Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Conducting Your Own Research: Something to Consider

Virginia Wilson
SHIRP Coordinator, Health Sciences Library
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada
Email: virginia.wilson@usask.ca

In the last issue we looked at a variety of free and open access LIS resources that you can use to find evidence pertaining to your practice question. Consulting the evidence is obviously the cornerstone of evidence based practice and evidence based librarianship (EBL). There are occasions, though, when a search of the available evidence just isn't fruitful. The articles found may not be directly applicable to your situation. The articles might increase your body of knowledge about a particular subject, but perhaps are not practical enough. Or, you might not be able to find anything at all. This *EBL 101* column asks you to consider collecting your own evidence in order to inform your decision-making process, i.e., undertake some research of your own.

Of the three definitions proposed for EBL early in the millennium, only one specifically mentions the notion of librarians conducting research. Crumley and Koufogiannakis' definition describes EBL as including "encouraging librarians to conduct high quality qualitative and quantitative research" (62). For academic librarians on the tenure track, such research is often essential for

professional movement, and will most likely (although not always) be tied to professional practice. However, there are more benefits to be derived from conducting research than getting tenure or promotion, and ideally more than tenure-track, academic librarians will be conducting it.

What are the benefits of practitioners conducting research? The benefits are many, and I would suggest that they outweigh the barriers that might hamper librarians and information professionals in their quest to conduct research:

- Research aids in the improvement of problem solving and decision making in the workplace.
- Research by library and information professionals creates new knowledge and contributes to the growth of LIS as a profession and a discipline.
- Undertaking research can help make library professionals critical consumers of the research literature.
- Librarian-researchers bring an additional set of skills to the table in

order to provide optimal information services to researchers in other fields.

- Conducting a research project can improve an individual's ability to think critically and analytically. (adapted from Versoza)

It's important not to let the thought of a research project strike fear into your heart. One of the barriers to the practice of EBL is the real or perceived notion held by librarians that they do not possess the necessary skills to undertake research. However, projects can be simple and practical. The process of EBL is intended to help improve your decision making and problem solving at work. Thus, research questions that emerge from practice can be powerful motivating factors in the conducting of research because they are found in your everyday work and can aid you with it.

Work has been done of compiling research questions that need to be answered. In 2001, Jonathan Eldredge published an article entitled "The Most Relevant and Answerable Research Questions Facing the Practice of Health Sciences Librarianship." In 2006, Lewis and Cotter looked at that issue again in their article, published in *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, entitled "Have the Most Relevant and Answerable Research Questions Facing Librarians Changed Between 2001 and 2006?" Both articles are useful in terms of getting an idea of what research topics are important to librarians, health or otherwise, and can help set the stage for thinking about your own practice questions.

Professional associations can be a good source of both research topics and research funding. Often, associations will put together a research agenda, a way to focus resources on research topics that would benefit members.

- **CLA/ACB** (Canadian Library Association) Library Research and Development Grants http://www.cla.ca/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Grants&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=5758 Be sure to check with your CLA

division or interest group for research funding opportunities as well.

- **ACRL** (Association of College and Research Libraries) Research and Scholarship Committee http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/about/sections/is/committees/research.cfm This page contains the ACRL research agenda for library instruction and information literacy, a bibliography of research methodology resources, and much more for the librarian-researcher.
- **MLA** (Medical Library Association) Research http://www.mlanet.org/research/ This page contains grant information, research resources, and projects and studies.
- **SLA** (Special Libraries Association) Research Grant http://www.sla.org/content/resources/scholargrant/resgrant/index.cfm This grant description suggests research topics and the focus is on evidence-based practice.

There are a variety of books and websites that can assist you in becoming familiar with and more adept at various research methods. Workshops, webinars, and online courses can help you spruce up your skills as well.

A Few Resources for the Librarian-Researcher
Online activities:

- The Education Institute often has sessions that deal with research methods. http://www.thepartnership.ca/partnership/bins/index_ei.asp

Some books to get you started:

- Leedy, Paul D., and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod. Practical Research: Planning and Design. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005.
- Powell, Ronald R., and Lynn Silipigni Connaway. Basic Research Methods

for Librarians, 4th ed. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004.

Online tools for research activities:

- Survey Monkey
  http://www.surveymonkey.com/
- Sample Size Calculator:
  http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm
- Webpages that perform statistical calculations: http://statpages.org/
- Bank of Canada inflation calculator:
  http://www.bankofcanada.ca/en/rates/inflation_calc.html
- Outcomes Toolkit:
  http://ibec.ischool.washington.edu/static/ibeccat.aspx@subcat=outcome%20toolkit&cat=tools%20and%20resources&tri=toolkitabout.htm

(These links are from the Evidence Based Toolkit for Public Libraries created by Steph Hall and me: http://ebltoolkit.pbworks.com/.)

Conducting your own research from a front line perspective will assist you in your own decision-making process. But make sure you give thought to broadcasting the results beyond your own library. By disseminating your results via scholarly journal, conference presentation, personal communication, or other dissemination mode, you will be making it possible for other practitioners to learn from and build upon your work. A barrier to the practice of EBL is lack of buy in by managers. The research process, including the publishing of results, is not seen as important or worthwhile in some instances. However, Genoni, Haddow, and Ritchie state that "practitioners must increase their contributions to research literature. … The writing-up of research needs to be recognized and rewarded by employers as a legitimate professional task" (57). Research projects can enhance the library's status within its community, both locally and professionally, which will help to generate the buy in. The dissemination process helps build and strengthen the evidence base, and helps to build a culture of research amongst librarian and information professionals.

I'm always on the lookout for good quality books/websites/online sources and courses dealing with research, and I know I've only scratched the surface in this column. Please pass along your favourites to me and I will compile them for a future column (virginia.wilson@usask.ca). Coming up next time in *EBL 101*, an introduction to critical appraisal.

Works Cited

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