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One within Many, Many within One
A Collaborative, Dialogical Exploration of Librarian-Teacher Identity

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Article abstract

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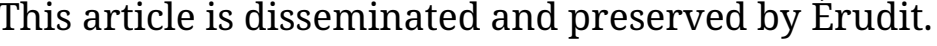

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One within Many, Many within One: A Collaborative, Dialogical Exploration of Librarian-Teacher Identity

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is one of the most consequential responsibilities of an academic librarian, yet many of us approach it without the training or self-awareness required to do it well. Teaching well means being willing to commit to endless, fearless exploration of pedagogical pathways, shifting social realities, and discomforting valleys within the self. These journeys enable us to define and strengthen our teacher identities. Critical LIS studies on identity frequently explore the multiplicity of librarian attitudes toward teaching or the complexity of individual librarian identities. In our study, we merged these two exploratory objectives by analyzing the dialogical interaction of an academic librarian's multiple identities in the teaching context. As academic librarians, diverse in terms of race, gender, age, and professional experience, we engaged in collaborative autoethnography to uncover and name the interlocking identities that inform our teaching endeavours. Through the lens of dialogical self theory (DST) and its concept of self positioning, we identified positions of the self that interact and negotiate with each other to facilitate or complicate the act of teaching itself. Autoethnographic exploration deepened our understanding of our teaching selves and helped us decipher the sociopsychological scripts that hinder and empower us as educators.

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Keywords: *collaborative autoethnography · dialogical self theory · information literacy instruction · librarian identity · teacher identity*

RÉSUMÉ

L'enseignement est l'une des responsabilités les plus importantes d'un.e bibliothécaire universitaire, mais beaucoup d'entre nous l'abordent sans la formation ou la conscience de soi nécessaires pour bien le faire. Bien enseigner signifie être prêt.e à s'engager dans une exploration intrépide et infinie des voies pédagogiques, des réalités sociales changeantes et des vallées malaisantes du soi. Ces parcours nous permettent de définir et de renforcer nos identités d'enseignant.e.s. Les études critiques en bibliothéconomie et en sciences de l'information sur l'identité explorent fréquemment la multiplicité des attitudes des bibliothécaires à l'égard de l'enseignement ou la complexité des identités individuelles des bibliothécaires. Dans notre étude, nous avons fusionné ces deux objectifs exploratoires en analysant l'interaction dialogique des identités multiples des bibliothécaires universitaires dans le contexte de l'enseignement. En tant que bibliothécaires universitaires, divers en termes de race, genre, âge et expérience professionnelle, nous nous sommes engagé.e.s dans l'autoethnographie collaborative pour découvrir et nommer les identités imbriquées qui façonnent nos pratiques d'enseignement. À travers le prisme de la théorie dialogique du soi et de son concept de positionnement de soi, nous avons identifié des positions du soi qui interagissent et négocient les unes avec les autres pour faciliter ou compliquer l'acte d'enseigner lui-même. L'exploration autoethnographique a approfondi notre compréhension de nos sois-enseignant.e.s et nous a aidé.e.s à déchiffrer les scénarios sociopsychologiques qui nous entravent et nous habilitent en tant qu'éducatrices.teurs.

Mots-clés : *autoethnographie collaborative · auto-théorie dialogique · enseignement de la maîtrise de l'information · identité bibliothécaire · identité enseignante*

For reference, instruction, and subject librarians, teaching is a primary responsibility in the practice of academic librarianship. Academic librarians' affinity for this central endeavour may be influenced by the development of a teaching identity or the lack thereof. Teaching identity development is complicated by the wide variety of backgrounds, preparation, and social contexts that influence librarians' experiences of teaching. The library and information science (LIS) literature has reported a disconnect between the importance of the teaching role for academic librarians and the extent to which librarians have been trained to step into this role (Brecher and Klipfel 2014). The conflict between performing a required professional duty and feeling ill-prepared to perform that duty causes many librarians to feel ambivalent about teaching and/or being a teacher librarian. Though the LIS literature has derived important insights about how librarians contend with occupying an ambiguous teaching space, there is a notable absence of literature that directly engages with identity

theories in relation to teaching, with few exceptions (Julien and Genuis 2011). We posit that using a theoretical lens provides a foundation and scaffold within which researchers can systematically make sense of the apparent contradictions inherent in librarian-teacher identity development. Further, testing the boundaries of a theoretical framework allows LIS researchers to conceptualize identity development and its inherent liminality from a perspective that they may not have previously considered but that may be highly relevant to their lived realities. Within this conceptual space, researchers can discover new means of debating, discarding, coalescing around, and extending LIS epistemologies.

We embarked on a collaborative autoethnography to come together in conversation to document and analyze our teaching identities. We were inspired to do so by the book chapter "Carving Out a Space: Ambiguity and Librarian Teacher Identity in the Academy" by Mattson et al. (2017). In their collaborative autoethnography, the four authors used the experience of a peer observation initiative at their institution as a springboard for examining their personal identities as instruction librarians. In the chapter, they discussed how they came to be teacher librarians, the tensions between their teaching role and other library job responsibilities, and how the perceptions of others affected their identities. By adopting this approach, we were able to observe the multiple dimensions that make up our teaching selves and share them with each other openly.

In this study, we also use a contemporary psychological theory known as dialogical self theory (DST) as a framework to explore our own professional identities and to recognize how society influences them. Specifically, we apply DST to answer three questions:

1. What sub-roles emerge as we teach?
2. How do our teacher identities intersect with other parts of our librarian identities?
3. How does our social environment contribute to the construction of a teacher identity?

As a theory, DST is well suited to this type of investigation because of its rejection of the idea of a single self and its acknowledgement and endorsement of multiple selves that shift, contradict, unify, and ideate in response to constantly changing social contexts.

