mark the second constructivist-focussed wave of IL guidelines (Hicks and Lloyd, 2016). These criteria meant that the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU, 2013) VALUE rubric, which aligns with behaviourist rather than constructivist educational theory, was necessarily disqualified from the study. At this stage, analysis focussed on the preambles to these models and guidelines because of the focus within these sections on presenting guiding concepts. Work examining the statements of learning and learning outcomes that are presented within these documents is ongoing.

The study also analysed introductions to 16 books that specifically explore these four models of IL (see Appendix 1). These titles were selected through an examination of the Worldcat database as well as relevant LIS publisher websites. Books were included if they were published in English between 2011 and 2020 and had a specific focus on teaching one of the four frameworks mentioned above; books that explored threshold concepts and IL were included as part of this subset of literature because of their influence on the ACRL framework. Books that provide a general overview of IL research or practice were excluded. Professional texts were chosen for this study because they offer unique insight into professional practice; typically written by and for librarians, these texts also form a growing industry (Seale, 2016) yet are often overlooked in research (e.g. Sample, 2017). More specifically, the study analysed introductions to these texts because of the work that is done in these chapters to frame major IL concepts. Our data set consisted of 148 pages of professional documents and 16 pages of IL guideline texts.

Analysis consisted of two phases. In the first phase, each researcher coded the preambles from the IL models and the introductions to the professional texts for the ways in which librarians were positioned in each document. During this phase, each researcher engaged in a close reading of the identified texts, employing Potter and Wetherell's

(1987: 148) advice to reflect on the reasons for which they were reading the text in a specific way as well the features that produced that reading. This approach allowed a focus on the specific details of each text as well as facilitating the move beyond an emphasis on the authors' intentions and taken-for-granted assumptions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 148). In the second phase, the researchers came together to discuss the data set and examine the coherency of the emerging discourse. This process helped to identify ten codes that described librarian positioning and self-positioning within these professional documents. Data were subsequently reanalysed by both researchers. This step helped to collapse several overlapping codes to produce the final set of six codes that are presented below.

### *Limitations*

Limitations of this study include the exclusion of empirical articles and conference proceedings from the data set as well as the emphasis on librarians' representations of IL. However, the typical focus on classroom practice within empirical IL work as well as the tendency for journal guidelines to discourage the problematisation of IL and associated concepts (Hicks, 2018: 81) meant that textbooks were seen to provide greater insight into librarians' understandings of IL concepts as well as the ways they are positioned and understood in practice. The growing industry of IL textbooks, which became particularly apparent after the publication of the ACRL Framework in 2016, as well as the typical exclusion of professional texts from content analysis work (e.g. Sample, 2017), provided a further rationale to examine this genre.

### *Findings*

An examination of IL models and professional texts suggests the existence of two distinct narratives related to the role, expertise and professional practice of teaching librarians. In the outward-facing narrative, which is presented in preambles to IL models, librarian work is typically absent from guidelines for practice. In contrast, book introductions, which constitute the inward-facing narrative, centre professional librarians in their text yet simultaneously position them as incompetent, or as lacking the skills and understandings that they need to be effective in this setting. These discourses constrain and enable the practice of IL.

#### *How does the discourse of ILiHE position librarians in IL models?*

Analysis suggests that the expertise and contributions of professional librarians and library workers is both obscured and silenced within the four IL models that were studied in this research. Credit for the creation of IL guidelines, for

example, is frequently attributed to campus experts that were consulted by the documents' authors rather than to professional librarians themselves. Thus, a new curriculum for information literacy (ANCIL) model specifically highlights the contributions of 'those working in curriculum design and educational technologies' (Secker and Coonan, 2011a: 4) to the development of their model, as well as 'experts in the information literacy field' (Secker and Coonan, 2011a: 4) rather than library professionals. Correspondingly, the SCOUNL (2011) model appeals to 'professionals working with different user groups' (p. 3) in its call to extend the boundaries of these guidelines. These findings are particularly surprising given the frequency with which librarian-focussed Delphi study methodology is used within the construction of IL models and guidelines (e.g. ACRL, 2016; Secker and Coonan, 2011a).

