

INVESTIGATING ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR
OWN TEACHING SKILLS

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Abstract

Background

Information literacy (IL) is increasingly important in the higher education (HE) context. HE institutions are placing greater significance on IL as an employability, or graduate, attribute, meaning that the library, the traditional provider of IL, is becoming more of a focus in institutional strategies. Librarians need to know more about teaching theory and techniques in order to provide high-quality IL teaching, but not much research has been done into how they conceive of their teaching, their skills and themselves as teachers.

Aims

This dissertation aims to investigate the variation in conceptions of their own teaching skills among academic librarians who teach IL in HE. Secondary research questions include whether they would describe themselves as teachers, whether they are influenced by teaching theories (and which ones), and whether they are actually teaching or training. The dissertation includes a literature review covering IL, pedagogy, approaches to teaching IL in HE, and librarians as teachers, before describing the methodology, presenting and analysing the results, discussing the results in the context of the wider literature, and giving conclusions and recommendations for further research and improved practice.

Methods

The research uses a qualitative phenomenographic approach. 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 are conducted using phenomenographic techniques to encourage participants to talk about their conceptions, and the interviews are then transcribed and analysed.

Results

The data gives rise to four categories of description, each of which describes a conception that librarians hold of themselves and their teaching. The categories are: 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.

Conclusions

The results answer the research question and generally correspond to ideas put forward in the literature. Further support and training for librarians and LIS students is suggested, and more in-depth and larger-scale research is recommended.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

CILIP defines information literacy (IL) as “knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner” (CILIP, 2014). Being information literate is an essential skill for life in the “global information society” (Johnston & Webber, 2003, p. 335) and should be regarded as more important in the curriculum than technological skill (Johnston & Webber, 2003). 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, p. 227), and a recent SCOUNL report emphasised the importance of libraries in promoting and improving students’ employability through IL and digital literacy (Wiley, 2014).

Throughout the past two decades, IL has started to be seen less as a “library skills” competency and more as a skill relevant to everyday life (Andretta, 2005; Johnston & Webber, 2003). Most frameworks define IL as a combination of behaviour and awareness, such as in the SCOUNL Seven Pillars model (SCOUNL, 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. Hepworth and Walton (2009) state that “Empowerment is underpinned by information literacy”, noting that being able to access and use information can lead to better social and political engagement.

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 & Corrall, 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. This dissertation aims to fill that gap by investigating the variation in 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. The research will 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.

1.2. Research aims and objectives

The aim of the dissertation is to investigate the variation in conceptions of teaching and teaching skills among academic librarians who teach, and to understand what they do when they are teaching IL.

I have identified five main objectives:

- To assess the literature concerning IL, pedagogy, approaches to teaching IL in HE, and librarians as teachers, to understand the context in which academic librarians operate
- To assess the literature around phenomenography in order to create a research approach that is faithful to the key characteristics
- To conduct a series of phenomenographic interviews with academic librarians to understand their experiences of teaching and their conceptions of themselves as teachers
- To analyse the resulting data and create a set of categories describing the different conceptions librarians hold about teaching
- To use the results to make recommendations for improving and supporting the development of teaching skills for librarians

1.3. Structure of this dissertation

The dissertation is broken down into five main sections. First, a literature review will examine the current literature surrounding IL, pedagogy, approaches to teaching IL, and librarians as teachers. The methodology chapter sets out the research questions before describing in detail the research approach and methods used. The results and analysis are detailed in the next chapter, before being discussed in the context of the research questions and the wider literature. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations are set out in the last chapter.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will explore the literature related to the themes covered by this dissertation, including information literacy, pedagogy, approaches to teaching information literacy, and librarians as teachers. The literature covered is broadly written by practitioners and researchers in library and information science, although the literature concerning pedagogy also includes contributions by educational researchers. Content has been chosen for its relevance and currency as much as possible; where older articles or chapters have been included, it is because they are especially relevant or interesting.

2.1. Information Literacy

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, Boon & Johnston (2005) found that academics in different disciplines held different types of 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. At the same time as Webber, Boon and Johnston’s report, Mackey and Jacobsen (2005) reported on the benefits of partnerships between librarians and academics, suggesting that academics who recognise 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 helps link 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 “information literacy” (which is taught) (Cox & Corrall, 2013; Peters, 2009), arguing that information literacy is “a broader and more complex concept” than solely skills-based training (Forster, 2013).