As four academic librarians, we have witnessed the messiness of our own identity development. Rather than shying away from that messiness, we believe there is value in collectively facing and unraveling it. We are a diverse group in terms of ethnic, gender, and racial backgrounds. Our educational credentials encompass a

range of disciplines: food studies, library and information studies, molecular biology, political science, psychology, science education, social work, and sociology. Our professional paths have taken us to academic and medical libraries, high school and community college classrooms, educational consulting firms, and higher education administration offices. As instructional librarians in a newly formed academic library department, we leverage the richness of these life experiences in the context of our teaching responsibilities and when trying to better understand who we are as teachers.

Background

Identity

Identity is an individual and social construction with both internal and performative dimensions (Hammack 2015, 12; McCall and Simmons 1966, 67). In the sections that follow, we highlight three aspects of identity that pertain to our study of academic librarianship and teaching: librarian identity, teaching identity, and librarian-teacher identity.

Librarian Identity

While Edward Holley (1985) defined the academic librarian in terms of knowledge possessed and Stephen Bales (2009) put forth an academic librarian archetype based on an analysis of librarian job duties over several millennia, contemporary writings on librarianship practice suggest that librarian identity is elusive and difficult to articulate (Hicks 2014, 253; Klein and Lenart 2020, 2; Mattson et al. 2017, 16). Criticizing what they describe as the essentialist treatment of librarianship identity by some scholars, Klein and Lenart (2020) argue for a conception of librarian identity that centres the "messy, complex, and unique relations that emerge through interactions between librarians and library users" (2). As they point out, this type of identity conception—one based on relationships rather than specific professional duties—has the potential to both enrich our identities (16) and make the library profession more diverse and inclusive (2).

The themes of diversity and inclusivity also come forth in the work of Hackney et al. (2018). They conceive of librarian identity as both complex and shaped by life experiences rooted in one's race, class, gender, and sexuality. In their discussion of identity, they reference the concept of intersectionality put forth by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and encourage more dialogue on the intersectional identities that inform people's experiences within librarianship.

Exploring the complexity of librarian identity from a different angle, Pierson, Goulding, and Campbell-Meier (2019) associate four anchors with the multifaceted nature of the librarian identity: contextuality, socialization, outside perception, and individual perception. In their model, contextuality refers to demographic factors and non-librarian professional experiences; socialization includes intra-professional relations; and outside and individual perceptions encompass externalized and internalized views and stereotypes (424). Importantly, they point out that librarian identity can be transformed through "experience, time, and dialogue" (421–422).

Additional literature suggests that, among other factors, academic librarians' self perceptions are shaped by their professional values (Hicks 2014; Kirker 2022; Mattson et al. 2017; Swanson, Tanaka, and Gonzalez-Smith 2018), training experiences (Mattson et al. 2017; Walter 2008; Wheeler and McKinney 2015), and faculty perceptions (Mattson et al. 2017; Walter 2008; Wheeler and McKinney 2015). Three roles embraced by academic librarians—information specialist, (Kirker 2022, 342), service professional (Hicks 2014; Kirker 2022), and teacher (Kirker 2022; Mattson et al. 2017; Wheeler and McKinney 2015)—reflect these influences. Teaching is often central to librarians' relationships with students and faculty on college and university campuses; it could even be viewed as an extension of the other two roles, insofar as it involves sharing information in an effort to serve others. Despite the connectedness of their teaching, service, and information provider roles, academic librarians may value these roles differently in relation to each other, perceiving certain roles as more central to their professional identity and status (Garcia and Barbour 2018).

Teacher Identity

Identity development among professional teachers is a subject of considerable scrutiny in the literature of education and teacher preparation (Zhang and Wang 2021). In both a K-12 and post-secondary context, it appears that having a positive teacher identity is connected with the long term motivation, job satisfaction, efficacy, and pedagogical engagement of teachers (Day and Kington 2008; Canrinus et al. 2012; Kreber 2010; Esmaili and Dastgoshadeh 2016). Much of the literature regarding teacher identity comes from a K-12 context; cultivating an identity as a teacher is regarded by scholars of teacher preparation to be a crucial element in the training and growth of new classroom educators (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009).

Because teaching requires significant personal investment in a socially defined system, teacher identity is best understood holistically, incorporating internal affective dimensions and external structural factors. The literature suggests that, although intentional identity work is becoming more commonplace in teacher education programs (Flores 2016; Hsieh 2016), teachers develop their identities

gradually over the course of their careers; those identities are cultivated in the space between personal and professional identity (Bukor 2015). As such, teacher identity formation is influenced by a kaleidoscope of factors, including conceptions of the self, tensions between personal and professional spheres of self, and the social discourses, emotions, and experiences of agency related to the teaching role (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009).

Compared to K-12 teacher identity development, there is less literature focused on teaching identity in post-secondary contexts. Unlike teachers who are preparing to enter a primary or secondary teaching role, new university teaching faculty typically do not participate in formalized teacher training courses or degree programs within graduate schools of education. Thus, novice university teachers generally have less time and space, as part of their training, to grapple with a teaching identity, and academic teaching identity has received less scholarly scrutiny overall (van Lankveld et al. 2017).

Based on the literature that does exist, it appears that post-secondary educators are more likely to experience a fragmentation in their professional roles; in addition to teaching, they must also integrate what it means to be a researcher, an academic, or a scholar (Kaasila et al. 2021; Trautwein 2018; McCune 2021). Nevertheless, academics do cultivate identities as teachers. In reviewing the literature of university teacher identity development, van Lankveld et al. (2017) note that collegiality, supportiveness, feeling valued, and a sense of community are critical factors in promoting formation of a teaching identity (330). These aspects of teaching identity development in higher education closely mirror concepts of interest in librarian identity scholarship more broadly.

Librarian-Teacher Identity

The extent to which librarians value or embrace the teaching role as part of their identity is the subject of numerous studies (Azadbakht 2021; Becksford 2022; Julien and Genuis 2011; Kirker 2022; Mattson et al. 2017; Walter 2008; Wheeler and McKinney 2015; Wilson 2008). Research on librarian-teacher identity from 2008 to 2022 posits that increasing demands for information literacy instruction have made the adoption of a strong teacher identity critical to academic librarians' professional advancement (Kirker 2022; Walter 2008; Wheeler and McKinney 2015). While this may be true, academic librarians hold varying beliefs about the role of teaching in librarianship. In their studies of academic librarians at different stages in their careers, Wheeler and McKinney (2015) and Kirker (2022) encountered librarians who viewed teaching as fundamental to their identity and others who did not identify as teachers. Kirker notes that some academic librarians are reluctant to call themselves

teachers both because of their own strong attachment to their librarian identity (347) and because of how they are viewed by teaching faculty (336).

