



Editorial

Should We Value Knowledge and Expertise?

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As I write this editorial, I am on an airplane, reflecting on the EBLIP6 conference, held June 27-30, 2011 in Salford, U.K. In my personal opinion, the conference was a great success. There were a wide variety of concurrent paper sessions from an international group of delegates, thought provoking keynotes, and just the right amount of social activity, including the main conference dinner at the Manchester United Football Club! This journal will have a Feature section in our next issue (December) that highlights the conference, including keynote presentations, some of the papers that were presented, and commentaries from attendees about the conference itself. So for now, I'll just offer my warmest congratulations to the organizers.

As I left Salford and tried to reflect on what I had learned and discussed with others, there were many things that came to mind. Immediate things that stood out for me had to do with impact, reflection, and the complexity of

decision making. The theme of EBLIP6 was "Valuing Knowledge and Expertise". This is a somewhat controversial theme for an evidence based practice conference, where research evidence and its implementation are the focus, and expert opinion is not generally held in high regard. None of the keynote speakers' presentations spoke directly to the theme, however several paper presentations did include some reference to the importance of professional knowledge.

Expertise is a loaded word, filled with notions of snobbery and over-confidence, even close-mindedness. If anything, those involved with EBLIP remove themselves as far from the notion of "expert" as they can. But if we consider an expert to be someone who has built up a significant amount of professional knowledge (both through experience and research) on a topic, then the EBLIP movement should not simply dismiss this notion of "expert". Perhaps, we more appropriately should consider expert

voices (knowledgeable, reasonable, experienced voices) as ones that we need to listen to as another source of evidence within our profession.

Reflecting on this made me realise that in my own professional approach, I often seek out different experts depending upon the questions I am trying to answer. When I was a newer librarian, my more senior colleagues were the experts I learned from and they gave me guidance at that point in my career. Now, when starting new projects, I may consult experts from other institutions to help me by passing on their knowledge of something that is new to me; and I, in turn, do the same for other librarians. That consultation is a starting point, a guidepost, and yes, I certainly value it. Without it, where does one even begin? As someone who tries to be evidence based in my practice, I think the key is to not stop with that expert opinion, but to build upon it, test it, ensure that it works in a given context. That process usually involves research evidence and local data, and a quest to build upon previous professional knowledge.

The theme of EBLIP6 was perfect. It came at a time when evidence based practice in LIS is looking inward. There were many people presenting similar thoughts – about just how complex decision making is, how there are other forms of evidence besides research, that practice is messy, and that the EBLIP model is perhaps a bit too simple. We need to think about values,

about what we already know, and how to build on that knowledge without simply being dismissive. We also need to look at the model we hold up as an evidence based one, and test it – there needs to be more research on evidence based practice itself.

The conference reinforced for me that EBLIP is at an exciting point where we have moved into a reflective phase that is sure to result in growth and change. The conference taught me that we must value knowledge and expertise, but at the same time, also question knowledge and expertise. We should acknowledge and embrace the complexity of the work we do as LIS professionals, and be glad it never fits in a tidy box. Each and every one of us uses our own knowledge and expertise to assist with deciding what to do in a situation, and if we are active, conscious professionals, our knowledge continues to grow and our minds remain open to new possibilities. Valuing our profession and why we do this work, requires such openness and above all else drives us to make the best decisions we can at a particular point in time.

I think of EBLIP as a movement within LIS that strengthens our knowledge and expertise as a profession by reminding our professional community of the importance of both doing and using research. The scientific aspect of our work continually needs to be reinforced and built upon. Paired with professional knowledge and expertise, we may have a winning combination!