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### **LIS Journals as a Source of Evidence for Evidence-based Practice: The Case of *School Libraries Worldwide***

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#### ***Abstract:***

*Journals in the field of school librarianship support evidence-based practice in school libraries through the publication of research articles and articles that describe “best practices”. In this paper, the authors analyze and compare research articles and “best practices” articles in the international journal School Libraries Worldwide to develop a better picture of the journal as a source of evidence for evidence-based practice.*

LIS journals provide a vital source of the information that LIS professionals need to ensure that their work exemplifies the best practices of the LIS field. The development of a new international LIS journal in the area of school librarianship, *School Libraries Worldwide*, is examined in this paper in terms of its role in supporting best practices through the publication of two kind of articles: those that reflect current "best practices" and those that report research in the field of school librarianship. Professionals look to their journals for evidence to inform and improve their practice. LIS journals support "evidence-based practice librarianship," an approach to professional practice that “seeks to improve library practice by utilizing the best-available evidence combined with a pragmatic perspective developed from

working experiences in librarianship" (Eldridge, 2000). That is, evidence-based practice depends on LIS professionals using "good evidence" including evidence from research and evidence from practice (Clyde, 2003, p. 26).

## **THE JOURNAL**

*School Libraries Worldwide*, published twice yearly by the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL), publishes literature reviews and papers of commentary and opinion in addition to research and best practices articles. It is a refereed journal, with an Editorial Board drawn from 14 countries on five continents. It has been edited by Dianne Oberg since its establishment in 1995. The journal is sent to all members of IASL as part of their benefits of membership. Libraries of universities and colleges (with school librarianship programmes) subscribe, as do school library service centres. Articles are indexed in a number of indexing and abstracting services (including Bibliothek Forschung und Praxis, Children's Literature Abstracts, Contents Pages in Education, ERIC, Library Literature, and Library and Information Science Abstracts—LISA), and the articles are available full text online for a fee through ProQuest (which increases access to the articles). In addition, the IASL web site School Libraries Online supports access to the articles through two main strategies: a Table of Contents listing for each issue of the journal; and the provision of abstracts for the research articles through "IASL's Research Abstracts" on the web site (with access by keyword, topic of the research, author, and country about which the research was done).

## **THE ANALYSES**

To study *School Libraries Worldwide* in terms of its role in supporting evidence-based practice in school librarianship, content analysis was used as a methodology to investigate two kinds of articles published in the journal from 1995 to 2003 inclusive: those that reflect current best practices and those that report research in the field of school librarianship. The two types of articles were first analyzed separately, as described below. Then the analyses of the two groups of articles were compared to identify any patterns such as the possible dominance in the articles of the representation of the experiences of particular areas of the world or particular topics, and any gaps in the representation of the experiences of particular groups of people or particular regions, or gaps in the presentation of topics or professional practices. Finally, the paper presents some general conclusions about the articles in the journal and relates them to evidence-based practice in school librarianship.

The research articles were separated from the professional or best practices articles using criteria for identifying research articles in LIS (Clyde, 2001, p.68). These criteria were developed through a study of LIS research in and about Iceland (Pálsdóttir, *et al.*, 1997), and subsequently used in other projects (see, for example, Clyde, 2002). The criteria are:

- Evidence that the work reported in the article was intended as research
- Statement of aims or hypotheses or research questions
- Information about the research methodology used
- Discussion of the research results
- The work placed in the context of other related research and literature
- Discussion of the implications of the work

- Includes a reference list or bibliography
- The report is of more than two pages

To be considered a “research article,” an article had to meet all eight criteria. It should be noted that these criteria are not evaluative; they serve simply to separate research articles from the other articles published in a journal.

The other non-research articles were then examined to ensure that they fell into the category of professional or best practices literature, using the categories developed by Boyd Rayward (1990) in his analysis of LIS journals. Rayward developed four categories for determining the nature of LIS journal articles. In addition to “research articles” which he termed “scholarly literature,” Rayward categorized other LIS articles as “practical literature” (focusing on details of systems, procedure, organization, or application), “reportage” (focusing on news, description, or discussion), and “hortatory literature” (focusing on self-congratulation or self-recrimination and filled with ‘should’s, ‘must’s, and ‘ought’s). The other or non-research articles of *School Libraries Worldwide* primarily fall into Rayward’s category of practical literature. The exceptions include 12 reportage articles and one hortatory article, and these have been excluded from the analyses.

