Practitioner and LIS Student Perspectives on Information Literacy for Librarians

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This paper considers recent findings of ongoing research exploring how Library and Information Studies education can most effectively support students in developing their information literacy instruction practices. Practicing librarians in the UK were interviewed in order to gather their insights on the development of their information literacy instruction skills. The analysis identified key concepts and issues which may help to inform curriculum development in information literacy in LIS education, which is a growth area in the UK.

Introduction

This paper discusses recent findings of ongoing research, which aims to explore how Library and Information Studies (LIS) education can most effectively support library students in developing their information literacy instruction practices. It builds on recent previous work[1] which examined LIS student perspectives, widening the scope to include library practitioners' views. A sample of practicing librarians in the UK were interviewed in order to gather their insights on the development of their information literacy instruction skills. The texts were analyzed thematically in order to identify key concepts and issues which may help inform curriculum development in information literacy in LIS education, which is a growth area in the UK.

The analysis of LIS student views indicated that while students' personal information literacy skills may be well-catered for during their studies, their 'producer IL' skills, relating to how they may deliver good practice interventions to users, were considered to be less well served. Knowledge and understanding of pedagogy was particularly identified by LIS students to be an important issue. A subsequent workshop for practitioners, who were mainly drawn from academic libraries, explored some key areas: skills and competencies, how these are developed, how this development is supported, and the role of library schools in this development.[2] Following on from the workshop, these key areas were discussed in short semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of practitioners drawn from wider range of sectors in the UK. This paper discusses these interviews, building on the earlier work.

While ongoing curriculum development in library schools is designed to support developing professional needs, other avenues of continuing self-development are also available pre and post-study through on-the-job and externally-provided training, professional association support and special interest groups. The findings from the practitioner views are discussed in this context, with a particular focus on identifying relative contributions by library school curricula and employer and professional association and other training body interventions. The findings from the qualitative data from these interviews are then mapped to professional associations' competences criteria and library school curricula and recommendations are made on how librarians may further

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enhance their skills in the area of delivering information literacy. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this work will be used to inform LIS curriculum development around information literacy instruction and will encourage a continuing dialogue between library schools and the profession to support librarians in their professional development throughout their career. The UK perspective of the research demonstrates similarities and differences in these issues to an international audience.

Literature Review

Forty years ago in an opinion piece in the Journal of Academic Librarianship it was noted that "*teaching the methods and philosophy of library orientation / instruction should be incorporated into a library school curriculum.*"[3] While the Deans of Library Schools consulted on this topic generally agreed that in principle this was a fine idea, there was some reluctance to include it in the curriculum in detail, either due to forcing a choice on dropping an equally (or more) important topic, or through lack of expertise of faculty. It was suggested that embedding it into wider courses, or offering it as a special one-off topic may suffice. Recent reviews have identified that the development of librarians' teaching skills is a continuing issue. Today, as we move from bibliographic instruction through user education to information literacy, library school faculty are still having similar discussions, often with similar conclusions. Possibly this is due to a lack of agreement within the profession on the relative importance of teaching skills in the modern profession: 'librarians as teachers' was identified as an "organization fiction" in 1979, provoking much discussion.[4] This tension in professional identity has continued as the role of the librarian has shifted, along with the emphasis moving from physical to digital and the attendant increase in awareness in the importance of supporting information and digital literacies. In academic libraries in the US, in particular, the issue of tenure and status has informed much of this discussion.[5] Although tenure is not an issue in the UK,[6] as librarians' professional identity remains in flux,[7] the role of librarian as educator is once more coming under the spotlight. It has again very recently been observed that "*there is a severe mismatch between the ways our library schools prepare graduate students for the classroom*"[8] and that "*the need for prepared instruction librarians continues and training remains inconsistent.*"[9]