2.2. Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the science of education, encompassing theories and frameworks for learning and teaching. It is concerned with not only the content of what people learn, but also how they learn it and how it is taught (Moore, 2000). The main philosophies and theories underlying modern pedagogy are based on those developed by psychologists in the 1950s and 1960s, and are outlined in this section.

2.2.1. Theories of learning and teaching

An early theory of how people learn is behaviourism, which arose from B.F. Skinner’s work, primarily conducted with animals. Skinner contended that positive reinforcement, where the teacher rewards correct responses, was an effective way of training people to behave in the required way (Moore, 2000). Teaching based on behaviourism is often highly structured, goal-oriented and teacher-focused, and the learner is seen as an “empty vessel” waiting to receive knowledge from the teacher (Foster, Angus, & Rahinel, 2008, p. 508). However, behaviourism fell out of favour thanks to the emergence of new theories which focused more on the process of learning, rather than the content being learned (Foster, Angus, & Rahinel, 2008; Moore, 2000). The underlying assumption of these theories is that people constantly re-adjust their ideas to accommodate new information, constructing their own knowledge (Fry, Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2008, pp. 9–10).

One of the first major constructivist theories was put forward by Piaget, who suggested that people construct knowledge from their experiences, rather than being passive receivers of information (Moore, 2000). Piaget’s ideas about active learning are very influential on current

IL teaching practice, which is becoming increasingly interactive and student-focused (Andretta, 2005). The psychologist Lev Vygotsky proposed a similar theory around the same time as Piaget, which agreed that learning was about making meanings from experience, but argued that the learning process is a social one, where discussion among students and with teachers prompts and facilitates the learner to move towards understanding new concepts (Moore, 2000). Kaplowitz (2012) describes how collaborative work and group discussions can empower students to control their own learning, becoming “active participants” (p. 6) rather than passive learners. Jacklin and Pfaff (2010) found that active learning removed the hierarchy of teacher and student, meaning that learners felt more confident to ask questions. Foster, Angus and Rahinel (2008) note that social constructivist learning, which they call the “all in the hall” approach (p. 513), led to deeper knowledge than traditional “sage on the stage” passive learning. This goes a step further than the approach suggested by King (1993) in her influential article, who advocated moving from being a “sage on the stage” to being a “guide on the side”, a more facilitative role, based on constructivist ideas. O’Malley and Delwiche’s (2012) case study of IL sessions at a university demonstrated the impact of moving from lecture-based transmission-style learning to interactive practical workshops, finding that the new style of teaching contributed to a higher attendance rate and improved perceived effectiveness of the sessions.

Focusing on the student’s experience is “more likely to encourage students to adopt approaches to learning that lead to deep conceptual understanding and change” (Lameras, Levy, Paraskakis, & Webber, 2011), enabling students to become successful independent learners. Biggs and Tang (2011), describing the concept of constructive alignment, say that teachers should focus on “what the student does and how that relates to teaching” (p. 20), and then design teaching which not only accommodates and supports this but also aligns to the institutional objectives (such as graduate attributes).

Inquiry-based learning (IBL) is another popular constructivist approach to teaching in HE, and is “essentially student led” (McKinney, Jones, & Turkington, 2011, p. 223). IBL revolves around the idea that problem-solving and independent research facilitate learning much more effectively than the traditional behaviourist-influenced “transmission” style of teaching. Hepworth and Walton (2009) state that “It is fundamental that learners should be seen as active participants [...] rather than passive recipients of information” (p. 76). IL is crucial for

effective IBL, because students need to be able to understand and use information well in order to be “effective inquirers” (McKinney, Jones, & Turkington, 2011, p. 223). Chang and Chen (2011) warn that IBL could have negative outcomes if students do not have sufficient IL.

Other approaches based on constructivism include game-based learning, which follows active learning theory in suggesting that activities can be more effective in helping students learn than traditional teaching. Game-based learning is student-centred and has been reported to have a significant positive impact on engagement and learning, especially with regard to IL (McDevitt, 2011). Problem-based learning is another approach, similar to IBL in that it is centred on independent learning and research in order to solve a problem set by the tutor. It is more constrained than IBL, which is more student-focused, allowing students to participate in creating the research questions or tasks (The University of Sheffield, 2014).

