Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Editorial

Evidence Based Practice Outside the Box

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I love food. I love cooking, baking, testing, and eating. I read about food preparation, food facts, and food service. Over the years I've developed my fair share of knowledge about cooking and I'm a decent cook, but I'm no chef. I guess I'm what you'd call a "foodie". However, I have the good fortune to have a friend who is a chef and owns one of the best, and certainly the most innovative, restaurants in town. During this summer I hosted a cooking class in my home for my family with my chef friend as instructor. The Tex-Mex barbecue theme was a big hit (you can contact me for recipes, if you like), but much more fascinating was the explanation of the science behind the cooking. It turns out that there is a term for this: molecular gastronomy. Another term, and hence the genesis of my "Eureka!" moment of the summer, is *evidence based cooking*. Good cooking is not just following a recipe (not all of which are evidence based) but at its best is the culmination of heaps of tested information regarding why and how chemical and environmental factors work together to result in a gastronomical delight. For example, will brining or marinating a pork chop make it moister? And, if brining, what temperature should the water be, how long should it soak, and how much salt is needed? Why does pounding meat increase its tenderness? What will keep guacamole from browning better – the pit or lime juice? What does baking soda do in a chocolate cake? Eggs or no eggs in fresh pasta?

Like most librarians, I tend not to take information at face value. I want to know where information comes from and whether or not it is valid, based on specific factors. I've come to notice that evidence based, or evidence informed, practice is everywhere and has a tremendous impact on our lives. Why do you rotate the tires on your car? Evidence shows that the front tires wear

more quickly (think about all those 3-point turns, the braking, etc) and therefore, switching the front tires with the back tires will increase the life span of the tires. Ergonomics is based heavily on human factors research and usability testing; theme park design is largely affected by studies on the psychology of waiting; the study of local weather patterns and temperatures directly affects landscape architecture; advertising is strategically designed and presented based upon sociological studies such as demographics and viewing/reading behaviour. Could one argue that natural evolution is a result of nature's long-term evidence-based practice? I know that I'm not alone in finding this fascinating, especially since the basis of these studies is information. While my own work may focus more on medical and health information, I feel that as an information specialist I can take pride in the fact that the soul of my field, information, is essential to the world around me. Think about this when you feel yourself getting cynical about research and the validity of your profession (don't tell me you've never been there).

I will be the first to admit that evidence is not always the be-all and end-all. There is a lot to be said for spontaneity (i.e. "Hmmmm…I wonder if a sprig of fresh thyme would taste good in the mushroom sauce?") and happenstance (i.e. "Well, whaddaya know... penicillin!"). I certainly don't think that every decision needs to be researched. But thank goodness for many research based decisions, without which the world would be a very different place and, heaven forbid, the perfect crème brulée may not exist.