The best practices articles analyzed for this paper all fit into Rayward’s category of practical literature, and meet the following criteria:

- Evidence that the practical information in the article was intended to support or encourage “best practices”
- Detailed rich description of the context from which the practical information was derived
- Clear description of the “best practice(s)” which would allow application in another location or context
- Discussion of how the “best practice(s)” might be implemented
- The work placed in the context of other related research and literature
- Discussion of the implications for practice of the work
- Includes a reference list or bibliography
- The report is of more than two pages

**Table 1: Research and Other Articles in *School Libraries Worldwide***

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Research Articles</i>	<i>Other Articles</i>	<i>Total Articles</i>
1(1) Jan 1995	7	-	7
1(2) Jul 1995	1	3	4
2(1) Jan 1996	2	7	9
2(2) Jul 1996	3	1	4
3(1) Jan 1997	2	5	7
3(2) Jul 1997	4	3	7
4(1) Jan 1998	4	2	6
4(2) Jul 1998	2	8	10
5(1) Jan 1999	7	-	7
5(2) Jul 1999	7	1	8
6(1) Jan 2000	2	11	13
6(2) Jul 2000	7	1	8
7(1) Jan 2001	5	2	7
7(2) Jul 2001	2	5	7
8(1) Jan 2002	4	3	7
8(2) Jul 2002	2	5	7
9(1) Jan 2003	2	5	7
9(2) Jul 2003	4	2	6
<b>Totals</b>	67 (51.2%)	64 (48.8%)	131 (100%)

Note 1: Editorials are not included in the counts

Note 2: The July 1995 issue includes one reportage article and one hortatory article.

Note 3: The January 2000 issue was devoted primarily to "A Day in the Life...", descriptive stories from school library personnel around the world. There were only four regular articles in the issue, of which two were research articles. It was thus not a typical issue of the journal.

## RESEARCH ARTICLES

Research in the field of LIS has been studied in many different ways over the years. However, in 1990 the Finnish researchers Kalervo Järvelin and Pertti Vakkari developed techniques for studying published research output in LIS, in such a way that the research output can be compared over time and across national boundaries. They used their own methodology to study international research in LIS generally through articles in 37 core journals (Järvelin and Vakkari, 1990). They subsequently updated this work through a longitudinal comparative study (Järvelin and Vakkari, 1993). Other researchers who have used their methodology include Cano and Rey (1993) for a study of the Spanish LIS research literature, Guðrún Pálsdóttir *et al.* (1997) for a study of published LIS research in and about Iceland, Yontar (1995) for a study of LIS research theses in Turkey, and Ragnhildur Blöndal (1997) for a comparative analysis of published and unpublished LIS research in Iceland. Most relevant to this present study, Patricia Layzell Ward (1997) used the methodology to compare research articles and professional articles in nine British LIS journals over a thirty-year period 1965 to 1995. Maxine Rochester and Pertti Vakkari (1998) later compared a number of country studies that used the Järvelin and Vakkari methodology, looking at national differences and trends. By 2000, Turkish researchers Yontar and Yalvaç could describe this methodology as “widely accepted” (Yontar and Yalvaç, 2000, p.41) internationally.

**Has the amount of research reporting in *SLW* increased or decreased over the years?**

Over the whole period studied, the research articles in *School Libraries Worldwide* accounted for 51.2 per cent of all articles (see Table 1). However, there was sometimes a great variation from year to year: for example, in 1998 just 37.5 per cent of articles were research articles, while in the next year, 93 per cent of articles were research articles. Such things as a special issue of the journal devoted primarily to short “Day in the Life...” stories, made a great deal of difference to the counts. However, in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003, the percentage of research articles published in *School Libraries Worldwide* has remained fairly constant at around 50 per cent and very close to the average for the whole period. The impact of a 2002 decision by the journal’s Editorial Board, to have theme sections in the second half of each issue of the journal, appeared to result in an immediate slight decline in the proportion of research articles, but this trend has reversed with the July 2003 issue. Though observable in a situation where the total number of articles under consideration is relatively small, neither trend was statistically significant.

**Who writes about research for *SLW*?**

The brief “author affiliation” information provided at the beginning of each article was used to categorize the authors of the research articles in *School Libraries Worldwide* (see Table 2). Approximately four fifths of the articles were written by university faculty members and/or doctoral students in universities; the proportion is higher if one takes into account the fact that five other articles had at least one university faculty member as co-author (taking the total percentage to 88.1%).