The traditional image of the academic librarian as a "gatekeeper of knowledge" (Kirker, 336) reinforces the idea that librarians are not "real" teachers on a par with professors who specialize in specific disciplines and who teach on a day-to-day basis. In the Wheeler and McKinney study, librarians who did not identify as teachers saw themselves as lacking in required qualifications (120), while some participants in Kirker's study thought teaching required having an ongoing relationship with students, which they did not have (344). Additional research suggests that teacher identity formation can also be mediated by the circumstances of one's professional environment. van Lankveld et. al. (2017) found that university teachers often struggle in neoliberalist environments where assessments are frequent (330) and in contexts where research is regarded more highly than teaching (331). This finding brings to light a challenge that many academic librarians face: the need to balance teaching along with other commitments and responsibilities. Taking on multiple roles complicates efforts to develop a teaching identity (Hays and Studebaker 2019) and helps to explain "the constant struggle to identify what a librarian is and what being a librarian means" (Mattson et al. 2017, 16).

Dialogical Self Theory as an Analytical Framework

The first mention of "the dialogical self" appeared in the journal *American Psychologist* in 1992 (Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon). In the article, the authors attempt to connect the egocentric concept of the self popularized in many societies of the Global North to more ethnocentric examinations of identity. They consider the self to not be a self-contained, independent individual but rather an embodied social being who, through dialogical exchanges within their culture and with others, organizes a multiplicity of selves. Their organization is an internal relationship of consultations, criticisms, agreements, and conflicts that reflects how they function with others in society.

The concept of *positioning* is central to DST and explains how the self is constructed both individualistically and socially. The self participates in an internal negotiation (dialogue) in order to situate itself within, and in relation to, reality. Through this dialogue, the self acknowledges and engages with multiple versions of itself. These selves exist both internally, formed by one's personal thoughts and feelings toward oneself, and externally, based on one's behaviours toward others and how others behave toward them. There are four key concepts associated with positioning in DST, which we use in our analysis: I-positions, meta-positions, third positions, and promoter positions (Table 1).

I-positions represent one's contact with the social environment across time and space. As such, one can have a multitude of internal and external I-positions. As a dialogical self, one moves between I-positions as change occurs within the social environment. This movement allows the dialogical self to call upon these I-positions to interact with one another, share their impressions and exchange information about their respective I's (Hermans and Gieser 2011).

Concept	Brief Definition	Narrative Example	Application of DST Terms
I-position	How one represents oneself within the social environment across time and space in the context of other people.	There is a ball player on a team with a losing record.	I-as-ball player I-as-teammate
Meta-position	How one considers and evaluates their I-positions from various perspectives.	After a game, the coach meets with the team about their performance.	I-as-evaluating: • I-as-confident in my ability to play well, win games • I-as-doubting my ability to play well, win games
Third-position	How one mitigates two or more conflicting positions	The coach decides to give a teammate more playing time than the ball player.	I-as-mediating: • I-as-ball player who wants to compete • I-as-teammate who wants my team to win more games
Promoter-position	How one organizes and integrates their various positions in service of oneself and other people.	The ball player supports the coach's decision as it may help the team win more games. The ball player practises more so they can improve and get more playing time	I-as-competitor: • I-as-ball player who values playing I-as-collaborator: • I-as-ball player who values playing

TABLE 1 Concepts associated with positioning in DST.

A meta-position provides perspective as a dialogical self considers its multiple I-positions (Hermans and Gieser 2011). It allows a wider vantage point for the self to reflect upon its personal history and a collective history of society, and to recognize

the linkages between different I-positions. Meta-positions provide the dialogical self an awareness of its multiple I-positions and the ability to organize these I-positions relative to specific circumstances or interactions with others.

When turmoil arises and is recognized within the self, it is due to conflicts between I-positions. A third position which develops as a dialogical self (through the use of meta-positions) recognizes the tension between these I-positions and allows them to co-exist within the conflict (Hermans and Gieser 2011).

Promoter positions represent a self that is actualized and engaged with society at large. Here a dialogical self is able to marshal its I-positions, meta-positions, and third positions to intentionally strive to participate in and change society (Hermans and Gieser 2011).

After reading the work of Akkerman and Meijer (2011), where the authors applied DST as a framework to conceptualize teacher identity, we were inspired to incorporate DST into our exploration of librarian-teacher identity. Although DST has been used in the education literature to understand how teachers construct their identities (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Vandamme 2018), we know of no studies that explicitly apply DST to librarian-teacher identity. Just as DST aims to be a "bridging theory" linking multiple disciplines (Hermans and Gieser 2011, under "Introductory Chapter"), we hope our study can serve as one bridge of communication between the identity-focused corpora of teaching and librarianship literature. With this goal in mind, we offer this study as an illustration of how DST positioning can help heighten awareness of the internal struggles and negotiations that make teaching both challenging and rewarding for academic librarians.

Methods

Collaborative Autoethnography as Method

In this study, we used collaborative autoethnography (CAE) in order to synergistically investigate our professional selves. CAE is an offshoot of autoethnography, "a research method that enables researchers to use data from their own life stories as situated in sociocultural contexts in order to gain an understanding of society through the unique lens of self" (Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 2013, 18). Autoethnography is a contested method that challenges the dominant view of what research is. Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2021) argue that the subjective nature of autoethnography is a feature rather than a fault: "autoethnographies use the subjective turn in ontology (how we understand/apprehend and experience 'reality') and epistemology (how we create knowledge) to argue that it is impossible to stand or act outside of world-building and meaning-making processes" (6).