Research has repeatedly shown that, despite some very good practice examples to contradict this, LIS curricula do not offer as much in development of pedagogy amongst their students as the students (and alumni researchers) would like.[10] New LIS graduates consistently feel under-prepared for their work commitments in terms of delivering information literacy, and although bibliographic instruction has featured on the curriculum since the 1980s,[11] the shift in emphasis in practice towards a pedagogical, rather than a training- or skills-based approach seems to be at odds with LIS delivery, which tends to focus on developing the information literacies of the students in the hope that developing a high level of these will naturally enable graduates to support these in their users. Indeed the acquisition of relevant skills identified by Shonrock and Mulder's 1993 survey participants[12] strongly shows that information skills outweigh teaching skills and that these are often developed further on-the-job post-graduation. Sadly, just as knowing a lot about history does not make you a history teacher, this is just part of the picture. By 2002 the message (from Albrecht and Baron) was becoming louder: "*Librarians are no longer keepers of information, but teachers of information*"[13] and with this power comes responsibility – for LIS programs to support the development of these skills, for practitioners to take a lifelong learning approach to this development, and for employers and other support organizations and networks to support this development. Close examination of LIS curricula by Julien[14] showed that the shift from information skills to pedagogical theory and instruction practice strongly called for by researchers and participants was only slowly starting to take hold (albeit at an elective, rather than core/compulsory level). Although this is still found to be the case,[15] gradually practitioners appeared to be changing their view of their professional identity, noting the centrality of

teaching in their practice.[16] Also the reasons behind them not developing these skills at library school were starting to appear more complex possibly being caused not just by lack of space in the timetable and inexperienced faculty, but by how important this development is considered to be by those responsible for developing the curriculum. At the same time, a reference librarianship syllabus analysis[17] showed that while there had been great developments since the 1970s in terms of adding instruction training to the curriculum,[18] this was still not to be found across the board and did not map to all of the recently introduced ACRL Standards and Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators.[19]

It has, of course, been noted that there are plenty of opportunities after LIS for graduates to develop their skills in the workplace.[20] This may take many forms, from Masters' level study in education through engagement with internal and external training opportunities to informal peer support and self-directed study. Indeed, this work-based continuing professional development (CPD) strongly supports widely held beliefs that one of the most effective ways to develop teaching skills is through repeated practice in the field.[21] This may be offered strategically within, particularly, academic institutions as part of the wider cultural need to deliver "instructional improvement" (such as workshops, peer observation, financial incentives and teaching-focused discussions)[22] to faculty, which may then be made available to wider staff services. If this is combined with a foundation of knowledge of pedagogical theory then it will contribute to the development of an effective praxis, informed by theory and practice.[23] The vocational nature of LIS directly informs its delivery. In the UK accreditation is by the professional association, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) through their Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB) which identifies a range of skills and competences expected of a professional librarian and is used as a checklist against programme content in the accreditation process[24] as well as informing the mentored process of Chartership, self-directed development, or résumé writing and self-appraisal.[25] The lack of opportunity to develop practical skills while studying in order to apply theoretical principles was identified recently as a key frustration of recent LIS graduates, particularly in terms of helping develop work-ready graduates with experience as well as knowledge.[26] This brings in an added complication to the inclusion of pedagogy into the curriculum as the provision of resources (particularly time) for students to gain teaching experience while studying an LIS can be difficult for faculty to arrange and manage. This supports an argument that while the LIS can provide the foundational principles, the work-based experience and the communities of practice[27] which can significantly improve delivery could possibly be more appropriately provided by the employer.[28] It should be noted, however, that research suggests that librarians may prefer to learn about assessment, instructional design, and teaching (amongst other ACRL Standards) at library school, building on this in the workplace,[29] although reluctance within the profession to deliver teaching contributes to the complexity of this development.[30] Unless this is more rigorously recognised as a central role of library staff – and IL is recognised as a discipline[31]—by all stakeholders and colleagues working together in developing their skills[32] then it may be destined to remain on the outskirts of the curriculum.

Methodology

In order to explore practitioner views of their development of information literacy skills, conference delegates were randomly approached at a CILIP conference for interview. The researcher had announced via Twitter that these interviews were due to take place, and a small number of participants had self-identified as wishing to take part. The remainder of the participants came from random face-to-face requests during coffee and lunch breaks during the event. The purposive and convenience nature of this sample, where participants were likely to be attending the conference because they were committed to CPD in some way, means that the sample is likely to be skewed in favor of people motivated to improve their practice so it may not be representative of the whole popu-

lation of library and information professionals. This is also a UK conference so views expressed here cannot be generalized internationally. Additionally, as the conference was organized by CILIP it is not surprising that most of the participants are members and speak about the professional association during the interviews. Each interview took up to 10 minutes and was recorded digitally, transcribed later that day and imported into NVivo10 for analysis. All participants were anonymized and signed an informed consent form, which had been approved by the UCL Department of Information Studies Ethics Committee in advance. Seven structured questions were asked, with some open follow-ups to expand on answers. The participants were drawn from a range of sectors and asked whether they had a professional role in supporting users. If they did not perform this role regularly as part of their duties, they were not interviewed. The questions were shown one-by-one to the participants on a tablet, helping to remind them of the question during their response and enabling effective communication in a very noisy refreshments space. The questions (Table 1) were informed by, and build upon, the author's previous work on the subject[33] and were designed to gather views from a wider scope of sectors.