**Table 2: Who writes about research? n=67**

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Number of Articles (%)</i>
University Faculty, PhD Students	54 (80.6%)
Officers with Library Authorities	2 (2.3%)
School Librarians	2 (2.3%)
Employed in University Library	2 (2.3%)
Private Consultants	2 (2.3%)
School Library Service Centre Personnel	-
Officers with Education Authorities	-
Mixed Groups*	5 (7.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67 (100%)</b>

\* In each case, the “mixed group” consisted of at least one academic and at least one school librarian.

**Which countries are represented in the reporting of research?**

Table 3 gives an indication of the countries about which research articles have been published in *School Libraries Worldwide*. Perhaps not surprisingly, the United States of America accounted for around 30 per cent of the research articles. However, this was less than the 41.5 per cent found in a study of all the English-language research articles and papers in school librarianship (Clyde, 2002, p.61), suggesting that *School Libraries Worldwide* has a broader international base than might be expected. The articles listed in Table 3 as “international” were of two main types: those where data were collected by the researcher/s in two or more countries; and those the aim of which was to study an international phenomenon (such as an international professional association). Canada (the country where *School Libraries Worldwide* is edited) and Australia were the countries that ranked second and third. Twelve countries together accounted for 19 research articles—more than a quarter (28.3%) of

the total; 16 individual countries (excluding those represented in “international” reports) are represented in the research articles.

**Table 3: Research Articles by Country Studied n=67**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of Articles (%)</i>
USA	20 (29.9%)
International	10 (14.9%)
Canada	8 (11.9%)
Australia	6 (9.0%)
United Kingdom	4 (6.0%)
Botswana	3 (4.5%)
Sweden	3 (4.5%)
Fiji	2 (3.4%)
Israel	2 (3.0%)
South Africa	2 (3.0%)
Ghana	1 (1.5%)
Iceland	1 (1.5%)
Jamaica	1 (1.5%)
Japan	1 (1.5%)
Latvia	1 (1.5%)
Lithuania	1 (1.5%)
The Netherlands	1 (1.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67 (100%)</b>

### **What topics are reported in research articles?**

The research topics classification of Järvelin and Vakkari is based on an hierarchical structure of categories and subcategories that cover the broad field of LIS. Table 4 presents the results of the analysis of research articles in *School Libraries Worldwide* by main topics (for brevity of reporting; interested readers will find the full classification in Järvelin and Vakkari, 1990). As was the case when used in Anne Clyde’s (2002) study of research articles and papers in the field of school librarianship internationally, the Järvelin and Vakkari topic classification required expansion to accommodate the research concerns of school librarianship as represented in the articles in *School Libraries Worldwide*. In fact, this was anticipated by Pertti Vakkari (2004). As was the case in the international study (Clyde, 2002, p. 66), one of the most popular areas of research reported in *School Libraries Worldwide* was information literacy and information skills (19.4% of articles). Järvelin and Vakkari include “User Education” in the category of “Library and Information Service Activities” but the information literacy / information skills research that is being undertaken in the field of school librarianship (and reported in *School Libraries Worldwide*) goes well beyond library user education. It also goes beyond the “Information Seeking Behaviour” that is part of the “Information Seeking” category. The category “Library and Information Service Activities” (20.9% of the articles) includes articles on library collections and facilities. The added category of “National Surveys” covers research studies with a wide-ranging approach, carried out to describe the “state of the art” of school libraries in a country, usually as the basis for forward planning. Under “Other Aspects of LIS”, eight of the ten articles were related to the evaluation of the *Library Power* initiative in the United States.

