Why is professionalism important to us? It is a topic hotly debated throughout all library sectors and across many fields such as health, law and commerce, because it is linked to ideas of status, conduct and quality of service. This chapter will examine professionalism, because we believe it goes to the heart of our work identities.

Not all schools round the world, or closer to the home of the authors in the UK, are fortunate enough to have a library. As in many countries, school libraries in the UK are not a statutory requirement, resulting in a mix of provision. Equally not all school libraries are run by professional librarians. They may be run by teachers, teaching assistants, clerical assistants, or library managers. Even where there is a professionally managed library the person running it may be a dually qualified teacher/librarian (a common pattern in the USA and Australia) or a singly professionally qualified librarian. A significant minority of secondary schools and a few primary schools in the UK employ such professionals, who are referred to as chartered
librarians when they have successfully completed their course of study and the qualification process afterwards. There is no single set of qualifications or experience for the job and traditional distinctions between professional and non-professional staff are not acceptable in today’s workforce. Where such fragmentation exists, homogeneity of standards is not a realistic goal at present, although the professional organization for librarians in the UK – the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – is moving towards a framework of qualifications and accreditation which covers the whole spectrum of those working in our field. We are now all at different stages on the same road of continuing professional development.

Where then does that leave notions of professionalism? This diversity means that we cannot think about professionalism in terms of qualifications, experience or the promise of statutory status. To do so would exclude many who currently run school libraries. So we must find other ways to think about professionalism.

The value and meaning attached to the concept of professionalism ebbs and flows. Today footballers are referred to as ‘professional’, indicating that they are paid for what they do, as opposed to amateurs who play for pleasure. On the other hand a professional was traditionally distinguished from a craftsman, by mastery of the intellectual aspects of their role. Today’s workforce is much more complex, with a web of career pathways and a recognition that professional development is a continuing journey, where passing one exam or hurdle does not mean that you have ‘arrived’. Technological advances, organizational change and the advent of the digital generation are
blurring the picture and challenging accepted ideas of professionalism.

The struggle for professional recognition is not new; it is why people form associations. Nonetheless, just as individuals have faced threats to their identity so have these associations. People no longer remain within one career for their entire working lives and so fields of employment contract and expand and this is reflected in changing membership numbers. Centralizing resources and stabilizing membership figures has become a matter of survival. Consequently the 21st century has seen a number of amalgamations. For example, in 2002 the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists in the UK merged to form CILIP.

It has been claimed that a profession never talks so much about being professional, nor strives so hard for recognition as a profession, as when it feels itself to be under threat (Stronach et al., 2002). One way forward is to think about the different discourses of professionalism. These give us clues about what professional practice looks like and what we are doing when we act professionally. There are lots of different models and each has strengths and weaknesses. They help us to see ourselves as professionals in our schools and give us ways of moving forward. Their influences help determine our priorities for how time and money should be spent in service provision. The discourses that follow are not just about school librarianship but are relevant to all library sectors in all parts of the world. This matter has been considered by Carol Kuhlthau (1993), a well known American researcher and champion of school libraries. As you can see in Appendix 1, her research identified a series of
roles for school librarians and, although a little dated, these still resonate with us today.

**What are the discourses of professionalism?**

Discourse in this sense refers to the power of language and how it shapes our practice and identity. This happens daily within our institutions where language is a reflection of the organization’s accepted thinking. It is used to drive its policies and so shape our behaviour and responses. On a larger scale it is a mechanism used in the formation of policy by governments to solicit support and compliance. The study of discourse is mainly derived from the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1972). The significance of discourse is easily recognized in education where the use of language continually evolves to influence people’s attitudes and behaviour. For instance, a ‘disaffection project’ becomes a ‘behaviour improvement programme’ or ‘remedial studies’ becomes ‘learning support’ or ‘inclusion’ (and, in the school library world, the ‘school library’ becomes a ‘learning centre’ or evolves across the Atlantic as a ‘media resource center’). The following discourses are considered and their effects on professionalism in school libraries explored in turn.

**Discourse of managerialism**

This is typically an externally imposed model; it is not about individuals negotiating what they want to do. They may have some say in types of target-setting but generally this is done to other people’s expectations. This discourse emphasizes the manager’s
role as instilling accountability into the organization’s culture. The discourse of managerialism is usually identified with the methods of the private sector that have been transferred to the public sector to encourage a culture of efficiency and economy. It aims to encourage conduct and activities that are considered appropriate in a market environment, believing the market mechanism to be the best driver of effectiveness. This is done by linking evaluation processes and performance review to value for money.