2.2.2. Pedagogy for librarians

Having a good understanding of pedagogical theories is considered essential for effective teaching (McGuinness, 2011, p. 74), although Moore (2000, p. 2) states that “teachers themselves often have surprisingly little explicit knowledge of the ideas of theorists of teaching and learning”, and Torras & Sætre (Torras & Sætre, 2009) state that “only when the academic library, as a professional community, has a common understanding of its pedagogical foundations will it be possible to design and carry out user education programmes in information literacy as part of the formal curriculum” (p. 16).

Interestingly, Bewick and Corrall (2010) found that subject librarians thought knowledge of teaching and learning theories was the least important type of knowledge to have, rating practical skills such as designing and delivering teaching much higher. McGuinness (2011, p. 83) suggests that these librarians may not be able to see the link between their teaching activities and the theories on which they are based.

2.3. Approaches to teaching IL

Lameras, Levy, Paraskakis and Webber’s (2011) research into academics’ conceptions of blended university teaching using virtual learning environments (VLEs) presented the variation in approaches to teaching as a continuum ranging from “teacher-focused and content-oriented” to “student-focused and process-oriented” (p.153), alongside a hierarchy of four

different conceptions of the VLE. This highlights the diverse nature of teaching; it is impossible to suggest that all librarians and other IL instructors approach IL teaching in the same way.

Some librarians use ideas about “learning styles” when planning their teaching (Jacklin & Pfaff, 2010; Sanderson, 2011). Several models have been put forward, each proposing a set number of distinct environmental- or personality-based learning styles, which can be diagnosed using questionnaires and other tests, and which allow teachers to tailor session content to the preferences of their students. Although learning styles have been incorporated into several national guidelines such as that of the ACRL in the USA (ACRL, 2012), the theories behind them are diverse and sometimes contradictory, and it is important to be critical of learning styles before implementing them as part of teaching (Sanderson, 2011).

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 at the University of Sheffield, which aimed to promote information literacy using an Inquiry-based Learning approach. Walsh (2014b) presented a paper at the LILAC conference on using a Game-Based Learning approach for information literacy, and has run workshops for librarians on how to integrate the approach into their work (Walsh, 2014a). Diekema, Holliday and Leary (2011) produced a case study on the introduction of Problem-Based Learning for information literacy at a US university, noting that this approach was more effective for some students than for others. Loo (2013) reported on 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, p. 271). Initiatives such as A New Curriculum for Information Literacy (ANCIL) (Secker & Coonan, 2011) 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, Secker, Wrathall, & Webster, 2012). At the University of Manchester, librarians have been running an entire module dedicated to digital and information literacy, which can be taken as part of any degree

programme, and involves both individual and group assessment (Aston & McIndoe, 2014; University College for Interdisciplinary Learning, 2013).

Feedback and assessment are core elements of HE education, and recently the emphasis has shifted from teaching staff's performance to focus on student achievement, making assessment more important than ever (Mackey & Jacobson, 2010). Librarians who participate in student assessment can help to build a clearer picture of student learning, providing an idea of their IL abilities to complement their subject knowledge (Mackey & Jacobson, 2010), and the insights gained from assessing students can be useful to the library as well as academic staff (McCulley, 2009). Walsh (2009) describes several methods of assessment being used by librarians, including questionnaires, essays and observation, suggesting that rigorous assessment is not yet widespread, although the recent development of librarian-led credit-bearing modules such as at the University of Manchester (University College for Interdisciplinary Learning, 2013) perhaps signifies that librarians have moved closer to this in the last five years.

2.4. Librarians as Teachers

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, Henry and Eshleman (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 ANCIL and Leeds University's Skills@Library programme teaching (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, 2013).

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 LIS professionals for new graduates to have teaching skills and for them to have learned these during the postgraduate course (Simmons & 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 BTECs or postgraduate certificates.

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 & 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 & Corral, 2010, p. 102). 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, p. i).

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, Sproles, & Johnson, 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).

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to give an overview of the methods used to conduct this research. It will first outline the research questions which formed the basis of the dissertation, before describing the research approach and specific methods used, with reference to the literature. The sampling process, interview techniques and data analysis are discussed in detail, along with the ethical considerations for this research, to provide a complete picture of the research process.