**Table 4: Research Topics (Järvelin and Vakkari Classification) n=67**

<i>Research Topic</i>	<i>Number of Articles (%)</i>
The Profession	5 (7.5%)
Library History	2 (3.0%)
Publishing	-
Education in LIS	4 (6.0%)
Methodology	-
Analysis of LIS	-
Library & Information Service Activities	14 (20.9%)
Information Storage & Retrieval	-
Information Seeking	1 (1.5%)
Scientific & Professional Communication	-
Other Aspects of LIS	10 (14.9%)
Other Studies	1 (1.5%)
Added: National Survey	9 (13.4%)
Added: Information Skills/Literacy	13 (19.4%)
Added: Principal Support	2 (3.0%)
Added: Information Technology	2 (3.0%)
Added: Censorship	2 (3.0%)
Added: Reading & Reading Promotion	1 (1.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>67 (100%)</b>

#### **What research methodologies are used?**

Table 5 shows the most common primary (or main) research method reported in research articles in *School Libraries Worldwide* was the survey (40.3%), reflecting the findings of Clyde's 2002 analysis of research articles and papers in school librarianship internationally (where the survey was found to account for 39.1% over the decade 1991 to 2000). Qualitative methods accounted for 29.9 per cent of primary methods used in research reported in *School Libraries Worldwide* (19.6% in the international study; Clyde, 2002). Other methods used as the primary method include case studies (often employing multiple data collection methods), action research, content analysis, and historical methods. On the other hand, half the methods listed in the Järvelin and Vakkari classification were not reported at all (as a primary method) in research articles in *School Libraries Worldwide*.

#### **What indicators are there of the quality of the research?**

All articles submitted for consideration for *School Libraries Worldwide* go through a process of double blind peer review. The reviewers are members of the Editorial Board of *School Libraries Worldwide* who bring an extensive expertise in both professional practice and in research. The majority hold or have held faculty positions in universities; this suggests at least a minimum competence in assessing research. The review process should ensure basic quality control; certainly it means that research articles with obvious methodological or other problems are not published. However, the peer review process is not without its critics as a method of controlling research quality (see, for example, White, 2003; Henderson, 2003); other methods also have their problems (see Clyde, 2004, in press). Katzer, Cook and Crouch (1998, p.7) outline a strategy that readers can use to evaluate published research articles; however, a 2003 study by Anne Clyde shows that even experienced evaluators will disagree in their evaluation of research articles as a basis for evidence-based practice. This research related to assessing the quality of research articles is continuing.

**Table 5: Primary Research Methods Used**  
(Järvelin and Vakkari Classification) n=63

<i>Primary Research Method</i>	<i>Number of Articles (%)</i>
<b>Empirical Research Strategy</b>	<b>63 (94%)</b>
- Historical method	4 (6.0%)
- Survey method	27 (40.3%)
- Qualitative method	20 (29.9%)
- Evaluation method	1 (1.5%)
- Case / Action research	12 (17.9%)
- Content or protocol analysis	3 (4.5%)
- Citation analysis	-
- Other bibliographic method	-
- Secondary analysis	2(3.0%)-
- Experiment	1 (1.5%)
- Other empirical method	1 (1.5%)
<b>Conceptual Research Strategy</b>	-
- Verbal argumentation, criticism	-
- Concept analysis	-
<b>Mathematical or Logical Method</b>	-
<b>System / Software Analysis / Design</b>	-
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>1 (1.5%)</b>
<b>Discussion Paper</b>	-
<b>Bibliographic Method</b>	-
<b>Other Method*</b>	<b>3 (4.5%)</b>
<b>Not Applicable, No Method</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>67 (100%)</b>

\*Includes one mixed methods article

## PROFESSIONAL ARTICLES

### Has the amount of reporting of best practices in *SLW* increased or decreased over the years?

Over the whole period studied, the non-research articles accounted for 48.8 per cent of all articles (see Table 1). However, if the non-research articles are divided into sub-groups according to Rayward's categories, professional or best practices articles only account for 38.9 per cent (51 out of 131) of all articles. There was sometimes a great variation from year to year in the proportion of best practices articles published; the range from year to year varied from a high of 62.5 per cent in 1998 to a low of five per cent in 2000. The amount of variation from year to year was similar to that for research articles.

### Who writes about best practices for *SLW*?

The brief "author affiliation" information provided at the beginning of each article was used to categorize the authors of the best practices articles in *School Libraries Worldwide* (see Table 6), as it had been for the research articles. Approximately half of the best practices articles were written by university faculty members and/or doctoral students in universities; when one takes into account the fact that three other articles had at least one university faculty member as co-author the total percentage rises to 62.7 per cent.



**Table 6: Who writes about best practices? n=51**

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Number of Articles (%)</i>
University Faculty, PhD Students	29 (56.9%)
Officers with Library Authorities	2 (3.9%)
School Librarians	8 (15.9%)
Employed in University Library	3 (5.9%)
Private Consultants	3 (5.9%)
School Library Service Centre Personnel	-
Officers with Education Authorities	2 (3.9%)
Mixed Groups*	4 (7.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>51 (100%)</b>

\* The “mixed groups” included: an academic and a school librarian (two articles); an academic and an officer with an education authority; and a school librarian and an officer with a library authority.

