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# On Your Own but Not Alone: One-Person Librarians in Ireland and Their Perceptions of Continuing Professional Development

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## ABSTRACT

One-person librarians (OPLs) are the sole information provider in their respective organizations. Continuing professional development (CPD) is vital to satisfy their own information needs and, by proxy, those of the people they serve. No research has so far been carried out to establish what CPD means to these highly specialized library workers. This article reports on some of the findings of a phenomenographic study conducted among thirty OPLs in the Republic of Ireland. The researcher found five different ways of experiencing CPD, ranging from an organizational focus only to a lifelong, life-wide learning orientation. She also discovered four dimensions of variation, namely, “time,” “style,” “networking,” and “role,” each of which influenced succinctly how solo librarians perceived the effectiveness of different means of CPD. The study suggests that a new model of understanding CPD is needed if library associations want to provide successful support to OPLs. A “one-size-fits-all” approach is not appropriate for OPLs.

## INTRODUCTION

Continuing professional development (CPD) is widely recognized as an integral part of being a professional (Collin, Van der Heijden, & Lewis, 2012). The library and information science (LIS) profession is no different, with professional organizations placing increased emphasis on CPD (Broadly-Preston & Cossham, 2011) and many libraries actively encouraging their staff to engage in activities that enhance and deepen their knowledge by, for example, engaging in staff development committees (Davis & Lundstrom, 2011). Technological developments in particular make constant updating of knowledge necessary (Corrall, 2011), especially in the context of Web 2.0 (Broadly-Preston, 2009b; Partridge, Lee, & Munro,

2010). In some circumstances, however, this can be a problem: “often called a solo librarian, an OPL is the only librarian (or only professional librarian) in a library or information center” (Siess, 2001, p. 1). These one-person librarians (OPLs) have limited access to training courses and frequently small budgets. For many of them, being part of a professional association is vital, as these offer access not only to workshops and conferences but also to many electronic resources and networking opportunities.

Library associations around the world have developed CPD initiatives (Broady-Preston & Cossham, 2011; Ghosh, 2006; Roper, 2006), but to date there is no countrywide strategy in Ireland. It is up to individual librarians to follow the guidelines provided by the Library Association of Ireland (LAI). Without the pressure provided by a national policy or by a compulsory scheme, however, many OPLs find it difficult to make a case for CPD to their management, who often are not librarians. OPLs face the dilemma of having to close the library in instances where they do not have access to another librarian who could cover for them. Resnick (2003) gives some advice in this regard, but warns that nonprofessional staff or volunteers are no substitute for the service provided by a qualified solo librarian. So how do OPLs in Ireland manage continuing professional development?

#### RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW

The rationale behind this research was a sense of frustration experienced by the researcher, who had encountered barriers to CPD in her own practice. She was of the opinion, however, that OPLs have both a right and an obligation to keep up-to-date and that they should be able to expect support from professional bodies and management alike. This led to an investigation of the literature available, which was quite limited with regard to OPLs and CPD. The basic questions, such as what OPLs actually understand “continuing professional development” to be and how they experience different means of CPD, were not answered at all. In the researcher’s opinion these needed to be clarified in order to offer successful CPD opportunities to solo librarians. As a volunteer committee member of one specialist group of the LAI, the professional body of librarians in the Republic of Ireland, she had an additional interest as a CPD provider.

The present article reports on some of the findings of a recently completed doctoral thesis (Hornung, 2011), which is based on a qualitative research project conducted among OPLs in the Republic of Ireland. After briefly reviewing relevant literature, it describes phenomenography, the research approach used, which is followed by an outline of the research project and the data collection and analysis process. The next part looks in more detail at the main findings and compares them with related studies. Finally, some of the implications for policy and practice are discussed.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researcher carried out an extensive literature review, which incorporated studies in the fields of adult education, lifelong learning, management, psychology, sociology, and LIS. She also drew on her own experience as an OPL in an educational research center in Ireland.

After many revisions the following two research questions were established:

- What are the Irish OPLs' conceptions of successful and effective CPD?
- How do OPLs in Ireland experience different methods of CPD?

The next section outlines some of the literature reviewed that informed this study. The focus is on three areas of interest to the present article: OPLs, CPD, and phenomenography.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on OPLs is scarce worldwide and virtually nonexistent in Ireland, except for two articles by Sliney (1985, 1988). In general, contributions tend to be personal accounts and case studies (e.g., Woolley, 1988) and are often equated with being employed in special libraries (e.g., Smith, 2001), even though that is not the only setting where they work. Despite estimates that one in three librarians worldwide could be classified as an OPL (Siess, 2003), they remain a group of library workers seldom investigated. The figures for Ireland are sketchy. The latest year for which there are data available is the 2011 Census, which was published in 2012 and revealed that the number of librarians, archivists, and curators in 2011 was 1,671 (Central Statistics Office, 2012, p. 47). With a separate entry for "library clerks," we can assume that these are qualified librarians. How many of them are OPLs, however, is not known.

The OPL movement can be traced back to Guy St. Clair, a former librarian, who, when invited to speak at the Annual Conference of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) in 1972, insisted on changing the title of the talk from "The One-Man Library" to "The One-Person Library" (Siess, 2003), which has since become "one-person librarian." He also cofounded (with Andrew Berner) *The OPL Newsletter*, one of the first dedicated information resources for solo librarians. Judith Siess, librarian, information consultant, and former chair of SLA's Solo Librarians Division, later took over as editor. In the United Kingdom and in Ireland, the term "one-man band" is still quite popular, but in the present article, "one-person librarian," or "OPL," is used. There are also several concepts available regarding who would count as an OPL. For the purpose of her study, the researcher defined it as "a qualified librarian/information professional working on his/her own without any professional help in the immediate organisation other than clerical/administrative."