	TABLE 1 Interview Questions
1.	Have you got a library qualification?
2.	What sector do you work in?
3.	What is your role?
4.	What are the skills and competencies needed to successfully deliver good practice information literacy?
5.	How do you currently develop these skills?
6.	Who currently supports you in this development (employers, professional association)?
7.	Could Library Schools support this development, or is it more appropriately delivered as CPD in the workplace?

The texts were read through after transcription and organized by themes arising initially from the questions: *qualification, sector, role, skills and competencies, develop, support, library school / CPD*. They were then coded by these themes and further coded to identify patterns within the data. These were noted initially by repeated reading and reflection but also by ranked stemmed term frequency within each of the broader themes. The ranking of the stemmed terms provided an opportunity for the researcher to identify key areas of interest by shared use of terminology, which was then used to explore the language used around this terminology. The ranking was performed by the NVivo10 software, generating a sortable ranked list of terms, and visualisations in the form of word clouds (examples feature below), which provide an accessible view of the most frequently used terms in the texts. Selected stop-words were initially removed by the software and others were discarded by the researcher, enabling a focus on more relevant terms. Clicking on these terms in NVivo10 shows the use of the term in context, allowing deeper exploration and further coding to take place. This content analytic approach[34] is informed by linguistic research relating to term frequency,[35] (xxPopescu) which suggests that frequently used terms in a discourse community provide insights into ways of thinking and practices within that community. The researcher was seeking to identify not only the semantic meaning of these texts (*what do the participants do*) but also some aspects of the latent or underlying meaning of the texts (*what do they think*).

Findings

The participants in the research spoke freely about their views on the skills and competences they needed to deliver information literacy, how they developed their abilities, who supported them in this development, and

whether library school had a part to play. The insights and examples they offered clearly demonstrated a two-fold view of information literacy, as 'users' themselves, and as 'producers' of information literacy in others.

Demographics: Sectors, Roles, and Qualifications

An attempt was made to gather comments from participants in a range of sectors and from those who had or did not have a professional qualification. These can be seen in Table 2, which demonstrates a wide representation of sectors across the sample:

Code	Sector	Role	Qualification
	TABLE 2		
	Demographics		
001	Health	Librarian	Yes
002	Special / research	Reference librarian	Yes
003	Academic	Academic liaison librarian	Yes
004	Not-for-profit	Library and information services manager	Yes
005	*Redacted for anonymization purposes*		Yes
006	Health	Outreach / reader services librarian	Yes
007	Public	Library manager and librarian	Yes
008	Legal	Graduate trainee librarian	No
009	Health	Library manager	Yes
010	Government	Knowledge and Information Agent	Yes
011	School	Head of the Libraries Resources Provision	Yes
012	Academic	Team manager (academic liaison team)	Yes
013	Government	Desk officer for information resources	Yes
014	Database provider	Contact Analyst	No
015	Public	Duty Library Manager	No
016	Public	Stock manager	Yes

In order to preserve the anonymity of 005 their sector and role have been redacted as this information would lead to easy identification of this participant.
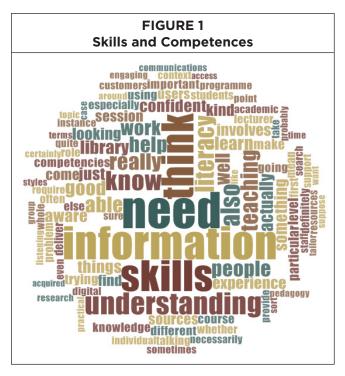
Skills and Competences

In terms of their skills and competences as users, the participants identified the importance of how their own IL skills contributed to their delivery ("*you wouldn't need to know the name of the third novel in the Eleanor Bronte series, but you need to know how to be able to find that information out*" (015)), particularly as a deeper **understanding** of IL practices led to an increase in their **confidence:**

> "*the big one is a really thorough understanding, not necessarily of the specific sector, because health is very specialist, but the core principles of information literacy and critical appraisal and how to drill down and evaluate the different data sources*" (006).