### **Which countries are represented in the reporting of best practices?**

Table 7 gives an indication of the countries in which professional articles published in *School Libraries Worldwide* have been set. Australia, the United States and Canada together accounted for over half of the best practices articles. The articles listed in Table 7 as “international” were of three types: those reporting practice in two or more countries; those reporting practice in international schools; and those commenting on the international relevance of a particular best practice. *School Libraries Worldwide* has a broad international base in terms of professional articles; 17 individual countries (excluding those represented in “international” reports) are represented in the reporting of best practices.

**Table 7: Professional Articles by Country Reported n=51**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of Articles (%)</i>
Australia	11 (21.6%)
USA	11 (21.6%)
Canada	7 (13.7%)
International*	6 (11.8%)
Botswana	3 (5.9%)
Bangladesh	1 (2%)
Fiji	1 (2%)
Ghana	1 (2%)
Greece	1 (2%)
Hong Kong (PRC)	1 (2%)
Iceland	1 (2%)
Latvia	1 (2%)
Malaysia	1 (2%)
Namibia	1 (2%)
New Zealand	1 (2%)
Sri Lanka	1 (2%)
The Netherlands	1 (2%)
United Kingdom	1 (2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>51 (100%)</b>

\* Includes international schools

### **What topics are reported in best practices articles?**

The most popular best practice topics published in *School Libraries Worldwide* were “Reading and Reading Promotion” (23.5% of the practice articles) and national surveys (another 23.5% of the practice articles). The next most popular topics were

“Library and Information Service Activities” (13.7%) and “Information Technology” (11.8%). However, all of these topics are related to themes of particular issues of the journal so this finding is not as significant as it would be if the journal did not use a thematic approach to soliciting articles.

**Table 8: Best Practices Topics (Järvelin and Vakkari Classification) n=51**

<i>Best Practices Topic</i>	<i>Number of Articles (%)</i>
The Profession	1 (2.0%)
Library History	-
Publishing	-
Education in LIS	2 (3.9%)
Methodology	2 (3.9%)
Analysis of LIS	-
Library & Information Service Activities	2 (3.9%)
Information Storage & Retrieval	-
Information Seeking	-
Scientific & Professional Communication	-
Other Aspects of LIS	2 (3.9%)
Other Studies	1 (2.0%)
Added: National Survey	12 (23.5%)
Added: Information Skills/Literacy	7 (13.7%)
Added: Principal Support	3 (5.9%)
Added: Information Technology	6 (11.8%)
Added: Censorship	1 (2.0%)
Added: Reading & Reading Promotion	12 (23.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>51 (100%)</b>

### **What bases for evidence are used in best practice articles?**

The main sources of evidence for the best practices articles were: empirical research reports; theory based on research; application of research and/or theory to practice; descriptions of best practice; and argumentation. In terms of sources of evidence, the best practice articles were evenly divided between those drawing primarily from personal experience, such as the implementation of a programme of service or instruction or the development of a document to guide and/or evaluate practice, and those drawing primarily from a reading and analysis of the literature of research and theory.

### **What indicators are there of the quality of the best practices?**

Like the research articles, the best practices articles submitted for consideration for *School Libraries Worldwide* go through a process of double blind peer review. All of the members of Editorial Board have histories of providing leadership in the field of school librarianship (often as a result of the professional positions that they hold); this ensures at least a minimum competence in assessing best practices. Although the majority work in first world countries where school libraries are relatively well-developed, there is a significant number on the Board who work or have worked in the developing world and who have the capacity to assess best practices in the context of their applicability or utility in countries in the developing world. Whether first world or developing world, there are considerable differences in professional practice from country to country and sometimes within countries, as a result of social, cultural, economic, and political factors and educational traditions. While Editorial Board

members come from 14 countries, providing for representation of five continents, nevertheless it is necessary that Board members and guest editors are aware of the need to consider best practices within a wide range of contexts.

## COMPARISONS

In this section of the paper, the analyses (above) of the research articles and the best practices articles will be compared, using similar questions or headings to those used in the discussions of the research and best practices articles. The aims are to identify trends in *School Libraries Worldwide* as a whole, and to develop a better picture of the journal as a whole as a source of evidence for evidence-based practice in school librarianship.

