B **Evidence Based Library and Information Practice** .

Commentary

A Big Step Forward: It's Time for a Database of Evidence Summaries in Library and Information Practice

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Since *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP)* began 10 years ago, evidence summaries have been an integral part of the journal. Evidence summaries present readers with a brief overview of an original research article in structured abstract form, followed by a commentary that critically appraises the research. A standardized format and guidelines are used to ensure consistency amongst writers. In our first 10 volumes, *EBLIP* has published 349 evidence summaries, averaging 9 per issue. They cover a wide variety of topics and touch on all domains of librarianship. Evidence summaries are written by members of a writing

team selected by the Editorial Board, and research articles are assigned by the Associate Editor. All published evidence summaries have undergone peer review.

Evidence summaries were designed to overcome some of the barriers to evidence based practice in librarianship and information fields by bringing awareness of previously published research to practitioners, and providing objective critiques of these. There was also the hope that summaries would help librarians be critical readers of the research literature (Koufogiannakis, 2006), and to inspire more critical thinking, as well as more rigorous research.

The Editorial Board has always been committed to making evidence summaries a useful tool for practitioners, and as such, some members conducted research on evidence summaries in order to learn more about the summaries and their impact. Kloda, Koufogiannakis, and Mallan (2011) undertook a study examining the content of evidence summaries from the first three volumes of the journal, with a focus on the commentary, or critical appraisal, component. This study revealed both strengths and weaknesses within library and information research, and also identified the aspects most likely to be critiqued (and overlooked) by evidence summary writers. Based on findings from the study, in 2012, the journal implemented changes to the guidelines for evidence summary writers. These changes were designed to improve consistency and focus, such as ensuring a descriptive title, a more concise abstract, a commentary not exceeding 450 words, and inclusion of a statement of significance and practical application of the research (Kloda, 2012).

To determine if evidence summaries had any impact upon readers, members of the Editorial Board embarked on another study, this time investigating the ways in which reading a specific evidence summary influenced a librarian's knowledge, their individual practice or workplace practices, or possibly had an impact on library users (Kloda, Koufogiannakis, Brettle, 2014). The findings demonstrated the numerous ways in which evidence summaries not only provide new knowledge, but assist in decision making at the individual and organizational level. It is now not only our opinion that evidence summaries are valuable aids in a librarian's ability to understand and access the research literature, but that they are instrumental resources for translating research to inform knowledge and practice. In this 11th volume of the journal, as we publish the 350th evidence summary, with no end in sight, it's time to harness the value that evidence summaries hold: librarianship needs a database of evidence summaries.

We can look to medicine for a way to potentially create such a database and make it useful to those searching for synopses of research evidence. Shurtz and Foster developed a rubric for evaluating evidence based medicine (EBM) point-of-care tools with five general evaluation criteria: compatibility and access, content, search options and results, quality control, and evidence (2011). These general evaluation criteria could also be applied to the development of a database of *EBLIP* evidence summaries. Content (e.g., types of summaries) and quality control (e.g., peer-review, author affiliation, editing process) are already inherent in the evidence summaries that would be the basis of a searchable database. The editorial board fully supports compatibility and accessibility of *EBLIP* evidence summaries such that any database developed should be open access and should link outward to open access versions of the original articles where possible (otherwise linking to abstracts). While we do not wish to compare a database of *EBLIP* summaries with EBM point-of-care tools, there are many concepts we can draw from looking at fields that have already developed such tools. Library and information research and practice would dictate how the product is used and organized, and we see overall value in having a one-stop shop for pre-evaluated analyses of research.

At one point, a group of Australian librarians categorized each evidence summary published in *EBLIP* according to domain, but as the number of evidence summarize expanded this effort was not sustainable and has since ended. However, it was useful for readers to focus on evidence summaries by broad general topic area, such as collections or management, for example. Ultimately, we would like to see the evidence summaries being housed in a searchable database, specific to this type of scholarship. At the moment, *EBLIP* is indexed in several sources, but evidence summaries are treated in the same way as original research articles, which sometimes leads to confusion. A specialized database that allows for searching by specific fields such as librarianship domain and sector as well as topic area, would allow practitioners to easily find relevant evidence. Each evidence summary allows a practitioner to get an overview of the article prior to actually reading the original.

Based on Shurtz and Foster's criteria, the real opportunities to improve upon *EBLIP* evidence summaries for use within a database are firstly in what search options and results will be available to those using the database as discussed above. This may require some additional work with each evidence summary to classify it based on domain, sector, and topic area to make these concepts more easily searchable. The second opportunity to improve upon *EBLIP* evidence summaries would be to assign a category to indicate the strength of the evidence of each original research article. Shurtz and Foster define the characteristics of their evidence criteria as "standard of grading" and "clarity of levels." Most *EBLIP* evidence summaries are critically appraised using a tool (e.g., the EBL Checklist and the ReLIANT instrument). As part of preparing evidence summaries for a searchable database, the scores from these tools could be made more evident.

Our call now is to the wider library and information studies community for assistance to develop a database that could house and treat evidence summaries in a way that would make them more discoverable and useful than is possible within the confines of a journal. We know that the expertise exists within our community, as do open source tools that could facilitate the development of such a home. If an institution is willing to host and help develop the underlying structure of the database, we know there will be overwhelming support from the EBLIP community to help with determining processes for the needed structure of content, metadata, editing, and other workflows. We know this because after 10 years of building a successful journal based on the will of the EBLIP community, the same effort will certainly be extended to a logical next step in the process. Will you join us in moving EBLIP forward by helping to build a database of evidence summaries?

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