CPD, in contrast, has been a topic of interest around the world for the LIS research community for some time. Researchers have investigated CPD for special librarians in the United States (Fisher & Matarazzo, 1993); public librarians in Israel (Doran, 2000); university librarians in Ghana (Adanu, 2007), Indonesia (Maesaroh & Genoni, 2009), Vietnam (Leong & Nguyen, 2011), and Finland (Saarti & Juntunen, 2011); and library staff in general (e.g., Brown, 1992, for the United Kingdom, or Cossham & Fields, 2006, for New Zealand). Within the academic library sector, the CPD needs of librarians in relation to their role as instructors/teachers has become a particular concern in many countries, evidenced by studies in the United Kingdom (Bewick & Corral, 2010), United States (Westbrock & Fabian, 2010), and Canada (Houtman, 2010). These are just some examples of a vast number of studies conducted over the last twenty years.

The CPD activities of library associations and LIS schools fall into another category of publications. Majid (2004), for example, reports on efforts made by LIS schools in Southeast Asia. Broady-Preston and Cossham (2011) compare mandatory CPD schemes as implemented by the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) and planned by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in the United Kingdom as a logical development of its voluntary revalidation scheme. On a more practical level, personal viewpoints (e.g., Cameron, 1994) and CPD linked to workplace learning, for example Ian W. Smith's series of articles in *Library Management* (e.g., Smith, 2004), also feature prominently in the professional literature.

However, despite longstanding and widespread interest in CPD, the concept has not been clearly defined in the literature. Collin et al. (2012, p. 155) assert that "theoretical and empirical controversy surrounds the scope and understanding of the concept." Broady-Preston (2009a) notes many different interpretations of the term CPD, even within the library and information profession, where it has been variously characterized by representatives as a realization, a commitment, a plan, an activity, and a process. She also highlights a "dichotomy between the perspectives of the individual and those of the employer with regard to responsibility for CPD and the benefits of this activity" (2009a, p. 265), reinforcing the conclusions drawn by Cossham and Fields (2007) from their investigation in New Zealand, which found a significant differences between librarians' and managers' views of CPD. Reconciling the development needs of professionals with needs identified by their employers is a universal problem that extends beyond the library and information community (Collin et al., 2012).

OPLs' participation in and needs for CPD have been researched in a few studies (e.g., Shuter, 1974; Slater, 1988; Williamson, 1990) and in training guidelines (Lacey Bryant, 1995). They adopted, however, more

quantitative methods of data collection, such as questionnaires and surveys with predefined categories. By their very nature, they thus provided definitions of CPD for participants and therefore gained only limited insights into participants' understanding of that term. Although these studies were valid in what they tried to achieve, they did not go to the core of the problem, which needed a more qualitative approach. As the researcher was interested in the variation in how people actually experience CPD and what it means to them, she chose "phenomenography" as the research approach.

Phenomenography is gaining more acceptance in LIS, where it has been used mainly in research on information seeking (e.g., Limberg, 1999); information use (e.g., Maybee, 2006); and information literacy, notably in the works by Bruce (1997) and Boon, Johnston, and Webber (2007). Bruce (1997) discovered seven conceptions of information literacy in her sample of Australian university staff. Boon et al. (2007), in their study of twenty faculty members working in higher education in the United Kingdom, found four different ways of understanding information literacy. CPD also has been the focus of phenomenographic research. In the related field of education, Stein, Shephard, and Harris (2011) conducted a study among tertiary educators that yielded five conceptions of e-learning and four of professional development for e-learning. Because readers may not be familiar with this research specialization, the next section outlines its theoretical background and provides a detailed account of the data collection and analysis.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Introduction to Phenomenographic Research*

Having compared several qualitative research methods, the researcher settled on phenomenography, which is not a methodology in itself but has been described as "rather a way of—an approach to—identifying, formulating, and tackling certain sorts of research questions, a specialization that is particularly aimed at questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an educational setting" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111). The approach originated in the field of education (Richardson, 1999) but has progressed from this narrow focus to investigating other phenomena.

At the heart of phenomenography is the variation in understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by participants across a sample group. Phenomenography "takes a *relational* (or *non-dualist*) *qualitative, second-order* perspective, . . . aims to describe the key aspects of *the variation* of the experience of a phenomenon rather than the richness of individual experiences, and . . . yields a *limited number of internally related*, hierarchical categories of description of the variation" (Trigwell, 2006, pp. 368–369). A conception has two parts: a meaning (referential aspect) and a structure

(structural aspect). The referential aspect can be found by what a person is saying, the structural by paying attention to which elements of the phenomenon the focus is on, often involving linguistic markers, such as the use of singular or plural (Marton & Pong, 2005). Each category also displays “dimensions of variation,” which are themes that are common to all categories but are experienced in a different way. Together, the conceptions and the dimensions of variations form the “outcome space,” which shows the relations these categories have to each other and also the dimensions of variations within each category.

#### *Research Setting*

The researcher sent out a “call for participation” in several Irish LIS publications, both in print and online. Some volunteers heard about the project through word of mouth and approached the researcher. Phenomenographic research often uses maximum variation sampling, which tries to capture multiple variables; Patton (2002) advocates looking actively for diverse characteristics in the sample, such as geographical variation, age, gender, stage in career, and picking participants who are as different as possible. Table 1 shows the variables identified; years of experience as OPLs was divided into less than and more than two years experience as anecdotal evidence suggested that it took someone new to an OPL role about two years to feel fully integrated.

During the interviews, participants also revealed a variety of qualifications (ranging from diploma to doctoral level), nationalities (mainly Irish), ages, experience levels as librarians, levels of support (completely working on their own versus having access to a library assistant), and working modes (mostly full-time, but some part-time).

#### *Data Collection*

The main source of data was thirty semistructured interviews conducted between September 2008 and June 2009. (Phenomenographic research usually has sample sizes between fifteen and twenty-five.) The University of Sheffield granted ethical approval for the research, and following a small pilot study in the summer of 2008, the researcher used the revised version of the interview schedule shown in appendix 1. The researcher traveled across the country to meet with the librarians in their workplaces, cafés,

Table 1. Summary of variables

Variable	Number of participants
Gender	5 men, 25 women (ratio 1:5)
Experience	8 had 0–2 years of experience, 22 had 2 and more (ratio 4:11)
Location	11 rural, 19 urban
Setting	9 health, 9 special, 6 academic, 3 corporate, 3 school/public

restaurants, pubs, and even an airport.