### Has the amount of research and best practice reporting in *SLW* increased or decreased over the years?

Table 1 shows that although the proportion of research articles to other articles may vary a great deal from issue to issue and even sometimes from year to year, over the whole period approximately half the articles fall into each of these main categories. Table 9 (below), which compares the first and second halves of the publishing history of *School Libraries Worldwide*, indicates that the proportion of research and best practices articles has remained about the same across the decade. However, a slight shift to a heavier emphasis on research articles seems to be occurring now; this is consistent with one of the current goals of the journal's Editorial Board, to develop *School Libraries Worldwide* into a significant research journal (Minutes of *School Libraries Worldwide* Editorial Board meeting, July 10, 2001).

**Table 9: Research and Best Practices Articles in *School Libraries Worldwide***

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Research Articles</i>	<i>Best Practices Articles</i>	<i>Total Research and Best Practices Articles</i>
First half of publication period (Jan 1995 to Jan 1999)	32 (54.2%)	27 (45.8%)	59 (100%)
Second half of publication period (Jul 1999 to Jul 2003)	35 (59.3%)	24 (40.7%)	59 (100%)

### Who writes about research and best practices for *SLW*?

Table 2 and Table 6 together help to answer this question. As was the case with the research articles, the group most likely to write best practices articles comprises university faculty and doctoral students, though school librarians are more heavily represented as authors or co-authors of the best practices articles than of the research articles. For approximately one fifth of the best practices articles (21.6%), school librarians were authors or co-authors; for the research articles, the proportion was about one tenth (9%). Thus school librarians were more likely to have been authors or co-authors of best practices articles than of research articles, even though they were still associated with a minority of the articles.

**Which countries are represented in the research articles and the best practices articles?**

Table 3 and Table 7 show the countries about which research articles and best practices articles have been written. Although the journal has a fairly broad international base (with authors from more than 20 countries, as indicated by the “author affiliation” information on the articles), over half of both the research articles and the best practices articles focus on just three predominantly English-speaking countries: the United States, Australia and Canada. While there were articles from countries such as Sweden (3), Iceland (2), and Israel (2) where English is not the national language, and articles from countries like Botswana (6) and South Africa (2) where English is just one of the national languages, nevertheless coverage of the non-English-speaking world is not strong in comparison with coverage of the main English-speaking countries.

**What topics are discussed in research and best practices articles?**

Table 4, Table 8, and Table 10 together help to answer this question. The broad topics most frequently represented in both the research and the best practices articles are topics with close relevance to the everyday work of the school librarian: information skills/literacy; library service activities (including collections and facilities); evaluation of library programmes and services; reading and reading promotion; and information technology. However, the research and professional articles tended to address different kinds of topics (see Table 10).

**Table 10: Topics Most Frequently Addressed, by Number, % and Ranking**

	<i>Research Articles n=67</i>			<i>Best Practices Articles n=51</i>			<i>Total Research and Best Practices Articles N=118</i>		
Library & Information Service Activities	14	20.9%	1 tie				16	13.6%	3
Information Skills/Literacy	14	20.9%	1 tie	7	13.7%	3	21	17.8%	1 tie
Other Aspects of LIS (evaluation)	10	14.9%	3				12	10.2	5
National Survey	9	13.4%	4	12	23.5%	1 tie	21	17.8%	1 tie
Reading & Reading Promotion				12	23.5%	1 tie	13	11.0%	4
Information Technology				6	11.8%	4			

In Table 10, those topics discussed in more than one tenth of each group of articles are shown (that is, 6 or more research articles, 5 or more best practices articles, 11 or more of the combined total of research and best practices articles). While topics related to library and information services activities and information skills/literacy were most commonly addressed in the research articles, national surveys and topics related to reading and reading promotion were most commonly addressed in the best practices articles. The frequency of national survey articles in both the research and best practices categories (where they usually took the form of national overviews) likely reflects the wider policy concerns of school librarians as collectives, in school library and/or library associations, for example, and as officers in education and/or library authorities. In addition, the frequency of the national overviews among the best practices articles is partly a result of a special issue of the journal (July 1998) that

published “state-of-the-art” overviews of school librarianship in 10 different countries.

