

CHAPTER 8

Carving Out a Space

Ambiguity and Librarian Teacher Identity in the Academy

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Janna: So a thought just occurred to me, there is this . . . on one hand this bitterness and insecurity, and [on the other] this fierceness we have to this profession.

Maoria: A what?

Janna: A fierceness . . . one of my thoughts about, thinking about myself as a teacher I don't want to give up the librarian part of me either, but I'm trying to figure out how the two coincide. Am I making sense?

Based on a desire to examine librarian teaching identity within the context of our institution, we sat down as colleagues to participate in a structured dialogue to explore the meaning of being a teacher-librarian. Our group is Janna Mattson, Social Sciences Librarian; Maoria Kirker, Instructional Services and Assessment Librarian; Mary Oberlies, Conflict and Peace Studies Librarian; and Jason Byrd, Head of Information Services. We are all professional faculty at George Mason University, a large, multi-campus, state, four-year institution located in northern Virginia. Maoria, the University Libraries' first assessment librarian, began the peer evaluation initiative in which we observe our colleagues during an instruction session and provide constructive feedback. Janna, Mary, and Jason together make up one of these peer evaluation groups, known as Teaching Squares. Maoria receives self-reflections from the librarians in each group as well as conducts her own observation of teaching librarians.

This chapter is formatted to represent three separate narratives:

- conversational, represented by the italicized, indented text;
- analytical, represented in the traditional text body and supported by scholarly literature;
- and self-reflective, represented by the text box insets.

On March 10, 2016, we sat down to record a conversation guided by co-constructed questions. This dialogue was then transcribed and edited for clarity. Additionally, not all aspects

of the conversation are reflected in this chapter. Based on the themes identified within the selected dialogue, we researched scholarly literature surrounding our conversation. Three months later, in revising this text, we added self-reflective comments to the conversational dialogue, again noted in the text box insets.

Becoming a Teacher-Librarian

In a phenomenographic study about librarians' perceptions of themselves as teachers, Wheeler and McKinney write that librarians who do not identify as teachers make that choice "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."¹ There is some cognitive dissonance between what librarians say we are and what we actually do: "Teaching skills are clearly recognized as important to the professional work of academic librarians, but to what degree do academic librarians think of themselves as teachers when they consider their place on campus, and to what degree is 'teacher identity' a recognized aspect of the broader professional identity of academic librarians?"² We want to begin to unpack this cognitive dissonance and the factors, both internal and external, that contribute to it.

Those Blank Stares . . .

Janna: Becoming educated in pedagogies and learning theories is one way I have become more comfortable in my teaching role as an academic librarian, especially in connections with students, and explaining my choices with teaching faculty. Have you guys felt empowered by knowing a little more about this? Or do you feel like [not having] teacher training is a hindrance for anyone here . . . ?

Jason: Yes, absolutely, because without this, what you end up becoming is a trainer, instead of being a teacher. You're just a trainer—you're just training. You could work for EBSCO coming in and showing how to use the EBSCO databases, and that is part of the problem. I think we have to work toward learning more of that. The thing is that most academic faculty also don't have that training. They come out of grad school in the same boat. So I think the rise of places like the CTFE [Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence] or any sort of faculty development center is crucial to making people into good teachers. I'm lucky that in the two universities I've worked they have a very robust teacher-training program for faculty. I've had a lot of exposure to these sorts of theories and pedagogies. But I think that without

participating in those things, and our colleagues who chose not to participate in those things, you really just become a trainer, a point-click-do.

[**Janna:** I believe service provision is an important part of libraries, but I do not agree that librarians should spend a lot of time in this role. I believe students need librarians to be available as teachers and research mentors.]

Janna: *Which doesn't really pull you out of that service provider role.*

Mary: *I'd say it adds to your confidence, learning the different theories and having that to guide you through the creation of lessons and activities. . . . I'd imagine we can all agree that coming in and being told you will teach, we all feel initially alarmed. Having a little training . . . makes you a more confident teacher. . . . In working with you [Janna] it's made me much more confident. . . . From when you and I first started observing each other when we were just starting with problem-based learning to observing you this past fall . . . it's very different what you do in the classroom. I think it is definitely one of those things where the evolution of what you've learned guides you.*

.....