The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and over one hour, with an average time of about forty-three minutes. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim. She also took note of body language and the research settings as well as her own reflective thoughts on the interview process. These notebooks deepened her understanding of the life worlds of these OPLs. Hazel, Conrad, and Martin (1997) have criticized the failure of phenomenographic research to record the emotional experience of participants, so the interviewer tried to capture at least some of this information. Although member check is not widely used in phenomenography, the researcher offered all interviewees a copy of their transcript; all but two declined.

#### *Data Analysis*

The literature does not offer much support with regard to phenomenographic data analysis. The researcher adopted some parts of the analysis framework identified in other phenomenographic studies (e.g., Lupton, 2008). Dahlgren and Fallsberg (1991, p. 152) suggest the following steps, while at the same time highlighting the need to jump between them:

- *Familiarization.* The researcher, although in most cases also the interviewer, has to read through the protocols carefully, to get acquainted with them in detail. This stage is also necessary for making required completions and corrections.
- *Condensation.* The most significant statements made by the subject are selected to give a short but representative version of the entire dialogue concerning a certain phenomenon.
- *Comparison.* The selected significant dialogue excerpts are compared in order to find sources of variation or agreement.
- *Grouping.* Answers that appear to be similar are put together.
- *Articulating.* A preliminary attempt is made to describe the essence of the similarity within each group of answers (stages 4 and 5 may be revised several times before the analysis is assessed as satisfactory).
- *Labeling.* The various categories are denoted by constructing a suitable linguistic expression.
- *Contrasting.* The obtained categories are compared with regard to similarities and differences.

Data analysis, therefore, took place in cycles of iteration. To make the process more transparent, the researcher kept logs of decisions taken and a trail of photographic evidence. She also filled notebooks with summaries of all interviews. Reflecting on feedback she had received from other practitioners and in line with her own preferences, the researcher decided on a manual data analysis strategy. She concluded that she could gain a richer understanding of the data by using a cut-and-paste technique, work-

ing with the paper printouts of the interviews. The researcher started by focusing on the individual interviews and then moved on to the group.

First, she wrote summaries of all interviews and tried to capture in long hand all statements about CPD using the main questions as headings (see appendix 1). The researcher then looked at the full transcripts, including background questions and contextual information. Some people revealed more about their experiences after the official interview was over, so she wanted to capture them in the statements. As stated previously, the collective experience is at the heart of phenomenography. There are similarities and differences between people's ways of experiencing CPD and the intention behind the words might be different. To better manage the vast amount of data (between twenty and more than thirty pages per transcript), the researcher initially worked on a subset of five interviews (interviews 1, 7, 12, 14, and 27), which represented different variables, to keep maximum variation. All thirty interviews, however, were eventually subjected to the same rigorous procedure.

Then, the physical handling of the data started with the focus still on the individual. The researcher decided to cut transcripts along the structure of the questions posed. She started off using the questions as headings under which to group statements but realized quickly that different kinds of groups started to emerge, which formed the basis for the initial categories (drawing on the analysis of the first five interviews). These categories became even more apparent with the rest of the batch. Two more emerged. She put those piles into plastic folders. Some initial reorganization already happened at this stage, because some statements needed to be put into another folder. She also kept other folders: "responsible for CPD," "how to find out about CPD," "bad CPD," "incentives," "barriers/problems," and "networking." The last one developed early on. First, the researcher thought it might be a category, but then it shaped up to become a dimension. She highlighted parts of the conversation that made a case for why it should be put into that folder. The researcher tried to keep the context together; where the next paragraph was on a new page, that part was cut out, stapled to the first sheet, and put into the same folder.

*The Emerging Categories (Group Focus).* Having read through each interview again, the researcher tried to write meaningful statements (e.g., "CPD is successful if . . ."), using her summaries of the interviews, in line with Åkerlind's (2005) approach. After analyzing five interviews that way, she read across all of them again (group focus) and was satisfied that she had established the first tentative categories. The researcher met with her supervisor to discuss the emerging categories and potential labels for them. They read quotes from the interviews to each other to verify the categories. After a further meeting with the supervisor, the researcher continued with the analysis of the remaining twenty-five interviews, constantly checking for similarities and differences. The researcher was struck by

how some comments fitted with other peoples' comments. Many statements were nearly identical. The researcher wrote the interview number on the left rim of the printouts as this would help with tracing back excerpts to the full transcripts. She kept writing meaningful statements, which took the form of a second, even shorter summary, while working with the manuscripts. Early on, the researcher established a table of categories, which changed and expanded in the light of more interview cut-outs being added. Simultaneously, she developed a table of dimensions. At the end of this cycle, she discovered that two of the categories could be subsumed into the other five categories. The content of other folders (e.g., "motivation," "networking") either formed dimensions or were used in the discussion chapter of the thesis. The categories and dimensions together formed the outcome space (see appendix 2).

#### *Reliability and Validity*

In common with other qualitative research approaches, phenomenography requires the researcher to address issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was achieved through giving detailed accounts of the context of the study and the methods of data collection used. The pilot study allowed the researcher to reflect on many aspects of the study, and the subsequent changes were implemented in the main study, thus showing dependability. The researcher's supervisor and another student played "devil's advocate," challenging the emerging categories. Some data were exposed to other researchers through conference contributions, and their suggestions were taken on board. These measures ensured confirmability. The thesis, on which this article is based, provided a narrative account of all steps taken and therefore established transferability.

Data collection coincided with the biggest economic downturn in the history of the Irish state, and its financial implications for the library world became apparent with many of the interviewees. Inevitably, phenomenographic research provides a snapshot set in a specific time and under specific circumstances, but the findings are robust and still valid at the time of writing; when the researcher presented her results at the joint CILIP/LAI conference in May 2012, many librarians, including OPLs, commented on how they could identify their own conceptions within the categories of descriptions. This type of feedback is widely practiced in phenomenography (Åkerlind, 2012).

