



Editorial

Thoughts on Reflection

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There has been some acknowledgement in the published literature that reflection is a crucial element of the evidence based library and information practice (EBLIP) model we have adopted (Booth 2004, 2006; Grant 2007; Helliwell 2007). As we work through a problem and try to incorporate the best available evidence into our decision making, reflection is required at several stages, including the very identification of the problem through to our assessment of the process itself and what we have learned in order to inform future practice. However, reflection and reflective writing have not fully been integrated into the process we espouse, and very little has been done to look more closely at this element of the model and how it can be integrated into professional learning.

In a recently published research article, Sen (2010) confirms the relationship between reflection and several aspects of professional practice. These include critical review and decision making, two aspects that are tied closely to the evidence based process. Sen notes:

Students were more likely to show evidence of learning, self-development, the ability to review issues crucially, awareness of their own mental functions, ability to make decision [sic] and being empowered when they had mastered the art of reflective practice and the more deeply analytical reflective writing. (p.84)

EBLIP (the journal) tries to incorporate elements of reflection within the articles we publish. While we clearly believe in the need for our profession to do quality research and publish that research so that it can be accessible to practitioners, we also know that research cannot be looked at in isolation. Our evidence summaries are one way of reflecting critically on previously published research, and in the same vein, our classics bring older research studies back to the foreground. This work needs to continue to be discussed and looked at for its impact on our profession.

More directly, the *Using Evidence in Practice* section uses a standardized format enabling

practitioners to share their experience of integrating research evidence into their practice. The final section of these brief articles asks the writers to reflect on their experience. Although it is not research, the individual reflection allies with what Schön (1983) called “reflection on action” and such reflections over time form a practical, tacit knowledge that we use to inform our work. Within this section of the journal, we hope readers will become more aware of how different types of evidence can be integrated into real-world decision making. Not everything requires a full blown research study, and this section allows readers to see what other practitioners are doing, and in turn it should enable them to reflect upon what they are doing in their own practice.

Being aware of situations where things may or may not have worked, and reflecting on the reasons why, brings together our sense of critical thought and practical experience that go a long way in filling the “librarian observed” and “professional judgements” parts of the EBLIP definition (Booth and Brice 2004). Acquiring professional knowledge does not end when we complete a graduate program, or have a certain number of years experience under our belts. It needs to be continually and consciously cultivated via reflection on our practice, our research, and simply what works and why.

Research knowledge only takes us so far. People often ask me, “What do I do when there is no evidence? Or when the research evidence is weak?” Does this stop us from moving ahead? No. A decision still needs to be made. Evidence based practice is not only about acting when there is good evidence. Enhancing our professional judgments via a career built on analytical reflection, will provide knowledge that goes a long way towards making difficult decisions a little bit easier; even (or perhaps, especially) in the cases when there is already a large body of research evidence.

Perhaps EBLIP proponents need to start thinking about the best ways to be reflective

practitioners. Could we start a new type of “journal club” where practitioners keep journals as reflective tools, and meet regularly to work through problems and give one another feedback? Or pair up with a reflective partner to have discussions on critical incidents that occurred within our practice? I am sure some people are already doing this, or are finding other mediums such as blogs, wikis, and mailing lists to reflect on elements of practice and engage others who are interested in the topic. However, coming up with concrete strategies for developing reflection within our profession needs to be more widely discussed and articulated. Our professional bodies would be a good starting place, and via these bodies developing skills through continuing professional development. We can learn a lot from other fields such as Education and Nursing, which have more fully incorporated elements of reflection into their practice. We also need to consider the best way to integrate our reflection with available research. I’m sure there are many ideas just waiting to be put into action, or already happening (in which case we would love to hear about them). As with anything worthwhile, there is no simple formula for success, but there is a valuable goal; in this case, improving our practice for the benefit of our patrons and a better understanding of how and why we do what we do as librarians and information professionals.

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