3.2. Research questions

The research questions this dissertation aims to address are: **What are academic librarians' conceptions of their own teaching, and how do these conceptions vary?** The research questions were chosen because within the last decade teaching has become a more central part of academic liaison librarians' roles, and the researcher felt that investigating the conceptions of librarians who teach would give a clearer picture of why and how librarians teach. Supplementary research questions include:

- **Would librarians describe themselves as “teachers”?**
- **What teaching methods and theories are librarians influenced by, if any?**
- **What are librarians actually doing when they “teach”?**

The research focuses specifically on academic librarians who teach information literacy to students at higher education institutions in the UK. This focus is partly because these are the teaching librarians that the researcher has had the most contact with, but also because conducting research with a broader focus (for example, librarians in any educational establishment, or higher education librarians across more than one country) would not have been appropriate or achievable for a small-scale project such as this.

3.3. 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 & 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, Stoodley, et al., 2012), or to understand “information experiences” such as information seeking (Yates, Partridge, & 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, p. 16). It is important to note that, as Bowden (2005, p. 17) 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.

3.4. Sampling procedures

The number of participants in phenomenographic studies is usually between 10 and 30 (Stenfors-Hayes, Hult, & Dahlgren, 2013), allowing the researcher to ensure there will be a good level of variation within the group. However, for this dissertation, a smaller group of participants was used, with just six interviews being conducted. Bowden (2005) advises having a large enough group to ensure variation, but not so large that the data is unmanageable. It was agreed between the researcher and the supervisor that having about six interviews would meet these criteria, considering the short timeframe available for the research. Participants were identified by the researcher from among her personal acquaintances. 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 demographic variation can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1

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

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.

3.5. Ethics

3.5.1. Informed consent and voluntary participation

This research project was judged to be low-risk by the University ethics panel. The participants were fully informed about the nature and mechanics of the research through an information sheet and consent form provided in the email inviting them to take part. The consent form clearly stated that participation was entirely voluntary, and that participants were able to withdraw their consent at any time during the process. The ethics documentation can be found in Appendix 1.

3.5.2. Data storage

The data collected from the interviews was stored securely and could only be accessed by the researcher and the supervisor. It will continue to be stored securely for use by the researcher and supervisor in subsequent publications or presentations after the dissertation is submitted, but will be destroyed once it has fulfilled its purpose.

3.5.3. Confidentiality

The participants' anonymity was guaranteed throughout the process, as no personally identifying information, such as their names or the names of their workplaces, was stored with the data (general demographic information was recorded but was presented in such a way as to prevent individuals from being identified). In addition, any quotes from the transcript which mentioned people or places were fully anonymised before being used in the dissertation.

3.6. Interviews

3.6.1. Format

Each interview was conducted face-to-face at the participant's workplace, and recorded using an audio recording device. The audio files were later transcribed by the researcher. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

3.6.2. Choosing interview questions

The interview questions were decided after careful reading of the literature. It is important that phenomenographic interviews contain probing questions to elicit the underlying meaning of what participants are saying; simple "what" questions do not encourage participants to think deeply enough about why they do things and how they conceive of phenomena (Åkerlind, 2005). The interviews are typically semi-structured, with a schedule drawn up in advance; while some researchers suggest planning to ask several probing questions and treating the interview more like a conversation, others warn that the interviewer should not speak too much, in order to avoid inadvertently influencing the participants' responses (Bowden, 2000). Several different types of question can be used to try to explore interviewees' thoughts, intentions and attitudes towards a phenomenon, including contextual questions, open questions, and requests for situated examples (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 106). Follow-up "probing" questions, asking the interviewee to explain in more detail or give a concrete example, help the researcher dig deeper into responses (Yates, Stoodley, et al., 2012). Marton (1986, p. 42) advises that the questions should be "as open-ended as possible" so that it is up to the participant to choose how they will answer the question, which could mean that interviews vary significantly from each other.

The interview questions for this dissertation were based on examples from the literature, including those given by Åkerlind (2005), Bowden (2005) and Diehm and Lupton (2012). As a

novice phenomenographer, the researcher felt more comfortable basing questions on those given in case studies, as it would ensure that they were phrased appropriately for phenomenographic research. The full set of interview questions can be found in Appendix 2.