#### *Limitations*

This study was limited to OPLs operating in the Republic of Ireland, since Northern Ireland fell into another jurisdiction and had its own unique circumstances. In line with the demographic makeup of the country, most participants were based in the Leinster (east coast) region. Within the group, there was a bias toward LAI membership, with seven OPLs involved

in one of the subgroups or on a committee. Only three OPLs in the final sample were nonmembers.

## RESULTS

Following an extensive data analysis, five categories of description emerged (see table 2).

Moreover, the researcher found four dimensions to be present in each category:

Table 2. Categories of description

Category	Description
Category 1	CPD is upskilling for the sake of the organization/library service (service orientation)
Category 2	CPD is about developing as a professional librarian (LIS profession orientation)
Category 3	CPD is helping you to do all the jobs an OPL does (OPL orientation)
Category 4	CPD is when you have learned something and you want to do things in a better way when you come back (personal orientation)
Category 5	CPD is about your development as a human being (lifelong learning orientation)

- Dimension “*role*”—responsibility, motivation, and support
- Dimension “*time*”—current job or career or life in general
- Dimension “*style*”—formal or informal with examples
- Dimension “*networking*”—type of networking, reasons for doing it

This section describes and discusses each category in more detail, while highlighting also the changing nature of the dimensions of variation. Appendix 2 provides an overview of this outcome space. It should be emphasized that one OPL could hold more than one conception or indeed all conceptions during the course of the interview. In the extracts from the interviews that follow, words in italics show emphasis by the interviewee.

### *Category 1—Service/Organization Orientation*

As shown in fig. 1, this category had a strong focus on service. Every CPD activity was pursued to advance the goals of the organization. As one librarian put it:

Well, I did go to one on copyright and it was interesting, but . . . maybe it would have been more relevant [mentions different library type] librarian. And we'd be very, very direct and the type of work I do is very consistent and I'd know things in copyright in terms of what I do. I feel that I'm very much geared, like the library where I work has *made me*, rather than, you know what I mean? I fit into what's needed in the

organization and *adapt* to that . . . So I suppose I kind of see myself more of an information officer rather than a librarian in the more traditional sense, do you know . . . So, I think I've just kind of more developed with the organization and knowing what that needs rather than my own needs. (Interviewee 4)

Often management was in charge of initiating CPD as evident in the dimension "role." Dimension "style" showed that both formal (training courses run both in the organization and outside, seminars, academic degrees; being involved in work committees) and informal (Internet-related sources, such as e-mail lists, online tutorials, and free resources; on the job) means of CPD were used, with a strong emphasis on the former. In the main, financial support and leave were given but only as long as it was in the interest of the organization: "Well, in *my* experience the training courses aren't directly related to librarianship. They tend to be more related to office management, administration, human resource management, project management, things like that" (Interviewee 15).

Dimension "time" also highlighted a focus on the current position, rather than using CPD as a career planning tool. The impetus for "networking," which happened in the organization and beyond, was on solving current work issues.

#### CATEGORY 1 – Service/organizational orientation

CPD is upskilling and keeping up-to-date to deal with a new aspect of your work, with new developments by acquiring new skills or fine tuning, deepening and broadening already existing ones. This could take the form of *technical upskilling*, which relates to training in management, customer service, information resources, Library Management Systems, technology etc.; *softer skills*, such as presentation skills; or *academic upskilling*, which is your development as a librarian, combating "educational inflation." Usually the practical applicability is important, but CPD could lead to an academic qualification, always in the light of how it supports the goals of the organization and your current role. Your employer gets a more qualified employee, and it is beneficial to them. It could help you with a promotion. It would encourage you to stay longer with this employer, because you feel supported. You help other people do their job better, always with regard to organizational goals. You can also learn from colleagues in the organization drawing on the institutional knowledge. You gain more confidence. You need all of the skills above to have a modern, progressive service and to bring the library forward so that another librarian can take over easily. If librarians are not constantly upskilled, it is a loss to themselves, the staff, and the community at large, and you don't have a good customer service.

Figure 1. Category 1—Service/organizational orientation.

*Category 2—Professional Orientation*

Professionalism was the main driver for professional development in category 2 (see fig. 2): “Continuing professional development . . . continuing professional development . . . I guess it’s lifelong education, really, it’s just keeping up to speed with the profession and various different developments and doing this in different ways, either through keeping up with the literature or going to a training courses, things like that or, I suppose, going back to study and getting either a higher degree or whatever in the name of continuing in my profession” (Interviewee 9).

**CATEGORY 2 – LIS profession orientation**

CPD is about professional development, about being a professional. You would not be able to do your work without it, but would become stagnant as your library degree outdated quickly and there are gaps in your knowledge. You got the theory in library school (sometimes you go back to read through notes) and you need to update on practical things by broadening and deepening your skills. CPD is important to see whether there is a trend in the library profession, so that you are not going to be left behind by doing things the old traditional way. You are aware that you are competing with other libraries and information sources. You learn from other librarians, even if they are from bigger libraries or work in a different subject area. You share a culture with other librarians, and meeting other LIS professionals helps to beat a feeling of isolation by providing a social outlet and by developing a feeling of solidarity. Your management often does not understand what is needed in terms of CPD, and you need to justify your position and prove your professionalism and value when dealing with other professions in the organization, especially as an OPL. This can be both a curse and a benefit. It gives you a certain amount of freedom to pursue what you want to do. It might facilitate an expansion of your role to a certain extent. You feel strongly about CPD and would pay for it yourself. It helps distinguishing between nonprofessional and professional staff, but it is also about allowing your support staff to have CPD, which could mean that you are providing training to them. It helps you with your career, but also influences and inspires other people around you. Librarians in this category are often involved with a library association on a committee level. The profession changes, and CPD can transform the traditional image of the librarian. It allows LIS to be recognized by other professions by providing accreditation and makes it stronger because other professions do CPD as well. The profession should develop leadership in certain areas, e.g. as CPD providers (LIS profession as CPD providers).