Janna: *I believe that we [Mary and Janna] started collaborating because of the commonalities between our subject areas, and also during our problem-based learning pilot study. This project actually helped me establish some equilibrium with this way of working and describing what we do. Did you experience this in terms of professional growth and partnering with me on this? Did you become [sic] to think of yourself as more of a teacher rather than a librarian?*

Mary: *It actually was a really good experience partnering with you. I've always seen myself more as a teacher than a librarian. . . . I wanted to be a teacher in the first place. I just happened to go about it in a very different way. But I don't know a lot about [teaching]. . . . I think . . . our partnership has helped me grow in what I can do. When I first started here, I didn't know what to do. . . . So partnering in general helped me learn different activities. I'd already started doing some problem-based activities, but I didn't know how they worked very well. . . . There was no theory involved. It was just, "Let's see what happens. I don't know how this is going to work out, but let's see what happens."*

Janna: *And I think that's also what we need to start doing. I was uncomfortable with it,*

*too, because I didn't see myself as a teacher. Maoria, we talked about that article you brought to one of the Round Tables about "Are you a trainer? Are you a teacher librarian?"*³

[**Mary:** This idea of playing at teacher is something I really struggled with when I first started as a professional librarian. I had no training in teaching, so I felt like an imposter. I was flying by the seat of my pants and crossing my fingers it worked. But honest truth? I still struggle at times. I am sure I am not alone in this (maybe I am?), but it certainly feels lonely to have that insecurity. Our community of practice goes beyond introducing me to new tools and theory; it also provides a support network. Not sure something is working? I will ask my Square to watch out for it. Need to bounce ideas for a new project? Square to the rescue.]

Maoria: *"Are you a facilitator?"*

Janna: *Facilitator. That kind of thing.*

Mary: *I think some of it is also . . . Even though I see myself as a teacher, it's like the teacher from childhood. Where you're playing teacher.*

Maoria: *Yeah. Like with your friends.*

Mary: *Exactly. I set up my whiteboard and I'm talking you through the lesson about the American Revolution. So there's actually no thought going into it other than, I want to share my knowledge with you and I hope that you get it. It's kind of like . . . it's really that imposter thing. So I played at being a teacher. And now through some of this peer stuff that we're doing, and you've introduced me to the educational theory and then how this goes into lesson planning. And oh, lesson planning. And oh by the way, learning objectives might be a good thing to add into this, guys. It's one of those things where it's like scaffolding . . . ow, sexy.*

[laughter]

Mary: *It takes you from being that play teacher to being a real teacher.*

We feel as though we often fail our students. This failure materializes in multiple ways—failure to find sources, failure to engage with a topic, failure to see students' final work, and failure to transfer our knowledge to students. Then there are the uncomfortable seas of blank stares of students who seem to barely tolerate the obligatory librarian visit that their well-meaning instructors have arranged for them. We know we have to do better since this is the most forward-facing and public aspect of our jobs. We have to learn how to teach, perhaps to feel that deflated feeling just a little bit less often, but more importantly to support student learning.

This making sense of teaching and learning theories as well as various pedagogies that Mary

and Janna discuss connects to the theme in the library scholarly literature that the “value of support, good training and reflective practice is emphasized as a way of avoiding poor teaching.”⁴ We created our own community of practice through the commonalities of our subject areas as well as being librarians who work on distributed campuses, away from most of our librarian colleagues, which at certain times created feelings of being on the periphery of our organization. What we reflected on directly relates to the scholarship on communities of practice: “This environment of professional development allows individuals to expand their skill set, become more knowledgeable of trends in their field, and to enhance their sense of professional identity.”⁵ Through our self-directed professional development, our community of practice, we are becoming “real teachers.”

But What about the Books?

[**Jason:** I am making a distinction here between reference—which I define as answering a question with a definitive answer—and teaching, which can also occur on a reference desk. Increasingly, the work of academic librarians focuses on providing research assistance and instruction, either in the classroom, in our offices, or on a public service desk.]

Jason: *The real work [for public service librarians] is in teaching now. It’s not in reference. Collection development can largely be automated using approval plans that are set up correctly with a little help along the way from us. But to me, the biggest part of what we do is teaching and outreach also. . . . It is a different kind of work for public services. Our real work comes in teaching. That’s where I learned how to use resources. Not because I sat on the reference desk, but because I had to teach them and I had to know them. So I had to learn how to address these things and how to communicate.*

[**Maoria:** I realize this is not a reflection only of my professional interests, but also of the time restraints placed upon me. I love teaching, developing my instructional skills, and helping other librarians improve their instruction. Teaching and instructional assessment take a significant amount of time. I don’t have the bandwidth to spend time and energy thinking of aspects of librarianship outside my general area of instruction and assessment. This does not mean that collection development, space planning, and other areas of librarianship are not important; however, they are not important to me right now.]

