Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

The Current State of EBL

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Evidence based librarianship, still in its infancy, is slowly gaining interest and momentum. Increased exposure to the evidence based model of practice is allowing information specialists to learn more about what is involved and how its application can affect practice. Events such as the International Conference on Evidence Based Library and Information Practice and publications such as EBLIP help to increase awareness of EBL as well as increase the body of evidence necessary to fully implement such a practice model. Having said that, barriers remain that hinder the application of evidence based librarianship in its most basic form.

Brice, Booth and Bexon established six steps involved in the practice of EBL: specify the problem, find evidence to answer the problem, appraise the evidence, apply the results, evaluate the outcome, and redefine the problem. Without a large body of research from which to draw evidence, information professionals are often forced to replace the step of finding the evidence with designing and performing their own research. What this means is that rather than being able to find, appraise, and implement existing research, practitioners are finding themselves in a position where they have to design and carry out original research in order to obtain applicable evidence. Aside from being time consuming and costly, many are not comfortable with research design or data analysis, and they may lack administrative support or the needed resources available to support research. Until the body of evidence is substantially increased, it is essential that original research be encouraged and published.

I recently posted a message to the EBLIG electronic mail list requesting EBL success stories. I hoped to hear how people had used evidence to assist in their decision making as well as whether the applied evidence had a positive or negative result once implemented. The response was minimal, save for three people who had carried out original research and used the

results to modify practice or implement a new service or policy. Nobody mentioned using existing evidence, and nobody mentioned evaluating implementation results. On the surface, this supports the general hypothesis that the body of research is low and that EBL still has a way to go before it is practised regularly and systematically. But that's just my opinion; perhaps there's a research paper out there somewhere.

My intent is not to cause information specialists to feel intimidated or pressured to research and publish like there's no tomorrow. Rather, I am taking this opportunity to encourage information professionals to practice EBL and to write about their experiences, whether the results are negative or positive. If existing research helped you make a decision, write about the process and tell how well it worked (or didn't work). If there was no existing research, design your own study and publish the results. If you thought outside the box and looked beyond library literature to find applicable research and evidence, share the methodology and rationale with your peers by submitting it to a journal or presenting it at a conference. The more we share through publications and presentations, the better equipped we will be to adopt the evidence based model of practice. The application of EBL can not only save time and money, but can also position information professionals as the highly competent researchers and prolific writers that we are.

Works Cited

Brice, Anne, Andrew Booth, and Nicola Bexon. "Evidence Based Librarianship: A Case Study in the Social Sciences." Proceedings of the 71st IFLA General Congress and Council, August 14-18, 2005, Oslo, Norway. 19p. IFLA. 4 June 2006, <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/papers/111e-Brice_Booth_Bexon.pdf>.