Figure 2. Category 2—LIS profession orientation.

Different “styles” were used here, with a tendency toward LIS-related development, but the importance of accreditation of CPD activities was experienced most strongly. There was a perceived lack of support from management, even hostility toward CPD for their OPL (as apparent in dimension “role”), and librarians pointed out that formal recognition would make their case stronger, for example: “I’d like to see some sort of formal structure put in place, maybe by the *different library associations*. I don’t know if they exist already or whether they’d recommend it, but it would be nice to see some sort of formal structure, because I think, to follow a formal structure, as I said earlier, to *have* to do ten hours makes you think much more about what you do. I suppose, more formalized structure and possible recommendations as to what counts as CPD according to the different associations and some sort of incentive as well, maybe some sort of accreditation that is recognized by employers” (Interviewee 18).

“Networking” was particularly important in this category, as it served multiple purposes: it was essential to being a professional, usually involved peers, and had more of a career-long dimension.

#### *Category 3—OPL Orientation*

In category 3 (see fig. 3), OPLs remarked on their special status as singletons. They also reported an occasional sense of isolation. Although their respective work environment featured as prominently as it did in category 1, the focus was more on doing the day job as a solo librarian (rather than organizational needs) with an emphasis on quick, reliable information. CPD activities were always initiated by the OPL and usually responded to a pressing need-to-know.

I think it’s important, especially when you’re trying to be a jack of all trades that you keep yourself updated, like keep your skills and your knowledge of, both your knowledge in a practical way, of how to do certain things, but also just general knowledge of developments in librarianship or developments in publishing and just keep yourself informed, so that you can actually do your job better and go places. That you’re not kind of caught out [laughs] by something that you were totally unaware of and somebody else kind of says “oh, why aren’t we doing this?” . . . I think it’s probably even more important if you’re a generalist, like a one-person, and you’re trying to cover everything. I find I’d nearly include being a member of different groups, library groups, I would consider that part of professional development, because I find it really, really useful to just interact with other librarians who are in similar areas . . . even just talking to them, you find out things just by chance that you mightn’t have even found out in a formal kind of setting and you can exchange experience and you can learn from that . . . (Interviewee 11)

Networking was quite informal but with the view to problem solving, as an OPL could not be keeping an eye on all relevant developments. Informal means of CPD were preferred here, such as on-the-job learning: “And

### CATEGORY 3 – OPL orientation

CPD is about staying on top of things while juggling all the jobs an OPL does. You are a jack of all trades, an all-rounder and more of a generalist, rather than a specialist. The better you get at a specific skill, the easier your job becomes. You work in isolation and are not exposed to other librarians in your organization, which means you cannot bounce ideas off them, and you do not have much time. You need to stay one step ahead of your clients and therefore you pick things up as you go along. Some things are so new that you have to teach yourself on the go, so that you do not get stuck in a rut or become complacent. You do not know what you know or should be developing. You need to find your own way to satisfy your information needs. You are responsible for the library service, and because you are the information expert in the organization, you are often the first port of call. You are expected to know things, which include a teaching/training role to the users of your library and other professionals in both formal and informal ways (individual OPL as a CPD provider). You make your own job to a certain extent as the role of your library is changing all the time. You have to know about new technologies and about how people look for information by staying alert. You have to be proactive and go above and beyond what your users want.

Figure 3. Category 3—OPL orientation.

clearly, I think what we all said, ‘oh, a librarian can go in and work in any environment’ or we’d like to say, there’s a huge difference between knowing your environment and your subject area, just in terms of speed and fluency in dealing with the enquiries that you get and knowing the materials and knowing the resources. So the way I’ve done that is by sheer exposure to the area, really [. . .] you just pick up as you go along” (Interviewee 23).

#### Category 4—Personal Orientation

Category 4 (see fig. 4) was somewhat different from the other four. Here a CPD event came first, with the librarian only acknowledging a need later. The OPL was in charge here as a person, rather than a professional librarian, with no input from management: “So, yeah, so, basically they’d be searching skills, new ways of doing things, that kind of thing . . . And again, it’s kind of *ad hoc*, you know, something comes along. I couldn’t say to you now that I need to update my skills in x, y or z area, I couldn’t say that to you. But something might come along and I might say ‘I don’t know a lot about that’ or ‘I need to do something about that.’ Again, I might be doing something at work and I might realize ‘well, I need to do something about that,’ you know” (Interviewee 19).

**CATEGORY 4 – Personal orientation**

CPD is when you have learned something and when you come back energized, excited, and inspired, e.g. from conferences or from visiting other libraries. You want to do things or want to do them better (relevant to your work), want to put them into practice. You would like to do research (usually quite practical) into something you are passionate about. A specific need or an aspect of your work might have triggered this. It could also purely be an interest you have. You know you are good at something, but could be better. Sometimes you read or hear something and wonder how this could be incorporated into your work. You might want to develop a skill for future use, and the information you received might be useful at a later stage.

Figure 4. Category 4—Personal orientation.

“Networking” happened nearly by coincidence, for example as a side effect of attending a conference, and often acted as a trigger to do something in a different way. Both the current job and the career came up in the “time” dimension, but with an emphasis on the OPL as a person. In terms of “style” of CPD, both formal (such as short seminars, training and refresher courses) and informal (Internet resources, shadowing people, newsletters from vendors, and reading journals) means were reported, with a strong sense of practical applicability of training courses: “It was a, I mean, it was ‘advanced Internet searching’ or maybe, anyway, one of those, that you sat down at a PC and you actually had a quiz almost to do of, to find information. You sat down and you searched and then, ehm, to learn how people searched in different ways . . . So I had never searched like that before. And actually, I kind of search like that a lot since that course . . . [these courses] would have answered sort of more practical needs” (Interviewee 20).