Maoria: *This just reminds me of a conversation I had during a pre-observation meeting where afterwards we started talking about collections and space, etc. I can remember talking to this librarian and thinking to myself, “These are all things that I do not care about,” and stopping and wondering if I should care about collection development and weeding and the use of the space. This subject librarian technically*

has a very similar job to me. But is it so different that I should be thinking about those things, too? Then I stopped and thought maybe this person isn't even supposed to be thinking about these things?

Janna: *And that is what I am struggling with. What is my identity as a subject librarian? . . . I feel the same way as you. I don't know how to negotiate that.*

With a particular emphasis on our teaching roles as librarians, we began to wonder if we are neglecting something in our work. Or has that “something” disappeared? In forming our first Teaching Square, we naturally gravitated towards like-minded colleagues, but the roots of our classical librarian education and the viewpoints of our colleagues affect our librarian-teacher identity, sometimes causing hesitation.

The origins of some of our teaching identities are rooted in childhood play. We have also discussed our teaching identities in juxtaposition to our colleagues who spend more time in the work of collection development and the physical space of the library than Maoria and Janna. While forming our own teaching identities, we must also grapple with who we are in the academy at large, specifically how librarians are perceived by students and faculty, “campus colleagues” who are “unaware of [negative behavior], or under mistaken impressions fueled by stereotypes in the popular culture.”⁶ The ambiguity as a librarian-teacher-guest speaker in the classroom is often tricky to negotiate.

External Influences

Student and faculty perceptions of librarians, especially public-facing librarians, impact our identities. Our conversation gravitated toward two specific influences: microaggressions and professional identity insecurity.

Microaggressions in Academia

Janna: *Mary, when you observed my class, you and I noticed the same thing, that the instructor had an exam scheduled just after my IL discussion. I made a note in my reflective journal with two exclamation (!!) points. . . . Later, while the students were doing their group work, you showed me the note you made about that very same thing. Do you think this is typical of library instruction requests by faculty? Or should curve balls just be expected?*

Mary: *I think we should never have to expect curve balls. I think there should be a*

certain level of respect between them and us. That they would plan our thing. . . . I think sometimes faculty are confused about what our role is. Are we the people who buy [books] . . . and just sit waiting for them to remember us? Or are we colleagues? You know, people who are working right along beside them, and we should then be treated the same way as they would a fellow colleague. Would they ever bring a colleague to talk to their class right before an exam? . . . I don't think they do it intentionally. . . . [But] no matter how we approach it, it feels like "I can control you and how this session is going and this is how you're going to do it."

Janna: *That is an interesting analogy, not wanting to give up power. I have come across many faculty members who don't want to give up a lot of teaching authority.*

[**Mary:** Thinking more on this, I do not know if it comes down to power. It might have more to do with value of the information. Is the library instruction going to help the students meet the course outcomes? If I were a faculty member and did not think the library instruction would add value, then I would not hand over prime instruction time either. Maybe we undersell what our sessions can provide or just do not do an effective job at teaching? Or it could be the "otherness" of instruction librarians that leads to a devaluation of what we can provide because it is not easily understood. No matter the underlying reason, the exchanges between faculty and us can impact our teaching—or at least it does for me. Reacting to curve balls shakes my already shaky confidence. Surely faculty experience something similar, so why are we not partners in this?]

Mary: *And then you have the ones that undercut you. . . . It negates everything you just talked about. So what it says to the students is that I as a faculty member do not value what this person just said to you. . . . At the same time it's like "Why did you bring me in then? Why did you waste my time?" . . . I would say that your [Janna's] session that I saw, I found that professor to be very rude. It wasn't that she scheduled you to talk on the day of an exam; she didn't even show up on time.*

Janna: *It's funny, Mary, because I think about that session a bit and I don't know if I even recognize rudeness anymore.*

[**Group Reflection:** We recognize no one in our group is part of a truly marginalized group and hesitate to lay claim to this term; however, we did not find a sufficient alternative considering the parallels between our experiences in the hierarchy of higher education.]

