



Commentary

Building a Home for Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

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Received: 19 Jan. 2016

Accepted: 19 Jan. 2016

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A 10th anniversary is a good time for both celebration and reflection. As the group of people who started this journal, we wanted to look back at what we began working on in the spring of 2005 and provide some memories about how the journal came to be, considering our struggles and victories along the way.

The idea to start a journal began with email conversations between Denise and Susan at the end of April 2005. Together with Lindsay, we had recently begun the Evidence Based Librarianship Interest Group (EBLIG) of the Canadian Library Association (CLA), and we had a mutual interest in advancing evidence based practice via more concrete steps. Our two main ideas were for the creation of a database of evidence and for an international, open access journal focused on evidence based practice in librarianship. The latter seemed more feasible, and therefore our continued discussions focused on the implementation of a journal. Lindsay came on board soon after, and within two months Pam joined our small group.

In three months, we went from an idea to having the bones of our journal set up within Open Journal Systems (OJS) hosted by the University of Alberta Libraries (UAL). Looking back on it now, the time frame seems quite impossible, given that UAL had not yet begun its journal hosting service. In fact, *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP)* kick-started a new service for UAL, one that now hosts more than 30 journals using OJS, the open source software from the Public Knowledge Project (PKP).

Basically, we dove into the notion that librarianship needed this journal and that we were at the perfect point in time to make it happen. And this turned out to be true. In the Spring of 2005, the evidence based library and information practice (EBLIP) movement had been active for approximately eight years and was gaining momentum. Two international conferences had been held, another was being planned, many articles had been published, and

a year earlier, Andrew Booth and Anne Brice had published their landmark book on the topic. The focus of evidence based librarianship, as it was widely referred to at that time, was still on health sciences libraries. We felt it was important to have a professional forum for evidence based practice across all library sectors, and since no scholarly publishing venue existed, there was a need and opportunity to fill this void.

It was also critically important to all of us that the journal be open access. As librarians, we felt that open access was the way that scholarly publishing had to evolve, and we wanted to be part of that change. More importantly, we felt that evidence based practice could not become a reality unless all information professionals had access to this body of literature. We were all academic librarians at the time with excellent access to the library and information studies (LIS) research, but we knew that most librarians were not so fortunate, and this was a good opportunity to help make a difference. Fortunately, PKP's OJS was released in 2001 and had been operational for almost four years by the time we were getting started. Likewise, the UAL was at the point of being ready to support open access publishing with the infrastructure and in-kind technical support needed to make it happen.

Of course, the process wasn't easy or straightforward, and there certainly were detractors. We initially thought it would be best to partner with CLA, under which the EBLIG had formed; the thought being that this would assist with stability and governance of the journal. However, the CLA did not share our excitement regarding the need and value for this journal, so we quickly walked away and decided to go it on our own with the support of the University of Alberta, who made a firm and generous commitment at the incubator stage. *EBLIP* continues to function under a grassroots model of governance, built and revised by those who are passionate about evidence based practice and the journal. It is 100% maintained

by volunteers from around the world. The only money that has ever been spent was \$200CAD to design the logo and print some postcards, both of which we still use today! With institutional and collaborative support due to initiatives such as OJS, it is certainly possible to build a well-functioning, growing, and successful open access journal at a very low cost.

We engaged the library community from the start by letting people know of our plan via a mailing list and soliciting input on the name of the journal. This prompted much conversation and debate because not everyone thought that such a journal was warranted. The journal was tentatively to be called *Journal of Evidence Based Librarianship*, but Andrew Booth, well known for his ability come up with a good acronym, challenged this name and suggested *Evidence Based Librarianship and Information Practice*, or *EBLIP*. Carol Perryman suggested a slight change to *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice*, and by the end of June 2005, we decided upon *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*.

At the third EBL conference in Australia on October 19, 2005, we officially launched and promoted the journal, unveiling the journal's website and putting out calls for peer reviewers and evidence summary team members as well as for papers. Our initial team was quite small with the four of us as editors, 10 evidence summary writers, and 20 peer reviewers. In fact, we did not have a copy editor position at the time of our first issue—the editors did that work themselves! The launch of our first issue on March 15, 2006, was a defining moment and a scary one because the need to maintain momentum and continually find quality content became apparent. Like any new start-up, our early years were somewhat lean and were carried by the evidence summaries and other regular sections, such as EBL101. Recognizing that *EBLIP* was not well known in the early days meant that it was not always authors' first choice for submitting research articles. To solicit submissions, the editors combed through

conference programs for promising research presentations and contacted authors directly and invited them to consider *EBLIP*.

But how things have changed and for the better! With our 10th anniversary, *EBLIP* no longer has any trouble getting research article submissions, and we are able to have regular features through partnerships with relevant conferences. Google Scholar shows *EBLIP* articles as having 1074 citations, 846 of which have been since 2011, a sign of the journal's growth and acceptance within the LIS research community. Our volunteer cohort has grown to include an editorial team of 8, an editorial advisory team of 4, 11 copyeditors, over 100 peer reviewers, 21 evidence summary writers, 4 members who provide writing assistance, and 1 person who provides indexing support. More than 4000 readers have registered with the journal, but because we are an open access publication, we know there are many more readers who have not registered. In the one-year period from May 2014 through April 2015, the number of users visiting the site was 56,173, resulting in 73,546 unique sessions and 226,246 page views. Our readership is truly international with 35% of visits from the United States, 13% from Canada, 11% from the UK, and 7% from Australia. The remaining 34% comes from many diverse countries; the countries with the next highest use include India, Philippines, Malaysia, China, Sweden, and Nigeria.

Between the big moments of deciding to go ahead with a journal, finding the journal's home, naming our publication, building our core team, and publishing that first issue, a lot of work happened to get things off the ground, including many decisions about how we would run the journal, sections to include, formatting style, layout style, and so much more. We developed guidelines for submissions, evidence summaries, peer reviewers, copyeditors, the roles of the editors, and so on. It was a lot of work. But we all agree that it was worth it. Our guidelines for peer review have been adopted and adapted by other journals including

Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research and Journal of the Canadian Health Libraries Association.

We certainly do not want to give the impression that that the four of us were the only contributors to all this work. Everything we started with has evolved and been made better by numerous other individuals who have been the bedrock of this journal. We could never name everyone, but there are some who deserve special mention for their numerous and long standing contributions over the years, including Alison Brettle, Lorie Kloda, Katrine Mallan, Heather Pretty, Michelle Dunaway, and Jonathan Eldredge. We also want to thank those who have contributed content to the journal, especially in the early days. It is worth remembering that a journal lives or dies based on the quality of its content, and we have been very fortunate. Authors, peer reviewers, and editors all contribute to this quality, and *EBLIP* is truly a journal that has emerged from a strong community of practice within LIS.

Thinking back on 10 years of *EBLIP*, as founders we are proud of how the journal has grown and adapted with different people stepping up to lead at different points in time. It certainly stands as a measure and model of how a community can initiate and sustain a successful open access journal. While we believed this journal would be successful, the long term success and number of people who see value in the journal have far surpassed our expectations. In order to continue to remain relevant and be successful for at least another 10 years, it is important that the journal continues to exist as a venue for what matters to the wider evidence based practice community and that new voices join and engage in the conversation.