



Guest Editorial

EBLIP and Public Libraries

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Kudos to the *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* editorial team for planning this special issue focused on public libraries. This issue features research articles from LIS faculty and public library practitioners on timely and important topics: the use of volunteers in public libraries; using customer experience data to inform service practice; the efficacy of a Web-based staff training program; a study on the contributions and value of public libraries; and an evidence based collection analysis process. All of the evidence summaries in this issue also focus on public library issues. Public librarians may be less familiar with these critical appraisals of research articles, their use as another tool to facilitate knowledge translation from research, and as another source of evidence with which to make informed decisions.

EBLIP is one area where librarians from every sector can work together, sharing a common interest in evidence based professional practice. EBLIP at its best puts aside sector silos and offers a broad perspective for our work in all library types. The EBLIP conference is inclusive of all library types and *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* has always included articles and evidence

summaries from across the spectrum of academic, public, school, health, and other special libraries in its mission to provide a forum for librarians and information professionals to discover research that may contribute to decision making in professional practice.

Despite this welcome inclusion in EBLIP, public librarian participation is notably low. This mirrors the grim reality of low public librarian research and publication rates, as well as the small overall percentage of LIS research articles about public library practice. The results of a content analysis study (Penta, 2005) showed that over a four year period just 3% of article authors in North American LIS journals were employed in public libraries. Even in *Public Library Quarterly*, only 14% of the authors were public librarians (Penta, 2005). An earlier study that reviewed the state of research in North American LIS journals about public libraries over a five year period showed that only 7% of LIS research articles were public library oriented (Hersberger, 2001).

It isn't surprising that public librarian research and publication rates are lower than that of

their academic librarian and LIS faculty colleagues. Public librarians do not share the same research tradition, mandate, or requirement as our academic colleagues. However, the LIS literature and overall evidence base of LIS suffers from this lack of contribution from our public library practitioners and lack of information about our public library practice. EBLIP practitioners should be concerned about the overall quality and representativeness of the LIS literature and should consider strategies that can help balance sector specific research and publication efforts. While public librarians do make significant use of local data to inform organizational decision making, further encouragement and opportunity is needed to take the additional step of publishing these evidence based approaches with the LIS community. The "Using Evidence in Practice" section of *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* is a good example of a forum that public librarians should consider for these types of publications.

While the barriers to EBLIP are applicable across all sector types and are well documented (Booth, 2011), specific attention is required to engage public librarians. Orientation to EBLIP as a model of practice is needed first, and secondly, support and attention is needed to assist in overcoming the barriers to participation. Now, more than ever, with fiscal pressures and societal changes challenging the value of our public libraries, we need a strong base of evidence upon which to draw support and inform evidence based practice and advocacy efforts. The evidence base needs increased contributions about public library practice and value from both LIS faculty and practitioner-researchers to ensure balance and relevance.

While attention and commitment from organizations, associations, and practitioners are all required to implement change, the expertise and leadership from within our EBLIP community could also be harnessed to provide an engagement and support framework to further engage public librarians to our community. Further opportunity and welcome into the EBLIP community could be

encouraged through even small steps, such as ensuring there are public librarians on the conference organizing and local arrangement committees, and an EBLIP editorial position dedicated to seeking out and working with public librarians to encourage and support publication. The EBLIP community can further support our public library colleagues by working collaboratively on projects, such as helping to define the research questions of most pressing concern for public libraries.

In my former position as an academic librarian, I often heard the opinion that EBLIP was perceived to be just for and about health librarians and health libraries. EBLIP has grown so much that we know this is no longer true, but there is still work to be done. The number of public librarians in our ranks is still discouraging. We need to work together, reach out and provide opportunities, and share our EBLIP experience to engage more of our public library colleagues.

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