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# LILAC 2022: A reflection on librarians as teachers

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My first experience of LILAC should have happened in 2020 but having waited two years only made it even more exciting.

[LILAC 2022](#) took place at the fantastic location of Manchester Metropolitan University from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of April.

**Figure 1:** Manchester Metropolitan University. Photo by author.



There was a buzz of anticipation as we all registered for what was to be a very inspiring conference.

One of the strengths of LILAC is the parallel sessions: because of the choice of sessions, attendees can create a bespoke conference focused on the topics that are most relevant to them.

In my case, I have struggled to find my identity as a teacher, and I was glad to see that there were several sessions in LILAC that approached this topic.

The most relevant one was [‘Are you a teaching librarian? How two ‘imposters’ grew a library help centre’](#) by Keith Brittle and Cory Newbigging from the National College of Ireland. They explained their journey as teaching librarians, describing themselves as an accidental librarian and an accidental teacher. The concept of “imposters” resonated with most of the audience as, in a Mentimeter poll, most of the respondents agreed about feeling a degree of imposter syndrome in their current role.

Keith and Cory acknowledged that one of the reasons why this issue arises is because librarians do not always have pedagogical training and suggested several strategies for feeling more confident as teachers: being brave before perfect, recognising your successes, and being flexible so you can get as much hands-on practice as possible. The session finished with a very interesting discussion about whether teaching librarians should have PGCerts. The results were mixed, with some of the attendees emphasising that they can be good if they are practical, and they can help to assert our authority as teachers in front of academics, as academics themselves would be taking the same course.

On the topic of pedagogical training for librarians, Clare Sewell, from the University of Cambridge, presented [‘Increasing inclusivity: developing a HEA accredited teaching course for librarians’](#). Like the previous speakers, she acknowledged that pedagogical training rarely features in library qualification programmes and most librarians learn on the job or are offered PGCert courses which are largely aimed at academics.

At Cambridge, they developed a bespoke teaching and learning course for librarians, tied to their [CILN framework](#). The course is now in its third iteration, which is mapped to the HEA framework, and they are in the process of getting it accredited by Advance HE. Their aim is to open it to librarians at other institutions and create a community, not only for academic librarians, but also for public librarians, law librarians, and others.

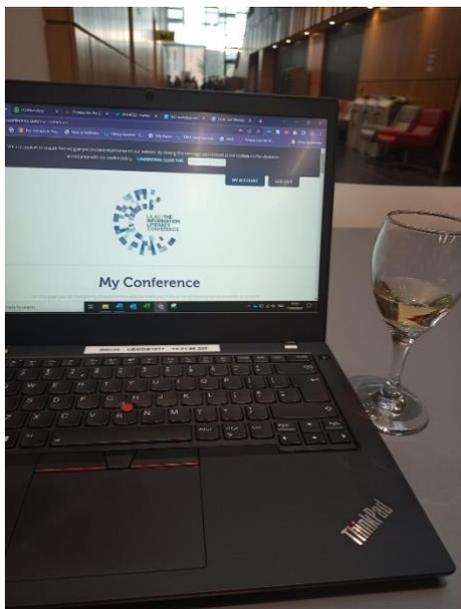
I worked towards my AFHEA award through a course with academics within my institution; although I enjoyed the interaction with other non-librarian participants, at times it was hard to relate it to my own practice. It would be good to hear more about this course once it has been accredited and open to other institutions, to see how it compares with current offerings. The last session specifically dedicated to the topic of librarians as teachers was Andrew Walsh’s [‘Changing Signature Pedagogies for Information Literacy’](#). I found the theme of signature pedagogies intriguing as I had not come across it before. The concept was introduced by Shulman (2005), who explains that signature pedagogies are the ways in which professionals are taught to undertake their new professions.

Andrew posited that there are also distinct pedagogies in teaching librarians. Historically, information literacy (IL) teaching was very competency-based but now definitions are more contextual and critical.

Therefore, our signature pedagogy has moved from, as he said, ‘training mini-librarians’ to a pedagogy that supports critical thinking, is embedded in compassion, and enables students rather than showing them the ‘correct’ way of doing things. This is an exciting development as it shows that increasingly librarians are reflecting on their roles as being teaching roles.

Although these three sessions were particularly aligned with the concept of librarians as teachers, this was a thread that ran through other presentations in the conference. For example, Chris Thorpe, in his '[Supersize \(and digitize\) my session! Reflections on redesigning a small-scale workshop for a large-scale setting in-person and online](#)' mentioned

**Figure 2:** 'Not everything was work'. Photo by author.



how they had to change their pedagogical approach when they were asked to adapt their IL workshops for the Health Sciences to a larger Foundation Year cohort.

Similarly, Alexandra Hamlett, from the Guttman Community College at CUNY, in '[Laying the Foundation: How Faculty Led IL Instruction Improves Student Success](#)', gave a different perspective on librarians as teachers. Addressing the problem of librarians being experts in IL but not necessarily in the disciplines within which they are embedded and the inefficacy of the one-shot session, librarians used the 'train-the-trainer' approach to teach IL to academics.

They had a grant which meant they could pay \$1,000 to each academic who joined the programme, and the librarians reviewed the syllabus, created and adapted lesson plans and assignments in a toolkit that academics could use in their courses. Unfortunately, in the UK not many academic librarians are accorded the same status as academics and, with a few exceptions, they are rarely allowed to be so involved with curriculum design.

Not everything was work, though! As well as being provided with lunch and snacks, we had the chance to attend the IL award ceremony and the conference dinner, which took place at the Edwardian Radisson Hotel — a chance to relax with a drink and chat with other attendees. It was good to see participants from all over the world, sharing best practice and seeing that we all face the same issues.

All in all, attending my first LILAC conference was a great experience. Not only did it confirm my feeling that I am not the only librarian who struggles to find their identity as a teacher, but also underlined that there are reasons why this happens, such as the lack of library-specific pedagogical training. I look forward to continuing my development as a teaching librarian by applying some of the strategies that I learnt during LILAC 2022.

## References

Shulman, L. S. (2005). [Signature pedagogies in the professions](#). *Daedalus*, 134(3), 52–59.