Jason: *I think we're dancing around the issue of microaggression. . . . What really struck me, Janna, is that you don't even recognize rudeness anymore. . . . I think that's part of the issue in carving out a space for the twenty-first-century librarian. We have to learn to be collaborators in the academy and not just librarians who collect books and know books and know how to find books. . . . It's sort of this otherness. . . . We*

are not an academic but we are not a service provider.

Throughout our conversation about the ambiguity surrounding being a twenty-first-century librarian and what that means, we continually circled around the idea of microaggressions. In discussing the slights, snubs, and at times negative messages we have experienced while working with faculty, we found it difficult to define what we were truly encountering—was it misperception, stereotyping, or microaggressions?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *misperception* as “a wrong or incorrect understanding or interpretation,” and *stereotype* as “a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.”⁷ Neither of these words hits on the vulnerability associated with the remarks and actions we experienced and the impact they had on teaching. The best way we can convey our meaning is through the use of the term *microaggressions*. These unintentionally harmful comments and actions can “resonate with deeply held understandings about our imperfections and limitations” and undermine, distract, and put people off balance.⁸ In this case, the harmful actions and comments resonate with us because of the ambiguity surrounding the teacher-librarian identity.

The term *microaggression* was coined in 1969 and is traditionally associated with the experiences of oppressed groups—specifically race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. . . . These hidden messages may invalidate the group identity . . . demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.⁹

In a recent study at a university following a cultural competence workshop exercise about microaggressions, Young, Anderson, and Stewart found 42 percent of attendees experienced microaggressions relating to hierarchy in the workplace.¹⁰ They define this observation as hierarchical microaggressions, which “represent the everyday slights found in higher education that communicate systemic valuing (or devaluing) of a person because of the institutional role held by that person.”¹¹ Four themes are identified within hierarchical microaggressions, the most relevant being valuing or devaluing based on role or credential.¹² Similar to microinsults, valuing or devaluing based on a role or credential leaves victims feeling like second-class citizens. In this case, hierarchical microaggressions come in the form of educational bias, “treating those with different educational status differently . . . [or] contributions of those at an academic level less than faculty [as] less valuable. . . . These comments build a message to employees that some

people in some roles in the university are valued over others.”¹³ We only feel comfortable placing these experiences within the realm of hierarchy in higher education. Roles are important within a university setting, and they do not exist alone among faculty, but also within all organizations, including libraries. Identity is important to everyone—it brings us together as a group, gives us a purpose, and adds to our self-worth.

In observing Janna’s instruction session, Mary experienced empathy for her, having had shared experiences in faculty unintentionally devaluing the instruction session through innocuous actions, such as, in this case, planning an exam immediately following her visit. During and following the session, Mary was shocked by the action, but did not have a label for it. Later, when learning about microaggressions, this event was one that immediately came to mind. It is telling that when discussing this experience with Janna, she did not see it the same way. Microaggressions are unintentional, they “have no intent to harm the victim; nor, in most cases, do they [the perpetrator] even realize that such harm can occur.”¹⁴ However, continuous attacks can be detrimental. They can lead to tensions in the workplace, hinder personal growth, impact employee attitude, harm the group identity, and cause the targets to see themselves as being less capable or having a position of low importance.¹⁵ Researchers have found that faculty and students often cannot tell the difference between librarians and library support staff or understand the role of academic librarians within the university.¹⁶ In addition to these challenges, the historical gender of this profession has been predominantly female. While the gender ratios have been changing in academia, teaching faculty have been predominantly male. This gender differentiation may also be at the root cause of these microaggressions. Our professional identity is already confused, and with the addition of hierarchical microaggressions, it can further blur the lines and add to the ambiguity we already experience within our own organizations—are we librarians, or teachers, or teacher-librarians?

Librarians and Professional Identity Crisis

Janna: *So what I’m hearing is that there’s either a lack of respect or a lack of understanding. And I definitely feel that as well. But which is it?*

.....

Mary: *Exactly, so there’s a lack of understanding of what we are, and because there is a lack of understanding, there’s a lack of respect.*

Jason: *I think there are two competing things here: there is the imposter syndrome of course, but there is also whether the microaggressions from the faculty are*

establishing you as an expert or as a service professional.