3.6.3. Pilot interview

It is recommended that researchers carry out a pilot interview, or several, to ensure that the questions are effective at drawing out variations in conceptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Åkerlind, 2005) and that the interviewer is able to conduct the interview without influencing the responses through asking leading questions or putting words in the respondent's mouth (Bowden, 2005). For this dissertation one pilot interview was carried out. The researcher felt that the questions and interview structure worked well during the pilot, and therefore proceeded to conduct the remaining interviews without changing the questions at all, and the transcript of the pilot was included in the analysis. The pilot was an opportunity for the researcher to practise asking questions in a "phenomenographic style", ensuring that the interviewee was allowed to fully articulate their thoughts and lead the conversation, with prompting from the researcher to maintain the focus of the interview. The remaining five interviews were conducted using the same techniques, with the researcher letting the interviewee direct the course of the interview and trying to interject as little as possible.

3.6.4. Transcription

Each interview was transcribed by the researcher as soon as possible after it had taken place. There is not much guidance in the literature about how detailed the transcription ought to be; Hornung (2013) describes how she not only transcribed the interviews, but also recorded body language and her own reactions during the interviews, to improve "her understanding of the life worlds" of her respondents (p. 681), whereas Åkerlind (2005, p. 116) reports that she did not go into as much detail, ignoring "minor linguistic or emotional aspect[s]" of participants' responses, partly because of financial reasons (professional transcription is expensive) and partly because they did not affect the overall meaning. For this project, the researcher took a middle-ground approach, recording hesitations and vocal tics, but disregarding body language or other environmental aspects of the interview, because this would have been too time-consuming for a project of this size.

3.6.5. Issues and limitations

As previously stated, the researcher was new to phenomenography and to interviewing. As such, the quality of the interviews may not have been as high as it is for more experienced researchers, as it was more difficult for the researcher to avoid making comments that might affect the interviewees' responses. The inclusion of the pilot interview in the final analysis is also something that does not follow traditional phenomenographic research; Bowden (2005) specifically advises against this, because the experimental nature of a pilot interview means the resulting data is not as useful as data from subsequent interviews. However, because neither the questions nor the order in which they were asked were not modified after the pilot, the researcher judged the pilot to be sufficiently similar to the other interviews to merit inclusion in the group.

The researcher also experienced some issues with transcription. Having followed Åkerlind's (2005) advice that interviews should be conducted in a "pleasant, conversational atmosphere" (p. 115), the researcher allowed the participants to choose where the interviews would take place. This led to some interviews being carried out in semi-public places such as a seating area in the students' union, where background noise occasionally made it difficult to hear the audio recording clearly. While the researcher attempted to transcribe the interviews as faithfully as possible, it was not always achievable. However, the researcher was satisfied that it was always possible to draw out the meaning from participants' responses, because no significant portions of dialogue were indistinct or unintelligible.

3.7. Analysis techniques

After all the interviews had taken place and had been transcribed, the transcripts were imported as a group into NVivo for analysis. NVivo software allows researchers to code and manipulate data in order to identify common themes or variation. 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. Bowden (2005) warns that analysing the transcripts one by one, before the set is completed, may adversely affect the later interviews by influencing the way the interviewer acts during them (p.20).

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 Lamas, Levy, Paraskakis and Webber (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. As there are several research questions being investigated in this project, several sets of categories were identified, with some links between them. The findings will be described in more detail in the next chapter.

4. Results

This chapter will present the findings from the data collected during the interviews. After introducing the four different conceptions identified from the data and presenting them in an outcome space, each one is described in more detail, supported by quotes from the interviews. Participants are referred to as “they”, “them”, and “themselves” during this chapter, and any places or people referred to in quotes have also been anonymised to protect the identity of anyone involved.

4.1. Outcome space

The perceptions and ways of experiencing teaching have been organised into four categories of description, which are presented in an outcome space. 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. The outcome space is presented in Table 2:

Table 2

	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 will be explored in more detail in the rest of this chapter.

4.2. The four categories of description

4.2.1. 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.

4.2.1.1. *I am a teacher*

When asked if they conceived of themselves as teachers, some participants responded very positively. Participant 3 said “yeah, 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 and level of... as the academics”. When talking about themselves in relation to the other teachers at their institution, 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. For example, Participant 3 said that “others will see you as an equal teacher”, and later that “they’ll treat you as- not just as a teacher but as a really valuable part of the course”. Participant 5 mentioned that when dealing with academics, “you feel as though you’re one of them, you’re included”, and Participant 4, speaking about librarian colleagues who were embedded in the faculty, said that “they are seen as [subject] faculty colleagues”.

Respondents also talked about teaching being a central focus of their role and something that they did every day. 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”, and Participant 3, who noted that “there’s all the interactions on the subject enquiry desk which you could treat as a teaching intervention”.

