

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS IN IRISH DEIS
AND FEE-PAYING SCHOOLS.

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ABSTRACT

School libraries provide students with information and resources that complement the curriculum being delivered by teachers while positively impacting students' schooling experience. School librarians are trained to equip students with the skills required to function in a society with a perpetual generation of information and assist students in successfully functioning in a knowledge-based economy. School librarians in Ireland are overlooked and undervalued. The potential value school librarians could bring to Irish students' education is unacknowledged at a national level and can also go unrecognised within the very institutions that house them.

This dissertation sets out to explore the role of the school librarian, focusing on DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools and fee-paying schools in Ireland. These schools are primarily the only second level institutions that house a school library and qualified school librarian. The research for this study will be carried out in the form of semi-structured interviews with seven qualified school librarians; three from DEIS schools and four from fee-paying schools. The findings will be analysed in the context of a literature review which focuses on the school librarians from other English-speaking countries. The findings from the two cohorts of school librarians participating in this study will also be compared and contrasted with each other.

The findings illustrate the varied role of school librarians, particularly within fee-paying schools. School librarians from DEIS schools are far more prescribed in their role, whereas the fee-paying school librarians lack the same direction and focus within their institutions. The findings also reveal the poor information seeking behaviour found in Irish second level students and the difficulties school librarians experience in combating this gap in skills. It is evident that school librarians provide significant value to their institutions, however often experience difficulty through misunderstanding of their role or a lack of acknowledgement from the Department of Education. Despite these obstacles, the school librarians that participated in this study prove themselves to be resilient, proactive and effective.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The school library space, first and foremost, provides students with access to reading resources and a place to study, but the role of the school librarian can far exceed these simple but significant services. UNESCO describe the school library as providing the tools and resources that can equip students with the necessary skills to not only function, but excel in an information and knowledge-based society; promoting life-long learning and developing the students' imagination (IFLA/UNESCO, 2000). The school library and librarian have quite the enigmatic presence in the context of Irish research and literature, largely down to the fact the they barely exist within post-primary schools across the country. Fee-paying schools and DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) schools both sit at opposite ends of the educational scale, yet these are primarily the two types of schools that provision a school library and fully-qualified school librarian. These schools make up the minority of the post-primary schools in Ireland yet are the only ones that house a school library and librarian. This study will explore the role of the Irish school librarian; delving into their primary responsibilities as well as investigating the existence of information literacy within these schools. Information literacy has been long regarded as the sole remit of the librarian and so this study plans to investigate whether it is on the radar for Irish school librarians and their schools.

This research will explore the role of Irish school librarians, focusing on DEIS and fee-paying schools. The DEIS Action Plan was launched in May 2005 in attempt to assist schools

considered to be disadvantaged either geographically, financially or in some cases, both (DEIS, 2005). Within this action plan, published in 2005, it was stated that 50 second-level schools considered to be most disadvantaged would receive support to introduce a school library and qualified school librarian. Currently, there are 30 school libraries managed by qualified school librarians in DEIS schools and these come under the JCSP Library Demonstration Project (PDST, no date).

The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) was launched to target potential early school leavers and to enhance the literacy and numeracy standards of students in disadvantaged areas (Kiely et al., 2005). Through this initiative, the JCSP Library Demonstration Project emerged to offer support to these socio-economically disadvantaged schools. After much research and applications, the JCSP Library Demonstration Project was rolled out across 10 post-primary schools in 2002 with an additional school being added in 2003 (Kiely et al., 2005). To date there are 30 JCSP School librarians based in 30 DEIS schools across the country (PDST, no date).

The majority of fee-paying schools in Ireland house a school library and qualified school librarian. Currently, there is no available information to ascertain a definite number of school libraries in fee-paying schools. There are 56 fee-paying schools in the Republic of Ireland, 31 of which are located in Dublin. There is a dearth of literature focusing on school librarians in Ireland with little information available on any level. The United Kingdom has a greater amount of research focusing on school librarians, however this is still lacking in comparison to the United States and Australia. Along with a dearth of relevant literature on

this area, further justification for this study is the poor information seeking behaviour of students reported in Irish third level institutions (Kerins et al., 2004; Dodd, 2007; O'Farrell and Bates, 2009). The majority of research focusing on information literacy has centred around undergraduate students so this study will explore the information seeking behaviour of students at second level and whether information literacy is on the radar for secondary schools.

Information literacy (further referred to as IL) is a topic of much debate and discussion within the field of librarianship. The majority of the research conducted in Ireland focuses on assessing the IL abilities of students in third-level education and the findings present unsurprising conclusions; IL proficiency levels of undergraduates are not what they need to be and the transition from second to third level education is more challenging because of this (Choolhun, 2012; Conrick and Wilcox, 2013; Sheridan and Dunne, 2012). Given that all research unequivocally agrees on this point, there is a consensus that action must be taken within tertiary education to address this issue. However, little research has explored the teaching of IL in a secondary school context. Whilst exploring the role of the school librarian the awareness of IL within secondary schools will also be explored. The research will include an analysis of the literature that focuses on school librarians and IL in both secondary and tertiary education.

1.2 Research Aims

The aim of this research is to explore the role of JCSP Librarians and school librarians in fee-paying schools. The research will identify the primary roles of the school librarians within

their institutions and outline where they get their directives from. In addition to this, the study will explore the level of collaboration that exists between school librarians and teachers as well as the perception of the school librarian in their schools; the information seeking behaviour of second level students and IL awareness will also be investigated.

1.3 Research Method

As stated previously, due to the dearth of literature focusing on school librarians, literature from countries outside Ireland will be analysed as part of the extensive literature review. Caution must be taken when assessing the school librarians from other countries, however the analysis of the existing literature will provide the overall background for the study and help develop the study's research questions. A qualitative approach will be taken for this study through the form of semi-structured interviews of seven school librarians; three JCSP librarians (from DEIS schools) and four school librarians from fee-paying schools.

1.4 Scope and Contribution

This research will address the current literature gap that exists on school librarians, their role within Irish secondary schools as well as the awareness of IL in these schools. It is hoped that the research will make a valuable contribution towards the currently overlooked school librarians as well as offering valuable insights for information professionals who are interested in understanding the current state of IL in Irish secondary schools.

1.5 Research Questions

The aim of this study is to explore the role of school librarians in DEIS and fee-paying schools. Additionally, the information seeking behaviour of students will be gauged along

with the awareness of IL within the school and whether the school librarians are delivering IL classes. The following research questions have been developed to this end:

- What are the main responsibilities of the school librarian?
- From where does the school librarian receive their direction?
- What is the standard of information seeking behaviour of students within the school?
- Is IL on the radar for the school librarian and teachers?
- Is the school librarian involved in the delivery of IL classes?

The objective of this study is explore the answers to these questions through interviews with Irish school librarians.

1.6 Dissertation Structure

Chapter one of this dissertation provides a background to the study and puts the research into context of the wider knowledge. Chapter one will also justify the reasoning for this study, it's research aims and the scope and contribution it hopes to make. Chapter two is the literature review which will conduct a detailed analysis of the existing literature focused on school libraries, IL and the information seeking behaviour of students. Chapter three consists of the research methodology. The methodology details the design of the research approach; research philosophy, research strategy, time horizon, primary data collection, research ethics and finally the limitations of the study. Chapter four presents the findings of the semi-structured interviews, these will be presented in themes and subthemes. Chapter five will conduct an analysis of the findings. The findings will be analysed first of all in the

context of the literature review as well as comparisons being made between the two cohorts of school librarians; JCSP librarians and fee-paying school librarians. Explanation for the findings will also be offered in this chapter. Chapter six will consist of the reflective learner account. This account will be an overall reflection of the master's course as well as the dissertation process.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Literature Introduction

The literature review chapter is an essential facet to the research process, its purpose being to provide a critical analysis of the relevant literature on the chosen research topic (Creswell, 2013, p. 28). The literature review sets the context for the chosen research while also helping to develop and refine the research questions. Moreover, it demonstrates the current state of knowledge in the subject area, its limitations and how the research undertaken fits into the wider context (Creswell, 2013, p. 30). In addition, the literature review provides the context for the research findings while integrating these findings into the existing body of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 72).

This literature review will assess the studies focusing on school librarians and post-primary school libraries. The impact of school libraries in second level schools and collaboration between school librarians and teachers will be analysed. Additionally, a critical analysis will be carried of the literature that focuses on IL in the context of secondary schools. As stated previously, there is a shortage of research conducted on Irish school libraries and IL in second level schools. This dearth of relevant literature will result in parallels being made with the UK, United States, Canada and Australia. Parallels will also be made between second level students and undergraduates assessing their IL levels in Ireland and the UK. The literature review will identify the main themes and subthemes that emerge when conducting the analysis. Assessing the existing research is an integral step in order to

develop the research objectives for this study. The main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the literature are:

- School Librarian
 - Ambiguity around the role of the school librarian
 - Teacher-librarian
 - School Librarians as educators
- DEIS and fee-paying schools
 - Faculty and staff collaboration
 - Strategic planning
- School librarian and literacies
 - Information seeking behaviour of students
 - Marketing the value of IL

2.2 School Librarian

The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens. (IFLA/UNESCO, 2000)

This is a classical grandiose UNESCO statement that argues the importance of school libraries' existence on our modern day society. However, nobody in Ireland seems to be taking any notice of the above. School libraries and their librarians are almost completely ignored from any research or literature within an Irish context. Coughlin et al (1999, cited in Kiely et al., 2005) is one of the few publications that focuses on Irish school librarians. This absence of literature on school librarians is mirrored by the shortage of school librarians

that exist in Irish secondary schools. DEIS and fee-paying schools are predominantly the two types of schools that have the provisions for a school library and a qualified school librarian. While Kiely et al strongly advocate for the existence of school librarians, they are a tiny voice in Irelands education landscape (2005).

UNESCO's Manifesto for School Librarians (2000) details the important role school librarians play in the development of student's literacy and numeracy levels. In spite of this, the Department of Education and Skills' National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 makes no reference to school librarians, nor does it acknowledge the value a school library can offer in improving children's literacy and numeracy levels (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). In fact, libraries are mentioned sparingly throughout the 90-page document. School libraries are mentioned in the document fleetingly (2011, p. 21). However, the document goes on to say how public libraries will be the important link with schools and communities. School librarians are not mentioned at all throughout this national strategy, which is only half way through its plan, running from 2011-2020. This is an indictment of the Department of Education and Skills, overlooking the value school librarians bring to an institution.

The School Librarian Association of the Republic of Ireland (SLARI) states that a school librarian does not necessarily have to hold a professional qualification but can be a teacher or someone with relevant experience and a love of reading (SLARI, no date). It must be highlighted that this study has chosen to focus on professional school librarians, not for example, an English teacher that also manages the library. A professional school librarian is

an individual that holds a qualification in library management and is employed by a primary or post-primary school to manage the library and library services. As stated, there are no requirements for Irish secondary schools to have a school library and so there are no requirements for school librarians from the Department of Education. Different English-speaking countries have different requirements for what constitutes a professional school librarian so it is important these differences are highlighted.

2.2.2 Teacher librarian

The teacher librarian is a role found predominantly in Australia, US and Canada and is a different role in comparison to the school librarian that is found in Ireland. Kiely et al (2005) describes the JCSP librarian as having a support role for teachers as well as supporting students in developing literacy and numeracy levels. Keller, who comes from the United States, classifies the teacher librarian as a classroom teacher, rather than having some sort of teacher support function as JCSP librarians have in Ireland (2016). The Australian School Librarian Association describes a teacher librarian as an individual that holds both a teaching qualification as well as qualifications in librarianship (ASLA, 2014). The association goes on to highlight the value of these teacher librarians as they hold qualifications in information management and library skills while being knowledgeable about the curriculum and pedagogy. This greatly contrasts the scenario for school librarians in Ireland, who operate without acknowledgment from the Department of Education. The primary remit of the Australian teacher librarian is an information specialist and training students in IL skills (Sheerman, 2013).

