

Book Review

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Maryam Ali

Library Assistant.
University College London.
Email: ucyllix@ucl.ac.uk.

Reale, M. (2018). *The indispensable academic librarian: Teaching and collaborating for change* Chicago: American Library Association Editions. pp.144. ISBN 978-0-8389-1638-4 £44. Pbk.

Librarians as educators and their identities specifically in academia are leading discussions in Michelle Reale's book, *The Indispensable academic librarian: Teaching and collaborating for change*. Reale (2018) effectively delves into the learning dynamics and experiences of academic librarians, academic faculties and students in American universities. The reader is drawn into the relationship between the academic librarian and the student lifecycle to unravel valuable lessons, challenges, and insights. The book is arranged into ten chapters, which are concise, compact and encompass a range of theories and perspectives underpinned with the author's reflections and experiences. The structure of the chapters invites the reader to engage and contemplate, providing deep personal and professional reflection. Each chapter starts with a short, themed quote of the subject area, which bridges the author's first-hand practice-based experiences with theoretical concepts. At the end of each chapter, there are final thoughts and a list of strategies, which initiates a dialogue between the author and reader, enabling the reader to take ideas forward and apply to their professional practice.

The book focuses on academic librarianship, the encounters between academic librarians and subject specific *faculties* in American universities. It can be argued that for further insight it would be useful for future literature to explore different demographics, for a comparative read, particularly in the UK higher education setting. Nevertheless, the work of Reale (2018) can provide the foundation to start a global conversation on the identities of academic librarians in the higher education sector.

The reader gains an in-depth understanding of the challenges and lessons through a professional biographical account of the author's encounters and experiences as an academic librarian. Reale's (2018) passion for the profession, belief in the valuable skills academic librarians hold and the importance of teaching is evident in all chapters. Reale (2018) investigates the history of librarians and their role in academia, the "stereotypes" of librarians,

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and observes that these stereotypes have not aided in the perception of the academic librarian. Reale's (2018) rich analysis on the role of librarians, particularly in the context of academia, offers insight into the complexities of a librarians' identity, and how they are perceived, explaining "We do not, as a group, define our identity. It is often defined by others, and perhaps therein lies the problem." (p. 6). There is a clear sense of how the narrative of an academic librarian needs to be reviewed and rewritten, and Reale offers ways to achieve this.

The first chapter provides a brief overview of the history of the profession and the identity of a librarian. Reale (2018) examines the ways this has evolved and how librarians are perceived. The second chapter focuses on the stereotype of librarians, which is extended to the sociological and anthropological analysis of the reference desk and the reference librarian. In chapter three, there is an exploration of intrinsic aspects of teaching and learning with a focus upon *conversational* practices, how knowledge and information are constructed and the roles of academic librarians within this. Embedding the key educational critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, Reale (2018) challenges the traditional methods of teaching, suggesting rather than talking at students, librarians should aim to co-create more active and critical learning activities, through knowledge exchange with students in the design and delivery of information literacy (IL) sessions. The discussions around the classroom and learner experience are further explored in chapter four, with an emphasis on inquiry-based learning. Using Kuhlthau's Information Search Model, readers are invited to review their current IL sessions. Within chapter five, the author explores the challenges and collaboration between academic librarians and university faculties, heavily based on Reale's (2018) personal experiences and anecdotes to consider how the relationship between librarians and the university can be improved. Reale (2018) returns to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy in the examination of critical librarianship in chapter six, to discuss how teaching can be shifted to a more holistic experience that enables the librarian and student to feel more liberated in the classroom setting. As Reale (2018) describes, "students need to learn how to find their voices, which liberates them and allows them to fully engage in their own intellectual and educational process" (p. 69). Chapter seven centres on the physical spaces of academic libraries in which spaces are designed for learners. This is carefully examined based on the author's own personal nostalgic accounts. Bridging the past to the present, the chapter provides valuable lessons in which library spaces can be improved to enhance student's experiences to foster a sense of community. In chapter eight, the reader is invited to look at librarianship from a reflective lens. This is one of the more interactive chapters, with the author inviting the reader to be reflective in their practice. As Reale (2018) states, "...reflection and establishing a reflective practice are signs of healthy professional self-esteem" (p. 102). Further examination of the role of librarians, is discussed in chapter nine, where Reale (2018) brings together the theory of leadership within librarianship. This chapter unpacks the concept of leadership and visits the *myths* of leadership, offering an alternative view on leadership for academic librarians. The final chapter examines wellbeing practices for librarians to look after themselves within this complex yet rewarding field of work. This self-care chapter is suitably placed at the end of the book with practices any individual within and beyond the university can apply in their personal and professional life.

Reale's writings challenge traditional perspectives, methods of teaching, and leadership roles for academic librarians in higher education. The range of models referred to provides essential foundations to implement specific professional practices. The book is a valuable companion in the journey of an academic librarian, whether one is in their early career stages or years in. It is also a must-read for those working among university faculties and working closely with

academic librarians. The book provides interesting, inspiring, and informative lessons that can be referred to at any moment in a librarian's career whilst navigating their professional identities in a university library.