Being evidence based in library and information practice

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Being evidence based in library and information practice

Edited by

Denise Koufogiannakis
and Alison Brettle

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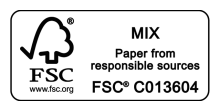

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Denise Koufogiannakis MA MLIS PhD is Associate University Librarian at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. In 2013 she received her PhD in Information Studies from Aberystwyth University, Wales, UK. Denise co-founded the open access journal *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* and has held several editorial positions since the journal's inception in 2006, including Editor-in-Chief from 2009 to 2011. Denise has contributed numerous research papers to the scholarly literature of EBLIP, and has served on the Program Committee of the international EBLIP conference series since 2003. In 2007, Denise was named a 'Mover and Shaker' by *Library Journal* for her contributions to the evidence based librarianship movement.

Joanne Gard Marshall MLS MHSc PhD spent 16 years as a medical librarian before becoming a faculty member at the University of Toronto in 1987. In 1999, she became Dean of the School of Information and Library Science at UNC Chapel Hill. Since 2005 she has been a Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina where she has taught courses in health information and research methods and pursued her research interest in health information seeking and use and evidence-based practice. She was principal investigator of the Value of Health Library and Information Services in Patient Care Study funded by the US National Library of Medicine. She is a past president of the Medical Library Association and has received multiple awards from both the Medical Library Association, the Special Libraries Association and the Canadian Health Libraries Association.

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PART 1

Background and model

Denise Koufogiannakis and Alison Brettle

1

Introduction

Denise Koufogiannakis and Alison Brettle

This book brings together recent theory, research and case studies from practice environments across the broad field of librarianship to illustrate how librarians can incorporate the principles of evidence-based library and information practice (EBLIP) into their work. EBLIP is an approach to professional decision making; however, we wish to emphasize an overall approach to practice that is about *being evidence based*, which is not limited only to decision making. Being evidence based involves:

- questioning our practice:
  - — are we doing things in the best way, and is there a better way?
  - — do we have the information we need to do our jobs?
  - — do we have the evidence we need to make well-informed decisions?
  - — why are we making the decisions that we are making?
- gathering or creating the evidence (through research or evaluation) if we don't have it already
- using information or evidence wisely:
  - — to make decisions about our own practice
  - — to improve our practice by testing out new ideas and implementing them based on the evidence we find
  - — to make decisions about our services
  - — to help others make decisions about our services (by demonstrating our effectiveness, value, impact or worth)

- using our professional skills to help others (often to make their own evidence-based decisions).

This book develops and rethinks the original EBLIP model. It takes an open and inclusive approach to exploring EBLIP and the ways in which it can improve the practice of librarianship. Since EBLIP's inception in 1997 the understanding of what evidence is, as well as how and why librarians use evidence, has grown more mature. Correspondingly, this book puts forward a model and approach to evidence that has evolved but is more realistic and practical for librarians in their everyday work.

This book builds upon the seminal work of Booth and Brice (2004b) by incorporating recent research and practice-based examples to illustrate the natural progression of EBLIP since Booth and Brice's work was published. This book seeks to provide librarians with an accessible new reference point for how they can use and create evidence within their practice to better meet the needs of their communities. It is organized into two sections; the first is structured around Koufogiannakis' revised framework for EBLIP (Koufogiannakis, 2013), which embraces a wider breadth of evidence sources and understanding of how librarians use evidence. The new framework is described and each element of the evidence-based cycle is considered in turn. Each chapter in this section provides theory relating to this step of the model, as well as practical tools and examples to help implement the theory. This section has been written by the volume editors, who are from Canada and the UK and have been involved with the EBLIP movement from its earliest days, and continue to be actively involved through their research in this area.

Part 1 Background and model

Denise Koufogiannakis and Alison Brettle

Chapter 1: Introduction – overview of the book and history of EBLIP

Chapter 2: A new framework for EBLIP – presents a holistic and cyclical approach to considering evidence. The nature of evidence is seen as comprising research evidence, local evidence and professional knowledge. Evidence can be used for individual or group decision making and convincing and influencing others. The steps involved include: articulate, assemble, assess, agree and adapt. The following chapters consider these steps in turn.