The teacher librarian of the United States has a similar role, except they are referred to as school librarian, not teacher librarian (AASL, 2010). This title was ratified in the US to combat the number of variant job titles that was emerging for effectively the same job role (AASL, 2010; Abilock, 2004). Similar to their Australian counterparts, the professional school librarian in the United States holds both teaching and library qualifications (AASL, 2016). The remit of the school librarian within the United States does contrast to their Australian counterparts in some ways as they are less focused on the teaching of information skills and have a greater tendency to focus on teacher support and basic literacy and numeracy (Achterman and Loertscher, 2008; Mardis, 2014). This role has a number of similarities to the role Kiely et al describe for JCSP librarians in Ireland (2005). Canadian school librarians appear to be far more diverse, in terms of qualifications, in comparison to other English-speaking countries (Branch-Mueller and de Groot, 2016). Branch-Mueller and de Groot (2001, cited in Branch-Mueller and de Groot, 2016) carried out a survey of teacher librarians showing this diverse array of qualifications. Finally, in the UK, school librarians generally hold qualifications in library management and are not required to hold teaching qualifications as well (SLA, no date). However, as is the case in Canada, often teachers can become part-time managers of the library without holding any library qualifications. These variances in qualifications, or lack of any, can call the efficacy of school librarians as educators into question, as will be discussed in further sections. Regardless of title or qualifications, the school librarians from each of the above countries have a number of core functions; promotion of reading, literacy, numeracy, IL and managing of the library space. The variance lies in what takes priority.

The participants of this study will be asked about their primary responsibilities within their respective schools. This will indicate how the Irish school librarians compare with their counterparts in other English-speaking countries. Unlike teachers, school librarians do not have a clear career path as evidenced by the above literature. This can result in ambiguity around the role of the school librarian which is the next theme to be discussed.

2.2.2 Ambiguity around the role

This again was a theme that emerged from much of the literature published on the topic of school librarians (Shyh-Mee et al., 2015; McKeever, 2013; Andretta et al., 2008). The immensely critical Lonsdale and Armstrong (2006) argue school librarians have a complete lack of understanding when it comes to their role within the school environment. However, this blame should not be laid solely on the shoulders of the librarians, but also on the management of the schools and the lack of direction for school librarians; a theme that will be discussed further on. Duke and Ward (2009) who are also quite critical of school librarians and their efficacy as educators, argue school librarians may be intimidated within a university or school context. While this may be the case within universities, it is a dubious claim in the context of secondary schools. One of the most prolific publishers of IL is Susie Andretta, and she raises the issue of territoriality and how librarians can often feel they are encroaching on the territory of faculty within a university (Andretta et al., 2005, p. 41). This point can also translate to the school context particularly in countries where school librarians do not require a teaching qualification and can feel they are encroaching on qualified teachers' jurisdiction.

Shyh-Mee et al (2015) explored the school librarian's perception of their own role within the wider school environment. School librarians in this study described themselves as: facilitators, custodians, supervisors, book minders and educators. This ambiguity around the role of school librarians within secondary schools adversely impact their ability to deliver effective IL classes (Andretta et al., 2008; Duke and Ward, 2009; Shyh-Mee et al., 2015). Shyh-Mee et al highlight the fact that not only are school librarians often unsure about their role within the wider school environment, but teachers can also misunderstand the purpose and value of the library and the school librarian. This again adds to the ambiguity that surrounds school librarians within the school and detrimentally effects their efficacy as educators. It must be noted that the Shyh-Mee research was carried out in Malaysia and care must be taken when drawing parallels with this and the Irish context. A significant number of school librarians in Malaysia are not qualified so this must be taken into account when drawing comparisons with Ireland. As stated previously, qualified school librarians are the target for this study and so lacking qualifications will not be an issue or offered as an explanation, as seen in Shyh-Mee et al's study.

The perception of the school librarian's role and the value they bring to their institutions will be explored as part of this study and the participating school librarians will be asked to answer questions resulting from a review of the literature mentioned above. While there is clearly a level of ambiguity around the role of the school library within some contexts, the question of the school librarian as an educator also emerged when reading through the literature.

2.2.3 School Librarian as Educator

Within the field of librarianship there is much discussion surrounding the question of librarians as educators. While there are several schools of thought, there is a general consensus that school librarians do in fact have a responsibility as educators, however their competency of teaching is questioned (Owusu-Ansah, 2005; Lonsdale and Armstrong, 2006; Kuhlthau, 2010; Wheeler and McKinney, 2015). Lonsdale and Armstrong go as far as to say that school librarians have a negative impact on the efficacy of IL classes (2006). Their research investigated the collaboration between secondary schools and universities and found that secondary schools largely focused on ICT skills, whereas IL was rarely targeted by school librarians. They argued this was due to the difficulty of assessing IL and so school librarians opted for ICT classes, teaching skills that were much easier assessed and quantified. This was a point also highlighted by Andretta et al (2008).

Lonsdale and Armstrong go on to point out that secondary schools and school librarians had a 'lack of exposure' to IL (2006). Lonsdale and Armstrong come across as being overly critical of school librarians when it comes to teaching, portraying university librarians as the saviours of IL and heroes of education. This overly critical viewpoint is also shared by Shyh-Mee et al (2015) who surveyed 710 school librarians in Malaysia. Their findings were more critical than Lonsdale and Armstrong, finding that a significant amount of surveyed school librarians were unable to accurately define IL (2015, p. 88). Lo et al (2014), similar to Lonsdale and Armstrong (2006) also question the competency of school librarians. Their research explored the role of school librarian in five regions; Hong Kong, Shanghai, South Korea, Taipei and Japan. Lo et al contend that the inadequacy of the school librarians in these regions was usually due to a lack of qualifications and training on the part of the school librarian (2014). As the school librarians participating in this study are all fully

qualified, having qualifications in library management, this issue is not anticipated. The theme of school librarian as an educator and the efficacy of the school librarian as an educator shaped a number of the potential interview questions. Some examples of these are as follows:

- Is IL on the radar for yourself within the school?
- Do you see yourself as a teacher/ educator/ school librarian, or all the above?
- Do you keep up to date with IL research and publications?

It is clear that the literature is quite critical of the role school librarians have within their institutions. Whether it's ambiguity around their role, questioning their efficacy as educators or not having the relevant qualifications, school librarian's competency as educators within their schools comes under a lot of scepticism. The next section will look at these institutions more closely.

2.3 DEIS and fee-paying Schools

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme was launched in May 2005 with an action plan published by the Department of Education and Science with the aim of addressing the educational needs of students from disadvantaged areas, encompassing both primary and post-primary schools (Department of Education and Science, 2005). This action plan, now over a decade old, is the sole plan for DEIS Schools and does not effectively define it's meaning of disadvantaged. The action plan includes schools considered socially, economically and geographically disadvantaged without offering any

parameters to qualify the term disadvantaged. It must be noted that not all DEIS schools are found in disadvantaged urban areas, but a number are located in rural areas also. The reason DEIS Schools were chosen as the target for this research is that 30 DEIS schools receive state provisioning for a school library and school librarian. The DEIS action plan encompasses 646 primary schools and 190 secondary schools throughout the Republic of Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2005). This research is going to focus on DEIS secondary schools. The DEIS Action Plan, published in 2005, stated that 50 second-level schools, considered to be the most disadvantaged, would receive support through the provisioning of a school library and qualified school librarian. Currently, 30 DEIS schools house both a school library and qualified school librarian. At this time, there is no literature showing plans to increase this to 50 schools.

The majority of fee-paying schools in Ireland also house a school library and librarian. There are 56 fee-paying schools in the Republic of Ireland (Irishlinks.co.uk, 2016). As stated previously, it was decided to focus on DEIS and fee-paying schools as these are primarily the only secondary schools that have a school librarian. While the JCSP librarians have a charter that outlines the expectations of their role within the library and the wider school, such a document of practice does not exist for school librarians in fee-paying schools.

The JCSP 'Read to Room' report was published over a decade ago and still there is little information available on the Irish school librarian. The only schools that receive State funding for a library are (DEIS) Schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2005). This report from the Department of Education and Skills, now eleven years old, is soon to be superseded with a new action plan for DEIS schools which is due to be published by the end of 2016 (education.ie, 2016). The libraries within DEIS schools were introduced as a result of

the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) Demonstration Library Project; developed under the Department of Education and Skills (JCSP, 2013). This charter describes the aims of the programme, to improve literacy and numeracy levels amongst students as well as enhancing the student learning experience. It is worth noting that the Department of Education and Skills National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (2011) makes no reference to school librarians and their role in promoting literacy and numeracy.

While the previous DEIS Action Plan (2005) hoped to see the introduction of school libraries and school librarians within 50 secondary schools across the country, the current JCSP programme sees the existence of 30 in what are considered the most disadvantaged schools. The charter goes on to describe the role of the school librarians; to have a professional partnership with teachers and school management in the planning and running of timetabled library classes for students (JCSP, 2013). The charter indicates that the library is much more than a room of books in these DEIS schools but as more of a creative space running many workshops. Reading this charter, one would be hard pressed not to see the value school librarians potentially bring to their institutions, however, the Department of Education and Skills refuse to acknowledge the valuable role these school librarians play.

Within their respective institutions, school librarian's collaboration with faculty can play a huge role in their efficacy and the impact they have within their school. Collaboration with other staff members is the next theme to be discussed.

2.3.1 Faculty and Staff Collaboration

Ensuring faculty buy-in and collaboration is crucial to the success of the school librarian as well as ensuring effective teaching of IL takes place (Miller, 2004; Andretta et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2011; Streatfield et al., 2011; Sisk, 2016). While only five sources are

identified here, this statement is unanimous throughout the literature that mentions faculty buy-in and collaboration between staff and librarians, across all English-speaking countries. As stated previously, the lack of collaboration between librarians and faculty has a detrimental effect on the efficacy of IL training (Lonsdale and Armstrong, 2004; 2006). Owusu-Ansah (2005) argues that in order for IL to become more successfully taught in schools and universities, librarians alone cannot be the sole champions for it. Streatfield et al (2011) whose work details the evolution of information of IL in schools in the UK, highlights that the key to developing effective IL programmes is collaboration with teachers. While librarians are suitable candidates for teaching IL, application of this cannot be solely reinforced by librarians. This task must be undertaken in classes with practical exercises and assignments, meaning teachers or faculty members must be involved in the process.

Gildersleeves (2012) in her study investigating the impact of school libraries within the context of the UK, advocates for the positive impact the school library has on its users, also highlighting the point that successful collaboration of school librarians and teachers is crucial in the efficacy of the school library. Gildersleeves also raises the concept of IL and reiterates that in order for successful information skills training to take place, again collaboration is key (2012). However, she goes beyond the notion of collaboration just between school librarians and teachers, but claims that parents need to get involved as well, particularly before students progress to higher education. At this point, Gildersleeves argues, waiting until higher education to deliver IL classes is too late for effective training to take place. While one can agree that the teaching of information skills should take place before progression to higher education, stating that training that takes place in higher

education is ineffective is an unsubstantiated claim. A critique of Gildersleeves' study is the fact that the role school management have in school librarian efficacy is not taken into consideration. This has been found to play an integral role in ensuring the school librarian has a positive impact within their institution (Miller, 2004; Andretta et al., 2008). Another important factor for school librarians is the development of strategic plans.

2.3.2 Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is an important factor, not only for school librarians in their approach to IL programmes, but also an overall strategic plan for the school library (Streatfield et al., 2011; Bikos et al., 2014; Shyh-Mee, 2015). A strategic plan outlines the goals and objectives of an institution and focuses the various players towards achieving the end goal. From the literature that currently exists on school librarians, it appears strategic planning is not adopted by many. Again, similar to the collaboration issue, the existence and adherence to a strategic plan can greatly impact the efficacy of an IL programme (Andretta et al., 2008; Lonsdale and Armstrong; 2006). It makes sense for a roadmap with end goals to be defined before setting out to teach an IL class. The delivery of IL classes appears to be taking place on a largely ad hoc basis and this method of teaching can have limited efficacy or benefit for students (Andretta et al., 2008; Lonsdale and Armstrong; 2006). Andretta et al. (2005, 2008) call for the development of a national IL policy to be drawn up for the UK. However, such a policy does not exist in the UK or Ireland. There are a number of frameworks that institutions can draw from and adhere to when developing their own IL strategic plan, but no ratified national strategy exists in Ireland. Andretta et al., urge librarians to adopt a more strategic approach to IL to ensure it becomes an embedded aspect of student's education and not a passive, ad hoc delivered filler class (2005, p. 44).

2.4 School Librarian and Literacies

It has been made evident how in various English-speaking countries across the world the remit of the school librarian revolves around literacies. Whether these are basic literacy and numeracy lessons or more advanced digital literacy or information literacy classes, these have been shown to be the realm of the school librarian. The following review the literature focuses on the information seeking behaviour of students as well as marketing the value of information literacy for both students' and their institutions' benefit.