Maoria: *Do you think that's because librarianship has changed? . . .*

Janna: *So you are saying that faculty would just assume that a student would stumble upon a librarian twenty years ago because that was where they would have to go?*

Mary: *Exactly. I definitely used databases in undergrad, but I also had to go to the library more often to use microfilm and things like that or to use actual bound journals. I definitely interacted with librarians in that "How do I get this microfilm machine to work?" way. But that's it. Whereas now they have everything on their computer and everything is there. So now it's like you have to bring the librarian in to help them handle how much information there is.*

<p>Jason: I believe this statement is too broad and too harsh. I have, however, had faculty tell me that they are uncomfortable with research in the digital age. Perhaps one of the ways we can carve a space for librarians in the academy is recognizing the anxiety that both librarians and faculty have about information.]</p>
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Jason: *What if one of the things we are seeing is the perception of microaggressions with faculty not knowing what our role is. . . . We were gatekeepers of information, and now we are instructing on how we are not gatekeepers anymore. . . . What if that is what we are experiencing and we are interpreting . . . as [a]microaggression or [a] sort of devaluing our place in the academy? What if it's that they just don't know?*

Mary: *I think it goes back to the imposter issue. I feel like an imposter as a teacher; I feel like an imposter as a subject expert; I feel like an imposter in academia. I have a faculty status but that feels fake sometimes. And so it's almost like you come to expect them to have that microaggression toward you. Well, I expect them to treat me the way they treat me because that's the way they've always treated me, so it kind of reinforces this idea of . . .*

Jason: *This otherness.*

Librarianship as a profession suffers from a professional identity crisis; some have speculated that it is the accidental nature of how librarians come to the profession that perpetuates this.¹⁷ Academic librarians in particular are "surrounded by colleagues following the dominant campus profession" as teaching faculty, and within higher education we lack a professional identity.¹⁸ It is not surprising then that we often feel like imposters within higher education, particularly so instructional librarians who are increasingly encouraged to think of themselves as teachers, but

often lack teacher training or come up against internal barriers like a lack of support from colleagues and administrators and misperceptions about the current role of libraries.

The teacher identity is integral for success, it can “affect everything . . . [from] effectiveness in the classroom to the ability to cope with change and to implement new practices in one’s instructional work.”¹⁹ To fully embrace this identity, teacher-librarians need more than just training—it requires a shift of understanding, moving away from the traditional understanding of the library as a physical space and the librarian role of getting the information from the space to people.

Plutchak discussed the idea of the “dawning of the great age of librarians,” and the shift we are experiencing and have experienced away from traditional librarianship. The focus is no longer about the library as a space; instead, the important work we are doing now is outside the library. This requires rethinking the services and roles within libraries and shifting resources to support new tasks and moving away from others.²⁰ This is certainly a theme that came out in our discussion that perhaps the lack of respect we encountered had to do with faculty and students not understanding the role of instructional librarians. This is particularly true for older faculty and librarians as the dynamic of librarianship (and even academia) has evolved with the technological changes of the times. In our discussion, we considered the differences just in the last ten years. In our experiences as undergraduates, we did not have librarians visiting our classes to provide information literacy instruction. Rather we worked with the librarian as needed when we were in the library doing research. Fast-forward to now, where students suffer from an information overload and need assistance with parsing the information to find what is relevant. These changes have led to the librarian moving into the teacher role, one that we not only do not always feel equipped for, but also an area that was previously dominated just by academic faculty, requiring us to carve out a new space in academia.²¹ It is not surprising we feel like imposters!

Sara Gray traced the historical roots of librarianship in an attempt to define librarianship, discovering the definition has evolved with time, but never really had an agreed-upon definition able to encompass all the roles within librarianship. Ultimately the librarian identity is contested and ambiguous, especially as the profession moves into the twenty-first century and must navigate how to carve out our space in academia.²² It is true that librarians need to decide what professional identity we wish to embrace so we can remain relevant in higher education.²³ However, perhaps rather than having a definable professional identity, a mission would work better. “The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities.”²⁴ Using this mission statement, Plutchak says our real job is then to apply

our talents and skills as best we can to help advance the community's goals.²⁵

Our Teaching Identities

Maoria: So, I've been thinking about something that was sort of said by you [Janna]. I have observed everyone [teaching] but about seven people now . . . there's a continuum of sage on a stage to being a complete facilitator.