The reflexive nature of CAE requires openness and honesty in confronting one's past, present, and future. As a member of our team said at the start of this project, this method affords contemplation of one's unreflected life experiences, and thus has the potential to cause distress or insight. In opting for a fully collaborative method, we shared responsibility for all parts of the research, including developing the methodology, analyzing our data, and reporting the results. We collected data both through concurrent collaboration and through autoethnographic conversations, following methods outlined in Chang (2008) and Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez (2012).

Preparation and Group Discussion

To prepare ourselves for the experience of discussing our teaching selves as a group, we engaged in a series of independent, reflective activities. Each of us completed a culture-gram, a diagram meant to represent the manifold social and cultural dimensions of our identities (Chang 2008). In drafting these diagrams, we attempted to gain perspective on our selves in relation to our social positions and roles, and began to inventory the multiple ways we define our identities.

With respect to teaching, we wrote structured debriefs describing the results of recent instruction sessions. We also wrote less structured reflections where we considered how our identities interact with our teaching roles, within our current instructional positions, and cumulatively throughout the course of our professional lives. By completing these introspective activities, we were prepared to discuss our experiences with teaching and identity development during the group discussion phase of the project. To guide our discussion, we co-created a set of 17 interview questions (see Appendix A). These questions were inspired by Walter's (2008) interview schedule and refined to include questions that addressed Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) three categories of teacher identity: multiplicity, discontinuity, and the social voice.

In advance of our group discussions, we developed a set of community norms for how we would engage with each other in a way that would allow all of us to feel psychologically safe and comfortable sharing our experiences honestly (see Appendix B). For our group discussions, we set aside three 90-minute blocks of time where we came together in person to respond verbally to the interview questions in a semi-structured format. We moved through each of the questions we had developed and allowed the conversation to ebb and flow as new topics emerged. We recorded the audio content of our conversations and used a combination of Otter.ai and human proofreading to transcribe our conversation so that we could analyze it.

Coding

To facilitate analysis of our group discussion, we coded our discussion transcript to identify highly relevant themes. Our coding activities were guided in part by recommendations put forth by qualitative methods researcher Johnny Saldaña (2009). We used two types of codes to facilitate two rounds of coding. In the first round of coding, we applied 38 codes that were a mix of a priori codes derived from the librarian-teacher identity literature and inductive codes developed after reading through our transcripts. In the second round of coding, we applied a priori codes using DST nomenclature: I-position, third position, meta-position, and promoter position. These four codes were used to label statements in the transcript that contextually positioned the speaker in relation to others (I-position), were reconciliatory (third position), were reflective (meta-position), or were aspirational (promoter position).

Each person was assigned a portion of the transcript to code. We maintain that coding is an inherently subjective process; therefore, we did not seek to achieve inter-rater reliability in our coding decisions; however, we engaged in regular member checks to confirm our shared understanding of the codes.

Theme Development

After completing coding for our transcript sections, we each searched for themes using the procedure suggested in Braun and Clarke (2012). During two group meetings, we discussed what each of us had identified, noting points of interconnectedness and overlap. From those discussions, six core themes emerged. We met as a group to articulate DST-inspired positions that reflected the themes and the substance of each transcript section. In the next section of the paper, we describe the themes that emerged, summarize the interview content, and share representative quotations from our discussion which exemplify each theme. Because DST is the theoretical framework through which we conducted our analysis, each theme is followed by the DST positions (I-position, meta position, third position, or promoter position) represented in that theme.

Results and Analysis

Theme: A Teacher is Something Else
I-position: I-as-(Not)-a-Teacher

> Q: Do you feel perceived as a teacher?
>
> A: I wouldn't necessarily call myself a teacher . . . I don't think teacher—as a title—fits. Or rather, it's not, it's not a garment that I choose to put on.

Our disconnectedness from the teacher identity can be partly attributed to the fact that our teaching reality is misaligned with what we have been conditioned to believe teaching is or should be. During our discussion, we realized that the elements that we recognize as being fundamental for teacher-dom are largely missing from our experience of teaching. Unlike teachers and professors, we described having time-limited contact with students, and being unable to consistently cultivate meaningful relationships with them over the course of weeks and months. We talked about walking into other people's classrooms and being referred to as guest lecturers or expert guests, even though we often lack insight into the curriculum or the learning plan. We reported feeling a lack of control and autonomy over our experience of teaching—how we walk into other people's classrooms, without influence over the culture of the class. As such, we see ourselves as being distinct from teachers, both in name and in where we sit relative to students and their endeavour of learning.

Taking place across disparate classrooms with no relationships to anchor them, our teaching lives are discontinuous, imbued with a feeling of always starting over. In much of our contact with students in classroom settings, we experience repeated first-day-of-school energy (without the last-day-of-school satisfaction): students whose names we don't know, syllabi that we didn't write (and perhaps haven't even seen). As supplemental instructors, we talked about relying on secondhand knowledge, filtered through other people's expectations of what librarians know and do—what professors want their students to get out of a library session, or what students have been told about the nature of research.

> Author 2: One of the fundamental reasons I don't see myself as a teacher as much anymore is because, for me, [being a teacher] is so much like going on this journey with the students from September to June, and [understanding] what that arc looks like, and how you all evolved during the course of the school year. That qualitative element is just so absolutely absent [from what I do now].

> Author 1: Isn't it fascinating that our version of teaching is like the first day of school every time? . . . You never get to the point necessarily where you have developed a comfort with that group before it's time to move on, and then it's like the butterflies all over again and the classroom culture that you don't know about that you're going into, sight unseen.

When we might take on the role of teacher, we focus on teaching, the verb, rather than being teachers, the noun. It is expected, institutionally at least, that we are performing the act of teaching, but on a broader scale, being a teacher is not immediately recognized as a core part of our identities, either within our social environment or within our own perceptions of ourselves.

> Author 4: I do think I'm perceived as somebody who is teaching something . . . but honestly, I really don't think very much about whether they perceive me as a teacher or not. I'm

> more concerned with whether they are getting what I'm telling them and "Am I explaining things well enough?"