2.4.1 Information Seeking Behaviour of Students

Children and young adults are growing up in a society with a perpetual generation of information. Devices, be it smart phones, tablets or laptops are very much an extension of themselves and are by and large the "go to" source for everyday information (Nicholas et al., 2011). Information seeking-behaviour has seen a huge shift in recent times and while information is readily available for students at the click of a button, this is raising some huge issues and challenges for when students move from second level to third level education. Generic phrases like 'Net Generation', 'Digital Native' and 'Google Generation' are used to describe the new information seeker that has grown up in an internet orientated society. Their first port of call when looking for information is the internet and more often than not, they use the search engine Google (Rowlands et al., 2008; Nicholas et al., 2011). These papers argue that this notion of the 'Google Generation' being more adept at information retrieval through the use of technology is completely false, and these papers are not in isolation on this point (Eastin et al., 2006; Kuiper et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2010). The opposite has in fact been proven to be the case when it was shown that while 'Digital Natives' may be able to return an answer quite quickly, their confidence in their answer is

not strong (Nicholas et al., 2011). Their findings go on to argue that the 'Digital Natives' are more likely to settle with the first or second answer they find rather than evaluating the reliability and the credibility of the source. As highlighted several times, the research reviewed here has been conducted in the US and the UK, no Irish equivalent exists at this time. Given that parallels exist between the US and the UK, it is a fair assumption to state that parallels should also exist with Irish students.

The relevancy of these points within this research is that this idea of the 'Google Generation' being naturally capable of retrieving, assessing and presenting information with technology has been debunked. Eastin et al. (2006) argue that while children are exposed to online media from an early age, this does not make them as skilled when it comes to locating and critically evaluating information online. When Irish students begin third level education they are not efficiently equipped with the skills required or expected of them to carry out academic research (Conrick and Wilcox, 2013; Sheridan and Dunne, 2012). Herein lies the value a school librarian can bring, combating this gulf in Irish students' abilities. The literature is unequivocal in the fact that school librarians can play a vital role in the supporting and developing students' IL skills (Andretta, 2008; 2011; Everhart et al., 2011; Choolhun, 2012; Bikos et al., 2014; Lo et al., 2014; Beck, 2015;). In Rowland et al.'s highly regarded and cited paper, the point is made how lacking the 'Google Generation' is in terms of their IL skills (2008). They note how students with some exposure to libraries in their early years, be it public libraries or school libraries, exhibit higher levels of IL skills. The point is made that in order to combat this lacking in student's IL capabilities, formative IL instruction should take place during the school years, as waiting until students reach

university could prove ineffectual. A point also made by Gildersleeves, (2012) however calling IL instruction at university level without being taught in second level, as ineffectual is an overly critical argument. All of the above illustrates the gaps in students' abilities to handle information. Something librarians are trained to handle and qualified to educate students in. One important method in promoting IL within schools and universities is marketing the value of IL to students.

2.4.2 Marketing the Value of IL

If students and staff members are going to commit time and resources to IL training, then librarians must be able to effectively articulate its practical value. The marketing of IL is another area where school librarians receive criticism (Lonsdale and Armstrong, 2006; Streatfield et al., 2011; Gildersleeves, 2012). Crawford and Irving (2013, p. 32) detail the many benefits of IL for students and how it promotes independent lifelong learning and employability. This is also a point highlighted by Andretta et al., however, they point out that selling the benefits of IL is a skill lacking in librarians (2008). By promoting the value of IL, this will encourage collaboration with staff and heighten faculty buy-in. Andretta et al., highlight a case study that uses IL as a unique selling point for its university courses and again, points to its role in enhancing employability opportunities (2005, p. 43). While this case study does not mirror the context of secondary schools, it is an example of how school librarians can become more vocal in their marketing and promoting of IL.

Gildersleeves (2012) also raises the question surrounding the marketing prowess of school librarians. Highlighting the high quality reports some of school librarians generate, Gildersleeves criticised whether these were marketed appropriately to the teachers and board of management in order to maximise the explicit value the school library offers

(2012). The importance of articulating value to school management and ensuring their buy-in was also emphasised by Miller (2004). As stated previously, the value school librarians bring to their schools is often misunderstood and so marketing their value could address this issue. This is a notion also highlighted by Hartzell (2002) who found that the majority of teachers and principals were not aware of the value their school librarians bring. To finish, this raises the question again about ambiguity; how many areas must an effective school librarian be efficient in, does marketing skills also have to be added to their skillset, along with pedagogy, knowledge of the curriculum and everything else that goes with managing a library.

2.5 Conclusion

Due to the dearth of relevant literature, many of the studies cited above were conducted in tertiary contexts or outside Ireland. However, the same principles can be applied to the second level context and comparisons can be made between the situation in Ireland and other English-speaking countries. The lack of literature published on school librarians and IL within second level schools is commented upon by many researchers (Gildersleeves, 2012; Turner, 2006; Streatfield et al., 2011; McKeever, 2013; Shyh-Mee, 2015). It is hoped that this study will address the gap in literature focusing on school librarians in Ireland. The themes outlined above are those which surfaced the most through reading and analysis of the literature. Both the themes and literature sets the context for this research and will be used to help develop research questions for gathering the primary data through interviews.

The following section will discuss the research methodology and the justification for each selection.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research methodology is the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the philosophical assumptions on which research is based and the implications of these (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 164). Saunders et al state the development of a research methodology ensures a reasonable level of coherence exists throughout the research design (2015, p. 165). This allows for effective answering of the research questions and a focus on achieving the research goals. It was pointed out previously that the absence of a strategic plan for school librarians is a contributing factor to the inefficacy of their role within a school. Similarly, the lack of a quality research methodology can result in an unfocused and disjointed research process.

The research process is a multi-layered process beginning with the research philosophy and gradually working down to the data collection and analysis stage. Saunders et al use the symbol of a research 'onion', seen in Fig 3.1 to represent the research process, and this symbol guides the researcher through the various steps of the research process (2015, p. 164).

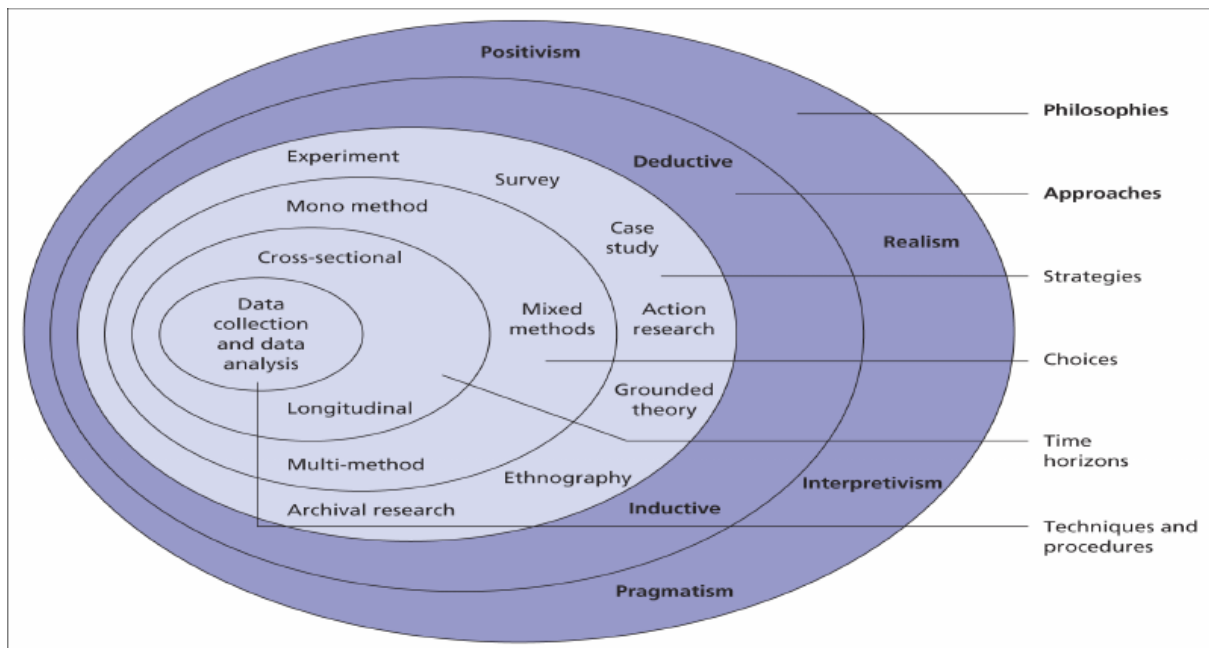


Figure 3.1 The research 'onion' (Saunders et al., 2015, p.164)

This chapter will focus on the research philosophy adopted for the dissertation, the research approach, strategy and the method used for population sampling. Each of these sections will be described and selection for each will be justified in the context of this research. The research ethics and limitations of both the research and methodology will also be discussed. Using a qualitative approach, research will be conducted on seven post-primary schools through the medium of semi-structured interviews with school librarians. Making every effort to ensure a balance and richness of information, three school librarians from DEIS Schools and four from fee-paying schools will be interviewed in a semi-structured manner. The first step in the methodology is discussing the research design or overall plan of the dissertation.

3.2 Research Design

The research design is the general plan that will be undertaken to answer the dissertation's research questions (Creswell, 2013, p. 12). Creswell highlights the plan should outline the

research objectives which stem from the research questions. Moreover, identifying the target population, outlining the process of collecting the primary data, indicating how the findings are analysed as well as detailing the ethical issues and the study's limitations will all be included in the plan. The following steps of the research design have all been selected to best explore the answers to the research questions outlined previously.

The research design being adopted for the dissertation is a qualitative one. The nature of the research will be exploratory. An exploratory approach was chosen due to the shortage of literature published on Irish school librarians as well as IL in the context of Irish secondary schools. This dearth of literature lends itself to exploratory research as there are no hypotheses already identified to prove or dispel. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the gap in the literature and set the foundation for future research in the area. The research design will discuss in detail the research philosophy, research approach, research strategy and the sampling technique used. The next step in the research design is to identify the research philosophy being adopted.

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 169). Throughout the research process a number of assumptions will be made by the researcher and these form the basis of the philosophy and shape the understanding of the research questions, the type of methodology used and how the research findings will be interpreted. Saunders et al state that the philosophy is selected to align with the researcher's beliefs and assumptions and there is no 'best' philosophy (Saunders et al, 2015, p. 124). The research philosophy most suited to this dissertation's approach is that of interpretivism.

Interpretivist philosophy, coming from epistemology, is the belief that individuals make sense of situations based on their own experiences and environments (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 140). It is the belief that individuals are influenced by their environment and each individual will have their own perspective, moulded by these factors. As this study's research question is interested in gaining an insight into the minds of school librarians from two very different types of secondary schools, it was decided that interpretivism is the most appropriate research philosophy for the study. Each school librarian will be influenced by their institution and their perspectives will be shaped by the way they attempt to make sense of this. It is hoped that herein lies the richness of the information. As Saunders states, interpretivist focuses on complexity, richness and interpretations (2015, p. 140). There is an acknowledgement that researchers interpret the language of their respondents and so their own values and beliefs play a part in the research process. When conducting the interview, the researcher must enter the social world of the interviewee and understand their perspective. In other words, the researcher must exhibit empathy while conducting the interviews.

In order to contextualize all of the above it is important to be cognisant of the fact that the target institutions for this research are two starkly different types of schools. While they are both secondary schools, the DEIS and fee-paying schools will differ greatly in terms of their environment and context. Each school librarian that is interviewed will be influenced by their respective schools and that is what makes this an interpretivist philosophy. This directly contrasts with positivism which is more focused on proving or disproving hypotheses through statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 137). Positivism implies that there is only one main truth, which is not appropriately suited to this study. Interpretivism

lends itself more to the exploratory research through a qualitative approach which is much more suitable. It is the researcher's responsibility to investigate each librarian's role in each context and analyse how their context shapes the information collected through in the interviewing process. The research is very much interested in the librarian's perspectives and experiences, uncovering attitudes and perceptions and so an emphatic stance must be adopted by the researcher. This is a very subjective approach and a qualitative approach should return a great richness of information.

3.3.2 Research Approach

Having decided on qualitative research and an interpretivist philosophy being adopted for the dissertation, the research approach will be an inductive one. An inductive approach is an approach to theory development that builds a theory through the observation of empirical data (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 718). Given the exploratory nature of this study, an inductive approach is the optimum choice. Initially, a number of themes and sub-themes will have been identified within existing literature, but there are no hypotheses to be proved or disproved. This type of qualitative and open strategy to building a theory lends itself to an inductive approach. An inductive approach allows for a more flexible framework which offers the luxury of reshaping the research focus in the future. Information will be gathered through semi-structured interviews, which will be a more conversational and flexible information gathering method. This also allows greater flexibility around the research question and the focus of the study; characteristics that align with an inductive research approach.