Chapter 3: Articulate – involves understanding the problem and articulating it within the context of the decision that needs to be made.

Chapter 4: Assemble – involves gathering evidence from multiple sources that are relevant to the problem. This can involve finding and creating evidence as well as using tacit knowledge.

Chapter 5: Assess – involves examining the evidence in terms of its quantity and quality; evaluating the evidence that has been assembled and comparing and balancing the evidence from different sources and types of knowledge.
Chapter 6: Agree – involves determining the best way forward and, if working as a group, achieving a consensus based on the evidence and organizational goals. Then the decision needs to be implemented.
Chapter 7: Adapt – involves reflecting on and evaluating the process and examining whether the change made a difference or whether further changes are needed. Theories on reflective practice and change management may also be incorporated.

The second section of the book focuses on the use of EBLIP in different sectors of the library profession. The context and drivers relating to evidence in each library sector are different and EBLIP has developed at different paces within each, but there are lessons and techniques to be learned between sectors. So, for example, even if you are not a school librarian, you may well find relevant approaches for your practice in the school library chapter. Each chapter considers the context and evidence base for the sector and how EBLIP is developing therein, and provides cases that demonstrate the use of EBLIP in practice. The authors in this section include leading scholars and practitioners who are actively contributing to the conversation about EBLIP today and who demonstrate the concept of evidence-based practice through their professional work. Reflecting the international nature of the EBLIP movement, the contributors have been drawn from the UK, North America and Europe.

Part 2 EBLIP in action

Chapter 8: Practitioner-researchers and EBLIP – Virginia Wilson, Canada
Chapter 9: Academic libraries – Mary M. Somerville, USA and Lorie A. Kloda, Canada
Chapter 10: Public libraries – Pam Ryan, Canada and Becky Cole, UK
Chapter 11: Health libraries –Jonathan D. Eldredge, USA, Joanne Gard Marshall, USA, Alison Brettle, UK, Heather N. Holmes, USA, Lotta D. Haglund, Sweden and Rick Wallace, USA
Chapter 12: School libraries – Carol A. Gordon, USA
Chapter 13: Special libraries – Bill Fisher, USA
Chapter 14: Conclusion – Denise Koufogiannakis and Alison Brettle

Before delving into the new model, the remainder of this chapter provides context by examining the origins and describing the history of the EBLIP movement.

Why EBLIP?

Originating in medicine, evidence-based practice (EBP) developed as a way of applying research evidence to clinical decision making. Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) emerged in the early 1990s, growing out of work by Sackett and Guyatt at McMaster University in Canada. Guyatt's editorial in the new publication *ACP Journal Club* was the first to coin the term 'evidence based medicine' and laid it out as a new approach to the practice of medicine wherein research literature is regularly consulted by clinicians so that new research evidence can be integrated with knowledge and clinical judgement (Guyatt, 1991). In 1992, *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* published an article by the Evidence Based Medicine Working Group which concretely outlined EBP as a new approach to teaching and practising medicine. From this publication, worldwide attention was focused on EBM and it began to grow and become firmly established as the best way of practising and teaching in the medical profession. Twenty-five years later, it is commonplace that medical schools integrate EBP principles into their curricula, and that healthcare provision is made on the basis of up-to-date evidence. For example, within the UK's National Health Service (NHS), services are provided in accordance with the guidelines set out by the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE), a national body established to provide evidence-based guidance for health and social care.

Although its adoption was often according to the level of enthusiasm or scepticism within the discipline (Trinder and Reynolds, 2000), the evidence-based approach quickly developed in other fields such as nursing (Stevens and Cassidy, 1999), rehabilitation (Bury and Mead, 1998), dentistry (Clarkson et al., 2003), social work (Corcoran, 2000), management (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2006) and librarianship (Eldredge, 1997). Whatever the discipline, the principle of EBP is the same: that of combining best evidence with professional judgement (Trinder and Reynolds, 2000), involving a process which includes finding, appraising and implementing the evidence located.

