Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Research in Practice

The Open Access Conundrum

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Welcome to the brand new column, *Research in Practice*! As mentioned in the final EBL101 column in the last issue, *Research in Practice* is intended for those who "are using research in their practice, conducting research for their practice, and otherwise interested in the varied and vast topics pertaining to research in practice. The scope of the new column is broad, allowing for a variety of topics to be explored in a number of ways" (Wilson, 2015, p. 175).

The most common misconception of evidence based library and information practice (EBLIP) is that it only involves using research in practice. Of course, it's not that simple, as there is more to EBLIP than research evidence, including user preference, what our library or info centre users want, need, or expect, and our professional expertise, the knowledge we bring to the table from our experience as practicing librarians. All

three components need to be present before it's really EBLIP. Still, the research evidence piece is what gives EBLIP its zing, and it's probably the easiest piece to leave off when pressed for time. I've always felt it needs a little special attention.

So, where to start in a brand new column that focuses on something as broad as research in practice? How about access? Open access (OA), that is. Recently on social media, a public librarian lamented that while compiling references for a writing project, she was faced over and over again with the paywall: the vendor page indicating that the article she wanted was going to cost $XX.XX to access. She wondered why any librarian would publish in a non-OA journal. Retweets, replies, and commiserations followed, urging all librarians and library and information studies (LIS) faculty to publish in OA journals.

This got me thinking about why researchers still choose non-OA journals as publishing venues these days. I thought of the following reasons off the top of my head:

- Journal prestige
- Impact factor
- Not fully aware of the OA option and its implications for research use
- Belief that OA journals do not employ rigorous peer review or perhaps any peer review
- Belief that all OA journals are predatory or that the risk of this problem is too high
- Belief that all OA journals charge a fee to publish
- Failure to understand what the fee is actually buying

So, if I can think of a list that long in just a few minutes, it suggests that there is still some work to be done in terms of educating researchers about the realities of OA. Of course, it begs the question, why don't librarians and LIS faculty know better? I would suggest that we do know better, but there are those who are making the choice not to publish OA for a variety of reasons:

- Prestige for tenure/promotion files
- High impact factor for tenure/promotion files
- Belief that a larger audience can be reached with a non-OA journal
- Concerns about making a mistake and publishing in a disreputable OA journal
- Author can't afford and/or justify a potential fee for publication or won't approach a journal to see if it will waive or reduce the fee

The second list is not intended to be a list of excuses nor am I pointing fingers. There are many folks in librarianship publishing OA or making their research available in repositories.

It's important to acknowledge that uptake of OA publishing has been slower in the humanities and social sciences than it has been in the sciences (Coonin & Younce, 2009). But, a recent study shows that more librarians and LIS faculty than ever are publishing in OA venues, although "librarians were confirmed to be the primary authors of OA articles on LIS" (Chang, 2015, p. 7). And, there are many reasons why authors *are* choosing to publish in OA journals:

- Support for the principles of OA
- Advantage of speed of publication
- Most suitable vehicle for making the research widely accessible
- Objections to commercial publishing models
- Copyright retention (Nariani & Fernandez, 2012, p. 183)

The reality of the paywall and the choice not to publish OA hampers evidence based practice efforts. What is this research being done for? From my perspective as an evidence based practicing librarian, it's to apply, to use, to inform, and to teach. What happens if research is not accessible except at a great financial cost? It's not applied or used, it does not inform, and it does not teach. Or, if it does, it's only to those who have privileged access to subscriptions. To have information stalled like that is not what librarians stand for.

And if we have no control over where researchers from other disciplines publish, surely we can look to our own discipline and make the right choices there. Librarian practitioner-researchers and LIS faculty members owe it to librarianship to make their research OA, either green or gold. As Chang points out, a "key to the success of OA journals is that authors are willing to publish in OA journals" (2015, p. 2). And when it comes to EBLIP and research informing the practice of librarianship across all library sectors, only OA makes sense.

References

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