Because there is so much variety and complexity in what we do as academic librarians, we also reported that we sometimes rely on teaching or instruction load as a comprehensible signpost to which we can point in order to explain to others what it is that we do as librarians. We talked about the act of teaching as representing our productivity, and a way of distinguishing our practice of librarianship from other ways of being a librarian.

> Author 3: I get a sense [that] when I introduce teaching or consultations to colleagues who may not teach as much or at all, it's a way of distinguishing what we do from one another. And also, at times, it's to kind of show how busy I am . . . "this is how busy I am, this is all the teaching that I do."

Although we described gestures to the act of teaching, or the classes on our calendar, as markers for our productivity, we hesitated to describe ourselves as teachers.

Our conversation about teach*ing*, but being distinct from teach*ers*, highlights the temporal and shifting nature of I-positions, as described by DST. While teacher is not among our core I-positions, the moments where we feel more teacher-like are when I-positions that are related to teaching come to the fore (e.g., I-as-facilitator, I-as-explainer, I-as-reassurer, I-as-helper). The fact that we can sometimes consider ourselves *people who teach*, but not necessarily *teachers*, may be related to the external domains of our identities. In our conception, there is no I-as-teacher without an external domain that is populated with complementary I-positions like "my students," "my classroom," "my curriculum," or "my syllabus." Those I-positions are missing from the context in which we teach, making I-as-teacher a position we are unlikely to adopt.

Theme: Not Natural, Not Comfortable
I-Positions: I-as-Anxious, I-as-Excited, I-as-Preparer

> Q: How do you feel when you are called upon to teach for a new class or in an unfamiliar setting?
>
> A: Anxious . . . even teaching classes I've already taught brings a certain level of anxiety.

Perhaps because we do not fully embrace the teacher identity, each of us talked about feeling anxious when asked to teach a new class or to teach in an unfamiliar setting. Our anxiety reflects our discomfort with these unpredictable aspects of our job. Two of us mentioned not wanting to feel this anxiety, wanting to feel something else, yet being unable to get rid of it. The biggest driver of this anxiety is lack of time. We frequently receive requests to teach that allow limited time to prepare the class

presentation material. The anxiety can be mediated by both external and internal forces; for one group member, topic familiarity (external) leads to less anxiety, while for another, procrastination (internal) breeds more. For most of us, the anxiety is present from the start, although feelings of excitement and gratitude may follow.

We manage our anxiety in multiple ways. We prepare as much as we can, partly by obtaining syllabi or assignment details from the professor in advance. We practise boundary setting, with at least one of us refusing requests when there is not sufficient time to craft a lesson for the students. We also modify our thoughts, by engaging in positive self-talk, reflecting on past experiences, or by acknowledging our nervousness and our desire to approach new teaching requests more positively. While preparation, boundary setting, and thought modification do not cure our anxiety, they can lessen it. We find it helps us feel more in control of our workload and the learning outcomes.

In addition to feeling anxiety, two group members talked about feeling resentment when called to teach at the eleventh hour, viewing it as a lack of respect for what librarians do.

> Author 3: I too feel anxiety, but there are also times I feel resentment, that in those circumstances when it feels like it's just kind of brought up with like, a week's notice or even less than that sometimes that's like, Yeah, I'll do it. But I don't really feel like this is being appreciated by the faculty member.

The resentment also manifests when professors are slow to send requested course syllabi that will help with customizing lessons to better meet the needs of the students.

> Author 1: I never really consciously think of this as resentment, but it is resentment. When I have to pull information from the requester . . . I feel like I'm imposing because I have to ask multiple times, like, "Oh, you know, we talked three months ago and you said you're gonna send me that syllabus . . . It's three months later—can you send it?"

Despite these slights, the fact that professors call us in to teach suggests that they understand that library research skills are important, and they value the work that we do.

An examination of our discomfort with teaching through the lens of DST reveals a clear I-position of I-as-anxious. For most of us, this position is a dominant one that exists across time, in that it shows up repeatedly in response to ongoing requests to teach. It is unclear to what extent I-as-anxious shows up across spaces within the teaching context. Does it only appear when we prepare, or is it also present in the classroom, during one-on-one consultations, or elsewhere? What is clear is our

need to subdue this I-position. Anxiety is a stigmatized emotion, both socially and professionally unacceptable even if unavoidable.

The desire to subdue I-as-anxious leads us to engage in multiple types of preparation. I-as-preparer is the I-position that protects us from the discomfort inflicted by I-as-anxious. We prepare ourselves mentally through self-talk and logistically by requesting syllabi and class assignments. We supplement this preparation with time management, rejecting requests that come within too tight of a timeframe. I-as-preparer gives us a sense of agency in a teaching landscape where our instruction is often an afterthought and our expertise is not always understood or respected. Together, I-as-anxious and I-as-preparer form a powerful I-position "coalition" (Hermans 2003, 111) that enhances our professional resilience and self-confidence.

Theme: In the Dark
I-Position: I-as-Uncertain, We-as-Uncertain
Meta Position: I-as-Evaluator

> Q: How do you feel when you are called upon to teach for a new class or in an unfamiliar setting?
>
> A: I feel a little bit in the dark, a little. There's something I don't see here and I can't see it.

Closely linked to our feelings of anxiety about teaching is a persistent uncertainty. We talked about uncertainty being present at both an institutional and an individual level. At the institutional level, it manifests in the absence of a clearly articulated vision or guiding plan for librarian teaching. Individually, it comes through in the unclear teaching requests we receive from professors and our own limited understanding of the impact of our instructional activities. The uncertainty leaves us questioning how much teaching we are expected to do and whether our teaching efforts are successful.

When tasked with teaching one-shot sessions in classes that are not our own, we operate in a realm of unpredictability and limited information. We talked about teaching requests that arrive with scant details about the class itself or the type of library instruction needed. The vagueness makes it difficult for us to align our lessons with course objectives and learning goals.