In education, this is in the arena of national curricula and publication of exam result league tables coupled with a system of inspection to monitor implementation. Knowledge of how we will be evaluated influences our behaviour, hence the pressure that teachers feel to ‘teach to the test’ rather than give attention to topics or skills that they might consider more appropriate for their students. School development plans, now repackaged as school improvement plans, could be seen as an outcome of the managerialist discourse, in that they allocate resources to desired changes which are linked to central government priorities. This level of prescription and setting of common standards is criticized for reducing the level of autonomy available to teachers and librarians. Others see this as a method of achieving change for the better, in a manner that is rapid and cost-effective.

Managerialism can lead to tensions between target-setting, the drive for cost-effectiveness and the philosophies and ethics of librarianship. Public libraries in the UK are mainly measured in terms of their issue statistics and therefore must tailor a large part of their stock to materials that are in high demand. On the surface this appears to be a sound business response. However,
this can cause a tension with public libraries’ remit to support learning in the community. A traditional public library philosophy has been to fulfil the role of ‘the people’s university’, but in recent times public libraries have been criticized for failing to develop the breadth and depth of their collections in the race to satisfy mainstream demands (McMenemy, 2007; Christie, 2008). Their approach to stock acquisition has also attracted criticism, when these processes have been contracted out to one major supplier for cost-efficiency reasons. It is believed that this has resulted in the purchase of materials of far less diversity than previously, leading to a neglect of smaller publishing houses and local bookselling businesses. Potentially this affects the quality of books published for all of us as the market adjusts to meet these big customer demands. Ethically, most librarians would shrink from taking actions that are likely to be detrimental to the community and culture of the book trade. Librarians in large organizations are not responsible for all such decisions and pragmatism prevails in the face of managerialism.

The managerial model of school librarian is one where the emphasis is on managing resources and deploying them to meet the organization’s needs in an efficient and effective manner. Effectiveness is expressed quantitatively, by value-added and other audit-measurable terms. This emphasizes the management skills of systems analysis, target-setting and evaluation. For the school librarian this will mean counting issues, reservations, catalogue use, student and class visits, and reporting on the size of collections and how they map to the curriculum. The following vignette demonstrates this approach.
Alan was given an extra sum of money to buy materials to support a new module on the Tudors for A-level history. He provided publishers’ catalogues for the teachers to select from and then purchased the items. A special subject heading was added to the online library catalogue so that pupils would be able to locate the selected books. Alan also used this heading to track the issue statistics. At the end of the year he produced a short report for the history department, which showed that, in his opinion, too few books had been borrowed in relation to student numbers. As a result the teacher discussed with him ways to increase students’ use of the new books.

In this discourse, the library’s effectiveness is measured in terms of its system performance. It is about meeting targets rather than the quality of the interaction between librarians, students and teachers. We may find in our schools that we have management targets to achieve but does that reflect the sum total of the school’s leadership thinking?

The deputy head responsible for the behaviour improvement programme analysed student data and identified that those students with the highest number of classroom exclusions were also the ones with the weakest literacy levels. In order to improve their engagement with lessons she developed a holistic integration package run by learning mentors. As part of that offer she asked the librarian to develop a reading initiative that would build the students’ confidence and allow them to experience success as readers.

Target-setting and number-crunching are tools and not necessarily ends in themselves. Clearly this deputy head’s priorities, in the light of the data, are to improve relationships and learning experiences for these students. So do our measurement procedures
reflect the aims of an educational organization? Do they reflect our philosophy of librarianship? Are they about teaching and learning as a result of using resources or about the resources themselves? This managerialist discourse might be usefully identified with Kulhthau’s concept (1993) of the bibliographic paradigm. This is where information retrieval is analysed from the resources, systems and technology point of view, rather than from a user’s perspective.

If ‘Alan’ in the earlier vignette surveyed the history students to find out why their library usage is low, he might obtain insights that would not surface through study of systems data alone. Such a survey might reveal barriers such as the lack of study space available in the library or a perception of the library not being a welcoming place, or simply that the history teachers never suggest that students use the library. His meeting with the teachers might result in some suggested ways forward but it will not be a solution rooted in evidence that is relevant to the problem.

Good practice often develops as a result of personal learning rather than the study of quantitative data, as seen in the following vignette.

