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Research in Practice

Research in Practice: Mythbusting EBLIP

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Over the years, I've heard lots of reasons that library folks might shy away from evidence based library and information practice (EBLIP). For some, it's even a hot-button issue, usually focusing on the use of the term "evidence". I often wonder if the thought is that EBLIP precludes doing anything else to facilitate decision-making. I've always seen it as an important part of my professional toolkit and don't look at it along partisan lines. So when asked to present a conference session about EBLIP to the 2015 Saskatchewan Library Association conference, I included a section about EBLIP myths – some of the reasons that I've heard for avoiding EBLIP in professional practice. Everyone's experience is different but perhaps some of these will resonate.

Myth 1: EBLIP is so restrictive. It only advocates using research evidence.

EBLIP does encourage the use of valid and reliable research results. These can be from the published literature or can be results found through doing your own research on a particular topic related to your practice. So, the myth here is that it **ONLY** advocates using research evidence. I can see where this comes from. The idea of "evidence" points to formal research results, and often to quantitative results. However, recent research, such as that by Koufogiannakis (2012), suggests that librarians use a wide variety of what they term "evidence". Some of this comes from the published research and some of it comes from elsewhere. It's all about expanding the definition

of evidence in the EBLIP context to include our own professional knowledge and expertise and what our users or patrons prefer or need, as well as the formal research results. I've written more about this particular myth in a past Research in Practice column (Wilson, 2015).

Myth 2: EBLIP doesn't take into account all my years of experience.

Basically, this myth was dealt with in myth 1, but further to that, EBLIP does indeed consider knowledge and expertise gained over the course of a career. It would be silly if it didn't! The idea is not to discount a librarian's knowledge but to enhance it by ensuring that library users or stakeholders and the published research are consulted. We often hear the phrase "let's not reinvent the wheel". EBLIP, and its three-pronged approach, is all about not reinventing the wheel. It's about being thorough and inclusive in order to make the best possible professional decision.

Myth 3: Evidence based practice is only used in academic libraries and in medicine.

While it is true that evidence based medicine was the model adopted by health sciences librarians in the early 2000s as they got the ball rolling for EBLIP, it is not true that it just stayed that way. Not only can EBLIP be used in every library sector (public, school, special, and academic), evidence based practice has expanded across many disciplines including, to name just a few:

- Evidence Based Crime Prevention
- Evidence Based Policy Development
- Evidence Based Software Engineering
- Evidence Based Scheduling
- Evidence Based Social Work
- Evidence Based Nursing
- Evidence Based Management
- Evidence Based Dentistry
- Evidence Based Policing
- Evidence Based Business
- Evidence Based Conservation

The point of this, from a library perspective, is that while different libraries or library sectors may have different approaches to decision-making based on organizational structures, budgetary considerations, and the like, EBLIP can be used as one way to ensure that all sides of the problem are considered. The *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* journal published a special issue on public libraries in 2012. In the editorial introducing the special feature, Ryan (2012) stated that "EBLIP is one area where librarians from every sector can work together, sharing a common interest in evidence based professional practice. EBLIP at its best puts aside sector silos and offers a broad perspective for our work in all library types" (p. 5).

Myth 4: EBLIP requires too much specialized knowledge.

I do acknowledge that the term "too much" is relative. The specialized knowledge this myth refers to is research knowledge, and the ability to critically appraise the research evidence you find. There are checklists and rubrics available to help go through a research article with a critical eye. As well, a lot of critical appraisal is common sense. As librarians and library workers, we are trained to assess information sources, to determine if the information is reliable and credible. It's much the same with the published research, which has the added benefit of being peer reviewed. While peer review does not guarantee quality, it does suggest that a second or third pair of eyes have looked at the research in a critical fashion. Also, I would suggest that engaging with research in librarianship is quite like reading the newspaper or watching television news, in that we hopefully are critical of it: not critical in a negative sense, but critical in the sense of not accepting everything at face value and being aware of where the information comes from and who might benefit from seeing it presented a particular way.

Myth 5: I don't have the time so it isn't for me.

It is true that one of the major barriers to practicing in an evidence based way is a lack of time. However, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. Like anything, when a process or a workflow is first starting, it does take time for it to be smooth and to eventually save time. EBLIP is like that. There will be a learning curve, but as the world of libraries continues to grow and change, we all have the potential to face many learning curves in our daily work. Once EBLIP as a process is internalized, it will feel like it is something you just do, that it is just the way you work. And because you are using this process to make decisions, you will hopefully save time overall by making the best possible decision using the best available evidence. Also, even incorporating bits and pieces of EBLIP into your practice can reap benefits. So I would suggest that you do some personal reflection or talk to colleagues to determine if you really don't have the time, or is something else going on.

As more and more librarians are conducting and disseminating research, the base of good, practice-based research is growing larger. It's there to help in decision-making and problem-

solving in practice. Our own professional experience and knowledge is the basis from which we approach our work. Our experience is valid, has value, and comes from many places: formal education, past disciplinary studies, and our own critical perspectives of the world around us. And our users/patrons/clients have needs and desires as they pertain to their library and information experiences. Be sure to ask them. If you can accept these three things, you are an evidence-based practitioner.

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