Librarians are similarly absent from statements about who should carry out IL instruction. Models suggest that IL should be taught by a range of non-library staff, including 'instructors' (Metaliteracy, 2018) and 'individuals and teachers' (SCOUNL, 2011: 4) with professional librarians only named as part of a long list of 'study skills advisors, learning developers, supervisors and lecturers . . . careers and admissions staff. . . academic staff' (Secker and Coonan, 2011b: 6). Relatedly, it is academic instructors who are tasked with designing instructional opportunities in the ACRL Framework (ACRL, 2016: 2) while librarians are instructed to collaborate 'more extensively' with 'partners on campus'. The inclusion of non-librarians within IL narratives is important because it suggests a greater engagement with situated understandings of practice. However, the reluctance to accord librarians equal footing as other academic professionals also diminishes teaching librarian expertise and labour.

### *How does the discourse of ILiHE position librarians in professional texts?*

In contrast, librarian labour and the role that teaching librarians play in IL instruction is centred in the book introductions that were examined as part of this study. However, librarians are simultaneously positioned as unfit for the job or as lacking the skills and understandings that they need to be effective in their role through being labelled as *under-prepared*, *unassertive* and *disempowered*.

Librarians are positioned as *under-prepared* when they are categorised as inexperienced as well as lacking in understanding. One prominent culprit that is blamed for under-preparation is a lack of prior training, which is seen to render librarians unqualified for teaching:

[many librarians] were unsure how to begin because they had no background in education. (Oberlies and Mattson, 2018: xvi)

little formal instructional training. (Bravender et al., 2015b: 3)

Educational deficiencies subsequently position librarians as unable to understand or engage with educational concepts:

being overwhelmed with instructional jargon. (Oberlies and Mattson, 2018: xiv)

The reliance of new IL models on complex educational theories further positions teaching librarians as incapable of comprehending and using key professional documents:

Many librarians have struggled to make sense of the document. (Godbey et al., 2017: 1).

[Librarians] need and want more guidance and resources for teaching conceptually about information literacy within the classroom. (Harmeyer and Baskin, 2018: xix)

The extent of these concerns subsequently leads teaching librarians to be positioned as *unassertive*, which forms a second theme within these texts. Within this framing, teaching librarians are positioned as unable to be effective in their career because of a lack of confidence in their teaching:

our first goal is to address the teaching anxiety and insecurity librarians often experience. (Oberlies and Mattson, 2018: xiv)

Fear and uncertainty are also seen to impact librarians' ability to adapt their teaching to meet the challenges of new institutional frameworks:

[new ways of doing things] can feel daunting. (Harmeyer and Baskin, 2018: xix)

uncertainty about how to teach *ideas*. (Bravender et al., 2015a: ix) (emphasis in the original)

A perceived lack of preparation as well as under confidence subsequently leads to the positioning of librarians as *disempowered*, which forms the third theme of this research. Librarians are seen as powerless to effect change in the classroom:

with the intention to shift this paradigm and empower teacher librarians. (Oberlies and Mattson, 2018: xiv)

in an effort to contribute to the conversation and empower teaching librarians to meet this challenge. (Bravender et al., 2015a: ix)

They are also viewed as isolated or as lacking influence on campus and in broader conversations about 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 a campus, this goal [of a campus-wide approach to information literacy] is easily accomplished. (Burkhardt, 2017: 5)

Focussed on deficiency, these themes provide a sombre depiction of librarians' readiness for and ability to be effective within a teaching career. At the same time, there is a strong thread of collegiality running throughout professional texts, a finding which is also noted by interviews with teaching librarians (Nichols Hess, 2020a, 2020b); librarians are positioned as both collaborative and creative as they work to share material, advice and ideas that will help them to overcome these issues:

instruction librarians are a vocal bunch . . . seeking to share the knowledge we have gained with others. (Oberlies and Mattson, 2018: xiii)

this approach has brought us into a community of practice where we try out new ideas, disagree, refine, and try again. (Hofer et al., 2018: xii).

we find ourselves hunkering down with each other or other colleagues before or after class sessions to share or solicit ideas about what worked, what might work, or what didn't work. (Bravender et al., 2015a: vii)

Illustrating the variety of emotions that structure librarian engagement in teaching, these statements draw attention to teaching librarian strengths as well as the important role that community engagement plays within professional practice.