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Margaret developed an excellent library programme of activities as part of her school’s chosen specialism: performing arts. The range and quality available to students and staff impressed the visiting inspector. Margaret demonstrated that it had taken time to evolve the whole programme and it reflected her own learning gained from a Master’s programme that she was following.
It is possible that imposing narrowly defined targets upon ‘Margaret’ might have stifled her creativity.

We need to consider how much time we spend on activities that fall within the managerialist model and how beneficial these are to teaching and learning. How far does this model support the development of the library’s educational role? Kuhlthau’s (1993) grid in Appendix 1 allows us to consider some options.

**Discourse of technical-rationalism**

This discourse characterizes professional activities as a set of competencies that can be broken down into their parts, as a set of skills that can be mastered and where the efficiency of their delivery can be easily measured. Practitioners are accountable for the technical accuracy of their work. The model assumes that professionalism can be systematized as a set of guidelines and protocols. It assumes an equality of delivery and does not make any allowance for the difference that varying levels of experience can make to the performance of a role.

This model of school librarianship is one which places an emphasis on the mechanics of the role: cataloguing, issuing books, display work, sending lists of new books to teachers, organizing author talks and providing user education on how to use the library systems to locate items. This discourse, like managerialism, might be said to sit within Kuhlthau’s (1993) bibliographic paradigm, with the librarian’s role designated as organizer and locator of resources. The priority is to put the user in contact with the required item and at that point the librarian’s responsibility in the process is ended.
Diana delivered an induction lesson to Year 7 students every September. She gave each student a new library ticket and explained the rules of the library, its layout and the procedures for borrowing a book. Students were then given a worksheet to complete that enabled them to practise locating books using the Dewey Decimal Classification.

Some may be attracted by this approach because it offers a clear definition of tasks. Alternatively, the approach may be viewed as reductionist, because it does not acknowledge the intellectual or creative processes that lie behind actions. Some go further in their critique of the technical-rational discourse and view it as a denial of the complexity that fills real-life situations. In this critique, these intangible elements of intellect and creativity are seen as essential parts of the professional expertise needed to lead a successful school library and so this discourse might be dangerously limited. It takes more than a set of technical skills to create a dynamic learning environment in the library that users feel is vibrant and responsive to their needs.

After some years Diana began talking more to other librarians who fed back to her things she had not considered. She realized that students had problems with defining what information they needed and in selecting useful search terms. Discussion with teaching colleagues identified an opportunity to teach research skills as part of subject tasks, so that students would learn in a more meaningful way at the point of need, rather than being expected to remember skills from a stand-alone context.
There is a global drive to break jobs down into their parts and identify these as skills. Around the world and across librarianship, making skills tangible is a powerful paradigm. If they are tangible they are measurable. From an organizational point of view, it makes them manageable. From a professional association’s point of view it means acquisition of a new skill is visible and can be rewarded. Continuing professional development is considered an inherent part of professionalism. We believe such development is more than just the acquisition of a new skill; it must also be an enrichment of understanding. New learning that leads to re-conceptualization is the most powerful form of continuing professional development. Many librarians are located in the technical-rationalist discourse. It offers a lot of opportunities, but as we have shown it also has limitations. It is interesting to note that CILIP’s current Chartership Framework (CILIP, 2008) involves demonstrating the intellectual aspects as distinct from simply the mechanical skills of the librarian’s role.

**Discourse of social democracy**

This discourse places an emphasis on the professional’s obligations to society, maintaining justice and equality of access for all. Its characteristics are those of collaborative leadership, shared decision-making, responsibility for processes and their outcomes, where professional judgements are valued.

This model of school librarianship is characterized by the desire to empower access to information for all. This is done in the belief that providing access to information is a step towards alleviating social and economic disadvantage. An emphasis will
be placed on designing and marketing the service to appeal to all parts of the school community. This leads quickly to the question of how to focus time and budget. In any school, it will not be possible to meet all of the needs all of the time. So targeting resources to achieve maximum effect is strategically vital. In some schools the librarian does this by putting energy into developing relationships with younger students, believing that this is a foundation for the student’s time in the school. Others do it by prioritizing relationships with staff, hoping through work with them to reach many more students.

This discourse resonates with the current inclusion agenda that is promoted by central and local governments, as evidenced by many public and school library activities that seek to involve people from marginalized or disadvantaged groups.