In contrast to the inductive research approach is a deductive approach. A deductive research approach is concerned with the developing of hypotheses through assessing

literature or data and then setting out to prove or disprove these hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 146). While a deductive approach can take on qualitative research, it typically lends itself more to quantitative. Given the fact that this study is not setting out to prove any hypotheses or collective quantitative data, it was decided that an inductive research approach will be more suited.

3.2.3 Research Strategy

As mentioned previously, the research strategy for this dissertation is a qualitative research design and Saunders describes the strategy as the plan of action to achieve the research goal (2015, p.169). The strategy is the link between the research philosophy and the methods used for data collection and analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that it is not concerned with numbers and figures but rather language and interpretation. Data collection is most commonly conducted through interviews, focus groups or observations.

The research strategy being adopted for this dissertation is a mono method qualitative study, meaning that it will use a single data collection technique; semi-structured interviews. As mentioned previously, the target population, or interviewees, for this research will be qualified school librarians. The semi-structured interview approach offers a number of advantages in comparison to the structured approach. A semi-structured interview allows for more flexibility giving the potential to return far richer information from the interviewee. Another advantage is the potential to discover information or perspectives that the researcher may have otherwise not considered. This type of information gathering through conversational semi-structured approach is what Saunders et al refer to as narrative inquiry (2015, p. 197). The respondents answering the questions and offering their perspectives

through narratives; giving insights into their role as school librarians in their respective schools and their approach and perspective of IL within their schools. These factors are encompassed by the exploratory nature of the research and are the rationale for the chosen research strategy.

3.2.4 Time Horizon

A key consideration when conducting the research is whether to carry out a cross-sectional study or take a more longitudinal approach. A cross-sectional study is a 'snapshot' taken at a particular time while a longitudinal study is more a series of snapshots over a more extended timeline (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 200). Saunders et al liken a longitudinal study to that of a diary, certain perspectives over an extended period of time. Given this study is focusing on the current role of school librarians in post-primary schools and investigating if IL instruction currently takes place, this is a 'snapshot' of the situation at the current time. Therefore, this study is a cross-sectional one, being more suited to the limited time-frame. A longitudinal study is not feasible for a study that is carried out over the space of three months. Longitudinal studies are carried out to investigate a change or development over an extended period of time, not a snapshot of a particular time.

3.3 Data Collection

It has been mentioned several times that the data collection will be carried out through the medium of semi-structured interviews. A list of questions can be found in the appendices and will set the foundation for the interviews. The difference between structured and semi-structured is the level of flexibility allowed when conducting the interview. It is important to note again that this allows the researcher to discover information that may not have been

considered and allows the researcher to probe further, enhancing the richness of the information that is gathered. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of themes and some key questions to be covered (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 394). In furtherance, each interview can vary, however the same themes and research questions should form the core of each interview.

The preferred method of conducting the interviews is face-to-face rather than over the phone or internet. Face-to-face interviews are regarded as the 'gold standard' of qualitative research methods as researchers believe it allows them to get a better understanding of their respondents and gauge their non-verbal communication; body language or eye contact for example (Redlich-Amirav and Higginbottom, 2014). The school librarians participating in this research have confirmed that face-to-face meetings at their schools will be no problem, especially during the months of June and July. They highlighted, with students on summer holidays, the researcher should have little difficulty in meeting school librarians in their schools as they continue to work throughout the month of June. However, in light of a librarian being unwilling or unable to conduct a face-to-face interview, a phone interview will be the second option. Interviews will be recorded through the mobile phone app 'Cogi' and then transcribed shortly after the interview. With the interviews being conducted in June while students are off and the target population located in the Dublin area, this minimises the level of difficulty that could be faced when collecting data.

3.3.1 Sampling – Selecting Respondents

As stated, the target population for this study is seven school librarians from secondary schools located in the Dublin area; three from DEIS secondary schools and four from fee-paying schools. A non-probability purposive sampling approach will be used. Purposive

sampling involves the use of the researcher's judgement to select cases that will best answer the research questions (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 301). For this study seven school libraries around the Dublin area have been selected as the target population and this also involves factors of convenience and availability. Contact was made with all school librarians through email. Email addresses were either attained from school websites or received from school administrators on request. An email was also sent out on the behalf of the researcher to all the members of the School Librarian Association in Republic of Ireland (SLARI); this resulted in three school librarians contacting the researcher. Another email sent on the behalf of the researcher was sent out to Academic & Special Libraries (ASL) mailing list and this resulted in the seventh and final librarian's participation in the study.

The use of a 'snowball' method of attaining more respondents was attempted but this was unsuccessful in securing any further school librarians' engagement. The limitations to purposive sampling will be discussed further in the limitations section. Face-to-face interviews were arranged with five of the seven school librarians; three taking place in their school library and two taking place in Dublin Business School. Due to difficulties in meeting face-to-face the final two interviews were conducted over the phone.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

As stated, the smart phone application 'Cogi' was used to record the face-to-face interviews and 'Boldbeast Recorder' was used to record the phone calls. Interviews were then transcribed within forty-eight hours of the interview being carried out. The philosophy of qualitative data has been discussed previously and its subjective nature; analysing the narrative of the respondents in the context of their experiences and environment; or schools, in this case. Saunders et al highlight the difficulty in analysing qualitative data

(2015, p. 572). As it is based on words and not numbers, and words can have different meanings, great care and time must be given to the analysis of the interviews. Once they were transcribed the researcher identified the key themes that emerged throughout the interviews and coded them accordingly. This coding was carried out to ensure effective analysis and to ensure no vital information was omitted from the findings. Being mindful that there is a comparison angle incorporated to the research, this was taken into consideration throughout the process of analysis. After the first draft of analysis was completed and the main themes were identified, this produced fourteen themes. The process of analysis was completed until the themes are condensed into the primary three or four, with sub-themes included within these. This process of recognising relationships and developing the categories is key for when it comes to presenting the findings.

3.5 Research Ethics

Research entails gathering of data from people about people and so it is key that the ethical implications of a study are taken into consideration (Punch, 2005 cited in Creswell, 2013 p. 92). As Saunders et al state, the majority of ethical issues can be foreseen and handled during the design phase of a research project (2015, p. 249). Consideration to the ethical implications of this research proposal have been considered and there are no anticipated issues in the conducting of this research. All participants of the research process will be willing candidates themselves and no incentives shall be offered in order to coax participation. Participants will not be put under any pressure to engage with the research. A copy of the main discussion themes and general questions will be forwarded to all participants prior to conducting interviews so each respondent is comfortable with the line of questioning and topics being discussed. Permission to record interviews will be secured

prior to the interview with all respondents. There are no issues anticipated on the matter of recording the interview, but should an interviewee refuse, notes will be taken throughout to ensure accuracy. This is not expected to be an issue as confidentiality of each participant will be assured prior to beginning the interview. Saunders et al include a number of checklists that can be completed to ensure ethical conduct through the research process (2015, pp. 246-261). No issues arose while completing these various checklists.

3.6 Limitations of Methodology

The most prevalent limitation of the research methodology is the sampling size of the target population. The purposive sampling strategy being used has a low likelihood of being a strong representation of all school libraries and school librarians (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 301). This low likelihood of representation is due to the purposive strategy as well as the low number of respondents being interviewed. Moreover, it cannot be considered a strong representation of secondary schools across Ireland as the vast majority of secondary schools have neither a library nor a school librarian. This limitation could be tackled in future research by expanding the sample size to incorporate a greater number of school librarians. A mixed method approach of qualitative (semi-structured interviews) and a quantitative (questionnaires) could have the potential of reaching a greater sample size and minimising the effects of this limitation. Aside from the small sampling size there are no other anticipated limitations at this early stage. Securing willing respondents is not expected to present any difficulties. Nor is meeting respondents face-to-face expected to pose many difficulties given the limited geographical size of the sample.

3.7 Conclusion

While the school librarians being interviewed are all coming from a secondary school context, the information gathered in the DEIS and fee-paying schools is expected to differ greatly. Along with the information gathered about each individual school and librarian, there is a richness in the contrast between the two different types of schools. It is the aim of this research to give a rich insight into how IL classes are being delivered to students in DEIS and fee-paying secondary schools. As an area currently uncharted by Irish researchers it is hoped that the information gathered can add value to the debate around the issues of IL in Irish education.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the role of school librarians within the context of Irish post-primary schools, focusing on DEIS and fee-paying schools. Also being investigated is the awareness and teaching of IL on the part of the librarians and their respective schools. Finally, a compare and contrast of the DEIS versus fee-paying schools will be carried out based on the below findings.

The focus of this chapter is to present the findings of the semi-structured interviews with the seven school librarians that took part in the study. The following findings were elicited through the interviews. While the interviews were carried out in a conversational and semi-structured manner the main research questions were at the core of each interview. These were as follows:

- What are the main responsibilities of the school librarian?
- From where does the school librarian receive their direction?
- What is the standard of information seeking behaviour of students within the school?
- Is IL on the radar for the school librarian and teachers?
- Is the school librarian involved in the delivery of IL classes?

To ensure the anonymity of the respondents their names or schools will not be used and instead will be given codes which will also indicate whether they are from DEIS or fee-paying Schools.

DEIS (JCSP) School Librarians:

D1

D2

D3

Fee-paying School Librarians

FP1

FP4

FP2

FP4

The sample size of this study must be taken into consideration and acknowledgment must be made that given the small sample taken, this study cannot be taken to draw conclusions for all post-primary schools across Ireland. Rather the findings provide a snapshot of the roles of school librarians within post-primary schools that participated in the study and the perception and delivery of IL skills in these schools. In furtherance, a detailed analysis of the findings is carried out in chapter five.

4.2 Role of the School Librarian

The role of the school librarians varied greatly between the DEIS and the fee-paying schools. The JCSP librarians in the DEIS schools were far more prescribed in their responsibilities in comparison to that of their fee-paying counterparts. All of the JCSP librarians stated that promoting literacy and numeracy were their primary responsibilities. DS1 stated that literacy development within the school as the primary goal given the fact that literacy levels are quite low in DEIS schools. All three JCSP librarians stated that first to third year students were their primary focus as junior cert students are what the JCSP Library Demonstration Project was introduced to target. In spite of this, the three JCSP librarians stated that they would find themselves dealing with students outside their JCSP classes. Each of these librarians went on to mention several initiatives that they would implement for students including 'drop everything and read', 'accelerated reader' or 'book in the bag'. While some of these initiatives were set-out by the JCSP Project, librarians highlighted that they would have a large level of autonomy in their role to develop initiatives for improving literacy levels. One notion that was reiterated by all librarians was the idea that there was no 'one size fits all', when it comes to approaches for school librarians. DS3 highlighted that each school has their own requirements and just because a project ran successfully in one school, doesn't necessarily mean it will be effective in the next.

The role of the school librarians in the fee-paying schools varied as much between themselves as they did with that of the JCSP cohort. Interviewees FP1, FP3 and FP4 stated that promoting the library was one of their main responsibilities within their school. FP1 and FP3 in particular went into depth about marketing the value of the library through social

media, erecting posters around the school as well as engaging in community outreach. As FP1 stated:

“Making posters, having a book sale... having all these community links. There is a lot of marketing. The whole time is to get people engaged with the library.” (FP1)

Another marketing strategy that was mentioned by FP1 and FP3 was the creation of library newsletters with the aim of getting students, teachers and parents more engaged with the school library. It was uncovered in the opening stages of the interviews that promoting a reading culture within the school fell within the realm of the majority of the school librarians. All of the fee-paying school librarians stated that they have a huge amount of anonymity in their roles and have very little by way of directives to follow. All the fee-paying librarians were asked about where their directives come from and their responses were as follows:

“No, I did it myself. I’m the type of person, there is no way, I could see as soon as I walked in.” (FP1)

“There aren’t any... off you go.” (FP2)

“I was given the library and a blank slate, and off you go.” (FP3)

“There are no standards or directives...was brought in to manage the library and basically given a blank slate.” (FP4)

These quotes illustrate the level of anonymity fee-paying school librarians enjoy and the level of control they have in developing their own roles within the school.

