Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Evidence Summary

Further Study is Needed to Define and Measure the Use of Reflective Practice in Library and Information Science

A review of:
Grant, Maria J. "The Role of Reflection in the Library and Information Sector: A Systematic Review." <u>Health Information and Libraries Journal</u> 24.3 (2007): 155-66.

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Abstract

Objectives - To identify and review the literature of reflective practice in library and information science (LIS) in order to understand its role, particularly with regard to health libraries.

Design - Systematic review

Setting - LIS English-language articles published between 1969 and 2006, and indexed in the *Library and Information Science Abstracts* (*LISA*) database.

Subjects - 929 citations retrieved from the *LISA* database.

Methods - The author conducted free text searches in the *LISA* database for the terms 'reflective,' 'reflection*,' or 'reflexion*.' An initial search series was conducted in 2004 in order to retrieve items published between 1969-2003, then in 2007 for articles published between 2004-2006. In all, 929 article citations were retrieved. Exclusion criteria included those articles addressing the facilitation of reflective practices in others, as well as non-English language materials, and those predating 1969. After review, 55

articles met the author's relevance standard. Citation tracking then added 10 articles to the total. From this dataset, full-text articles were obtained where possible, if determined on initial scrutiny to be deserving of further examination. Thirteen articles (.013%) were ultimately selected for analysis. These articles were categorized as analytical or non-analytical, with respect to perspective (individual or organizational), and recency of events (retrospective or recent). In addition, a determination was made about whether the articles' foci were reflection occurring *on* (in retrospect to) or *in* (during) practice.

Main results - Of thirteen articles, five were found to be non-analytical, with the other six being analytical. Three of the non-analytical items were the reflections of an individual, while the remaining two offered an organizational perspective. The non-analytical accounts were found to be descriptive accounts by an individual, mostly retrospective and offering no consideration of implications for LIS practice. Analytical reflective accounts attempt to systematically appraise events from the recent past, and draw conclusions in order to improve future actions.

Conclusion – A gradual increase in the use of analytical reflective practice is demonstrated over the period from 1969-2006, although insufficient examples of the practice were found in the published literature. Reflective practice is likely to be beneficial to LIS practitioners, especially when time is spent in considering the implications of lessons learned from practice.

Commentary:
This article was evaluated with the use of Greenhalgh's checklist for appraising systematic reviews, and one provided by McMaster University for the appraisal of qualitative studies. Several checklists were

used because this reviewer could find none that were sufficiently applicable for an evaluation of a systematic review of this nature.

To begin with, the author has claimed this work is a systematic review, (Grant), and references the text *Evidence-Based Practice for Information Professionals: A Handbook* (Booth and Brice) in the process of performing analysis. Yet there has been no effort made to perform what these same authors define as the process of systematic review:

> A systematic review tries to answer a clear question by finding and describing all published and, if possible, unpublished work on a topic […] uses explicit methods to perform a thorough literature search and critical appraisal […] and uses appropriate statistical techniques to combine these valid studies. (Booth and Brice 11)

The researcher in LIS attempting to measure qualitative phenomena in a systematic manner immediately encounters a serious barrier consisting of the use of nonstandardized vocabulary. If the process of reflection is not, as the author claims, well established in LIS, the use of the terms 'reflective,' 'reflection*,' or 'reflexion*' used to retrieve literature will not necessarily provide any comprehensive set of data. In establishing the need for an inquiry about the use of reflective practice, Grant cites the words of Booth and Brice in a chapter entitled "Evaluating Your Performance" (Booth and Brice 127-137) which clearly conflates the concept of *reflection* with that of *performance evaluation*. Despite Grant's provision of the definition of reflection from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and her mention of a definition provided for the

term in the literatures of nursing and midwifery, no attempt is made to define reflection for LIS. In the absence of a working definition, the differentiation of *reflective practice* from the practice of *evaluative analysis* has not taken place. Because of this, a search for literature is problematic, and becomes an exercise in searching for term occurrences which are likely to be only part of the actual practice of reflection in LIS.

Furthermore, even if LIS publications adhered to more standardized terminology (as is the case in nursing, one of the disciplines cited as preceding LIS in the use of reflective practice), the process of systematic review demands examination of resources beyond those indexed in only one bibliographic database. Grant explains her lack of access to LIS bibliographic databases other than *LISA*, and projects the need to enlarge an inquiry for evidence of reflective practice, but without a broader effort, including books, databases, hand-searching, and other resources, her work cannot properly be called a systematic review.

Searching articles indexed in the *LISA* database alone is not sufficiently comprehensive to ensure thorough searching has been done when the intent is to perform a systematic review, even if descriptor terms are available (see Eldredge 36-48). For example, a search of the Library Literature and Information Science database with (reflective <in> KW OR reflection* <in> KW OR reflexion* <in> KW AND between 1969 and 2006) yielded 1802 items, compared to the 929 retrieved from *LISA*. This reviewer notes that articles from such publications as *Publishers Weekly* are included in the total retrieved from the Library Literature and Information Science database, and wonders what other criteria were used to determine relevance in the article under review, since that detail is not provided: "[…] efforts were made to obtain

the full text of those that appeared to be relevant" (Grant 157).

The resulting literature, a total of 13 articles, is analyzed and categorized, after which the author draws conclusions in response to her research question. Assessment of the "methodologic quality" (another criteria of a well-performed systematic review) has been done only to the level of identifying the 13 articles as "analytic" or "non-analytic", as "recent" or "distant past," and as "reflections in practice" or "reflections on practice" (Grant 156).

Due to methodological problems, the study cannot be replicated or generalized, although unquestionably, a study of the use of reflective practice in LIS would be beneficial to the profession for the reasons mentioned by the author. The study might have been better approached as an initial review of the literature, as a way to assess the status of reflection in (or on) practice. This work would have been improved by an attempt to discuss the problems encountered in trying to perform the study, and a clearer discussion of the exclusion/inclusion criteria. The author contributes to the sparse literature about the use of reflective practice in LIS with this effort, providing readers with an overview of its application in nursing and education, and pointing the way to future research.

Works Cited

Booth, Andrew, and Anne Brice. "Appraising the Evidence." Evidence-Based Practice for Information Professionals: A Handbook. Eds. Andrew Booth and Anne Brice. London: Facet Publishing, 2004. 114-118.

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Greenhalgh, Trisha. <u>How to Read a Paper</u>. 2nd ed. London: BMJ Books, 2001. <u>netLibrary</u>.[OCLC]. [UNC University Libraries, Chapel Hill, N.C.]. 14 Nov. 2007 <http://www.netlibrary.com>.

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