Eliza decided to evaluate the library’s Homework Club to find out what was most valued and least valued by its users and also to find out why some students never used it. A series of questionnaires and interviews yielded quantitative and qualitative data, answering not only the research question but revealing some unexpected results, too. This evidence helped to plan future development and secure increased funding. An analysis was also made of the attendance register in terms of age, ethnicity, ability banding and overlap with the special educational needs register. It concluded that the Homework Club appealed to all parts of the school’s community and was therefore a successful part of the school’s policy on inclusion. This evidence was then included in the school’s self-evaluation form for inspection.

Public libraries in the UK are driven by national targets regarding equality and diversity. All current and new initiatives
have to be surveyed for impact on equality. In 2009 funding is heavily tied into projects that aim to reach minority groups in the community. If a library authority can get itself written into the local area Children’s Plan it will be able to access funds for working with children. This requires activities to be made available for those who are identified as vulnerable children. If the library service can show it affects outcomes for these children, it will then be written into the plan and have access to further funding. Therefore, raising the service’s profile is crucial to its own inclusion.

Which comes first, the requirement to meet national targets to ensure service survival or the desire to meet those children’s needs? The pragmatic might argue that it does not have to be a choice; it is simply a matter of capitalizing on opportunities that help them realize philosophical and ethical goals for the service. Others feel overwhelmed that they must find solutions to help society solve its social and economic needs as laid out in government targets.

A liberal library philosophy is about the service representing and serving all members of the community. Pressure from national targets will always be the driver behind planning. Currently, the over-riding question is how to reach minority groups, and the reality is that this vision must be achieved with limited time, money and energy. This can lead to tension between service priorities and ethics, between providing for the demands made by the mainstream users and the needs of the minority groups. Can the social democratic librarian be all things to all people or must difficult choices be made?
Provoked by a conference presentation (Clyde, 2004) Chris began to question why there was an absence of teenage fiction involving gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters in her school library. Was this censorship by passive omission or fear of teacher and parent reaction if such items were stocked? A small collection of positive stories were bought and advertised through the school counsellor and personal education teachers. Feedback from students via the counsellor was very positive. Chris now believes it is just as important to provide young people with this material as to give them access to information about contraceptives and other aspects of sex education.

The social democratic discourse might also be characterized as the view that librarians uphold when resisting censorship, whether generated by government, business corporations or individuals. Influenced by this discourse, the school librarian wants to make information accessible. At what point does duty of care towards students lead to censorship? Ethical dilemmas are at the heart of professional judgements. In examining our beliefs and reasons in relation to our role, how far will we defend them or how far will we go in order to realize them?

Student voice and duty of care are Nathan’s two greatest influences when making decisions about the library. He often experiences conflict: should he allow his 11-year-old students to borrow only manga books or should he intervene knowing that for some, their reading skills would benefit by reading a more appropriate text? Should he negotiate with the students, setting them targets to improve their reading, offering the latest manga titles to them as a reward? Would this be unethical?
The school librarian of this model acknowledges that each individual’s understanding of information will affect their behaviour in a library environment. In educational terms, this points towards the need for a child-centred approach to working with students in the library environment. It might also be characterized by Kuhlthau’s (1993) concept of studying library services from the users’ perspective. As Kuhlthau points out, the professional role can go beyond providing a clear and well ordered system, to that of mediator and counsellor.

**Where does this leave school librarianship in the 21st century?**

We are now in an age where universal truths are questioned. New technology allows everyone to generate information and its free availability has dispensed with the need for intermediaries to check content, either at the publication stage or at point of access. Society’s view of information is changing and in turn the role of the librarian is being questioned, not least by librarians themselves.

The post-modernist discourse in professionalism is seen as an expression of the uncertainty of roles and identities in this 21st-century age. Post-modernism is a search for new ways of articulating the experience of living in a post-industrial, high-tech era of globalization. Its influence may also be seen as responsible for identifying the other discourses of professionalism already discussed.

Post-modernist interpretations have both positive and negative visions for professionalism. Technology presents
opportunities for professionals to create and communicate without boundaries. This can facilitate a revolt from what may be seen as the more oppressive aspects of managerialism and technical-rationalism.

Alex was told by his line manager to count the number of pupils entering the library each lunchtime. Doing this took up time that he could spend helping pupils. Conversations with an online librarian community allowed him to see that his role was being measured only in a technical sense, not accounting for the extra work invested in developing relationships with staff and students. So instead of feeling de-professionalized he opened a conversation with his line manager about the educational aspects of the school library.

