Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Editorial

Evidence and Ethics

Alison Brettle
Editor-in-Chief
Senior Lecturer, School of Nursing Midwifery and Social Work
University of Salford
Salford, United Kingdom
Email: a.brettle@salford.ac.uk

Welcome to the December issue of *EBLIP*, the final issue of my first year as Editor-in-Chief. A year which I have thoroughly enjoyed and one where the fears over what to write in my editorials haven't materialised. This quarter, ethics has featured quite heavily in my working life so I decided to make this the topic of the editorial, sharing some of my thoughts regarding evidence, ethics and how ethical principles are implemented within the *EBLIP* journal.

Ethics are "principles of conduct or standards of behaviour governing an individual or profession" (Library and Information Science Editorial Committee, 2010), and as individuals or professionals we may be governed by various ethical codes. As I'm sure you know, EBLIP originated in the health domain, where ethical values and ethical research feature strongly. Indeed, by its formal definition, research cannot take place unless "ethical approval" from an appropriate committee has been granted. The practicalities of taking research through the ethical approval process can often be time consuming, and those involved in research need to bear this in mind when planning a project. Each committee will

have a slightly different form and process (which can add to the frustration of the researcher), but basically will make their decision to approve on the basis that the research includes obtaining informed consent from participants (i.e., participants know what the research is about and what their involvement will mean); that the research will not cause harm to participants; that confidentiality will be maintained; and that the research undertaken is methodologically rigorous and worthwhile. Preparing a proposal for ethical approval, whilst time consuming, makes the researcher think about all aspects of the research and how it is going to be operationalized, which can save lots of time and effort in the long run and may well also improve the research design. These principles are the same whatever discipline the research takes place in, and should be something that we are aware of as consumers of evidence.

Within LIS in the UK, ethical principles have been put to the fore within a new professional framework (CILIP Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2012a). The framework outlines the broad range of

skills required by workers across the LIS profession, placing these on a wheel with ethics and values in the centre, as they underpin the profession. Placing ethics and values at the core in this way helps us set our knowledge into a wider context and, I believe, is one of the ways that we can make a difference as LIS professionals. At the same time, our ethical values and principles help to differentiate us from other professions and help to define what we do as LIS professionals. These ethical principles are outlined in a code (CILIP Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2012b), which sets out professional responsibilities in relation to users, colleagues, and the information community and society. The elements which are particularly relevant to EBLIP, and which are espoused in the scope and mission of the journal, include maintaining and enhancing professional knowledge and competence, sharing results of research and development, encouraging best practice, and promoting equitable access to information.

There are also ethical codes of practice for journal editors, these include one for LIS editors (Library and Information Science Editorial Committee, 2010) and a more general one which originated in the medical and health domain (Committee on Publication Ethics: COPE, 2011). Both of these guide journal editors in relating to readers, authors, reviewers, and publishers, and both seek to establish best practice for journal publishing. For the *EBLIP* journal, these codes of practice provide a useful framework for ensuring the journal operates in a professional and ethical way. A recent example where the codes have been used in *EBLIP* is in dealing with a submission from one of the editorial team (Koufogiannakis, 2012). Strong ethical principles have been at the heart of the *EBLIP* journal since its inception, but decision making is quite informal and based on the agreement of the editorial team members who meet monthly and communicate regularly by email. In keeping with our informal decision making structure the editorial team discussed how to deal with the submission by an editorial team member and decided that it should be treated in exactly the same way as any other

submission (i.e., subject to double blind peer review and would need to adhere to the decision of the appropriate editor). To do this we also needed to adjust the Open Journal System, so that the submitting editor did not have access to the area where submissions and reviews are stored. In line with the COPE code (2011), we then made this procedure explicit on our web site (http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/EBLIP/about/editorialPolicies#peerReviewProcess), as well as documenting the decision on our internal wiki.

As the journal grows and develops, it is important that our decision making and principles maintain consistency and are made explicit. We also need to plan for the future and ensure that the journal is open to as wide a range of people as possible. To this end all our positions are advertised widely, and each application is reviewed by at least two members of the team. Terms of office and a policy for succession planning have also been established. The criteria and policies are stored on a wiki, which hosts a wide range of guidelines, procedures, and documents and is used by all members of the editorial team. As the team grows and similar issues are faced by new members of the editorial team, we have a reference point, policy, or guide to ensure that the decisions made are consistent. As appropriate these can be reflected in the policies which are stated on the journal website and are available to all our users. In this way, we hope that the journal maintains its strong professional and ethical ethos and continues to ensure that the best available evidence about LIS research is made available to help practitioners in their decision making.

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