## Discussion

Within the higher education sector, IL discourse is shaped by inward and outward-facing narratives. The outward-facing narrative of IL, which draws upon standards and guidelines, downplays professional expertise by positioning teaching librarians as peripheral to core understandings of practice. In contrast, the inward-facing narrative of IL, which is located in book introductions, centres professional work yet positions teaching librarians as lacking the proficiency and capability to be effective in their role. Librarians have typically felt unsure about their teaching identity (e.g. Davis, 2007; Detmering et al., 2019; Julien and Pecoskie, 2009; Walter, 2008; Wheeler and McKinney, 2015), and a lack of training is often identified as a barrier to engagement in the field (e.g. Walter, 2008). However, what is striking about the findings from this research is that institutional models and guidelines can be seen as reinforcing and perpetuating teaching insecurities by devaluing librarian contributions to practice. These discoveries broaden our understandings of the sociocultural conditions that shape librarian engagement in teaching; LIS schools cannot be seen as uniquely to blame for the

challenges that teaching librarians face in the classroom. At the same time, they also demonstrate the intricate dynamics of IL discourse within the higher education sector.

Most complexly, the exclusion of teaching librarians from professional guidelines can be seen as forming a process of othering that has an important influence on the shaping of practice. Othering refers to the ways in which specific groups of people are marginalised and disempowered in society (Weis, 1995). Typically used to stigmatise 'deviant' groups (Grove and Zwi, 2006), othering is also employed to suppress those whose behaviour is considered to constitute a threat to social order (Canales, 2000: 21). In the case of institutional guidelines, teaching librarians are othered through their omission from practice; silencing labels and positions teaching librarians as a group that lacks the capacity to either shape IL or to contribute to conversations about the future of the practice. Indicating that professional librarian expertise has little role in both current and future understandings of IL, the suppression of teaching librarian involvement in practice raises a number of uncomfortable questions about professional expertise and the forms of knowledge that are legitimised within new models of IL. Exclusion also threatens the sustainability of IL by placing the blame for previous failings of the IL project upon teaching librarians rather than on broader structural issues; the potential for IL to realise its potential as an 'educational reform movement' becomes further linked to the downplaying of librarian expertise rather than a 'richer, more complex set of core ideas' (ACRL, 2016).

The othering that is noted within IL models further complicates and reframes our understanding of professional texts. Books that were analysed as part of this study tend to have been written by and for librarians to provide a practical and accessible supplement to IL models and guidelines. However, when these books are analysed in light of the othering that takes place within IL models, they cannot merely be understood as simple manuals of practice. Instead, the emphasis on creativity and collaboration means that these texts become reconceptualised as constituting a form of resistance, or as the means through which teaching librarians oppose the marginalisation that they encounter within formal models of practice. In centring librarian creativity, professional books enable teaching librarians to reinsert themselves into the IL conversation; the sharing of useful tips and workarounds enables teaching librarians to reiterate the role that professional practice plays within IL. More importantly, the sharing of experience borne of practice means that librarian-authored books become places where teaching librarians can reconstruct themselves as both useful and valuable, or as members of the IL community that others can learn with and from. In this sense, professional texts become recognised as the means through which teaching librarians start to contest

and negotiate their exclusion from new models of IL practice.

Professional texts also help librarians to build the community that is threatened by their exclusion from official visions of IL. The emphasis that is placed on librarian deficiency within professional texts means that resistance to marginalisation could be seen as uncertain, at best; efforts to re-centre professional expertise could be understood as undermined through the labelling of teaching librarians as unprepared, unconfident and disempowered. However, in framing librarian experiences as shared or communal, authors of professional texts can also be seen as subverting their othering, or as engaging in what Canales (2000) refers to as inclusionary othering to create cooperation rather than marginalisation. Professional texts consequently build opposition to teaching librarians' relegation from IL practice by normalising librarian emotions and legitimising (self-)positioning; practitioner concerns are understood to be both common and appropriate. The emphasis that is placed on the building of coalitions consequently adds nuance to the tendency to position librarians as all-knowing and all-powerful experts within first generation IL documents (e.g. Kuhlthau, 2004). At the same time, the jostling for power can also be seen as destabilising professional identity and preparation for work as well as the role that professional expertise plays within the broader practice of IL.