### **What research methodologies or types of evidence are used in articles in *SLW*?**

The primary research methodologies used in the studies described in the research articles published in *School Libraries Worldwide* are shown in Table 5, according to an internationally-recognized classification. There is no equivalent classification for the strategies used to collect the evidence on which best practices articles in the field of library and information science are based. The research studies were based on only half of the research methods listed in the Järvelin and Vakkari classification, though there was a reasonable balance between quantitative and qualitative studies, with the latter being better represented in *School Libraries Worldwide* articles than in research in school librarianship internationally. As noted earlier, the main sources of evidence for the best practices articles were: empirical research reports; theory based on research; application of research and/or theory to practice; descriptions of best practice; and argumentation. Two patterns of evidence predominated: (1) review of research and/or theory, followed by application or argumentation related to practice and (2) description, followed by discussion and/or analysis of best practice. Within the first pattern, there were about twice as many articles using argumentation compared to those using application. Several reasons might be advanced for this finding: perhaps this indicates that there are many school library practices that are contested, or perhaps those school library practices that are accepted as best practices arouse less attention from those in the field. An in-depth analysis of the articles would be needed to address this question.

### **What indications are there of quality in the research and best practices articles in *SLW*?**

Issues related to the quality control of research articles and best practices articles in *School Libraries Worldwide* have been discussed above. The members of the Editorial Board of the journal, with the Editor and Associate Editors, currently have the responsibility for managing quality through the peer review process. In addition, guest editors with specialist knowledge and experience of the topic solicit articles for the theme section of each issue of the journal and have an important role in evaluating the submissions. Many other professional and research journals operate in a similar way. While the rejection rate for all articles (in both categories) submitted to *School Libraries Worldwide* is low (see Lee, *et al.*, 2002 for a discussion of article rejection rates as an indicator of journal quality), the editors and guest editors work with authors of marginal articles (using comments from reviewers) to improve the quality of submissions. In a relatively new and small research and professional field like school librarianship, this kind of activity is seen as necessary to build up the literature of the field.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

How and to what extent does *School Libraries Worldwide* function as a source of evidence for evidence-based practice in school librarianship? *School Libraries Worldwide* has a strong overall record of dissemination of research and best practices articles, but even though more than 20 countries are represented altogether, these articles draw heavily on the research and practice of first world English-speaking

nations where school libraries are particularly well-developed. School librarians from other areas of the world will find fewer articles that resonate with their contexts and their challenges. The Editor and the Editorial Board will be considering strategies for addressing this problem, and in particular for encouraging the submission of articles from more countries with different traditions of education and school librarianship. One such strategy, implemented on a trial basis in 2004, is to seek out quality articles published in other languages, for translation into English for publication in *School Libraries Worldwide*.

The authors whose work is published in *School Libraries Worldwide* are likely to continue to be mostly university faculty and doctoral students, but the Editor and the Editorial Board need to work to ensure that the voices of the professionals working in the school library field continue to be represented in the journal. Two types of articles that have previously offered opportunities for this were the “Day in the Life” articles and the “State of the Art” articles. These two types of articles made up about one-half of the best practices articles in the journal, and these two types of articles originated from more than one-half of the 20 countries represented in the journal. Unfortunately, these kinds of articles are less likely to be of the sort that fit within the research mandate of the journal.

The analyses undertaken for this paper have opened up questions for further research. A possible follow-up to the analyses presented in this paper would be an in-depth examination of the particular best practices recommended in the professional articles published in *School Libraries Worldwide*; this would allow an assessment of these practices in terms of the research published in *School Libraries Worldwide* and elsewhere. Another follow-up would be an analysis of the sources of evidence presented in articles, in best practices articles as well as research articles, to determine what types of research methods are being used to address various types of topics or practices.

Evidence-based practice involves using evidence as a basis for improvement of professional practice. The quality of the evidence is one of several factors that will have an impact on the actual improvement that can be accomplished. The quality of the evidence found in the research and best practices articles published in *School Libraries Worldwide* is accounted for primarily through the peer review process. Within the limitations pointed out earlier, peer review is an acceptable way of assuring basic quality control for research articles. Although it is used widely for the assessment of professional articles, particularly in the absence of other generally accepted strategies in the field of school librarianship, peer review may or may not be as useful for professional articles as it is for research articles. This matter needs further investigation, since it is an important consideration for evidence-based practice in school librarianship.

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