Our experiences communicating with faculty about instruction has led us to think that many professors do not understand what librarians do or what it is they need from us. One group member senses that professors value librarians' knowledge of how to navigate the information ecosystem, even though they might not quite understand what that knowledge is. On the other hand, we can never be certain of the motivation behind the instruction request. Two group members noted that, in

cases where a professor has inherited another instructor's course and syllabus, an invitation may simply be a manifestation of longstanding tradition, rather than the result of intentional planning on the part of the professor.

Between our uncertainty about the professors' objectives and their uncertainty about our roles lies a third layer of uncertainty: Is what we are teaching meaningful to the students? We strive to assess the effectiveness of our teaching methods through faculty surveys (with varying levels of success), informal student polls, observation of students' in-class reactions, and, most commonly, thoughtful self-reflection.

> Author 2: How do you assess your effort as a teacher?
>
> Author 1: In [the] early part of my career, I tried to do the quantitative assessment, the surveys, and then I learned about survey fatigue . . . even getting an assessment from faculty is like pulling teeth.
>
> Author 4: I make a distinction between effort and effectiveness . . . "Did I do my best? Was I prepared? Was I in the moment?" To me, that's what the effort is about. And if I say yes to all those questions, then I feel good about that. As far as the effectiveness, I do like to ask questions like, "What is the thing that you learned that you can take away?"

One group member gauges teaching effectiveness by the number of consultation appointments, while another finds that to be a less reliable indicator. While only one of us currently uses an established assessment model on a regular basis, we all value assessment as a tool for growth and would welcome more institutional guidance on assessment methods.

During our group meeting, we expressed uncertainty about where teaching ranks among the library's institutional priorities for tenure-track faculty. Much of the discussions among faculty librarians centre around scholarship and publishing, yet we have the sense that a certain amount of teaching is expected of us as well. As one group member put it, the messaging around teaching is mixed: while teaching is both expected and taken for granted, it is not talked about with the same reverence as research grants and publishing. We speculate that this might be partly related to the absence of a library school at our university, where credit-bearing courses on librarianship could be taught by library faculty.

> Author 1: How do you perceive the prioritization of teaching by leadership in the library?
>
> Author 4: I think it is kind of indirectly communicated that it is important, but then it's like we get a mixed message because it seems like in a lot of the meetings, it focuses on scholarship and publishing.

Despite the ambiguity in messaging, we devote considerable time to cultivating and improving our own teaching practices. We conduct planning meetings with professors, attend professional development activities, and experiment with our own

methods of assessment. These activities make us feel more ready to teach and provide a measure of control in an environment where so much seems beyond our grasp.

The overriding I-position that comes through in our conversations about teaching expectations is I-as-uncertain. As a group, we are unsure of how our teaching contributions are valued and assessed by the professors who invite us to their classes, by the students we teach, and by the institution in which we work. We know that teaching is important, but we struggle with how exactly to articulate that importance within the confines of a tenure-based academic system where grants and publishing dominate the discourse. This uncertainty is exacerbated by the discontinuity and inconsistency of our interactions with professors and students. Because our time together is so limited, we have a limited understanding of each other's roles and needs.

We-as-uncertain represents the collective faculty who function as frontline librarians and administrators within the institution. Though less common than the I-as construction, the we-as construction is used to indicate either peer group membership, an in-group/out-group dichotomy, or an integration of others into one's cultural group (Blackbeard 2018; Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010; O'Sullivan-Lago and de Abreu 2010). In this case, we-as-uncertain reflects the prevailing sense of uncertainty in the contemporary academic library environment.

In an environment of unspoken norms and uncertainty, we develop tools that will help us answer our own questions. This toolmaker is embodied in the meta-position I-as-evaluator. In DST, the meta-position is described as self-reflective and capable of providing an "overarching view so that several positions can be seen simultaneously" (Hermans and Gieser 2011, 16). For us, I-as-evaluator functions as the caring critic, the reassuring presence within ourselves that can help us pinpoint not only what we don't know and where we might be falling short, but what we are doing well. It helps us stay steady when our tenure-track responsibilities threaten to throw us off balance. Its arrival marks a shift from uncertainty to empowerment.

Theme: Teaching as Performance
Third Position: I-as-Performer (Encompassed I-Positions: I-as-Approachable, I-as-Human, I-as-Reassuring, I-as-Relatable)

> Q: What dispositions emerge when you teach?
>
> A: I'm very responsive, like if they're open and they're digging it, you know, I feel more open and more excited. And if they're more reserved, then I try not to overwhelm them like too much with my personality, but regardless, it always feels a little bit like performing to me. Because the whole act of professing just seems so different, than who I am as a person. So I have to put myself in the mind space of doing that, to be comfortable with that.

In the midst of the anxiety and uncertainty we feel about teaching, we find ways to adapt once we are in the classroom space. As we discussed our teaching dispositions, we introduced words like *audience*, *hamming*, and *improvisational* to describe our experiences. This language leads to the perception of our teaching as a kind of performance. We expanded upon how most of our classroom teaching occurs as a one-time guest and how, after introducing us, professors often characterize our role through librarian stereotypes, referring to us as experts or fonts of wisdom. These lofty descriptions make some of us feel pressure to deliver on this characterization, which further contributes to our feeling like performers. Some of us have the opposite reaction, eschewing the professional formality of academia and striving to be seen as approachable and relatable.

> Author 2: Which version of me I'm going to be sort of depends on which version of them they are. I'm in a room with these people and I don't know who they are and what their day is and how they're going to use this information, necessarily. And so, the only reliable thing that I can do is convey myself as someone who is helpful.

We ruminated on this idea of the performer, pondering whether and how we bring our whole selves into teaching. We acknowledged the relationship between feeling like a performer and the social conditioning that shapes our professional and personal identities, particularly with respect to gender, race, and age:

> Author 1: Well they didn't expect a Black librarian when they were coming in, you know what I mean? Like how do you move past that and also, I don't know. In some ways you have to be aware of the stereotypes. But at the same time, you have to pretend that they don't exist to move forward.

> Author 3: I navigate this space as being male. And most of the classes that I'm presenting in are predominantly female, or female presenting, at least. And there are times where I'm like, "Don't mansplain", I'm over-explaining something and I feel this pressure not to be another guy just like talking at women.