[Maoria draws a Likert scale type of diagram]

Maoria: To me the twenty-first-century teacher should be a facilitator—where students are leading the learning, etc. I would be interested if I could map where people sort of fall, and I would bet money that the farther you fall toward the complete facilitator the less resistant you were in this [evaluation/peer review] process. Because it comes back to what you said tying the sage on the stage to being authoritarian: "I am the expert and no one else can contribute." The closer you are to that the seemingly more resistant you would be to someone coming in and giving you feedback.

.....

[Maoria: I believe strongly in student-centered learning, but I realize that it is outside many librarians' comfort zones to teach that way. This statement reveals my personal bias for instruction and one that I want other librarians to embrace. I struggle with the push-pull of authority and facilitation, too, but I am actively working to let facilitation gain the upper hand. As I reflected earlier, I need to recognize that not all librarians will value instruction as highly as I do.]

Maoria: If we think of sage on the stage, which is sort of like your authoritative instructor, to your complete facilitator teacher at the other end, from a zero to a ten .

..

[Jason: As a learner, I do quite well in (and even prefer) lecture-based, authoritative style settings. In fact, I usually don't appreciate classroom activities and active learning strategies. As a teacher-librarian, however, I believe that a more facilitative style of teaching is more effective. I struggle with setting aside my personal preferences as a learner with my knowledge of pedagogy as an instructor.]

Jason: An authoritarian style of teaching versus a democratic style of teaching . . .

Maoria: So where do we think we fall? If you were assigned a number?

Jason: I would say I'm probably a seven.

[Mary: I have mentioned my lack of instructional training previously, and this is really what pulled me to being a facilitator. Initially it took the pressure and attention off me by placing the students in control of their own learning. There is more thought behind this decision now, of course. I believe student-centered learning adds more meaning to

my short time with students. I like setting up my sessions to meet the varied learning needs of my students. I always struggled in classes when I did not have time to think through processes, talk with others, and practice. I find being a facilitator allows me to better address all student needs and varied levels of experience.]

Mary: *Where would I fall? I think I would be a six?*

Maoria: *Janna, where do you think you would be?*

Janna: *I would say I'm like an eight or nine? Would you guys agree with that?*

Jason: *From what I've observed, yes, I would agree with that.*

Janna: *What would you say, Maoria?*

Maoria: *I would say I'm probably an eight.*

[**Janna:** My preference for being a facilitative teacher rather than an authoritative lecturer stems from my own research in learning theory as well as my personal discomfort of giving lectures. I need real-time student feedback to feel like an effective teacher.]

Janna: *So we're kind of birds of a feather here, right?*

Jason: *I would give you a higher number, Mary.*

Maoria: *I would give you a higher number, too.*

Mary: *What number should I be!?*

Maoria: *I don't know. I think we all fluctuate back and forth between seven and nine.*

Janna: *I think it depends on the instructor.*

Jason: *And the subject matter.*

Maoria: *I think we are all on the right side of the spectrum here, literally. . . . Already we're identifying ourselves of that leaning. This doesn't get to the idea of expert, but it gets to the facilitative teacher. We're identifying ourselves of that orientation. I would imagine if you're already of that leaning, then you're probably actively working more toward facilitation as much as possible.*

Janna: *Okay. So I guess continuing along that same line—we [Jason and I] talked about me feeling more like a teaching librarian facilitator rather than a librarian expert, and that was actually one of the things you mentioned in our Teaching Square conversation. You appreciated me not imposing my methods on the student but letting them know how to do it and making adjustments after. Can you talk about why this is a highlight for you?*

Jason: *You let the students decide the best method. You presented the students with a problem and asked them to devise resources, but you didn't define how to do that. You let them explore on their own, and when they were sharing what they found, you did a very good job of acknowledging their own knowledge creation process and not imposing your model of how it should be done. . . . You were definitely assuming that role of a facilitator and not the one who knows everything. . . . So I have a question for you. When I told you that I like that you weren't imposing your methods and that was really great in showing your expertise, you seemed surprised by that. What surprised you?*

Janna: *I've never heard anyone articulate their teaching style that way, and maybe that's because I haven't had a chance to really talk to anybody about how they teach or what works best, and maybe that is part of what this is. Really we are taking this whole day to talk about teaching and what it means to be an academic librarian and those opportunities are so rare.*

Through the negotiation of our identities as teacher-librarians and our roles in the academy, a dichotomy began to surface in our discussion. The two competing teacher identities that emerged were an authoritative sage-on-the-stage instructor and a facilitative student-centered instructor. We noticed a disparity in our teacher identifications with those of our colleagues and how those identifications affected attitudes and interactions beyond the classroom.

