



Commentary

EBL is HOT, Help it Sizzle!

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EBL is hot in our profession. Its concepts and theories are the subject of articles, journals, and books in our literature. Workshops and conferences are embracing the idea and “evidence” is quickly become the new standard for our research processes. With all this support why does EBL need help? While it seems to be accepted at a theoretical level, EBL needs help on a more practical level with implementation – and that is where library managers and directors come in.

Library administrators at all levels need to embrace the concept and become the driving force for its acceptance into the daily routines and practices of our professional work. They can accomplish this as they are the ones who set the agendas. It is the directors and managers who approve sabbaticals and research projects, and who provide resources (human or otherwise) for all library initiatives. I predict that without the practical support of library

administrators, the theoretical support for EBL will start to dwindle.

Making decisions based on the best possible evidence or information at hand is what administrators do naturally. However, those decisions are not always empirically based. Decisions are often based on conversations held around the water cooler or with other administrators at meetings and conferences. It is essential that decision makers become more aware of what kind of information is driving their decision-making. It would be much better for our libraries and our profession if those administrative decisions were based on evidence based research. A library director making a case to a senior administrator would be in a much better position to argue for funding to provide additional services if there was research to back up the argument. In the same way, a librarian would be in a much better position to serve students if he/she was aware of student use patterns based on research.

Linda Watson noted in her presentation to the 2nd International Evidence Based Librarianship Conference in Edmonton, Alberta that there are four main players in EBL: LIS Programs, Associations, Librarians, and Library Administrators. She outlines five points for library administrators and their role in EBL: recruit individuals with innate curiosity; create an environment of inquiry and expectation for reflective practice, presentations, and publications; provide resources for learning and practicing research skills; seek out opportunities within the institution for research partnerships; and more than anything, set an example! (Watson 2003)

Building on Watson's suggestions, here are some practical ways administrators can make EBL happen in their libraries:

1. Encourage proposals for new services that follow the steps of EBL.
2. Offer institutional support for research. This is easier in an academic library where there is an expectation that librarians (who are often members of the local faculty association) will conduct research. Encourage leave time for sabbaticals or research leaves.
3. Create financial support mechanisms for research, such as a research fund that will be available to researching librarians on leave or not.
4. Encourage question formulation in all policy discussions using PICO or Booth/Brice's SPICE (Setting, Population, Intervention, Comparison and Evaluation) model. (Booth and Brice 2003)
5. Support EBL activities such as journal clubs, research committees, research registries, and brown bag sessions.
6. Support collaborative initiatives for research both within libraries and among different libraries and faculty.
7. Encourage the creation of repeatable research that encourages a more robust body of knowledge. Remove language from collective agreements or agreements with librarians that promotes only "unique or original research."
8. Be willing to change. Making decisions based on the best possible information can produce many changes, and administrators need to be prepared for and ready to work with these changes.

Professionals are excited about EBL because they have found a way to bring research into practice. The nature of librarianship is service. With EBL librarians can enhance their research practice in a way that also enhances service to the user. No wonder the profession is excited. To ensure it becomes a common part of our research and practice, library directors and managers need to embrace the idea and help with the implementation. It is the right thing to do for both the staff they administer and users they serve.

Works Cited

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