4.2.1 Ambiguity Around the Role

The interviews found that there was no ambiguity on the part of the school librarians that participated in this study. JCSP librarians have a clear remit within their schools and have focused goals that they set out for themselves. All JCSP librarians were clear in their role within the school, confirming that their role within the school was to promote the literacy and numeracy of students. They were very clear in their answers, stating they were there to support the teachers in improving literacy levels. Each JCSP librarian has a full timetable of classes to this effect, primarily targeting first to third year JCSP students. Some ambiguity existed in relation to whether they perceived themselves to be teachers, school librarians or both. However, as DS1 highlighted, they are not there to teach the curriculum but rather there to support it.

Clarity of the role was also evident amongst the fee-paying cohort. The interviewees were confident about their role within the school and the value that they brought. FP2 highlighted the fact that Irish school librarians are all professionally qualified librarians and that they know exactly what they are doing.

“So we [school librarians] know what we’re doing. We know about stock, attracting readers, managing the physical resources in the library, stock selection, all of that. That’s what we are trained to do.” (FP2)

Similar to the JCSP librarians, contrast amongst the fee-paying librarians did emerge on the matter of whether they perceived themselves as teachers. Responses varied from ‘certainly being a teacher’ (FP1), to ‘being a type of teacher’ (FP4) and then completely disregarding any notion of being a teacher (FP3). Common ground between all four fee-paying librarians

came with each of them confirming that they have an educational role within the school.

The findings from these interviews illustrate that the participants of this study have no ambiguity about their role within their schools.

4.3 Within the Institution

The following section is going to focus more closely on the school librarians within their respective institutions. This will include the findings that show the level of collaboration that exists between the school librarians and teachers, their approach to the library – in terms of strategy, reporting and planning and finally how the school librarians are perceived within their individual institutions. The following are the main questions that were asked in interviews in order to illicit these findings:

- To what extent does collaboration exist with teachers or school management?
- Do you find teachers to be territorial?
- Does the library have a strategic plan?
- Are you expected to generate reports for management?
- Does the school see the value of the school library?

4.3.1 Collaboration

Collaboration with teachers was a huge bone of contention for some school librarians while others enjoyed quite effective professional relationships within their schools. There were no parallels to be found between the school librarians from the two different institution types, each school being subjective. Overall JCSP librarians appear to have a more harmonious relationship with teachers in comparison to the fee-paying school librarians. One common

theme that surfaced from all interviews was the fact that effective collaboration with teachers was quite subjective and varied from teacher to teacher. Most librarians did give an overall view about the level of collaboration within the school.

As stated previously, the key focus of the JCSP librarians is to support the teachers in the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills and as a result, JCSP librarians reported successful collaboration taking place. DS1 emphasised the importance of the relationship between teacher and librarian, if the librarian is to have any worthwhile impact. DS1 went on to state how pointless the school librarian's classes are if they are not matched with what the teacher is covering in class. Communication and collaboration being described as key to the efficacy of literacy and numeracy classes within DEIS schools. Going on, it was pointed out that while the curriculum is not taught by the school librarian, their classes must complement it. When it comes to the preparation and development of classes, there did not appear to be much collaboration taking place between the school librarian and teachers. When asked, DS1 stated that they would generally develop a programme first and then approach the relevant teacher for some input afterwards. DS2 also confirmed that the efficacy of their role within the school is determined by successful collaboration with teachers. DS2 stated that initially there is some apprehension on the part of the teachers, however, once trust is built the majority of teachers come around. The necessity of trust-building was raised by the majority of interviewees, stating that it can take a while for teachers to 'come around' to the library and the value it can add.

Stressing the importance of collaboration with teachers was not as evident amongst the fee-paying librarian cohort. Overall, this cohort of school librarians tended to operate more independently from teachers. However, it was clear when it comes to teaching students IL, the fee-paying librarians placed a large emphasis on effective collaboration with teachers. The bone of contention regarding collaboration with teachers was evident from the fee-paying cohort. FP1 was the most optimistic of this group when it came to collaborating with teachers, highlighting effective collaboration's importance in order to maximise the impact of the school librarian within the school. FP1 did not play the supporting role as seen with JCSP Librarians, but rather collaborated with teachers in more of a marketing sense. Getting teachers engaged with the library was more their approach; through competitions, posters and managing the school blog, which constituted close relationships with teachers. FP1 also confirmed that teachers were sceptical of the library and the school librarian initially, but they eventually came around and seen the value it offers.

FP2 was quite critical of collaboration with teachers within their institution. While the value of collaboration between teachers and librarians was acknowledged, FP2 stated that teachers could be uncompromising and unwilling to deviate from the curriculum unless instructed to by the Department of Education. The territoriality of teachers is something FP2 emphasised, something all other interviewees confirm to some extent. FP2 went on to state that territoriality of teachers could potentially hinder the school librarian's ability to get more involved in teaching students, stating:

"Yes, they are extremely territorial, they would often see you as a threat." (FP2)

This is a point extended by FP4, a school librarian who experienced little or no collaboration with teachers. In regards to designing classes for IL, FP4 stated that there is no collaboration between the school librarian and teachers, as teachers generally have no interest in IL.

Going on, FP4 commented how teachers rarely look for input from the school librarian, who they view as a form of support staff along with administration. This point will be discussed further in the 'perception of the school librarian' section.

It is clear from the interviews that no formal communication exists between the school library and the teachers. There is no forum for collaboration between these professionals and in some cases, there is very little collaboration at all. The general consensus that emerged from the interviewees is that collaboration is easier with some subjects in comparison to others. All interviewees mentioned a relationship with the history teacher in their respective schools, and collaboration with the English teacher was also mentioned several times. Another common theme from all interviews was that successful collaboration rested on the shoulders of the school librarian. All respondents highlighted the importance of being proactive and having to reach out to teachers and chase them down. There is no onus on teachers to engage with the library and some don't. DS3 stated the following when asked about this:

"People will tend not to come in unless you put yourself out there, you have to be sociable. You are totally on your own, you're the one unique individual in the school, in this room that people don't have to come into unless they don't want to." (DS3)

In terms of collaboration between the school librarians themselves, this seems to exist informally between the JCSP librarians and sparingly amongst the fee-paying cohort. JCSP librarians stated that they would often email out feedback about what programmes worked

within their classes or what did not work. This was done informally through email and again there did not appear to be an official forum for formal communication. DS1 stated that the JCSP librarians hold two to three meetings a year where they can share ideas, but this appears to be the extent of current collaboration. The Fee-paying librarians stated that they could occasionally email other colleagues from fee-paying schools, but again no formal method of communication exists. DS1 was unaware of any collaboration between JCSP and fee-paying librarians.

4.3.2 Strategic Planning and Reporting

Of the seven school libraries involved in this study, none of the libraries had their own strategic plan. When asked, JCSP librarians confirmed their libraries did not have a strategic plan and the follow up responses varied. DS3 stated that each JCSP library should have a development plan that is drawn up each year and is incorporated into their annual report. DS3 also highlighted that the school would have a DEIS Plan, which typically runs for three years, and each of the JCSP librarians would feed into and support this. DS2 also stated that the school library did not have a strategic plan but went on to state that the library should have one, recognising the value of one.

The fee-paying librarians also confirmed that their libraries did not have a strategic plan in place. Similar to DS2, the fee-paying school librarians recognised the value of a strategic plan for the library despite the absence of one. FP3 was asked to draw up a five-year development plan for the library initially when appointed to the position, however this never came to fruition. When asked if the school had a strategic plan, FP3 and FP4 confirmed that their school did, however they were unsure if the library featured in it or not. Both surmised it may feature indirectly in some way.

All the school librarians, with the exception of one, confirmed they generate reports for the school principal and /or board of management. Beginning with the JCSP librarians, as part of their role, they are required to generate a monthly report and annual report for senior management. These reports detail the progression of the JCSP students, or the lack thereof. DS1 stated that these reports also dictate their plans for promoting literacy and numeracy levels of students. DS3 stated that JCSP Librarians are also expected to generate financial reports to account for everything they do.

Fee-paying school librarians do not have the same onus on them when it comes to generating reports. Only one of the four interviewees from fee-paying schools stated that they are expected to generate an annual report by management. FP3 confirmed they were asked by the school principal to generate a report which is delivered to the board of management. FP3 goes on to emphasise how the report is used to demonstrate the value of the school library. Both FP1 and FP2 also generate reports for much the same reason, however these librarians do it on their own initiative. FP2 highlights how there is no expectation for them to generate any reports, stating the following:

“Basically I can do what I like here, there is no standard or guideline. I don’t meet or have to meet any school management. I do send out an annual report to account for my activities every year; I don’t have to do that; I choose to do that.” (FP2)

The above is a sentiment that is also conveyed by FP1 who submits reports without being directed to. While they are important in terms of illustrating the value the library brings to the school, FP1 highlights that their reports are not very detailed, commenting how they have not reached that level of evidence within the library as of yet. Generating reports was a task FP4 used to carry out, however, as there is no longer an expectation to do so, they

ceased. In spite of this, FP4 recognises the value of reporting for libraries and making the library's value explicit to others.

4.3.3 Perception of the School Librarian

The perception of the school librarian within their institution, similar to other themes, varies from institution to institution. For this section, interviewees were asked how they felt they were perceived by teachers and management within their respective schools. As the role of the school librarian is made more explicit in the DEIS Schools, the perception of the school librarian also seems to be more positive amongst teachers and management within these institutions. In terms of collaboration, it was mentioned earlier that there tended to be scepticism around the initial introduction of a school librarian to the school. DS1 states the following to this effect:

“People will think money could be spent better. When I started, some teachers felt we should have had a PE hall and not a library. There wasn't funding for a PE hall but there was for a library. Some people don't like the idea, some do and some fall in between. And you just work with those who are willing to work with you.” (DS1)

Again the scepticism surrounding a school librarian is evident from the above, but DS1 goes on to state that eventually teachers come around to the library and the school librarian. DS1 draws attention to the fact that within the library, teachers have access to increased resources and once they realise that, they warm to the idea of bringing their students into the library. DS1 also emphasises that school librarians come with an additional budget, which reinforces their value add. This is a point made by DS2 and DS3 also. Overall DS1 states that as a school librarian they are looked upon favourably within the school and the value of the school library is recognised. This sentiment is echoed by all the JCSP librarians.

All JCSP librarians also stated that younger teachers who have recently graduated would have a more positive outlook of the library and are more likely to get engaged with their students. Building trust was identified as an important aspect of developing a positive perception of the library within the school. DS2 stating:

“I mean it does take a while, and initially they don’t know what kind of creature you are. I don’t think we give any extra work to anyone, they see us as being supportive and we provide a lot of resources and we do provide a budget.” (DS2)

Overall the JCSP librarians all reported a positive perception of both themselves and the school library within their institutions, coming from the students, teachers and management. All the JCSP librarians agree that they are seen as and treated like teachers within their institutions. When asked, none of the JCSP librarians reported their library being used for detention or that the librarian was viewed as a supervisor or child minder. Fee-paying school librarians did not share these positive sentiments.

“They treat the library as a day-care centre”, was the response from FP4 when asked how teachers perceived the school library. FP4 stated that teachers would see the librarian as having an administrative or supporting role, going on to state that they do not see the librarian as a qualified professional. FP4 commented that the photocopier was removed from the library to deter teachers asking for photocopying tasks to be carried out by the librarian. This was caveated with the point that teachers would more than likely not do this out of malice, but rather a misunderstanding about the role of the school librarian.

Overcoming the initial scepticism was an issue faced by the majority of interviewees and FP1 emphasised that on joining their institution, teachers were not even using the library. FP1 went on to emphasise the importance of building trust and confirmed that there is now

a positive perception of the library after a great deal of marketing and outreach strategies were implemented. Along with the JCSP Librarians, being perceived as a teacher within the eyes of the school, was also something FP1 confirmed.

Dealing with the librarian stereotype was an issue raised in most interviews and overcoming these stereotypes was gauged as being an important task for school librarians to combat.

Making a general comment about school librarians in Ireland, FP2 described the perception as the following:

“Yea the whole idea of sitting around, eating chocolates and reading Hello magazine...” (FP2)

FP2 was quite critical of how the school librarian was perceived within the institution.

Similarly, to FP4, the perception of the school librarian (FP2) is likened to that of one of the administrative staff, and not seen as a qualified professional. FP3 confirmed a positive perception of the school librarian existing within their school, going on to state that the school principal sees the value of the library and doesn't want it to be used as a dumping ground by teachers.