It was suggested that supplementing this understanding with related subject **knowledge** ("*understanding about the topic*" (003)), knowledge of the available resources ("*you need to know what sources are available*"

(014)), and technical expertise ("*I need good understanding of the tools that we're using*" (010)), all had an impact on their abilities in successfully delivering IL. An **awareness** of information skills and of the information world as well as of the institutional context was considered to be of value here.

FIGURE 1
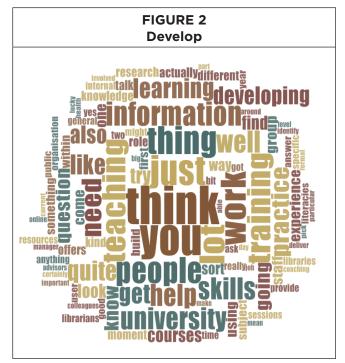## Skills and Competences

The comments on their own skills as users, however, were far outweighed by an emphasis on a need to successfully support development, as producers of IL. There was a strong focus, here, on a need for an **understanding** of teaching and learning principles and practices, strongly supported by an awareness of user information needs, their purpose and context, and successful communications. Interestingly, more was made of the importance of communication with the user than evaluating whether or not that communication had been successful. **Helping** (and **supporting**) users **learn**, as well as, predominantly, **teaching** them was noticeable. Some participants did not mention teaching, preferring **training,** although, on the whole, this term was used in relation to developing staff skills rather than those of the user. It was unsurprising, in this UK context, that the term 'instruction' did not appear in any of the texts, as this word is not used in UK English to describe teaching and learning.

Experience ("*whether that is just through experience that you gained doing something similar, or teaching*" (001)) of teaching practice, either in a previous career or through repeated delivery was considered helpful. The **sessions** delivered would then include **finding** and evaluating **sources**. An ability to recognise and work at the **level** of the user's knowledge was also mentioned ("*adjust to their level and make sure that they're getting the key points*" (006)) and it was suggested that this should be brought down to the level of the user ("*need to be able to take things down to a level that they can relate to*" (009); "*sometimes where we pitch things is slightly too high a level*" (012)).

FIGURE 2
Develop

Develop

When asked how they developed these skills in themselves, the participants offered a wide range of examples of both formal and informal learning. Their focus in these answers was heavily on how they developed their (producer) teaching skills, with some discussion on developing their (user) information literacies. This gave them an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the topic and their answers here were quite candid, revealing some of their feelings about **teaching**: "*when I*

first started I was very nervous" (001), although there was a prevailing pragmatic view, which seemed to suggest an acceptance that this was a necessary professional attribute which needed some self-directed attention:

> "*This is actually something, a skill I have had to develop this role in the past year. And it's something that I didn't have before, and was quite stuck in finding a way of actually setting out going, 'right, I need to know how to teach people'. I'd not had a role before that involved anything more than ad hoc advice.*" (004)
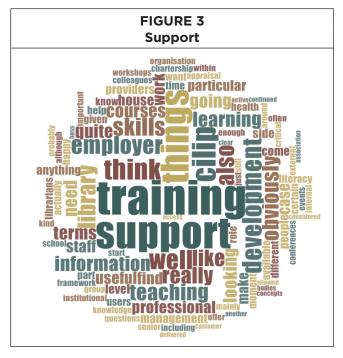
> "*Firstly I have to identify what skills I need, then I need to find out who can provide them*" (003)

Training courses were relatively popular in terms of developing knowledge and understanding of the theory of teaching or skills as well as in the use of resources. Attendance, particularly on external courses, was limited by the size of the employer's training budgets: "*trying to work out what the best way of doing that was, working for an organisation that didn't have a huge amount of funding for training.*" (004). Formal internal interventions were widely mentioned ("*Usually either on the job training or learning from others using the tools*" (010)), including:

> "*training to people on specific aspects, for instance things like online resources, practicing online resources that we subscribe to, and also finding out information generally, going beyond just using Google but interrogating the web in more sophisticated ways, how to help the customers with that*" (015).