4.2.1.2. *I do exactly the same teaching as other teachers do*

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”, and Participant 1 talked about lesson planning: “what might be most effective, erm, time planning, how you’re gonna structure the session, er and if-if you need any sort of materials, practical exercises, for example”. Participant 4 mentioned ways in which, like other teachers do, 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 a lot of 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 another theory they liked to use in their teaching: “So I suppose that’s the main bit of learning theory if you like that’s- that’s stuck with me, the whole idea of inquiry-based learning”, while Participant 2 had a more generalised learner-centred approach: “it actually meets the learners’ needs rather than your needs, ‘cause it’s not about what we want to do, it’s actually about what they want to cover”. These comments demonstrate an understanding of teaching theory and a belief that librarians’ teaching should be as deliberate and considered as other teachers’.

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 showed how this conception of IL feeds into a conception of the librarian as a teacher, stating: “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”, and further reiterating: “Proper information literacy – always teaching, ‘cause it’s about ideas and concepts and everybody in that room will be developing differently, you are teaching them”.

4.2.2. 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 aspects, 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.

4.2.2.1. 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, like Participant 1, who spoke about “professionals who do some teaching or support teaching in some way in higher education such as librarians or learning technologists or whatever”, and Participant 2, who said that “it’s not just academics that teach, it’s also support staff as well”. 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 as a librarian who teaches 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.

4.2.2.2. 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’. Participant 5 said: “I’d like to think that the role that we actually do is very similar to the academics, probably the only difference is we’ve not got the

responsibility so much for assessment and things”, while Participant 2 mentioned the relationship between librarians and students in comparison with academic staff and students: “I do get to develop a relationship over the three years with them, but I don’t think it’s as involved as the relationship that tutors have with their own students”. Participant 1 went further, asserting that librarians had little to no chance of developing a teacher-learner relationship: “when you’re doing the sort of work that we do [...] you may well only see students perhaps one time within a module or a programme”. 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: “I don’t think the teaching is the same as those that- obviously that the tutors do”, later commenting that “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; Participant 4 told the researcher that “as a librarian you’re trying to teach- impart knowledge of skills, I guess, rather than trying to impart knowledge itself”, while Participant 6 put it more bluntly: “it’s 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 4 said: “if something makes sense to me, it makes sense to me, it doesn’t have to be a specific theory”, and later stated “I think librarianship is very practical, and whilst theory is good, sometimes it doesn’t have connection to the practical”. Participant 2 acknowledged that theory underpinned their work, but said “I don’t get bogged down with the theory too much [...]it’s comfortable to know that it’s there and that there’s all this theory gone behind all the practices we do but I’m just getting on with it”. This attitude contrasts with the “teacher-librarian” idea that new concepts and theories can improve their teaching and be more effective for students.

4.2.3. 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.

4.2.3.1. *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 demonstrated this when, talking about their colleagues, they said: “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”. They wanted to emphasise the parts of their role which, while not specifically concerning teaching, still supported the teaching and learning missions of the institution. Later, Participant 1 confirmed this conception, telling the researcher: “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.

4.2.3.2. *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. Participant 1 talked about the librarians at their institution, saying: “the liaison team [...] there isn’t anybody that- that that’s all they do, teaching, [...] you know we’ve all got erm other responsibilities and bits of our job er that- that are perhaps not directly teaching or whatever”. Participant 4 talked about this same conception, while at the same time suggesting that they do not hold it themselves: “every academic librarian teaches, every academic librarian who’s- who has like a similar job to me, teaches, but I guess... if you don’t- if you see it as like, something that’s an add-on to your role, rather than something that’s integral to it, and I guess I see, probably, it’s more integral”.

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 compared the impact librarians' teaching has on students with the impact a teacher's teaching would have: "because we're not teaching them everything, it's just an introduction, if- you know, if I try a new teaching style and it sort of bombs, it's not really going to affect their final grades". 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.

4.2.4. 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.