The discussion surrounding the dichotomy between authoritative instruction and student-centered instruction has been ongoing for many years. Paulo Freire identified and then rejected the banking method of education, which conceptualized learners as vessels within which an instructor could deposit knowledge.²⁶ This method of instruction negates critical thinking, the foundation of what information literacy instruction entails. By removing ourselves from the sage-on-the-stage approach, we empower our students to think critically, engage with information sources, and construct their own knowledge.

The facilitative teacher-librarian establishes a classroom environment allowing students to co-construct knowledge with their peers. While many variations of social development and learning theory exist, we recognize the influence of Vygotsky's social development theory on our teaching philosophies: more specifically, the intersection of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) model with Freire's model call for problem-based education. As instructors, we turn to Freire's proposed solution of problem-based education, allowing for dialogue between students and teachers and deconstructing the power imbalances that often accompany these

relationships in the classroom. Through our facilitation of a problem-based lesson, students scaffold each other's learning and teach one another, passing through the ZPD to previously unattainable knowledge or skills.²⁷ Students become the teachers, and the teacher becomes the guide: "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches."²⁸ In this manner, we see a union between Vygotsky, Freire, and our teaching identities. We are not the authoritative bankers of education, but the active facilitators, guiding our students as they build their knowledge.

With the advent of the Association of College and Research Libraries' *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, our claiming of a facilitative teacher-librarian identity seems to align with the trajectory of our profession.²⁹ The *Framework*, because of its emphasis on metaliteracy and critical-thinking skills, makes space for teacher-librarians to abandon the sage-on-the-stage motif and embrace facilitative teaching and problem-based instruction. The frames encourage librarians to guide students rather than lecture them through the thresholds of information literacy. Burgess goes as far as claiming that the *Framework* requires librarians to cross a threshold with our instruction—a move away from point-and-click instruction towards "encouraging students to become active agents in their own learning."³⁰ The *Framework* reaffirms and supports our teacher-librarian identity.

Final Reflections

In preparing the conclusion to this chapter, we realized each of us has a different understanding of what "carving out a space in academia" means that speaks to the ambiguity we struggle with surrounding our librarian identity.

Janna: *Jason discussed how librarians need to carve out a space in the academy. We were so inspired by this notion that we used it in our title. For me it invokes the imagery of sculpting, how the winds shape a huge monolith over time. The monolith will always be a monolith, just as the academy will always be a place of learning, but it is shaped by the needs of its students and by new information.*

Mary: *I see "carving out a space in academia" as an aggressive phrase, almost a bit divisive and violent. Throughout our dialogue, analysis, and self-reflection, we explore an underlying struggle within the twenty-first-century academy. Specifically how we can grow from an old way of thinking of ourselves as firmly separate entities, to a new focus on partnership. Carving implies we want to be separate entities even*

in today's academy. However, the problem is that we (instructional staff, librarians, classified staff, administration) have a shared identity within academia, we are all living a similar experience, and we all have the same end goal to help users get the information they need. This creates a lot of overlap in our roles that we hesitate to embrace.

Maoria: *When I think about “carving out a space in academia,” I feel at odds with two competing ideas. The first is that we have room to make a space; the academy recognizes the need for librarians and libraries to be a part of the educational mission of the university. Conversely, I think about the need to make our own space, as though in order to be taken seriously as educators we have to push, pull, and carve our way into the academy. Our space must somehow be earned, not a given. Carving out space is a way not only to be seen as equal educators, but also to reclaim our own narrative of what librarians' roles are in a modern university.*

Jason: *“Carving out a space in academia” means defining how libraries—and librarians—are adapting to changes in higher education and the information landscape. As libraries move from repositories of information sources to centers of learning and knowledge creation, librarians are undergoing an identity crisis. Traditional library roles, like reference librarians and catalogers, are being replaced by roles as instructors and metadata experts. Our place in the academia in the twenty-first century will be defined by our ability to “carve out” a space in this changing environment while remaining true to our core values of equitable access to information and services, intellectual freedom, and a right to privacy and confidentiality.*

From our discussion and subsequent research, we have discovered that librarians are not one thing in the twenty-first-century academy, to others and to ourselves. Throughout library literature, we see a constant struggle to identify what a librarian is and what being a librarian means. Wheeler and McKinney and Walter point to our desire to remain separate from other instruction staff; Plutchak and Lankes say we should take on a mission statement rather than an identity and help advance our community's goals.³¹ It is certainly possible to see multiple ways forward—all of which possess validity, purpose, and possibility.