Although academic librarians had a much heavier emphasis on formal teaching development through their institution:

> "*we've got access to a lot of university-wide training, all of our subject librarians before they can teach, they have to go on a two day 'beginning to teach' course. So that gets them more into that pedagogical, that sort of library session that I need to deliver*" (012),
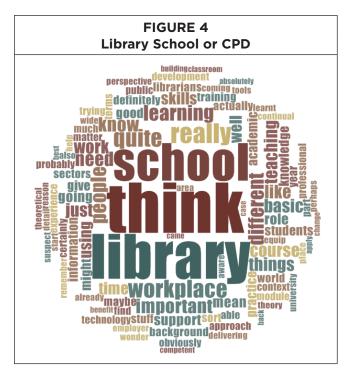

FIGURE 3
Support

others without this in-built access focused more on **practice** ("*One: practice. The most important thing, I find, is practice. Secondly, a lot of my own research online.*" (004), self-directed study (including MOOCs) and informal support from colleagues, wider cross-departmental networks and professional association support.

Support

The range of participant responses to the question asking who provided support in their showed that this was provided internally by the employer or colleagues, externally by other providers, or was self-directed. As previously mentioned, the cost attached to external **training** and **courses** from **providers** limited this type of **development**, although free or low

cost examples of support from the professional association (**CILIP**), its special interest groups ("*definitely CILIP and all its special interest groups*" (007)), and its recently introduced Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB), which frames Chartership development, as well as **charities** were identified: "*That has been a massive difference because that provides a framework that you can learn in more easily*" (006). Other, more sector-specific associations were mentioned included Special Libraries Association (SLA), Society of Chief Librarians (SCL), British Medical Association (BMA) and Health Education England (HEE). Formal internal training delivered by the **employer** was widely mentioned as an approach: "*there is in-house training we offer, on customer care skills, on how to find information from the print and the online resources we have*" (016), "*There is some internal training, kind of tends to focus on communication*" (013), "*I've been given quite a lot of formal training by the librarian as well, and colleagues who are around to back things up and explain things*" (008), with one participant noting it was important to be able to choose her employer by the level of continuing professional development (CPD) support they offered staff. Informal support from **colleagues** "*obviously people that are maybe the experts in a particular tool will kind of cascade that around the rest of the group*" (010), "*I can go to them at any time*" (003) and peer-review was also mentioned, along with cross-departmental and wider institutional training opportunities, particularly relating to e-learning and teaching practice.

FIGURE 4
Library School or CPD

Library School or CPD

Finally, the participants were asked to consider whether library schools have a role to play in their development, or whether this was more appropriately delivered in the workplace. Generally it was agreed that while "*library schools could have a role in teaching some of the fundamental basics of teaching theory, pedagogical theory*" (001) and "*an overview of pedagogy and teaching would be really useful*" (004), it was quite widely agreed that "*at library school it can only do so much. And it can give that theoretical background, but really the practical stuff has to be done in the workplace*" (012). This was justified by the fast-moving nature of the profession, the difficulty in predicting students' future needs, and sector- and workplace-specific variations in practices, contexts, and resources: "*learning on the job*" (012), supported by a foundation in theoretical principles. It should be noted that there was equal emphasis, here, on skills, and particularly **knowledge**, both as user (information skills) and as producer (teaching and learning): "*If you want to do well in your assignments, then you need to have good information skills, so that you can find suitable sources and the right citations and you know what you're looking at*" (006).

Discussion

It was noted earlier that there are opportunities in LIS education and in the workplace to develop the skills and competencies required to successfully deliver information literacy. It also appears from the literature that LIS education focuses on providing students with expertise in their information literacy skills of the students, with some evidence of provision of a foundational knowledge of pedagogical theory and some introductory instruc-

tional strategies, while the workplace and the wider profession provide more opportunities for experience and deeper exploration of practices, enabling the development of praxis. The interviews demonstrate this dual approach. Firstly, in terms of the skills and competencies, the participants identified their personal expertise in information literacy, particularly their subject knowledge, their knowledge of the resources and their technical skills. They also spoke about a need to understand teaching and learning principles and practices and the value of developing their experience in a practical scenario. This supports a holistic view of developing teaching and learning abilities, which draws together subject knowledge and expertise with reflective teaching practice informed by pedagogical principles.

