



Commentary

Moving the EBLIP Community's Research Agenda Forward

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Four times a year a new issue of *EBLIP* appears on the scene. Each issue brims with evidence summaries, original research reports, and commentaries. The eight editors, nine

copyeditors, nearly 100 regular peer reviewers, and numerous authors contribute voluntarily to the production of this peer reviewed, open access journal. In any given year there are

thousands of downloads from the *EBLIP* site, attesting to the wide use of *EBLIP*.

Participation in the production and use of *EBLIP* spans six continents and includes every type of library or information practitioner. Many of those either publishing in *EBLIP* or benefitting from its contents have never met one another. Only a fraction of those colleagues loosely affiliated with *EBLIP* have participated in the international biannual *EBLIP* conferences. These small conferences, with only a couple of hundred attendees, provide face-to-face contacts that build a common sense of purpose, although those contacts might translate into some ongoing or future associations with our *EBLIP* journal.

Our profession's version of evidence based practice (EBP) as an interest area and decision-making method might be thought of as a movement (Glynn, 2007; Koufogiannakis, 2012; Lewis, 2011). A movement is an important concept for understanding the place of EBP in fostering professional accountability, which seems to be an underlying theme in the great interest expressed in EBP by diverse professions (Eldredge, 2014). Yet, a movement is an abstract concept. The conferences are more tangible, but these occur at only two-year intervals and are attended by only a minority of interested practitioners.

That leaves the *EBLIP* journal as the most tangible forum for colleagues with an interest in EBP for our profession. On the surface, *EBLIP* might be a journal; it also represents a mostly virtual community that shares the goal of making EBP a firmly established reality. The authors define our profession's version of EBP, namely evidence based library and information practice, in the following way:

A sequential, structured process for integrating the best available evidence into making important decisions. The practitioner applies this decision making process by using the best

available evidence while informed by a pragmatic perspective developed from working in the field, critical thinking skills, an awareness of different research designs, and modulated by knowledge of the affected user population's values or preferences. (Eldredge, 2012, p. 139)

Producers and consumers affiliated with the journal might constitute what Wenger (1998) describes as a "community of practice." When one reads Wenger closely, it quickly becomes apparent that those colleagues associated with our *EBLIP* journal resemble a community of practice. Wenger notes that a community of practice fosters dynamic learning through professional practice. *EBLIP* certainly advances that goal.

Over the last decade our journal as well as our conference planners clearly have resisted institutionalization. Wenger recognizes that "institutionalization consumes energy. It requires continual maintenance" (p. 243). To the extent that any institutionalization does exist, Wenger reports that it should exist solely to serve the community of practice. Provided that we might even define our journal as an "institution" in Wenger's sense of the term, *EBLIP* certainly subsumes itself to the goal of applying research evidence in practice.

How should we define our future direction as a community of practice? Perhaps a research agenda might inform where we devote much of our energy as a community? Fortunately, some members of our community of practice have experience with defining a research agenda. A team of librarians in Sweden conducted a Delphi study to define the research agenda for their colleagues in that country (Maceviciute & Wilson, 2009). Unaware of our Swedish colleagues' efforts, the same year members of our team in the United States conducted a different type of Delphi study to define a research agenda for the Medical Library Association (Eldredge, Harris, & Ascher, 2009). A Delphi study allows members of a group who

hold diverse views to reach a satisfactory group consensus. In the U.S. study we focused upon generating important and answerable research questions. Our experiences matched the observations of others regarding the question formulation process (Booth, 2006; Kloda, 2008; Sutton, A., Booth, A. & Evans, P., 2013). We believed earnestly that once we had defined the research agenda, applied researchers would implement an action plan to answer its practical research questions. Instead, we were bewildered by the apparent inaction among researchers to answer these top-ranked research questions.

After conducting a second Delphi study (Eldredge, Ascher, Holmes, & Harris, 2012), we tried to find a way to implement the new research agenda. We developed the idea of linking *each* of the 15 top-ranked research questions to a systematic review. This new dimension would help build the growing body of systematic reviews in library and information science (Koufogiannakis, 2012). We were happily surprised when over 200 colleagues, a third of them from outside the United States and some even outside health sciences libraries, volunteered for our 15 systematic review teams. We reported on this project at EBLIP7 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan (Eldredge, Ascher, & Holmes, 2013), and we will be reporting on the project during EBLIP8 in Brisbane this July. We will be happy to answer your specific questions in Brisbane or via email.

First, however, our community of practice needs to determine if it wants to define a research agenda. Second, it needs to define the scope of the project. Will such a project include all registered users of *EBLIP* supplemented with the attendees at recent EBLIP conferences? Third, it has to define the methodology. We employed the Delphi method because it allowed

for electronically assisted asynchronous consensus formation. While we think that this methodology to be best suited to such a research inquiry, we all need to be open to other methodologies (Brettle, 2012). Once a research agenda takes shape, will systematic reviews be the next best step?

We the authors have experience with all three aspects of such a project and are willing to serve as resource persons for any project team with an interest. Finally, we are happy to serve more tangentially as an information-sharing clearinghouse to help potentially interested colleagues to organize a possible project.

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