



EBL 101

Evaluating the Results of Evidence Application, Part One

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After the question has been formulated and the evidence has been found, appraised, and applied, the next step is evaluation. It is easy to move on to something else and skip the evaluation. Lack of time and the desire to get on with what needs to be done next can thwart our best intentions. But evaluation is an important step in evidence based library and information practice (EBLIP) and it should be carried out on two levels: the practitioner level, where the person undertaking EBLIP looks at his or her own performance in the process; and the practice level, where what has been implemented is assessed. Part One of “Evaluating the Results of Evidence

Application” will deal with evaluation at the practitioner level.

In the past few years, the idea of reflective practice has been written about in conjunction with EBLIP. Cultivating the practice of reflection is helpful in all realms of professional practice, and especially helpful in terms of EBLIP, because it helps practitioners continue to learn and grow in daily practice. Booth (2004) writes about reflection in *Evidence-Based Practice for Information Professionals: A Handbook*. There, he talks about the notion of reflective practice as first discussed by Donald A. Schön in *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think*

in Action. Schön (1983) differentiates between “reflection-on-action” and “reflection-in-action”: essentially reflecting after the fact and reflecting as you go.

Grant (2007) published a systematic review which found that published reflections among library and information professionals have shifted from “reminiscence and retrospective accounts of careers and organizational development” lacking much analytical insight to “analytical accounts of reflection both ‘on’ and ‘in’ action” (p. 164). And in the last issue of Evidence Based Library and Information Practice, Koufogiannakis (2010) offers some thoughts on reflection in practice where she states that “research knowledge only takes us so far” and that through reflection, we can gain “a better understanding of how and why we do what we do as librarians and information professionals” (p. 2).

Evaluating your own performance as an evidence based practitioner involves contemplating and analyzing what you did, or in other words, reflecting on action. Booth (2004) suggests some questions to ask yourself:

- Did I ask a specific focused question?
- Did I find efficiently the best evidence to answer my questions?
- Did I evaluate the evidence reliably according to validity and usefulness?
- Did I apply the results of the research appropriately to a specific user or group of users? (p. 127)

Of course, you can reflect in more (or less) detail on your own performance. Booth (2004) claims that “[reflective practice] can be as simple, or as complicated, as you want it to be” (p. 130).

Reflection should also take place throughout the EBLIP process – reflection-in-action. While it may take awhile to remember to stop and reflect, especially if the project has momentum and you are worried that stopping to ponder might jeopardize it, getting into the habit of

thinking about daily practice as it happens will help strengthen reflection as a continuous process in practice. Thoughtfully considering what is going on as it happens brings an element of consciousness to professional practice, and can help get away from the “we’ve always done it this way” trap.

So how might an evidence based practitioner reflect in action? Booth (2004) suggests several ways to get started. Solo reflection might take place in a diary or with a mentor on an ongoing basis. Group reflection can be looked at as action learning, where the group collaboratively, self-reflectively, and critically documents it at all states of the process. In the era of Web 2.0, reflection can take place on a blog or a wiki, on a social networking site such as Facebook with a group of like-minded professionals, or however else you might currently utilize 2.0 technologies. It would be beneficial to create communities of reflective practice where experiences and knowledge could be shared.

Try to make time for reflecting upon and evaluating your own performance as an evidence based librarian or information professional. The more you self-assess, the easier the process will become and the more you will learn about using evidence in practice. Next time, I’ll look at evaluating the results of evidence application at the practice level.

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