In UK library schools, accreditation, and thus the curriculum, is informed by the previously mentioned CILIP PKSB. The curriculum is also informed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which advises on standards across Higher Education institutions in the form of Subject Benchmark Statements (SBS). Both the PKSB and the SBS for Librarianship, information, knowledge, records and archives management[36] include explicit mention of abilities which would be considered to be related to teaching and learning:

> *"The ability to instruct and guide users to assist them to develop their search and retrieval capabilities. The ability to support all stakeholders appropriately in gaining optimum experience of their contact with books, knowledge, information, data, records and archives. The ability to identify and make appropriate interventions to help different types of information users and service recipients become information literate and receive suitable support in their development as readers and users of information in all types of formats (text, numeric, audio and visual)."*[37]

However, as can be seen in these extracts, rather than use such terminology as 'teach', 'learn', or 'pedagogy', the statement uses 'instruct', 'guide', 'assist', 'support', 'help'. This language seems to identify the librarian as having a supportive teaching role, rather than a leading one; a teaching assistant rather than a teacher. In the PKSB, on the other hand, it is quite clear that the role of the librarian includes: "*Supporting users and teaching them how to work independently,*"[38] and that in addition to a high level of personal information literacy ("*Knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner,*"[39] appreciation of "*reading literacy, reader development, digital literacy, writing, numeracy and creativity, frameworks and curricula for education and training, teaching and training skills, supporting users, and Virtual Learning Environments*"[40] are all identified as being key attributes. Two knowledge / skills area are particularly relevant here: "*8.5 Frameworks and curricula for education and training: An understanding of these aspects relevant for any particular environment or user group. 8.6 Teaching and training skills: Understand and apply skills for effective teaching and training; awareness of how people learn and understanding of the learning experience, design and deliver a range of learning activities for specific audiences/users; undertake assessment and give feedback; evaluate experiences.*"[41] CILIP, therefore, clearly recognize the importance of pedagogical theory and teaching skills in their framework of librarianship, which is used to inform curriculum development. It should be noted here that not every Knowledge / Skills Area in the PKSB has to be included in an accredited curriculum. There is no mandate for 100% inclusion, individual institutions and programs being given some freedom to specialize as long as they provide an agreed level of coverage. The value of the PKSB is that it is not purely an accreditation framework, but can be used as a self- or staff-evaluation tool for CPD in the workplace.

This multi-faceted nature of the framework extends further, by informing the offer from professional association special interest groups (SIG). The CILIP Information Literacy Group (ILG) provides extensive resources for development of information literacy including a peer-reviewed journal, research funding, awards, workshops,

web resources and the annual LILAC conference. The activities of this group are highly influential in the UK, particularly amongst academic librarians, and supporting events reach out to schools, public and special librarians. Other SIGs (including Academic and Research Libraries Group, School Libraries Group, UK eInformation Group and Youth Libraries Group) also offer more sector-specific support, as do specialist sector associations including SLA Europe, Society of Chief Librarians (public libraries) via their Universal Offers training scheme, School Library Association and Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL), whose Seven Pillars of Information Literacy are very influential in the UK and beyond. This offer is widened even further by interventions from highly reputable charities and NGOs such as Good Things Foundation (formerly Tinder Foundation, focusing on digital skills and inclusion), Doteveryone (formerly Go On UK) and JISC.

Throughout this wide range in offers there are opportunities for development in both user information literacies and producer information literacies. When the interview participants spoke of how they developed their skills, they identified an urge to learn how to improve their teaching skills, developing these through practice and internal and external training. They mentioned support from a range of providers and, importantly, colleagues, and discussed how library school and workplace experiences combined to provide a holistic ongoing lifelong learning experience. This pragmatic view is positive and optimistic. It suggests that they recognize that while their investment of money and time in their professional education provides them with a strong foundation in principles and practice, as a vocational discipline LIS comes into its own through combining theory and practice. Praxis is central to this view, and it could be that this is the lens we need to use to examine pedagogical development of librarians.

Conclusions

While it is the role of the library school to provide an opportunity for students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the discipline of library and information studies, it is clearly not practical within a one-year full time or two-year part time program (which is standard in the UK) to include a Masters' level course in education as part of a LIS course. The dynamic nature of the profession and the constant developments in research mean that LIS curricula are continuously under review by faculty, and this is supported by the five-year cycle of the CILIP accreditation process. This research has shown that while participants develop some of their teaching and learning skills and knowledge at library school, the practical application of these skills in the workplace is part of the learning and development process. A more holistic view – that of lifelong learning and CPD – enables a deeper appreciation of how vocational development takes place. This could be incorporated into the curriculum through more collaborative approaches between library schools, employers and other providers such as special interest groups, associations and charities. It is common practice for library schools to have guests from the workplace to run sessions on professional and practical issues. Perhaps we should be exploring opportunities for faculty to visit workplaces to offer similar insights.

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