4.2.4.1. *I am not a teacher*

In direct opposition to the conceptions of librarians as teachers, this category involves a conception of librarians and teachers being completely different. 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 one is allowed to call oneself a teacher. Participant 1 suggested that teaching required a high-level qualification, saying: "I haven't got, erm, a degree or a Masters-level qualification in teaching", and Participant 5 made a similar statement, hinting that they do not think that their librarianship qualifications count towards advanced teaching ability: "other than the library degree, which obviously didn't- it included some basic sort of planning, how to plan and assess a session, how to evaluate and things like that, but there's no- I haven't got 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 1 also made a statement suggesting that they do not conceive of themselves as someone who could, or should, study a teaching qualification. When asked if they would like to obtain a teaching qualification, they replied: “it’s nothing that I’ve considered for myself so far”. 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 6 said that they were reluctant to label their activities as teaching, “purely because I don’t have teacher in my job title. If I was a teacher-librarian, I would call it- I still call it teaching but I’d be happier about calling it teaching.” Participant 3 spoke about the organisational structure of their institution affecting the way that librarians are described, 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.”

4.2.4.2. 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, saying: “I guess that’s probably a better word than a teacher, because I think of a trainer more as... er someone who’s going to teach you a specific set of skills”.

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”, while Participant 1, speaking about teaching techniques, added: “I don’t know what the technical definitions are”. 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.

The results will be discussed in relation to the research questions, and compared with the literature covered in the literature review, in the following chapter.

5. Discussion

This chapter will relate the categories of description to the original research questions, examining how well the questions have been answered and what insights have been gained. The discussion will also investigate whether the findings support or contradict the existing literature.

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

The research question this dissertation attempted to investigate and answer was: **What are academic librarians' conceptions of their own teaching, and how do these conceptions vary?**

The four categories of description which emerged from the interviews help to answer this question, although as noted in the previous chapter, their focus is 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, so it is still true to say that this research answered the original research question. The research found that librarians conceive of their teaching in four main ways: either that it is exactly the same as the teaching that other teachers do; it is teaching, but not the same type of teaching that other teachers do; it is teaching, but not as important or valuable as other teachers'; or it is not teaching but training.

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', while the conception that it is training, rather than teaching, is shown in McGuinness (2009), who noted that participants in her research were more comfortable talking about their training activities than labelling them "information literacy teaching". 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. Would librarians describe themselves as teachers?

This question ended up being the true focus of the results, with each category of description being named after a librarian's conception of themselves as a teacher. The ways in which librarians describe themselves range from "teacher-librarian", through "support staff", "librarian who teaches", to "trainer" (i.e. not a teacher).

Despite Feetham's (2006) and Moniz, Henry and Eshleman'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 the conceptions of librarians 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.

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

This question was quite an easy one to obtain an answer for, as it is not a conceptual question but requires concrete answers. The participants were forthcoming about their ideas and influences, if indeed they had any theoretical influences at all. 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 shown in the transcripts 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, despite describing their own teaching activities during the interview. 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"?

This question drew out a number of interesting points during the interviews. 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 information literacy (Cox & 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 converging 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.

5.5. Were all the research questions answered?

Overall, all the research questions were answered, although the focus did not fall where it was originally expected to. It is possible that a different set of interview questions could have drawn out more information about how librarians conceive of their skills, and put less emphasis on themselves as teachers, but the information gathered through this project paints an interesting picture of librarians' conceptions of themselves and their skills, two things that are extremely closely interlinked.

6. Conclusion

This chapter will summarise the main findings of the research, before identifying some issues and limitations of the methods used. Recommendations for practice arising from this research are detailed, before suggestions for future research are made.

6.1. Main findings

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

Which category a librarian identifies with will vary according to how they conceive of themselves, their teaching, IL, and other teachers, and it is possible that librarians would hold different conceptions at different times and in different circumstances. 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.

The project answered all the research questions set out at the beginning, and fulfilled the objectives of carrying out phenomenographic interview-based research and analysis. Despite the end results focusing slightly more on a secondary research question, the research was still successful in achieving all its aims.

6.2. Issues and limitations of the method

The researcher was inexperienced and time-limited, and both of these factors had an effect on the final work. A more experienced phenomenographer would have been able to design a more effective set of interview questions, answering the primary research question more comprehensively, and would have conducted the interviews with more skill than the researcher did. The short amount of time available to complete this project meant that the sample size was smaller than is usual for a phenomenographic study, and the analysis took place over a few

days rather than the months often assigned to it by other researchers. Despite these issues, the data obtained is valid and interesting, and the resulting outcome space is useful and brings new knowledge to the field.

