Evidenced-based

Having knowledge and experience in evidence-based practice is another important part of what library professionals do best and why librarianship is one of the most trusted professions in Australia.

The goal of evidence-based practice is to create better outcomes based on scientifically relevant research, most likely quantitative in nature. It is an approach where decision-makers rank evidence according to how scientifically sound it may be to help guide their choices. The practice as a movement began to emerge in medicine during the early 1990s and became popular in nursing and other allied health fields, education, research, management and many other disciplines.

Libraries have been using the concept for a long time. Having worked in academic and research libraries over the past 15 years, I have gained an appreciation of how library users rely on the expertise of information professionals to help them identify and critically assess the information available to them and to gather evidence for research.

Educating library users in information and digital literacy forms the basis for evidence-based research. A good example of this is computational analysis in the form of data and text mining. Using specific software which is often platform based, researchers can extract data, identify trends, search for patterns and better understand the relationships of terms within and between documents or datasets. Analysis can be focused on word frequency, words that occur near each other, common phrases and other patterns. This technique teaches researchers to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information as evidence for what they are trying to achieve. For more examples of evidenced-based librarianship in practice, see my full blog on the ALIA FAIR website.

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Digital expertise and **inclusion**

The Digital Inclusion Index in Australia measures three components: internet access including technology and data allowance; affordability; and digital ability – which addresses attitudes, basic skills and digital activities. The index shows that female gender, older age, Indigeneity and remote geography all play significant roles in digital exclusion with scores in these areas well below the nation's averages. We, as library and information professionals, need to be thinking about how we address accessibility and messaging and inclusion to remove barriers for all people in their information seeking and in the creation of new knowledge.

Whilst the internet has been transformative for most Australians, for the 10% of Australians who are not yet online the benefits of online access are unreachable. This disadvantage intersects with social and economic disadvantage, and as such is also an issue of social justice. The index indicates that lower levels of income, education and employment are all equated with significantly less digital inclusion. As a consequence, a substantial digital divide between the richer and the poorer is evident. If we are to be able to prosper as a nation, then it is of critical importance that digital inclusion is provided for all. The role that libraries can play in this arena is more important than ever. As the gap widens, more stable jobs, as well formal higher education are becoming increasingly out of reach for those without the digital expertise required to succeed educationally and compete in such workplaces. You can read more on this topic on my blog, posted on the ALIA FAIR website.

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