“Now there are some teachers that consider it a child minding service but overall the school is quite good. I'm very particular about that, the school has a library and it should always have a positive outlook to it as well.” (FP3)

The perception of the JCSP librarians within their schools was seen to be more positive and inclusive within the educational environment compared to the responses from the school librarians in fee-paying schools. There appears to be a greater understanding of the school librarian's function within DEIS schools which results in the positive view of the school library from teachers and management. As seen, this is generally not the case within fee-paying institutions where the perception of the school librarian is more critical. However, as

FP4 highlighted, this is more than likely due to a misunderstanding rather than any form of malice held against school librarians. The following section will present the findings related to IL within the schools, the information seeking behaviour of students and the awareness of IL amongst teachers.

4.4 Information Literacy

As stated in the literature review, IL has been shown to be the remit of the librarians within third-level institutions as well as the remit of the school librarians at second-level in some English-speaking countries. In light of this, interviewees were questioned about their approach to IL and its level of existence within their schools. Examples of the questions are as follows:

- Are IL skills taught within the school?
- Is IL on your radar? On the school's radar?
- Are classes embedded or delivered on an ad hoc basis?
- Is there an awareness of IL amongst teachers?
- How would you describe the information seeking behaviour of students?

These questions formed the core of the interviews and were expanded upon as the interview dictated. Responses varied between the interviewees and it was clear that the existence of IL skill instruction depended greatly on the approach adopted by the individual school librarian.

4.4.1 School Librarian and IL

The development of basic literacy and numeracy skills were explicitly presented as the remit of the JCSP librarians. All of the interviewees confirmed their own awareness of IL, however

not all were implementing it within their schools. None of the JCSP librarians participating in this study were delivering dedicated IL classes, however it became evident that information skills were something they were all knowingly or unknowingly teaching in some capacity. DS2 for example, stated that teaching IL was something they were aware of and should be doing more of. However, as the interview progressed it became evident that information skills were being taught within their JCSP classes. These came in the form of showing students how to search a library catalogue, use the index at the back of a book or find reliable sources of information online; all of which are considered information skills. This was common ground for all the JCSP librarians, while they might not have had dedicated IL classes, they were teaching information skills nonetheless.

Fee-paying school librarians also expressed an awareness of IL and the delivery of classes varied from school to school. One common thread raised by these librarians was the fact that getting IL classes introduced to the school entirely depended on the relentless pursuit of such by the librarians themselves. All of the fee-paying school librarians that were interviewed stated that they had developed IL programmes and proposed them to their school. The level of success varied. FP1, after years of pressing school management, had introduced formal IL classes to all years; first year through sixth year. FP1 described it was a drawn out process, beginning with one class delivered on an ad hoc basis and further developing it from there. This was a similar result from the interview with FP2 who stated that it took years for any kind of change to take place. FP2 delivers IL classes to Transition Year students as a formal eight-week programme. FP3 and FP4 have no formal IL classes. Both librarians stated that they usually wait for students to approach them and deliver one-on-one sessions in a completely ad hoc basis.

The primary obstacle school libraries reported in successfully implementing IL classes was not an indifference from school management but rather logistical constraints to accommodate the classes. All librarians pointed out that their school management seen the value in IL classes, however many lacked the timetabling capabilities to run the classes. JCSP librarians, who already have a full timetable would not have the scope to implement classes as much as their fee-paying colleagues. FP3 stated that they have developed a ten-week IL programme which is simply waiting for a timetable slot to come available. Three of the four fee-paying school librarians use the school library website for information skills training documents, however these are unmonitored, so efficacy of the sheets is unknown. All interviewees were asked if IL should be taught by the school librarian, the teacher or both. Interviewee responses were varied, however all agreed that school librarians must play a role. Some responses were as follows:

“The librarian, because that is what we are trained to do. Teachers are not trained to teach IL.” (FP2)

“I would always say both. Even though I am not a teacher it is a professional partnership between the teacher and the librarian.” (DS3)

The majority of interviewees stated that IL should be taught by both, with six out of seven respondents stating that collaboration between school librarians and teachers delivering embedded IL classes was key to the success and efficacy of the instruction. The consensus was that IL classes delivered on an ad hoc basis had little impact with the students, quickly reverting back to old practices if IL wasn't reinforced in the classroom by teachers.

4.4.2 Teachers and IL

Two of three JCSP librarians reported that teachers were aware of IL, however as DS3 stated, they don't use the term IL, instead using terms research skills or information management. All school librarians reported an awareness on the part of history teachers, as leaving certificate students must complete a research project as part of their final leaving certificate exam. Another point raised by all school librarians was the new Junior Cycle and its role in increasing the awareness of IL amongst teachers and students. Managing Information is a key skill as part of the new Junior Cycle and incorporates aspects of IL and digital literacy. Outlooks differed amongst interviewees about the plight of IL within Irish secondary schools, some school librarians being optimistic, whereas some were less enthusiastic about the future of IL in second level education. FP1 for example was very optimistic, pointing out that:

"The Junior Cycle is putting it on the map. You have English for example now. And you also have to have a digital portfolio – so they have to understand how to research stuff." (FP1)

In contrast to FP1's optimism, FP2 and FP4 stated that teachers in their institutions have no interest in getting involved with IL. When asked if FP2 was optimistic for IL in the future, the response was simple:

"No!" (FP2)

JCSP librarians erred more on the side of optimism highlighting the changes that the new junior cycle would bring and that with it would come an increased awareness of IL within secondary schools. Again similar to past findings, the awareness of IL differed with each teacher. Overall the only consensus was that awareness of IL amongst teachers varied and there was little or no IL instruction coming from the teachers themselves.

4.4.3 Information Seeking Behaviour of Students

The findings from the interviews on the information seeking behaviour of students was unanimous, Irish secondary school students have extremely poor information seeking habits. All school librarians highlighted issues such as plagiarism, students not looking beyond the first result when carrying out a Google search and a lacking of critical thought when looking for information. The majority of interviewees brought up students' predilection for Wikipedia combined with a tendency to simply copy and paste whatever information they gather regardless of source. Some of the responses illustrating this were as follows:

"Oh God. It's poor. They never look beyond the first two things that come up..." (DS1)

"Poor, very poor. Putting things in their own words is a big problem for them. And assessing the quality of the information they find as well. Finding good sources, they seem to trust anything." (DS2)

"I brought them to the library and told them to go and find a book, they couldn't do it..." (FP1)

"...and they haven't a clue. They're like sheep in headlights." (FP2)

All of the school librarians recognised the fact that students are entering third level education without being adequately equipped with the necessary skills to carry out academic writing, work independently or even find a book in the library. Steps were being taken by some school librarians. FP1 for example brings classes to local public libraries and shows students how to find books in the catalogue. Teaching students how to find reputable sources of information online as well as basic referencing skills were some of the activities mentioned by respondents in order to ease students' transition from second to third level education.

Chapter five will discuss and analyse the above findings in the context of the literature as well as discussing the similarities and differences found between DEIS and fee-paying schools.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

While chapter four presented the findings of the qualitative research, chapter five will carry out a more in depth analysis, setting out to answer the research questions that were developed at the start of the study. The analysis throughout this chapter will relate back to the literature review with comparisons being made with this study's findings. In addition to this, chapter five will discuss the limitations of the study which can be taken into account for any future research focusing on Irish school librarians.

5.2 Role of the School Librarian

As stated in the literature review there is a dearth of research focusing on Irish school librarians and so parallels have had to be made with school librarians from other countries. UNESCO's (2000) grandiose statement on the purpose of the school library as a fundamental contributor to the development of students and preparing them not only for school testing but as successful participants of today's knowledge based economy, was a sentiment corroborated by all the school librarians interviewed for this study. While an argument could be made that school librarians are going to be biased in favouring their own existence within secondary education, the work they are carrying out and the value they are bringing to their students reinforce these claims. This is the case for both the JCSP librarians and the fee-paying librarians. DS1 reported that 95% of students engaging with the library show marked levels of improvement, going on to state that the only reason 100% of JCSP students don't improve is that they are not present in school, given the disadvantaged environments

they come from. This fact that libraries positively impact student's academic capabilities has been made in countless studies (Stone and Ramsden, 2013; Hughes, 2014; Wheeler and McKinney, 2015). Anecdotally, JCSP librarians have stated how students are increasingly engaging in reading for enjoyment, coming to the library to study, do homework or just read a book. These points illustrate that while UNESCO's manifesto on school libraries may be grandiose, but the results are evident on the ground where school libraries exist.

5.2.1 Ambiguity around the role

Lonsdale and Armstrong (2006) strongly argued in their study that school librarians lack a basic understanding of their role, going as far as to state that they have little impact on the education of their students. This level of ambiguity around the role of the school librarian was also raised in other studies, albeit without the same overly critical slant that was proposed by Lonsdale and Armstrong (Shyh-Mee et al., 2015; McKeever, 2013; Andretta et al., 2008). The findings of this study completely contrast with the results of the literature review. All of this study's participants had a clear perception of their role within their respective institutions. While some of the roles varied between interviewees, each respondent was confident in their purpose and role within their school. Reasons for this contrast with the results of the literature review could be numerous, however one primary cause for this is that all of the school librarians that participated in this study were fully qualified, in that they held a library qualification. In Shyh-Mee et al's study it was pointed out that a number of the school librarians that participated in the research held no library qualification at all (2015). The lack of qualifications could explain why some individuals are ambiguous about their role in their school. Caution must be taken when drawing comparisons here as this study was carried out in Malaysia, so drawing parallels with the

Irish education system must be done so tentatively. Taking this into consideration, the lack of library qualifications could still explain the level of uncertainty that some school librarians harbour about their role.

Any ambiguity that did exist amongst respondents of this study was more within the domain of the school librarians from fee-paying schools than that of the JCSP librarians. School librarians from fee-paying schools were far less prescribed in their responsibilities and have far more autonomy in forging their roles within their institutions. As FP2 highlighted, this should not be viewed with judgement or scepticism as school librarians are qualified and experienced; stating that they know how to do their jobs. It could be argued that while this may be the case for more established and experienced school librarians, newly appointed librarians have very little direction or standards to follow from a national level. This level of anonymity which all fee-paying school librarians confirmed, could potentially lead to some ambiguity as witnessed from the literature review, however none surfaced from the research carried out in this study. JCSP librarians also reported a level of anonymity within their roles, particularly when it came to developing student activities and programmes. Again, this was viewed as a positive by all JCSP librarians as it gave them creative freedom. Another point highlighted by JCSP librarians was that there is not a 'one size fits all' programme for students or schools. Each school has their own demands and in effect, a national framework for school librarians to adhere to could potentially be detrimental to their efficacy.

Andretta et al. (2008) argued that teacher territoriality had a negative impact on school librarian's role within the school environment. The interviewees of this study all agreed that

teachers could be territorial at varying levels, however only one librarian (FP4) viewed it as having a negative impact upon their role. Teacher territoriality was not an issue raised by JCSP librarians in terms of their role as educators, which again could be as a result of the clear purpose and role in the school. Again, fee-paying school librarians were more susceptible to territorial flexing of teachers, with FP2 stating that territoriality of teachers directly hinders the school librarian's ability to get more involved with teaching students. A possible remedy to this could be school management putting a greater emphasis on the value of engaging with the school library. However, this is reliant on two factors; school management themselves seeing the value of the library and secondly, teachers following these directions. School management at FP4's school directed teachers to bring their classes to the library at least six times throughout the year, however, this was simply ignored by the majority of teachers and was not followed up by management. Overall, the respondents of this study were confident in the role they played within their schools and there was very little uncertainty amongst them, particularly amongst JCSP librarians. One parallel that can be drawn with the literature on this section is the fact that any apprehension that did exist was largely influenced by external factors, and not any ambiguity on the school librarians themselves.

5.3 Teacher Librarian

The Teacher Librarian of Australia and the United States is an individual that holds both teaching and library qualifications (ASLA, 2014; AASL, 2016). This differs to the Irish school librarian in that the requirement is to hold a library qualification, not both library and teaching qualifications. The remit of the Australian teacher librarian is to teach IL skills to students. This is due to the fact that Australia has a national framework for IL and has

incorporated IL instruction into the school curriculum (Bundy, 2004). This is in stark contrast to the Irish context where no national framework exists and there is no onus on secondary schools to teach IL. The United States on the other hand has ratified the job title 'School Librarian' in order to combat the various iterations of the title that emerged in the past number of years. The US School Librarian is more focused on basic literacy and numeracy skills which largely parallels that of the Irish JCSP librarians. One thing lacking in the Irish context is a national directive for school librarians. They are completely overlooked by the Department of Education, a fact that Irish school librarians are immensely conscious of. While JCSP librarians mirror the US school librarian, Irish fee-paying school librarians fall somewhere in between their Australian and US counterparts. While promoting a reading culture within the school along with the development of literacy levels is their remit, they also dabble in IL instruction; vying for the implementation of IL classes with varying degrees of success.