Post-modernist interpretations also offer more pessimistic visions of professionalism. Roles are so fragmented and de-professionalized by central control and their subjection to market values that they no longer offer a meaningful personal sense of identity. These issues of professionalism have been much explored in the field of health. Some writers (Stronach et al., 2002) encourage professionals to reflect on their local situation and recognize that a professional identity is a complex entity that cannot be explained by one theory alone. Focus should be placed on the positive features of diversity, creativity and trust. Professionalism is aptly defined as ‘judgement in conditions of uncertainty’ (Fish and De Cossart, 2006), which reflects the plural nature of our experiences. Decisions, large or small, ethical or otherwise, are made amid the messiness that is real life.

We can develop our own vision of professionalism. We do not
have to adopt or stick to one type of discourse, as to do so may leave one confused, disempowered and de-professionalized. It becomes more important than ever to examine our central values and to be clear about what we see as professional practice. There may be elements of each of these models that we need to meld and bring together into our own vision. We need to be able to set targets, to be aware of skills required but also to move into the creative context. In education the level of change experienced in the past 20 years has been immense and discourse has become a sophisticated tool. Clarity of personal vision enables us to identify when we are being re-positioned by a particular discourse and to engage with it critically in order to achieve personal meaning, whether in agreement or disagreement.

Essential ingredients for success in this dynamic environment are a clear sense of self, vision and ethics. Even those who have been in the profession for some time recognize the need to re-examine values. By revisiting our personal philosophies we can identify the most appropriate course of action. The word professionalism comes from the Latin word ‘profiteor’, to profess, to make a commitment to a set of values. It is this most intangible aspect that gives professionalism its greatest strength and passion.

What is our view of professionalism in the school library? What should it encompass? If we want to raise our profile we need to develop a vision: on which issues will we not compromise? What is it that we are prepared to fight for? What reflects the core values of our professionalism? That knowledge is the basis of our professionalism.
What influences the school librarian’s professional identity?

To be a successful librarian one needs to negotiate with the meaning of professionalism. That can only be done with insight into how others see us and our professional practice and by examining the ways in which others construct our professionalism. Job descriptions are a concrete expression of espoused values and can be used as a trigger for dialogue about our own roles.

At an informal librarians’ meeting someone asked Emily what her job description was like. This made Emily revisit the document and she was shocked to see that it no longer matched her ideas of what was important in her job. She looked at the sample job description recommended by CILIP (Barrett and Douglas, 2004) and read about teachers’ job descriptions in What Makes a Good School Now? (Brighouse, 2008). Having made some notes on different approaches (see below) she asked her line manager what she thought and was shown a teacher’s job description which was much more centred on teaching and learning than on competencies. Together they worked on bringing the librarian’s job description into line with those of other heads of departments.

Examples of different kinds of job descriptions

Version 1: Job description with a management/routines focus (technical-rationalism discourse)

Responsible for:

- the organization and day-to-day running of the Library Resources Centre
• the selection, maintenance and exploitation of stock
• financial management including planning and monitoring expenditure
• promoting library use
• promoting literacy skills and reading for pleasure
• delivering information and learning skills in collaboration with teachers
• liaising and co-operating with staff and advising pupils
• evaluating, record keeping and reporting
• managing the library assistant.

Version 2: Job description with a focus on librarianship knowledge and skills (managerial discourse) (Barrett and Douglas, 2004, 94)

• Management of a learning resource centre that contributes to the learning targets of the school, growing in line with educational initiatives
• Participation in school-wide development through the regular cycle of meetings with senior staff
• Generating and implementing the library improvement plan and managing the library budget
• Acting as a co-educator by teaching staff and students information literacy skills within curriculum contexts, particularly collaborating in the design and delivery of resource-based learning experiences
• Acting as an information navigator by selecting appropriate resources in all formats and bridging the gaps between
students and teachers and online/electronic information, the curriculum and subject teaching

- Developing the library’s contribution to literacy programmes and to inspire and enthuse students to read widely
- Maintaining and developing a working knowledge of educational initiatives, information and communications technologies and developments in school librarianship.

Version 3: Job description with a leadership/teaching and learning focus (social-democracy discourse) (using ideas from Brighouse, 2008, 78)

Principle accountabilities:

- ensuring, in consultation with teaching colleagues, that the library supports curriculum delivery
- taking the lead, in conjunction with teaching colleagues, in creating a whole-school reading culture and promoting wider reading and literacy
- supporting, in collaboration with teachers, the development of pupils as independent and lifelong learners, working with whole classes and individual learners
- contributing to the Every Child Matters agenda by ensuring that library provision supports the needs of the whole person in a safe and secure learning environment
- managing the operation of the library, continually reflecting on practice so that the service evolves and improves to meet its users’ needs.
The work environment

The work environment, with its intricate rituals and pressures, is a microcosm of its wider society. The social and political realities of our work relationships can present enjoyment, satisfaction, bewilderment, alienation and heartache. The nature of the organization affects our professional identity. In some schools, the librarian is seen as the keeper of books, in others, as someone working at the heart of the learning process. One of the strongest influences will be the lead set by the headteacher; his or her vision of professionalism and how far it permeates the senior leadership team is fundamental to the organization and the librarian’s place within it.

