

# Evidence-based practice

I don't have any great desire to become an academic. I much prefer to search for other people's research than to do it myself. It is this love of finding information that is the primary reason I chose librarianship as a career. Imagine then my shock when I began studying LIS at QUT and found that the kind of research I so loved to find was all but non-existent in my new profession! At first, I doubted my information seeking skills: 'I'm using the wrong keywords,' I thought. 'I must have my Boolean mixed up with my truncation,' I moaned. 'I'm a terrible librarian and will never get a job,' I despaired. Then I got a job, and found that my use of keywords, Boolean and truncation were perfectly fine — it was the library literature that was lacking.

I'm not saying that there's no worthwhile library research out there — just that there isn't a lot of it, and there are some quite sizeable gaps in the collection. The very type of research that we attempt to steer our users towards is lacking in our own field: scholarly, peer-reviewed sources, which contain original, evidence-based research. I am fortunate that I enrolled in a course where this gap in the literature is acknowledged, and we are not only encouraged to search for scholarly literature but to also contribute to that literature. Due to the good fortune of working in a library, I have been able to investigate topics of interest at work within my studies. Despite this introduction into both the practice of being a librarian and the practice of doing research, I never really thought I could combine the two. At least, not until I attended the 3rd International Evidence Based Librarianship (EBL) Conference in Brisbane in October.

The State Library of Queensland was generous enough to provide places for several students — from all over Australia — to attend the conference as student volunteers. Despite only being able to see a handful of the presentations, I was blown away. Here, at this conference, were people who both worked as librarians and conducted research — *at the same time!* Although there were papers by academics, the vast majority were by practitioners.

Evidence-based librarianship is defined by Andrew Booth as 'an approach to information science that promotes the collection, interpretation, and integration of valid, important and applicable user-reported, librarian-observed, and research-derived evidence'. Despite its health sector conception, it became clear at the conference that EBL as a practice is very much in its infancy, and we, as the librarians of the future, can have a part in shaping its course.

There were many excellent papers presented at the conference, but

two that I saw really stood out for me, and illustrate what I find so exciting about EBL — practitioners practicing research. Glenna Westwood from the University of Lethbridge recognised that she wasn't meeting the needs of foreign language students at her institution, and the literature was silent on the topic. Glenna used her study leave to immerse herself in the experience of being a foreign language student in Mexico for a year. Using herself as a test subject, she grounded her study in EBL, formulating a question and using research methods to find answers. What really struck me about Glenna was her courage, passion and honesty. She saw a need, she investigated it, she attempted to find answers, and she is sharing her experiences, mistakes and results with the library community.

Another inspiring group of librarians is from Central Coast Health in NSW. They used the SPICE formula (an EBL tool) to enhance the usability of their library intranet site. This strikes me as the kind of project so many of us could be involved in at work. These librarians had no extra funding, but with a supportive manager, dedication and teamwork they have both improved their workplace and added to the library literature, sharing their experiences, both positive and learning, with their colleagues.

These practitioners who are often new to the practice of research showed me that it doesn't always have to be perfect. I see this approach as putting a different emphasis on the word 'practice'. Rather than being scared that they wouldn't do it perfectly the first time, or even the second, these brave librarians used EBL to evaluate a problem and set in place solutions, and then report on their process and findings. I challenge all new librarians to do the same — when you have a problem at work, fight for your right to research! Then share your findings with us, so that we can collectively improve both our practice as librarians, and the quality of our professional literature. Because without it, can we really call ourselves a profession? ■



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...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column coordinator, Kate Watson, [k.watson@cqu.edu.au](mailto:k.watson@cqu.edu.au).

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