Herein lies the difference that exists between Irish school librarians; namely the JCSP librarians and fee-paying librarians. The three JCSP librarians reported very similar roles within their schools while even though only four fee-paying school librarians participated in this study, their four roles varied greatly. FP1 was found to be extremely IT focused and driven; all the while strongly campaigning for IL classes to be introduced. On the other hand, FP3 was passionate about developing a reading culture within the school, marketing the library as a haven for students away from the curriculum while creating an engaging library environment. While the literature lent towards a critical view of school librarians, operating without a national framework or any recognition, Irish school librarians are carrying out stellar work and bringing a huge value to their students.

5.4 Collaboration

Analysis of the literature focusing on collaboration between teachers and school librarians was largely based around the teaching of IL. The consensus is that effective collaboration between teachers and school librarians is key to the efficacy of IL instruction (Andretta et al., 2008; Streatfield et al, 2011; Sisk, 2016). This notion was also raised by the interviewees of this study, and not just for teaching IL. JCSP librarians, who hold self-described teaching support roles, commented that effective collaboration with teachers was crucial to ensure effective literacy and numeracy lessons took place. While it was highlighted that collaboration was not always a smooth partnership, there was an agreement that the efficacy of the school librarian's role hinged on successful relationships within the school. Lonsdale and Armstrong argued that lack of collaboration between these professionals had an adverse effect on teaching quality in IL classes (2004; 2006). The research findings of this study reflect these points also. FP4 specifically stated that unless IL classes were embedded and reinforced by teachers, then IL classes were a waste of time; emphasising the point that collaboration between the school librarians and teachers is key.

This research found that the extent of collaboration between teachers and school librarians varied from institution to institution, yet on the whole, JCSP librarians appeared to enjoy a greater level of collaboration in comparison to the fee-paying cohort. An explanation for this is the greater awareness and understanding about the role of the JCSP librarian in comparison to that of the fee-paying librarian. The JCSP librarians have been placed in schools for specific functions that are being made explicit to teaching staff. This can perhaps reduce the potential for teacher's territoriality towards the school librarians, as they should fully understand the librarian's role within the school. This clarity is not present in fee-

paying schools and could explain why fee-paying school librarians reported greater difficulties with collaboration. Teacher territoriality directly impacts the potential for collaboration between school librarians and teachers. As stated previously, territoriality was more prevalent amongst the fee-paying schools and further explains why JCSP librarians appear to have closer partnerships with teaching staff.

The fee-paying school librarian cohort are most reflective of Andretta et al.'s (2008) study in that as a collective, they experience the most difficulty in successfully collaborating with teaching staff. As FP2 highlighted, teachers are benchmarked by the curriculum and there is little incentive or onus to deviate from this. Getting through the curriculum with time to revise before exams is the priority of the teacher, not indulging school librarians and getting involved in IL classes. A point highlighted by all participants was that some subjects lend themselves to the library easier than others. DS1 stated how there are clear overlaps with history lessons for example; the history teacher and school librarian can easily collaborate on a project or develop a research skills lesson for students. The same opportunity is not there for science or PE teachers. The literature states that collaboration is key to successful and effective teaching on the part of the school librarian. This research has found that school librarians feel the same, collaboration is key to their efficacy as educators. However, due to external influences, collaboration is not always taking place, especially for fee-paying school librarians.

5.5 Strategic Planning and Reporting

During interviews school librarians were asked whether their library had a strategic plan, whether their institutions had a strategic plan, as well as being asked about the generation

of reports. None of those school librarians asked implemented a strategic plan for their library.

A strategic plan is used to outline the goals and objectives of a group or institution and gives stakeholders a collective focus toward an end goal. Research shows that a strategic plan can assist school libraries in being more focused and having a greater impact on their school environment (Streatfield et al., 2011; Bikos et al., 2014; Shyh-Mee, 2015). Streatfield et al (2011) found that the school libraries they investigated did not have their own strategic plan. Andretta et al (2008) highlights the importance of taking a strategic approach to delivering IL classes as well as having an overall strategy for the library. Through the interviews for this study, it became evident that Irish school libraries are lacking a strategic plan.

When asked, JCSP librarians stated they did not have a strategic plan for the library but deferred to their institution, stating that each DEIS School would have a three-year DEIS plan that the library would support. Similarly, fee-paying librarians who were asked, stated that they did not have a strategic plan in place for their respective libraries either. FP3 stated that there is no onus on libraries to have a strategic plan and this explains why none were implemented. FP3 went on to state that an attempt had been made to create a strategic plan for their school library, however it was a struggle to develop anything of substance. Aside from FP3, any librarian that was asked if they seen the value in a strategic plan for the library, agreed that it would be beneficial to have one. Therefore, it would appear from the research that Irish school librarians are similar to their overseas counterparts in not having a strategic plan for their library.

Generating reports and illustrating the explicit value a library brings to its institution is growing increasingly important in the twenty-first century (Kelly et al., 2012). In an age of return of investment, it is crucial that libraries illustrate the value add they bring and make clear the impact of their services. In light of this, school librarians were asked whether they generated reports or showcased their value.

Again, JCSP libraries were more prescribed on this front, being required to generate monthly reports, financial reports and an overall annual report. Two of four interviewees from fee-paying schools stated that they generated reports without in fact being directed to. FP2 commented that generating reports is not something that is required by the school librarian but was something they still carried out as it is important to illustrate the value of the school library. Generating reports offers libraries a chance to showcase the different initiatives that take place throughout the year and market the impact they have on the school. This notion of marketing the value of the library was something FP1 and FP3 pursued more than the rest of the interviewees. Both of these interviewees highlighted how their outreach initiatives and library newsletters were methods of illustrating their contribution to the school. While newsletters may reach students and parents, formal reporting would have a greater impression on school boards of management.

5.6 School Librarian and Literacies

It has been pointed out how the remit of the school librarian in English speaking countries is to promote literacy or numeracy levels within their school, delivery of IL skills classes, as well as managing the library space itself. Research has found that school librarians do play a role as educators within secondary level education (Owusu-Ansah, 2005; Lonsdale and Armstrong, 2006; Wheeler and McKinney, 2015). Lonsdale and Armstrong (2006) who have

a highly critical view of school librarians as educators found that school librarians have a tendency to focus on ICT skills rather than IL. They contributed this to the fact that IL is difficult to assess in students and as a result school librarians steer clear, opting for the easier option in ICT instruction. None of the findings in this study reflect that of Lonsdale and Armstrong's research (2006). The opposite was in fact discovered where all of the school librarian interviewees in some way delivered information skills; even on a one-to-one ad hoc basis in some case. In contrast to this, very few of the respondents focused on ICT skills within their schools. FP1 was the only interviewee that delivers classes on ICT skills. While interviewees did agree that it was difficult to assess IL, this did not deter them from delivering classes to students.

It must be acknowledged that Lonsdale and Armstrong's study dates back to 2006. Ten years ago computers and students' use of them may not have been as ubiquitous as it is today. As a result, schools may have put extra emphasis on the teaching of ICT skills which fell on the shoulders of the school librarians. As computers have become more universal, or as Nicholas et al (2011) state, extensions of students themselves, there is less of an onus on schools to train students in their use. It is evident from the interviews conducted for this study that school librarians recognise the importance of IL instruction, yet all interviewees also reported great difficulties in introducing IL classes to their schools.

5.6.1 School Librarian and IL

While it may be the remit of the school librarian, research is quite critical of school librarian's competency to teach IL (Lonsdale and Armstrong, 2006; Lo et al., 2014; Shyh-Mee et al., 2015). Lonsdale and Armstrong explain this is due to a lack of exposure to IL on the part of the school librarians. Shyh-Mee et al (2015) and Lo et al (2014) justify these findings

by showing that the school librarians that participated in their study lacked appropriate qualifications and so also lacked familiarity with IL. None of the above is reflective of the findings from this study. Firstly, all of the interviewees in this study are fully qualified professional librarians who learnt about IL while conducting their studies. In addition to this, quite a number of the respondents were very motivated in their attempts to introduce IL classes for their students.

Shyh-Mee et al (2015) whose study focused on school librarians in Malaysia found that many school librarians were unable to accurately define IL. This again is due to the fact that many of the school librarians that engaged in the study were not qualified professionals. All of the school librarians that engaged in this study confirmed their awareness of IL, having been exposed to it during their own studies. Andretta (2008; 2013) argued that in order to maximise the efficacy of IL instruction, classes need to be embedded into the curriculum. Andretta went on to point out the ineffectual impact IL delivered on an ad hoc basis has and highlighted how integration is key to the success of IL programmes. When raised to interviewees, this point was acknowledged, yet none of the respondents were found to be teaching an embedded IL class to students. The most common method of delivery came in the form of a transition year programme usually lasting for six to eight weeks. This lack of an integrated IL programme is not down to the indifference from school librarians but rather the lack of a national strategy on IL. Couple this with the strain the current curriculum puts on schools and there is no capacity for school librarians or IL programmes. As a result, the majority of information programmes are taught to transition year, if they are being taught at all. The respondents of this study agreed with Andretta, that not embedding IL classes has

limited impact on students, however this is the best they can hope for without a national framework that advocates for embedded IL classes.

5.6.2 Information Seeking Behaviour of Students

Nowadays, when students have an information need their first port of call is the internet; specifically, the search engine Google (Rowlands et al., 2008; Nicholas et al., 2011). A review of the literature assessing the information seeking behaviour of students has shown the notion of the 'digital native' or the 'google generation' as being adept researchers equipped with quality information skills has been debunked. At a time of perpetual generation of information students need to be equipped with the necessary skills to be successful players in this knowledge economy. Skills that Irish students do not have and are not being taught in secondary education (Sheridan and Dunne, 2012). The JCSP librarians and fee-paying school librarians all gave answers that reflect the findings from the literature review. Six of the seven participant librarians stated that students' information seeking behaviour was poor, while the other librarian (FP1) described their behaviour as fair. FP1 went on to state how this was in comparison to the national average, highlighting "*their [students] plagiarism is just horrendous.*" Taking this into account the overall view of school librarians from this study falls in line with the research that students have poor researching skills.

DS1 went into depth discussing this, laying the blame of poor information skills at the feet of the curriculum. DS1 commented how second level students, completing the current curriculum are not expected to have research skills – there is no necessity. DS1 goes on to state how the leaving certificate, aside from history, is assessing students' ability to memorize information, not critically assess or ethically present information. This, DS1 believes, is the reason Irish students have such poor IL skills. All participant librarians stated

how students do not see any problem in using Wikipedia as a source, and the question of source credibility does not enter their mind. Also highlighted through interviews was the fact that students will rarely look past the first or second result after carrying out a search using Google. All of these points indicate how the notion of the 'google generation' as capable researchers is inaccurate within Irish schools and not only justifies the introduction of formal IL classes but also justifies the continued existence and expansion of school librarians within the Irish education system.

The information seeking behaviour of Irish students is poor and this presents a challenging transition for students moving from second to third level education (Conrick and Wilcox, 2013; Sheridan and Dunne, 2012). While the above has shown how school librarians are attempting to address this gap, the consensus is that it is not something teachers are focusing on. Considering the majority of secondary schools do not have a school librarian, and it has been shown how teachers have a limited awareness of the concept, the majority of Irish students are not being adequately prepared for life in third level education. Unless school librarians are rolled out to schools across the county, they cannot be the only champions and advocates for IL.

5.7 Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

The focus of this dissertation was to explore the role of school librarians within three DEIS and four fee-paying Irish secondary schools; as well as looking at the information seeking behaviour of students and the existence of IL on the radar of these schools. The school library plays an important role in providing information and ideas that are key for students to function in an information and knowledge-based society; while equipping students with skills to encourage life-long learning (IFLA/UNESCO, 2000).

It is evident from the interviews that school librarians, whether they are JCSP librarians or fee-paying school librarians, are contributing to their institutions as outlined in UNESCO's manifesto and equipping their students with the skills necessary for an easier transition into third level education. It is worth noting that the skills these school librarians are passing on to students are not only relevant for those who pursue further study, but integral for anyone successfully functioning within an information and knowledge-based economy.

As the interview results have shown, the roles of the school librarians in Irish secondary schools are varied but ultimately boil down to promoting a reading culture within the school, developing literacy and numeracy levels, teaching information skills along with some digital literacies and finally, the management of the library space. Relationships within their institution has been show to vary between the JCSP librarians and the fee-paying cohort.