Lia’s headteacher gave an assembly about his summer reading choices and began by saying he always goes to Ms Kanton in the library for help with his choices because she knows all the latest books and always finds something that really suits him, and this was no exception . . .

This headteacher invested Lia with authority in the minds of his audience. Within a school, everyone will have different views of the librarian as coloured by their previous experiences and the attitudes of those around them.

Our confidence and effectiveness in responding to the range of demands made, develop our professional identity in the eyes of others. So too do our image and appearance. This does not refer to the power-dressing concept of the 1980s, but to group theory. If we want to be part of a group, then we need to adopt their image. If the leaders in our organization dress smartly, then we should do the same to be identified with their values.
Our professional identity
Values and philosophies drive the professional identity we wish to convey. Where these are unclear to others they may affect the visibility of our role within the school. This is where a deeper consideration of group theory can take our understanding to the next level. Forsyth (2006) describes the stages of Tuckman’s theory of group development as forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. ‘Storming’ refers to engagement and intellectual conflict with each other; it is where appreciation of other viewpoints is gained and jointly understood meanings are achieved. This process helps provide individuals with insight into ways forward in order to achieve the group goals. One cannot reach successful ‘performance’ without developing those relationships.

Our understanding of this theory is underlined by the findings of research into teachers’ awareness of information literacy (Williams and Coles, 2003). Although this understanding was limited at the project outset, after engagement, teachers understood information literacy to be a useful consideration. One of the barriers to their understanding was the librarians’ use of linear models. These concepts were interpreted by teachers as being more about the library than learning. The research showed that even with understanding, the teachers felt too overwhelmed by other demands to be able to take on what they perceived as extra tasks. Williams and Coles (2003) recommended that librarians continue to engage with teachers, finding ways to develop student skills and to express matters in a learning rather than library context. Tuckman (Forsythe, 2006) emphasizes that some of his stages
are cyclical, so ‘storming’ may be a continual process for teachers and librarians to explore and negotiate meanings. Our professional role cannot be perceived by teachers unless we engage intellectually with them. Professionalism is about more than wearing similar apparel.

How we are received and treated reinforces our professional identity and, in this context, a concept that is particularly relevant to librarians working in the education sector is that of cognitive authority. This theory (Wilson, 1983) is concerned with how people construct knowledge from their own experience and from the ideas of other people. Cognitive authority is the term applied to a person or source of information that is seen as credible and therefore allowed to have influence over one’s thinking. As the previous vignette illustrated, if a colleague who is seen as authoritative by others introduces us as an expert who should be listened to, then they extend their authority to us. This establishes our professional identity and in turn gives us the ability to develop cognitive authority in others.

Previous career experiences bring different qualities to the role and identity. Indeed some believe that the solo librarianship experience, common in schools, can be a grueling one for a young professional. Well developed professional experience may be an advantage in such situations. Reasons for job choice affect our engagement, motivation and development in the post and this is reflected in the development of our professional identity. Whatever our background, the difficulties of this challenging role should not be under-estimated. They can be further complicated if we enter an organization where the
predominant view of the librarian’s role is at odds with our personal vision. This will be explored further in Chapter 3.

To identify the dominant discourse and to engage with it will lead others to view us as effective in that domain. If our comfort zone lies within the model of technical-rationalism but the school’s leadership demands more of the activities associated with the social democratic model, the experience is not going to be an easy one. If the school’s expectations are that we will simply stamp books and mind the space then those of us with social democratic leanings will feel unappreciated and become very frustrated.

In reality the successful school librarian moves between all of the models of professionalism discussed, depending on the context of the situation. This is sometimes governed by our workplace and sometimes by our beliefs. Whatever our priority may be, day-to-day mechanics, teaching and learning or nurturing children, it will need to fit the school’s vision to be effective. Once we have a grasp of our own model it is time to focus on how others see us. In Chapter 2 the congruence between the two views, or the lack of it, will be examined.