> Author 4: When you show up in the world, you're not just showing up as a librarian. They don't just see you as the librarian necessarily. I don't just feel like a librarian when I'm walking around. I feel all of my identities, many of which are marginalized.

These excerpts reflect how our personal identities are always with us when we teach. Is it perhaps because of this we prioritize being approachable over our expertise as librarians? Here DST can help us understand the interrelatedness between one's individuality and their sense of self in society. Our I-positions as being approachable or relatable presences are in response to how society perceives our belonging to groups based on age, gender, and race. At the same time, our I-positions as librarians include both the individual choice to become this identity and the stereotypes associated with it. Through meta-positioning, we reflect on the identity as personal, shared, and prescribed by others. Through this reflection, we become aware of a third position, I-as-performer, acknowledging and reconciling

tensions between the I-positions. This third position can hold all our I-positions as worthy aspects of self, allowing their expression or repression depending on the circumstance.

In the classroom setting, we choose to leverage our professional identity, using it to focus on how students and faculty engage with us. Our identities as librarians allow us to set expectations and boundaries that are necessary to answer the call to teach and fulfill our other responsibilities. We recognize that there are examples when librarians, as in other careers, can over-rely on our professional identity. This would be tantamount to over-relying on one I-position. We went on to discuss the idea of vocational awe and of being in service to others at the expense of yourself. Here we find teaching as performance helps us compartmentalize. Teacher is a role we play and we can call upon it.

Theme: A Higher Purpose
Promoter Position: We-as-Values-Driven

> Q: Do you have a teaching philosophy?
>
> A: This is probably the hardest question because I read it and thought, "Oh God, do I have to cite some people? What did Freire say?"

While we did not set a definition of teaching philosophy prior to initiating the conversation about our broader visions of teaching, we spoke with a shared understanding that our actions are driven by an underlying set of beliefs. It was initially difficult to articulate a statement that would be clearly recognizable as a coherent philosophy; the terms *evolving* and *in flux* came up frequently. The ease with which we glide between dispositions in the classroom suggests a reluctance on our part to adopt a single persona or specific philosophy when it comes to our teaching. However, as we explored beneath the surface, it became clear that we each could articulate a core set of values, dispositions, and practices that motivate us and make our work personally meaningful.

Primarily, we believe that education is a right and that learners deserve to be taught with care and respect in a welcoming, non-judgmental environment. As we see it, we should come to instruction with the mindset that every student is bringing something of value to the classroom. We see it as our responsibility to respond to and leverage students' prior knowledge, convey relevant and practical information, and facilitate engagement. We navigate mundane library concepts while maintaining the conviction that the ultimate purpose of learning is to understand oneself.

We expressed a desire to inspire students to be both curious and critical of the conventional norms in higher education research. Perhaps because we routinely

contend with the limits, biases, and idiosyncrasies of information systems, we try to help students navigate these systems while at the same time warning students away from blindly accepting these systems. One member of our group describes the ideal student learning scenario as a progression through these phases: curiosity, criticality, construction, and creation. This group member believes librarians have the strongest potential influences on curiosity and criticality. These dispositions then set the stage for students to construct their own meaning from what they have learned and then become creators by building upon what they've learned and sharing their knowledge with others.

With these beliefs and values in mind, we try to establish a relaxed environment for students by being enthusiastic, reassuring, or adopting a joking manner. For some of us, it is effective to de-emphasize our authority and emphasize our role as co-learners. One of our members adopts a parental role in classes in acknowledgement of the generational gap between the librarian and the students. For all of us, it is important to reassure students that they are not being graded in the library instruction space. We also prioritize conveying the message to students that we are here to support them individually as well as in a class.

Translating this theme into the language of DST, our core teaching values emerge as promoter positions, representing our idealized teaching selves. Even when teaching routine topics like citation management, we hold fast to a collective higher purpose. As Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) explain, a promoter position represents a real or imagined "other" whose purpose is to "serve as a compass, particularly when people are confronted with problems, choices, or decisions that require a new orientation in their lives" (234).

> Author 3: Curiosity is what I really focus on. If I can foster a person's curiosity in my teaching in such a way that when I show them how to use a database or cite something they see it's all in the service of what they're curious about, that's what I'm really interested in; how you can take that and use it to your advantage.

In this quotation, a group member was asserting that all teaching in the classroom is in service of fostering curiosity. In this way, the librarian sees themself as a mediator between resources and students. It becomes critical for the librarian to curate the student's introduction to research resources in such a manner as to inspire curiosity rather than boredom, frustration, or confusion. This goal sets a high bar for the librarian, and thus the we-as-values-driven promoter position can serve as inspiration, and, alternately, establish a high standard for professional self-assessment.

Theme: Challenging the System
Promoter Position: I-as-Subversive

> Q: Being on the testing end of things, how has that coloured how you perceive education and teaching as an endeavour?
>
> A: A test doesn't necessarily tell you anything about their intelligence level or what they're capable of learning. And so much of what is called intelligence and what's called smarts is so arbitrarily decided by people just around deciding, "Okay, what do we think would make a good pedestal."

Like many librarians, our journeys to librarianship were indirect. Therefore, we recognize that our experiences in past jobs and careers have influenced how we approach our responsibilities and relationships in the workplace. As we told our librarian origin stories, one of us shared that they once worked for an exam preparation company that focused on techniques for beating the system behind national standardized tests. Another expressed skepticism about the value of certain types of standardized testing. Through these remarks, a theme of subversion emerges. While we all value learning and instruction, we acknowledge that academia often colludes in the gatekeeping of education and knowledge. The library may be party to this collusion, but we feel we can also undermine that, to some extent, through our teaching.

We all expressed reluctance to assume an authoritative posture when we are called to teach in a classroom, instead preferring to be perceived as friendly and approachable. We associate the authoritative posture with stereotypes perpetuated by professors and students about what a librarian does and the expertise we have. We choose to be more approachable in an attempt to disrupt this stereotype and to dispel the notion that the subject material is too complex for the student to comprehend. We feel our interactions, whether in the classroom or in one-on-one consultations, are an opportunity where we can encourage critical thinking as the student develops their research interests.