*Category 5—Lifelong Learning Orientation*

Category 5 (see fig. 5) is the most holistic of all categories: it includes lifelong and life-wide views of CPD, where learning never stops. Personal learning by the OPL results in better service delivery; on-the-job learning impacts on the librarian’s personal life. Current work, career, and potential employment outside the library field, as well as personal skills, are reasons for CPD, as the following extract shows. Researcher: “O.K. Is there any kind of incentive for you to do CPD?”; Participant: “Mmmmh. . . . for myself, personally, yeah? [R: Yeah] Oh, your mind would go numb if you didn’t continue to learn. Everyone should learn for life, I suppose. Life-

### CATEGORY 5 – Lifelong learning orientation

CPD is for your own personal development. It may or may not help with promotion within your organization or help you get another job, perhaps even outside the library world. It could be just for the sake of knowledge, purely out of personal interest. You cannot stop learning. You are a self-starter and it is part of who you are as a person, it is something that comes naturally to you. You do that all the time as a librarian anyway. You would do CPD even if there was no support from management. That would not stop you, because it is the 'feel good' factor. CPD is about lifelong learning and the importance of education. It also includes things you do outside the workplace and in your own time, which can feed into work. Every time you talk to somebody you learn something. CPD is contributing to job satisfaction, helps you to keep your sanity and doing your job as well as you can, but is also enjoyable. One potential outcome could be a further academic qualification.

Figure 5. Category 5—Lifelong learning orientation.

long learning! [both laugh]. Just keep your brain active as well as obviously keeping on top of your job, to do your job to the best of your ability” (Interviewee 10).

OPLs saw scope for learning everywhere. Formal learning often entailed academic degrees, frequently pursued in their spare time. The librarians were also often aware of their own learning styles and preferences, more so than any other category. Dimension “networking” was cast widely here, and any type of human interaction was seen as beneficial: “These are the people who are shelving, these are people who know where everything is! And they had such knowledge and, I mean, I learned so much *from* those people. And they weren’t qualified at all, like they weren’t qualified librarians and they had *such* knowledge to give and you’d learn it from everybody you meet, d’you know. So you just *pass* it on, it’s exchange. And pass the information on. There’s no point [it being] clogged up here [points at head], you know . . . And the more people you can pass it on to, the more the information disseminates out there” (Interviewee 30).

Management has no impact on this category. Barriers, such as lack of time off or financial support, have no significance.

## DISCUSSION

In summary, it can be stated that these five categories of description are distinct from each other and that they are clearly defined. They ranged from an activity securing survival in the organization and the job market to something more fundamental, which included personal life goals. CPD

was used to react to pressures of the outside world but also to fulfill personal learning needs. The findings show a new model of understanding CPD. This has implications for how people engage in CPD and what activities they choose. Compared to other studies with more quantitative backgrounds, which tend to presume that everybody in the sample group is the same, CPD in this qualitative study was experienced in a limited number of significantly different ways.

The researcher argued that a more qualitative research approach was needed in order to understand people's own perceptions. Regarding the motivation to do CPD, for example, this study found that the reasons behind it were as unique as the people's experiences and environments. The personal and professional goals differed from category to category, and therefore the "average person" as such did not exist. Chan and Auster (2003) found that both managerial support and motivation had a positive effect on participation in informal CPD activities for the librarians in their research. Personal satisfaction was valued higher than the prospect of a promotion, and this intrinsic outcome inspired them most. With regard to formal CPD, managerial support was cited most as having a positive effect. Juxtaposing this with the findings of the current study, some parallels can be drawn. In categories that showed a high level of informal CPD, such as categories 2 (LIS profession orientation), 3 (personal orientation), and 5 (lifelong learning orientation), the OPL was responsible for their CPD and highly self-motivated. In category 1 (service orientation), however, which relied heavily on formal CPD, management was often in charge and it would be safe to assume that their support would have been strong. Chan and Auster (2003) used a mail survey and recommended in-depth case studies on informal learning in the workplace in order to investigate some of the hidden factors, which the present investigation has done.

One of the few research projects to investigate librarians' attitudes toward CPD by means of interviews was Doney (1998). When asked what CPD meant to them, librarians described it as "training and the development of skills" (Doney, 1998, p. 488). This corresponded somewhat with category 1 in the present study, albeit constituting a simplified and shortened version of it. Looking at the implications of CPD, participants referred to an increased ability to do the job, promotion, and greater job satisfaction. Cross-referenced to the study at hand, these outcomes can be linked to categories 1 (service orientation), 3 (OPL orientation), 4 (personal orientation), and, very strongly, category 5 (lifelong learning orientation).

The impact of the work environment was another factor overlooked in most CPD studies. Varlejs's (1999) work on self-directed, work-related learning by librarians suggested that the size of the library had far more influence on participation than administrative support (i.e., financial assistance and release time). Comparing the results of the present study,

this was certainly the case with OPLs in categories 2 (LIS profession orientation), 4 (personal orientation), and 5 (lifelong learning orientation). Setting the categories against Skule's (2004, p. 14) work, which discovered seven conditions to be beneficial to informal learning at work, also yields some interesting results, as shown in table 3.

Interestingly, category 1 (service orientation) emerged as the most likely environment within which informal workplace learning would flourish, yet it was the one that leaned more toward formal CPD. This could perhaps be explained by considering the fact that these organizations were most likely to have a formal appraisal system in place, which has traditionally favored formal CPD, such as training courses and attendance at conferences. The OPLs who held this conception were thus more exposed to this mindset.