From the early days of EBM, librarians were considered crucial to the new approach and were often fully integrated as part of the research team, since searching for the latest research literature was considered an important part of the process. Health librarians took on an important role in EBM, becoming a vital link in helping clinicians to find quality research evidence and in teaching students how to find and evaluate the research literature. Within the health library profession, involvement in EBP was proposed as a means of demonstrating expertise and developing new professional roles (Dalrymple et al., 1995; Palmer, 1996; McKibbon, 1998; Scherrer and Dorsch, 1999; Falzon and Booth, 2001; Harris, 2005; McGowan and Sampson, 2005; Medical Library Association, 2005b).

During the early days of health librarians' involvement in EBP, those working at

large medical schools were well integrated and were incorporating these new processes into their own professional workflows. The natural next step of this integration was to apply the same principles to the library profession. Many librarians have now embraced EBLIP, and have been building a body of knowledge about how EBP can work in library and information studies, as well as building evidence about what works within the profession.

EBLIP provides a structured approach to decision making. It begins with an issue or problem that arises in the workplace – an area in which librarians are looking to improve practice. The problem may start out somewhat vague, and should be formulated into an answerable, well-built question. Depending upon the subject area or domain into which the question falls, databases are searched to find research evidence, and other types of evidence are also considered. Once relevant evidence is found on the topic, it is critically appraised to determine whether it is valid, reliable and applicable to the question at hand. This knowledge is then applied to the librarian's practice. The final step is to evaluate the process and determine what impact was made, where gaps remain and where improvement is needed for the next time. EBLIP is a continual cycle of improvement for the way librarians work and make decisions.

The growth of EBLIP

In 1997, at a point when EBM was firmly recognized and health librarians were participating in the searching and teaching activities of EBM, the term 'evidence based librarianship' (EBL) appeared in the library and information science (LIS) literature (Eldredge, 1997). While the first mentions of 'evidence based libraries' (Roddham, 1995) and 'evidence-based information practice' (Bradley and Marshall, 1995; Haines, 1995) can be traced back to 1995, it was Eldredge's 1997 article in *Hypothesis*, a publication of the Medical Library Association's Research Section, that caught the attention of medical librarians and began the movement in earnest. At this point, EBL began to grow, particularly within the health library community. The Medical Library Association (MLA) began offering a continuing education (CE) course on the topic, and by 2000 the MLA Research Section had created an Evidence-Based Librarianship Implementation Committee, whose goal was 'To foster Evidence-Based Librarianship (EBL) and to integrate its principles into the practice of health sciences librarianship' (Eldredge, 2000, 7). At this same time there were a growing number of papers published on the topic, and the first conference on Evidence Based Librarianship took place at the University of Sheffield in 2001 (EBL2001, n.d., 99; Eldredge, 2001). In the same year, the US Special Libraries Association (SLA) released a new research statement which emphasized the building of a culture of EBP (SLA, 2001).

While initially referred to as EBL, this approach to practice has also been called evidence-based information practice, and, since a meeting at the 3rd International Evidence Based Librarianship Conference in the autumn of 2005, has been generally referred to as EBLIP (Booth and Brice, 2007). This designation also mirrors the name of the journal that began publication in 2006 and the now biennial international conference series that was also renamed at about the same time. The change in name was largely due to the expressed desire to include information professionals of a wide range, which would include librarians but not be limited to those who held the job title 'librarian', and was prompted by the founding of the new journal, with an open discussion regarding an appropriate name (EBLIG Archives, 2005).

While EBLIP was initially of interest to health librarians, it has since grown to involve librarians from various sectors, including school (Todd, 2002a; Farmer, 2009; Gordon, 2009), academic (West, 2003; Booth, 2009a), public (Wilson and Hall, 2007; Ryan, 2012), law (Lerdal, 2006) and special librarians (Marshall, 2003; Fisher and Robertson, 2007; Savard and Alcock, 2007). It also extends to specific interests such as cataloguing (Carter, 2010), search interface design (Wildemuth, 2006) and information literacy design (VanScoy and Oakleaf, 2008). The journal *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* publishes articles from a wide range of library and information studies sectors and is a testament to the growth of EBP as a mainstream activity.