In the classroom and in our consultations, we witness students feeling overwhelmed by the amount of material they may have to discover, navigate, and comprehend for their assignments. We witness the pressures of academia and higher education, with its emphasis on grades and test scores, and how that emphasis shapes students' perceptions of intelligence and success. We feel that these pressures are often in conflict with learning. Because we are not tasked with grading students, we feel we can be subversive in our teaching roles. Our subversiveness invites students to be curious about their research and to be critical of how scholarly information may be produced and shared.

We believe being subversive in our library instruction can dissuade students from being overwhelmed by the research and scholarship within their chosen interests. By encouraging their curiosity, we encourage them to see themselves, all of their identities, in their interests. Here we recognize DST's promoter position, I-as-subversive. Our I-positions as librarians are implicated in academia and how it perpetuates social control and the gatekeeping of knowledge. The stereotype of librarian as expert is an example of this. Our choice to be librarians who are approachable is a subversive act to change how our students perceive the library and education. As a promoter position, the I-as-subversive is an incremental change to move society away from an academy that invokes anxiety and keeps people away.

Discussion

The results of our analytical-interpretive collaborative autoethnography are not generalizable, nor are they meant to be representative of anyone else's experiences but our own. Despite this, it is useful to note where our thoughts about teaching identity parallel or diverge from what has been reported in the existing academic literature.

Our disassociation from the teacher identity reflects "librarian who teaches," one of the identity constructions used in research by Wheeler and McKinney (2015, 118) and Kirker (2022, 338). As with some of the participants in those studies, we see our lack of participation in curriculum building and our limited options for assessing learning as key differences between our teaching and the teaching done by "real" teachers.

The dispositions we display while teaching are similar to the personas described in phenomenological research done by Azadbakht (2021). Azadbakht's participants prioritize projecting approachability to build rapport with students. At the same time, those participants want the respect of teaching faculty and desire to be viewed as authority figures by students. By contrast, we express a complete de-emphasis on expertise and instead prefer to be viewed as either co-learners or facilitators.

The anxiety and uncertainty we recount has been reported in survey research (Davis 2007), and in other autoethnographies (Esty 2017; Mattson et al. 2017). Davis's study found that over 60 percent of respondents experienced teaching-related anxiety. Our perception that teaching faculty don't understand what librarians do contributes to feelings of uncertainty. Davis's study similarly found a correlation between experiencing anxiety and feeling misunderstood by teaching faculty.

Teaching requires adaptability; in our discussions, this skill was likened to performance. Tewell's 2014 essay advising librarians to adopt techniques from stand-

up comedy simply calls this “reading an audience” (30). We read the audience for signs of confusion or understanding, anxiety or calm, and withdrawal or engagement. This helps us decide whether the level of instruction we provide is not enough, too much, or just right.

We also find that, beyond our core beliefs, there is an underlying desire to offer a counternarrative to some of the messages promulgated in higher education. We don’t grade, we don’t claim authority, and we invite students to be critical of what they read. In our discussions, we used the term *pirate energy* to describe work which helps students navigate systems which can be unfair, illogical, and bureaucratic. This pirate energy is reminiscent of Beilin’s (2016) advice to librarians: “Our challenge should be to teach success on two levels. We ought to encourage alternative definitions of success while at the same time ensure success in the existing system” (18). We want to teach students in acknowledgement of the means to an end, but we also want to preserve students’ love of learning and curious, questioning spirits.

Conclusion and Implications

Our librarian-authored autoethnography is unique in its use of DST as a framework for analyzing teaching librarians’ identities. DST provides us with a nuanced look at how we situate ourselves and are situated within our social environments. We are able to locate the sources from which perceptions such as I-as-not-a-teacher but I-as-facilitator, I-as-explainer, I-as-reassurer, and I-as-helper emerge. DST’s metacognitive approach helps us to articulate I-as-evaluator, the caring critic with the long view inside all of us. DST also allows us to reflect upon those aspects of our selves that enhance our self-concept (we-as-values-driven and I-as-subversive) and reconcile contradictory affective states (I-as-performer).

It is highly likely you are reading this because you are a librarian who teaches. You are reading this because, like us, there have been times in your career when you have questioned why you do certain things a certain way. We are librarians who, like you, at times question what that means within the larger systems of academia. Perhaps you have found similarities between how you experience your librarian identity and how we do. We also recognize that you bring your own identities and experiences that may lead you to disagree with our perspectives. In any case, we hope our collaborative autoethnography has invited you to explore what it means to be a librarian, to teach, and to be a teacher.

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Appendix A: Group Interview Guide

1. What kind of work did you do prior to becoming a librarian?
2. What were your expectations about teaching before becoming a librarian?
3. Do you have a teaching philosophy?
4. How would you describe your teaching style?
5. What dispositions emerge when you teach?
6. What are the typical highs and lows you experience as a teacher?
7. What challenges do you perceive as existing for teaching librarians in higher education?
8. Do your professional activities align with what people think librarians do?
9. Do you feel perceived as a teacher?
10. How is your teaching perceived among your professional colleagues within the library?
11. What have you learned about yourself in your teaching role?
12. How do you feel when you are called upon to teach for a new class or in an unfamiliar setting?
13. How do you assess your effort as a teacher?
14. How do you perceive the prioritization of teaching by leadership in the library?
15. What is your impression of the prioritization of teaching by your professional associations?
16. How do professors/instructors approach you to teach?
17. What is your impression of how professors/instructors approach you to teach

Appendix B: Community Norms

1. Give others time to form their thoughts.
2. Seek to understand.
3. Acknowledge or reflect on the impact of words and actions.
4. Listen to others with care.
5. Be present.
6. Seek the good.
7. Ask probing questions.
8. Allow people agency over their own observations or remarks.
9. Own your intentions and your impact.
10. Explore controversy with civility.