Another innovative feature of this article lies in its research approach. This was the first phenomenographic study in Ireland to examine OPLs' perceptions and the first to use this framework in relation to OPLs' CPD. Using phenomenography resulted in a complete new understanding of CPD: people's personal circumstances, experiences, and opinions make a difference in how they view CPD. Collin (2006, p. 408) used phenomenographic analysis in part for her research on design engineers' learning at work. Table 4 shows how the six conceptions that she found can be

Table 3. Learning conditions at work

Learning condition (Skule, 2004, p. 14)	Category reported in (for present study)
1 A high degree of exposure to changes	All categories
2 A high degree of exposure to demands	All categories
3 Managerial responsibilities [of the individual]	All categories
4 Extensive professional contacts	All categories
5 Superior feedback	All categories
6 Management support for learning	Categories 1 and 3
7 Rewarding of proficiency [e.g. higher wages, career opportunities within the organization]	Category 1 and also category 4 (to some extent)

Table 4. Conceptions of learning at work

Conception of learning (Collin, 2006, p. 408)	Matching categories
Learning through doing the job	1, 3, 5
Learning through co-operation and interaction with colleagues	1, 2, 4, 5
Learning through evaluating work experiences	3, 5
Learning through taking over something new	1, 3, 4, 5
Learning through formal education	1, 2, 4, 5
Learning through extra work contexts [i.e. outside work]	4, 5

contrasted and matched with the five categories identified in the present study.

Although Collin (2006) did not look at exactly the same phenomenon, as she investigated engineers' conceptions and experiences of learning at work, there is a certain degree of overlap between the two sets of conceptions. This suggests that phenomenography offers a reliable alternative approach to examining people's perceptions of phenomena.

#### *Types of CPD*

Of interest to this article is how professional bodies can respond to the ways in which these OPLs experienced different means of CPD. The categories form a hierarchy in terms of focus on CPD for work-related purposes or for person-centered reasons (see fig. 6).

It would be difficult for any library association to offer targeted CPD for more work-focused conceptions as the range of library settings in which OPLs work is quite wide. This could possibly be overcome by offering broad, general support using formal CPD methods (e.g., online seminars in finance and budgeting, which probably affect all OPLs), or through setting up an electronic platform, such as a dedicated website, for more informal work-specific queries. There will be limits, however, on how much can be catered for. Librarians whose conceptions fall into these categories will always have to look for CPD opportunities outside of what the profession can offer. For person-focused conceptions, however, an expansion of current provision, in terms of both quantity and availability would be welcomed, as OPLs in these categories were interested in the sheer breadth of opportunities, be they LIS journals or informal networking evenings and conferences, even in different locations.

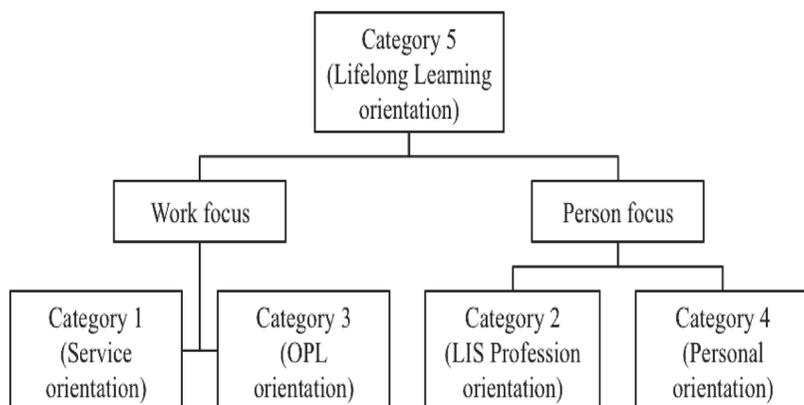


Figure 6. Hierarchy of categories.

Looking at this with a view to a potential Irish CPD scheme, no one CPD measure seems to fit with a given category, so no recommendation could be made here. The researcher suggests that using established learning-style models, such as the one developed by Honey and Mumford (1992), could help individual librarians discover and reflect on their preferred mode. They could then actively seek out CPD opportunities and give feedback to providers in a national framework.

All categories, however, could benefit from new methods of CPD as suggested by one of the OPLs: "It would be good if the Library Association [of Ireland], even if you could pay a little bit *more* in your subscription, but if that went into the training fund . . . In one of my previous jobs, what they used, it was a big company and what they used to do was they were training, say, five people out of a hundred in a skill and then they would be *super users*. So if the Library Association could even do something like that and *fund* five people in certain skills and then those people obviously would have to be voluntary or whatever, but people could pay a nominal fee and then those super users could spread those skills to people who needed it" (Interviewee 29). This cascaded training strategy could work well as OPLs are natural networkers, as evidenced in the study.

#### *Dimension "Networking"*

Another noteworthy outcome of the analysis was the amount of informal learning happening through networking, which so far has been a somewhat neglected area of investigation in LIS. Each category used networking, albeit in different ways, and with distinctive outcomes, be they as part of an ongoing engagement with other professionals or with a specific query in mind. This confirms that adults learn through connecting with other human beings along the lines of Allen's (1974, p. 33) interpretation of andragogy, namely through "mutual, self-directed inquiry." Networking constituted an exchange of information among equals, where one party would be more knowledgeable on a specific topic, but nonetheless all involved were peers. This sharing of information leads to knowledge creation: OPLs were using it not only for the users of their respective libraries but also with each other.

Considering the fact that they are all partaking in some form of networking, they might have already established informal relationships. A more formal way of networking, like peer mentoring, might help OPLs in particular with setting targets for their own development and that of the library service they provide. Kram and Isabella (1985) observed that peer mentoring, more than traditional models, satisfied the needs of professionals at all career stages. It offered greater opportunities for mutual development and growth. In any case, a national Irish CPD strategy would benefit from encouraging OPLs to sign up for more mentoring opportunities, be they on a local, national, or international level.

## CONCLUSION

This research had a number of significant outcomes. First, it showed that CPD was understood in distinct ways and that different perceptions lead to employing more formal or informal means of CPD, as shown in the outcome space (see appendix 2). Second, it highlighted the relevance of networking for OPLs across all categories and all types of library settings. Third, it identified some implications for the LAI in terms of supporting these OPLs. And, finally, it confirmed that phenomenography was a viable research approach to investigate phenomena in LIS, which in turn could inform professional practice. Yates, Partridge, and Bruce (2012) concur with this view.