EBLIP was strongly modeled on the original EBM process. The most widely cited and accepted definition of EBLIP was adapted from McKibbon et al.'s (1995) definition of EBM, keeping all the same components and basic meaning but inserting 'user' in place of 'patient' and 'librarian' in place of 'clinician':

> An approach to information science that promotes the collection, interpretation and integration of valid, important and applicable user-reported, librarian observed, and research-derived evidence. The best available evidence, moderated by user needs and preferences, is applied to improve the quality of professional judgements.
>
> (Booth, 2000)

EBL became better established in the literature in the year 2000, at which point Booth's definition was published from a conference presentation that he gave that year (2000); Eldredge published a number of papers in different journals that same year (2000b, 2000c, 2000d). Eldredge's publications were significant because they were the first published works that proposed a framework for EBL and the process involved and gave an outline for how to practise in this manner. Eldredge's *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* article from that year remains one of the most highly cited scholarly

papers on the topic. These publications allowed for scholarly conversation on the topic to begin.

In 2004 a book edited by Booth and Brice (2004) brought together many contributing librarians for a more in-depth look at EBP in LIS, building upon the foundation laid by Eldredge. As the first book published on the topic, it remains a seminal source for those interested in EBLIP. It covers EBLIP according to the same process as EBM, but from an LIS professional's viewpoint, providing examples of how this process works in LIS practice.

Moving forward

More recently, researchers have begun to further examine the EBLIP model so as to better understand its application within LIS and whether that is different from the model adapted from medicine. This work is laying an empirical foundation that provides insights into how EBLIP is perceived and used in librarianship. The studies are qualitative, providing the field with rich data that provides knowledge about librarians' use and understanding of evidence. Such work lays a foundation of evidence about the model of EBP in LIS and illuminates how such an approach works within our field. The earliest study by Thorpe, Partridge and Edwards (2008) followed by Partridge, Edwards and Thorpe (2010) examined how LIS practitioners experience EBP. This study shed light on different approaches and attitudes towards EBLIP, and showed that the process of evidence use is not always a positive one – evidence can be used as a 'weapon' within the workplace. Such findings introduced the idea of more complex factors within organizations that influence the use or non-use of evidence, and illustrate that being evidence based in practice is not so simple as one might initially suppose.

In the span of two years, three independent qualitative research studies relating to the use of evidence in librarianship practice were published. Koufogiannakis' (2013b) doctoral thesis and resulting articles (2012a, 2013a, 2015) focused on EBLIP within academic libraries and how academic librarians actually use evidence in their decision making. This study revealed that librarians use multiple sources of evidence that extend beyond research, that evidence is used for convincing, and the determinants of evidence use in practice, including a focus on the impact of organizational dynamics. At a similar time Gillespie (2013; 2014) was completing her doctoral work on teacher-librarians and their use of evidence in practice. Gillespie's study revealed that teacher-librarians use many types of evidence in practice, including professional knowledge and expertise, and provided insights into how teacher-librarians both encounter and engage with evidence, noting that the process is a holistic one that necessitates a fluid approach in practice. Finally, a study by Howlett and Howard

(2015) on special librarians' use of evidence in practice showed the high use of local sources of evidence by special librarians and the importance of environmental factors and workplace influences upon the use of evidence. While there were some differences in the findings of these three studies, as a whole they all point to the importance of using a variety of sources of evidence, depending upon the problem; the importance of professional knowledge within the decision-making process; and the complex nature of evidence-based decision making within the organizations in which librarians work.

Conclusion

This later research across multiple library sectors provided the foundations and ideas for this book. Combined with conducting research in the field, attending and speaking at conferences, running workshops on evaluation, research and evidence-based practice and editing the journal *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, the editors have gained a wealth of insights and experience on 'being evidence based'. By sharing these through this book we hope that more librarians will see the value of being evidence based and will thus drive their profession forward through effective decision making and demonstrating their value to their stakeholders. After all, finding information or making evidence available is at the heart of our profession and professional values; why shouldn't we want to do this in the best way possible? Being evidence based makes sense!