The fact that the role of the JCSP librarians has been made more explicit to teachers and other staff seems to have improved the environment for school librarians. As the interviews have shown, JCSP librarians appear to enjoy greater collaboration with teachers in comparison to their counterparts from the fee-paying schools. In addition, JCSP librarians appear to experience less territorial pressure from teachers which potentially facilitates their interaction with students on an educational level.

The importance of IL was acknowledged by all interviewees and was either directly or indirectly, being taught in some capacity by all. Even if this was on a one-to-one ad hoc basis. All participants highlighted the poor information seeking behaviours of their students and their reliance on Google as their primary information seeking portal. At some point, each of the school librarians pursued the introduction of IL classes and each respondent reported varying degrees of success. One commonality with all the successful librarians was

their persistence in having IL classes introduced. One librarian (FP2) commented that it took almost eight years before they felt progress was made. In order for IL to be fully implemented and integrated for second level students there needs to be a national framework that develops a strategic approach. This has been advocated for in the UK by Andretta et al (2008; 2013). The Australians lead the way on this front and have effectively integrated IL into their schools' curriculum. Until now it has only been third level institutions that have taken steps to address students' lacking in IL. It is time for action to be taken within secondary schools to address this serious gap in students' abilities. School librarians cannot be the sole advocators at a secondary level; they are too few and too isolated to have a significant impact.

This study is limited in that it focused on DEIS and fee-paying schools, as these are the primary schools that have provision for a school library and qualified librarian. Seven school libraries, three from DEIS and four from fee-paying schools, participated in this study giving a snapshot of the current situation for these schools. While parallels can be made with other DEIS and fee-paying schools, albeit tentatively, this is the minority of the overall view of secondary schools in Ireland; the majority not having a school library or qualified school librarian. Future research could investigate the existence of school librarians outside DEIS and fee-paying institutions and explore the roles of these individuals. In addition, research could be carried out investigating teachers' awareness of IL within secondary schools in Ireland, exploring their perception of the concept and gauging whether they see the value of it. There is very little research carried out on IL within secondary schools in Ireland or the role of the school librarian so there is ample scope here for any future research.

Chapter 6 Reflective Learner Account

6.1 Introduction

The self-reflection section of the dissertation sets out to assess my own learning style and how this has changed through completion of both the master's course and dissertation. This section will evaluate how learning occurred, the experience of completing the dissertation and the challenges that I faced at various stages of this study.

Taking on this master's course was motivated by a desire to upskill and increase my employability potential in what I consider to be an interesting and fulfilling field.

Librarianship offers a range of diverse, engaging and stimulating opportunities which is something I have not experienced in any of my past employment roles to date. Taking on and completing this masters has allowed me to develop new skills that can be applied within the library field as well as introducing me to a network of contacts which will prove invaluable as my career develops.

The idea of reflective learning is to take a step back from the learning experience, analysing it, drawing conclusions and then applying them in a practical sense; both personally and professionally (sheffield.ac.uk, 2016). From completing an undergraduate degree in history and geography, my own learning style has certainly changed while carrying out this masters and completing this dissertation. Completing this course has developed a greater awareness of my own strengths and weaknesses when it comes to approaching work and academic projects. Completing this dissertation in particular, highlighted my own learning style and how I combat challenges as they arise.

Before I assess my own personal growth and development, I want to discuss the various challenges that arose throughout the dissertation process and how I overcame them.

6.2 Dissertation Choice

From the very early stages of the MSc I had a strong idea of what I wanted the focus of my dissertation to be. Semester one of the course had the module 'The Teaching Librarian', which introduced me to the concept of IL. Through lectures, class discussion and my own experiences, it was clear that there was a huge gap between second and third level education that was exacerbated by a students' lack of IL skills. I was intrigued by how students entering third level education were so drastically unequipped to assimilate into the expectations of third level education. Taking the 'read, read and read some more' advice from my Research Methods lecturer, it became evident that there were few studies focusing on IL levels of Irish second level students. Finally, after some deliberation, I decided to focus on school librarians in Irish secondary schools and the awareness of IL in these schools.

6.2.1 Literature Review

The literature review section of my dissertation posed a number of challenges given the dearth of literature that exists in an Irish context. While this is a justification for carrying out the research, the aim of addressing this gap, at times it was difficult to find information on school librarians that would parallel with the Irish context. I also restructured the literature review several times throughout the dissertation process, trying to form the best structure.

Developing a coherent flow was something I found as a challenge, given the number of different themes that emerged through the literature review. In order to visualise this, I mapped out the overall structure on the wall of my home to identify where the different

themes link and overlap. This was not something I had done before when completing academic work and I found it very beneficial as it developed an overall roadmap of the study in my mind.

6.2.2 Methodology

Again from the very early stages of the process I knew I wanted to take a qualitative approach to the dissertation. Given the exploratory nature of this study I felt that a qualitative approach would enable me to collect a greater richness of information in comparison to carrying out quantitative surveys. Without any hypothesis to prove or dispel, I was eager to carry out semi-structured interviews with school librarians gaining insights into their roles. I felt that qualitative research was the optimum choice to answer my research questions. Exploring the various research strategies and approaches was extremely interesting; as was deciding which philosophy my dissertation most suited. Overall, the methodology was not the most challenging of sections and was a very interesting process to complete.

6.2.3 Primary Data Collection

By far the most challenging aspect of the entire process, but also the most rewarding, finding willing school librarians and conducting semi-structured interviews formed the core of this study and data collection.

The most difficult part of the entire data collection process was finding school librarians willing to participate in the study. As this research was carried out over the summer months, schools were closed and the majority of school librarians were on holidays, this heightened the difficulty in finding willing respondents. There were many unanswered emails and

follow up emails but the school librarians that participated in the study were all extremely good with their time and offered some highly interesting findings. Spending six months working in a call centre, interviewing strangers over the phone certainly stood to me and I ultimately I found the face-to-face interviews thoroughly enjoyable. It was fascinating to hear about people's different routes to becoming a school librarian, and each individual's background was as diverse as the next.

At times some of the respondents could begin to meander off topic so it required interviewing skill and tact to manoeuvre the interview back on course. The fact that semi-structured interviews were used allowed for a natural flow to the conversations resulting in some findings that I would never have considered otherwise. For example, who knew JCSP librarians were not paid by the Department of Education but rather the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (DS1). Transcribing each of the interviews was an arduous task but when it came to coding the interviews, this process helped in recognising the main themes that emerged.

Overall, I believe my interviewing skills were greatly improved through carrying out the semi-structured interviews. Organisational skills, coding skills, time management, active listening and the ability to think on my feet and react to nuggets of information interviewees may have mentioned were all enhanced through the process also. In addition, I built up a great deal of resilience through organising these interviews. This came from people not responding to emails or cancelling interviews; situations that arose while carrying out this study. All of these skills will stand to me in great stead as I swap the assignments for the job searching trail.

6.2.4 Findings and Discussion

The findings and analysis sections were started once the interview transcripts had been completed, the main themes were identified and coded appropriately. Completing the findings section was a unique experience as there was no analysis carried out in this section. Finding myself writing several paragraphs without critically analysing the content flew in the face of how writing my writing style had developed over the course of the masters. At times I would forget myself and would start to analyse the information or offer explanations for some of the findings. In the findings section I had to remain disciplined and maintain the narrative approach throughout. The discussion chapter was where my writing style could return and I enjoyed identifying the similarities between different interviewees as well as contrasting the findings of the two different cohorts.

The findings from the interviews were extensive and I found myself having to discard quite a lot of information in order to remain with the allotted word count. Given the difficulty in organising the interviews, having to cut out information was difficult, but necessary. Some of the skills that I developed through completing these sections was the ability to identify themes and code information, organising information in as succinct a manner as possible; my analysis skills and overall writing ability also improved. However, the greatest satisfaction came when reading through these two sections and realising that my own research had resulted in these findings. Completing the dissertation was the most satisfying aspect of the entire course.

The MSc as a whole was an intense, challenging, at times frustrating, but a hugely fulfilling experience. The technical nature of the course has greatly improved my skill set and set a great foundation to begin my career in the field of librarianship. The course also attracted

people from varied backgrounds and there were many enjoyable discussions with classmates throughout the year. The completion of the work placement in Dublin Business School (DBS) Library is one of the highlights of the entire year and has greatly strengthened my CV for once I begin the job application process. While it will be satisfying to finish the MSc course, it has motivated me to continue with independent study in the future and I would strongly consider undertaking another master's course sometime in the future. The course could be quite challenging at times, especially when trying to find the balance with work, however I am delighted it was a challenge I took on, and will soon complete.

6.3 Personal Learning

In order to get the maximum value from the MSc it is important to reflect on the learning experience and how this developed over the course of the masters. As an undergraduate, there was very little calculation put into assignments. Often I would begin to start typing and then consult with secondary sources as I went on. This approach was not something I was going to adopt for a master's course which required a far more calculated and organised approach.

6.3.1 Individual Learning Style

As stated, while completing my BA in history and geography I tended to jump into assignments without much prior planning or research. This quickly transformed while undertaking the MSc into a far more Reflector learning style; one of four learning styles presented by Honey and Mumford (1992, p. 6). They describe a Reflector learning style as someone to takes a thoughtful approach to projects, taking a step back and taking in many different viewpoints (1992, p. 6). Honey and Mumford go on to describe the Reflector

learner as someone who is calculated in their approach and cautious before determining a viewpoint or argument. This learning style is far more reflective of my own which has developed as I progressed through the masters. For my first assignment of semester one, I initially approached it as I would have done as an undergraduate; which would have been that of an Activist, act now and think later (Honey and Mumford, 1992, p. 6). However, I decided to take an alternative approach and conduct a review of literature before starting the assignment. This new calculated approach was then adopted for all assignments I completed throughout the course. Even in my professional life I have found myself taking a step back to assess challenges before taking them on, casting my old Activist approach aside.

6.3.2 Personal Growth and Development

Completing the MSc in Information and Library Management has allowed me to develop in both a personal and professional capacity. Professionally, I set out with the aim of increasing my employability and developing skills more tailored to a specific industry. Through completing this course and the dissertation both my research skills and my ability to critically analyse information have improved greatly. The ability to wade through large swaths of information withdrawing the most relevant information is a skill that will become more and more necessary in an age of perpetual information generation.

While completing this course I continued working throughout and this required great time management skills. Finding the balance between work, studies, family and friends was a difficult task which didn't come without sacrifices. However, nearing the end of the process it is clear the sacrifices were worth the effort. Completing this MSc is one of the most

challenging experiences I have taken on, but the feeling of fulfilment and satisfaction that I get from nearing the end makes the sacrifice and hard work all the more worthwhile.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

School Librarians as educators

- What are the primary responsibilities of a school librarian?
- How would you describe information literacy?
- What kind of role do you hold within the school environment?
- Do you think librarians have a responsibility to teach information skills?
- How do you feel about being an educator?
- Are you restricted in your role or is it the opposite? Is there lack of a strategic plan for SL and IL instruction?
- Remit versus vision – is there overlap or are your hands pretty much tied?

Faculty Collaboration and buy-in

- Is information literacy actively taught within the school?
- Do you think it is a concept teachers/principals/school board are familiar with?
- When planning information literacy classes are teachers involved in the process?
- Is there a formal process for delivering information literacy classes?
- What are the reactions you receive when approaching staff regarding information literacy?
- How do you communicate the value of information literacy to staff and/or students?

Strategic plan

- Does the school library have a strategic plan?

- If yes, does it align with the school's?
- Do you have control over the design of the library's strategic plan?
- Is a strategic plan something you considered/ see a value in?
- Are classes formally delivered or on a more ad hoc basis?

Additional Questions

- What are the expectations of the IL programmes?
- Who outlines these expectations? Are outcomes drawn from any other standards? ACRL/SCONUL/ANZIL?
- How would you describe the information seeking behaviour of students in your school?
- Is IL integrated with any subjects (Home Economics/ History/ Geography Religion -all have research projects worth 20% of LC)
- Is ICT training incorporated into any IL instruction? Does the school recognise the difference between Information Literacy and Digital Literacy?
- Are you familiar with the parallels between the learning outcomes of the Junior Cert and the learning outcomes of IL Programmes? (Welsh Framework – 8 levels)
- DofEd Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy – 90page document – 7 references to libraries and none to information literacy, what's your opinion of this? Is this an indictment of the DofEd, schools or librarians? Do you think librarians could/should do more?
- As a School Librarian, what do you prioritise? IL? Basic Literacies? How much autonomy do you have in this decision? Where do directions come from?