One of the practical outcomes of this research so far has been an enhanced debate among OPLs in Ireland, stimulated by dissemination of the research through professional literature and conferences. The researcher published an article on the project in *An Leabharlann: The Irish Library*, the journal of the LAI, in March 2012, the main part of which discussed recommendations for the LAI made by OPLs, identifying four areas for potential improvement:

- Networking opportunities
- More online courses and support
- Accreditation of activities: moving toward a compulsory CPD scheme?
- Promotion of the profession through CPD (Hornung, 2012, pp. 17–19).

When the researcher subsequently presented some of her findings at two library conferences in Ireland in May and June 2012, the discussions that followed then revolved around the potential establishment of a separate solo librarian group within the LAI structure, perhaps modeled on the Solo Librarians Division of the SLA. This division of SLA, among other things, runs a wiki for its members (Special Libraries Association, 2012), an idea that had also been mooted by one of the interviewees.

The necessity for a national CPD framework for librarians in Ireland is apparent. This should include all stakeholders and encompass informal and formal opportunities. OPLs in particular would benefit from it, as it would provide them with clear guidelines. These in turn could help them make a case to their organizations should they wish or need to do so. St. Clair (2003) argued that only a highly organized and structured professional learning program for librarians could help provide the highest standards of knowledge service delivery, which the customers deserve. Since the conclusion of this research project, the LAI has created a CPD learning portfolio for all its members, which is now available on its website (Library Association of Ireland, 2012). This tool can be used when applying for the LAI's Associateship and Fellowship qualifications. The LAI recommends a minimum twenty-five hours of CPD per annum, including

professional reading, attendance at conferences and courses, academic degrees, publications, and involvement in professional associations.

Even though this LAI learning portfolio is to be welcomed, it needs to go one step further and recognize the shift that is noticeable in many other professional associations. They are tending to move away from input-focused to outcome-based structures that seek to determine the competencies learned and do not rely any longer simply on a list of hours spent on certain CPD activities. The outcome of learning must match an increased measurable level of competence. Of course, purely participating in CPD does not make a practitioner competent (Friedman & Phillips, 2004). This researcher therefore argues that competency could be achieved through promotion of reflection, where practitioners analyze their own learning. In the case of CILIP, for example, reflection and self-assessment underpins their whole Framework of Qualifications, as is evident in its recently published Professional Knowledge and Skills Base tool (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2012).

As the present research was a qualitative study, the sample was naturally quite small. Future research could build on this model of understanding CPD, however, by conducting a larger survey among the OPL community in Ireland. Whatever the next steps, OPLs in Ireland have been shown to be proactive and innovative when it comes to CPD.

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### Appendix 1. Interview guide

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For data collection purposes, I would like to record this interview. If, at any stage, you feel uncomfortable with this, please let me know and I will stop the recording. I will also note some comments by hand. All information will be confidential and only be used in the context of this dissertation. Neither your name nor organization will appear in the thesis or any publication deriving out of it, nor will they be disclosed to a third party. I will send you a transcript of this interview if you are interested in it. You are welcome to comment on any mistakes and/or omissions I made during the transcription process. If you don't have any questions, I'd like to start by asking you...

1. What is your understanding (perception) of the term "Continuing Professional Development or "CPD"?
  - Prompts: When you hear the term, what comes into your mind? How do you think your employer defines CPD? Your colleagues? Do you agree/disagree?

2. Please describe a situation in which you felt a lack of knowledge (an information need) and of an example of CPD that helped you to address this perceived need.
  - To find out: What kind of CPD does the participant engage in? Ask for more examples
  - Prompts: What worked for you? What didn't? Which was the best? Which one the most useless? The most recent? Why do you think it was the best/worst experience? What was the critical thing? How do you judge whether CPD is "any good"?
3. Who in your opinion is responsible for CPD in a one-person library? Why?
  - To explore the role of professional associations, the library school, employers
  - Is there an official CPD policy for the library/organization in place?
4. What barriers, if any, did you as an OPL experience with regards to CPD?
  - What are the problems?
  - What incentives are offered by the employer?
5. Reflecting on your own experience, how important do you think CPD will be for your own future/for the future of the LIS profession?
  - Might come up: a need for a nation-wide policy/recommendations
6. Coming back to my first question: What is your understanding (perception) of the term? What does the term "CPD" mean in your view?
7. Is there anything else you think I should have asked you?

Background questions:

- Background on LIS education/non-LIS qualifications
- Membership of professional associations
- How long LIS professional? How long OPL?
- First job as OPL/First job after initial LIS education? OPL by choice?
- What kind of OPL? Maybe get some background on organization, work and employment conditions, library specifications/category of library, reporting to LIS professional?
- Are there any questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you very much for this interview!

## Appendix 2. Outcome space

		Categories of description CPD is...			
Dimensions of variation	Category 1 (Service orientation)	Category 2 (LIS profession orientation)	Category 3 (OPL orientation)	Category 4 (Personal orientation)	Category 5 (Lifelong learning orientation)
	Upskilling for the sake of the organization/library service	Developing a professional librarian	Helping you to do all the jobs an OPL does	When you have learned something and you want to do things in a better way when you come back	About your development as a human being
Role—who is in charge?	Librarian and management in charge; often only management	Librarian in charge; management often against/indifferent	Librarian in charge	Librarian in charge	Librarian as human being (lifelong and life-wide view)
Role—support?	Financial support and time off	Often no financial support and no time off	Financial support and time off	Often no financial support nor time off	Own time and own money
Style	Formal and informal; formal strong	Formal and informal; informal strong, but accreditation important	Very much informal	Formal and informal	Formal and informal, both very strong
Time	Current job, less career focus	Career focus, less current job	Very much current job—pressing need	Current job, also career (but with a more personal focus)	Lifelong—both current and future career as well as personal life
Networking—reasons?	View to problem solving (service)	Being a professional	View to problem solving (OPL status)	Acts as trigger to do something different/differently	Condition of being human
Networking—with whom?	People in organization and librarians	With peers	Peers and experts in organization and beyond	More accidental, e.g. speaking to people at conferences	Everybody

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