More problematically, exclusion from professional practice could also be seen as linked to the creation and maintenance of the deficit narratives that run throughout IL literature. Othering has typically been seen as something that is done to a group of people who are perceived to be different. However, the emphasis on legitimisation means that othering also forms a way to reinforce normality and secure the identity of those doing the othering (Grove and Zwi, 2006: 1933). Along these lines, the othering of students that is visible within IL narratives (Hicks and Lloyd, in press) could be linked to teaching librarians' attempt to bolster their legitimacy in the face of the marginalisation that they encounter within institutional documents. Deficit narratives have many origins and there are a number of systematic issues that contribute to the marginalisation of librarians, including their position within broader campus power structures. Notwithstanding, the recognition that othering operates on both exclusionary and inclusionary terms (Canales, 2000) suggests that the marginalisation of teaching librarians could impact the ways in which practice co-participants are positioned as well as the ongoing shape of practice.

## Conclusion

The introduction of new IL models has generally been seen as positive for a field that has been critiqued for remaining wedded to behaviourist understandings of pedagogy (e.g. Tuominen et al., 2005). However, a closer examination of

documents from the higher education sector suggests that professional librarian expertise has been eroded through attempts to update and popularise these models of IL. These developments have, in turn, created resistance among teaching librarians who can be seen as attempting to rebuild their role within the community through sharing practical know-how and understanding. This resistance must be seen as uncertain, given the emphasis that the authors of professional texts, who are often librarians themselves, place on teaching librarians' lack of preparation and confidence as well as their powerlessness on campus. Yet, the disparities between these inward- and outward-facing narratives demonstrate that within higher education, IL discourse must be seen as fractured as well as complex.

Theoretically speaking, these findings extend the authors' positioning of ILiHE as consisting of various intersecting discursive spaces (Hicks and Lloyd, in press) by illustrating how the professional tension noted in the positioning of teaching librarians is shaped through institutional spaces and brought into being through the semantic and operational spaces that create what is said in the practice as well as how this knowledge is applied. On a practical level, they also speak to the need for librarians and professional associations to address these narratives, which have also been noted in the work of related professional groups such as the Reference and User Services Association (Hicks and VanScoy, 2019). Future research should continue to examine these ideas in more detail, including the impact of new IL models on professional practice at a time when the professionalisation of librarianship is being drawn into question. It should also continue to work towards unravelling the tightly woven and multi-stranded shape of IL discourse that has built up within the higher education sector as we continue to interrogate the viability and sustainability of these narratives within complex information environments.

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## ORCID iDs

Alison Hicks  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2124-1730>

Annemaree Lloyd  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7835-8374>

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### Author biographies

Alison Hicks is programme director and lecturer (assistant professor) in the Department of Information Studies at UCL. Alison’s research focuses on sociocultural approaches to information literacy within academic, everyday and health contexts with a focus on transition and risk.

Annemaree Lloyd is an internationally renowned social science researcher who conducts research into information literacies and contemporary information practices in formal and informal learning connected to workplaces, community settings and in education. Professor Lloyd pursues this research agenda working with a range of groups including refugees, emergency services personal, nurses and with patients suffering chronic illness.

## Appendix I

### Information literacy models

- A new curriculum for information literacy (ANCIL; Secker and Coonan, 2011a)
- Framework for information literacy for higher education (ACRL, 2016)
- Metaliteracy (2018)
- Seven pillars of information literacy (SCONUL, 2011)

## Books

### ACRL framework

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*Information Literacy to Empower Learners*. London: Facet Publishing, pp. xv–xvi.

**ANCIL**

- Coonan E and Secker J (2013) *Rethinking Information Literacy: A Practical Framework for Supporting Learning*. London: Facet.

**Seven pillars/metaliteracy**

- Hosier A, Bullis D, Bernard D, et al. (2014) *The Information Literacy User's Guide: An Open, Online Textbook*. Available at: <https://textbooks.opensuny.org/the-information-literacy-users-guide-an-open-online-textbook/>