Mary: *What do you mean about fierceness?*

Janna: *Just being really adamant about being a librarian. . . .*

***Maoria:** I think the problem is there is no one definition of librarian. I'm sure if you asked us to write down a definition we'd all have very very different ones, and none of them are necessarily right or wrong.*

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Notes

1. Emily Wheeler and Pamela McKinney, "Are Librarians Teachers? Investigating Academic Librarians' Perceptions of Their Own Teaching Skills," *Journal of Information Literacy* 9, no. 2 (November 24, 2015): 120.
2. Scott Walter, "Librarians as Teachers: A Qualitative Inquiry into Professional Identity," *College and Research Libraries* 69, no. 1 (January 2008): 53, doi:[10.5860/crl.69.1.51](https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.69.1.51).
3. Referring to Wheeler and McKinney, "Are Librarians Teachers?"
4. *Ibid.*, 114.
5. Malia Willey, "Library Instructor Development and Cultivating a Community of Practice," in *Management and Leadership Innovations*, ed. Anne Woodsworth and W. David Penniman, *Advances in Librarianship*, vol. 38 (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group, 2014), 88.
6. Walter, "Librarians as Teachers," 63.
7. *OED Online*, s.v. "misperception," accessed June 29, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/119850>; *OED Online*, s.v. "stereotype," accessed June 29, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/189956>.
8. Catherine Wells, "Microaggressions in the Context of Academic Communities," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 12, no. 2 (2013): 335, <http://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sjsj/vol12/iss2/3>.
9. Derald Wing Sue, "Microaggressions, Marginality, and Oppression: An Introduction," in *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestations, Dynamics, and Impact*, ed. Derald Wing Sue (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 3.
10. Kathryn Young, Myron Anderson, and Saran Stewart, "Hierarchical Microaggressions in Higher Education," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (May 2015): 62–66, doi:[10.1037/a0038464](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038464).
11. *Ibid.*, 62.
12. *Ibid.*, 66.
13. *Ibid.*, 67.
14. Wells, "Microaggressions in the Context of Academic Communities," 330.
15. Young, Anderson, and Stewart, "Hierarchical Microaggressions in Higher Education"; Wells, "Microaggressions in the Context of Academic Communities."
16. Walter, "Librarians as Teachers," 60.
17. Susan K. Martin, "The Accidental Profession," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 21, no. 3 (May 1995): 198.

18. Walter, "Librarians as Teachers," 59.
19. Ibid., 55.
20. T. Scott Plutchak, "Breaking the Barriers of Time and Space: The Dawning of the Great Age of Librarians," *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA* 100, no. 1 (January 2012): 16, doi:[10.3163/1536-5050.100.1.004](https://doi.org/10.3163/1536-5050.100.1.004).
21. Walter, "Librarians as Teachers," 52–60.
22. Sara Wingate Gray, "Locating Librarianship's Identity in Its Historical Roots of Professional Philosophies: Towards a Radical New Identity of Today (and Tomorrow)" (presentation, World Library and Information Congress: 78th IFLA General Conference and Assembly, Helsinki, Finland, August 11–17, 2012), <http://www.ifla.org/past-wlic/2012/95-gray-en.pdf>.
23. Walter, "Librarians as Teachers," 59.
24. R. David Lankes, *The Atlas of New Librarianship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 13.
25. Plutchak, "Breaking the Barriers of Time and Space," 13.
26. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).
27. Lev Vygotskiï and Michael Cole, *Mind in Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
28. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 67.
29. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, February 2, 2015), <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.
30. Colleen Burgess, "Teaching Students, Not Standards: the New ACRL Information Literacy Framework and Threshold Crossings for Instructors," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 10, no. 1 (June 2015): 2, https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/perj/article/view/3440/3451#.WF1YK_krKCg.
31. Wheeler and McKinney, "Are Librarians Teachers?"; Walter, "Librarians as Teachers"; Plutchak, "Breaking the Barriers of Time and Space"; Lankes, *The Atlas of New Librarianship*.

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