Another difficulty the researcher encountered was the terminology used by both herself and the interviewees; on occasions it was hard to separate the underlying meaning from what participants were saying when they talked about “teaching”. Often it turned out that they were really talking about training or another activity instead, but used the word “teaching” for convenience. However, the researcher felt able to work out what participants meant in most contexts, allowing a useful amount of data to be collected and analysed properly.

6.3. 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.

Library managers should consider providing more training or supporting their librarians to undertake qualifications to further help alleviate the problems around confidence.

Librarians who work closely with faculty staff feel more like equals with the academics; efforts to forge closer links between the library and academic departments would be beneficial for both sides and especially the students.

Finally, universities providing library and information science qualifications should consider including more (elective) pedagogy and teaching-related instruction; user education features in most sectors of librarianship in some form, and newly qualified librarians would feel more equipped in the workplace having received a good grounding in teaching theory and techniques at library school.

6.4. Suggestions for future research

It would be interesting to conduct further research into librarians’ conceptions of themselves as teachers in an HE environment, to find out whether the tentative conclusions around environmental influences are actually true. This research has also brought up issues around

librarians' confidence in themselves and their abilities, which would benefit from deeper investigation.

The opportunity to conduct a larger-scale study on the same topic as this dissertation would be useful to determine whether the categories hold up or if they require further refinement. It would also provide an opportunity to rewrite some of the interview questions to see whether they more accurately address the original research question.

11028 words

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Appendix 1 – Ethics Documentation

The University of Sheffield. Information School	Investigating academic librarians' conceptions of their own teaching skills
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Researchers

Emily Wheeler ecwheeler1@sheffield.ac.uk

Pam McKinney p.mckinney@sheffield.ac.uk

Purpose of the research

The research aims to investigate the variations in academic librarians' conceptions of teaching and their own teaching skills, in order to understand how they feel about teaching information literacy and identify potential future support.

Who will be participating?

We will be asking academic librarians who teach information literacy at universities in the north of England to participate.

What will you be asked to do?

We will ask you to take part in an interview lasting about one hour in which you will be asked about your experiences of teaching information literacy to higher education students.

What are the potential risks of participating?

The risks of participating are the same as those experienced in everyday life.

What data will we collect?

The interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder and then transcribed.

What will we do with the data?

The audio files and transcripts will be stored on a USB drive and backed up to the researchers' personal computers and cloud storage. The results of the analysis will be published online as part of my Masters dissertation. We hope to be able to publish the research as a journal article or conference paper so may need to keep the data after the dissertation is submitted. After any subsequent publication, the data will be destroyed.

Will my participation be confidential?

Each interview recording and transcript will be assigned a number, and your name will not be attached to any data, ensuring your anonymity. We will also note down some information about you including your gender, the length of your career, and the type of university you work at, to help ensure there is variety among the participant group. This information will be aggregated and presented as a set of tables, so no individual will be able to be identified.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of this research will be published as part of my Masters dissertation, which will be publicly available online from the Information School website about six months after it is submitted. They may also be used in subsequent publications, which you will be informed of before they are made available.

I confirm that I have read and understand the description of the research project, and that I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that I may decline to answer any particular question or questions, or to do any of the activities. If I stop participating at all time, all of my data will be purged.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, that my name or identity will not be linked to any research materials, and that I will not be identified or identifiable in any report or reports that result from the research.

I give permission for the research team members to have access to my anonymised responses.

I give permission for the research team to re-use my data for future research as specified above.

I agree to take part in the research project as described above.

Participant Name (Please print)

Emily Wheeler

Participant Signature

Researcher Name (Please print)

Researcher Signature

Date

Note: If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Angela Lin, Research Ethics Coordinator, Information School, The University of Sheffield (ischool_ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), or to the University Registrar and Secretary.

Information School Research Ethics Panel

Letter of Approval

Date: 19th June 2014

TO: Emily Wheeler

The Information School Research Ethics Panel has examined the following application:

Title: Investigating academic librarians' conceptions of their own teaching skills

Submitted by: Emily Wheeler

And found the proposed research involving human participants to be in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's *'Financial Regulations'*, *'Good Research Practice Standards'* and the *'Ethics Policy Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue'* (Ethics Policy).

This letter is the official record of ethics approval by the School, and should accompany any formal requests for evidence of research ethics approval.

Effective Date: 19th June 2014



Dr Angela Lin
Research Ethics Coordinator

Appendix 2 – 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?



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Name Emily Wheeler

Department Information School

Signed Emily Wheeler

Date 31.08.2014

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