The Making of a Journal: Disseminating Research to Inform Practice

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Abstract

Objective: The journal Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP) published its first issue in March 2006. The purpose of the journal is to provide a forum for librarians and other information professionals to discover research that may contribute to decision making in professional practice. EBLIP publishes original research and commentary on the topic of evidence based library and information practice, as well as reviews of previously published research (evidence summaries) on a wide number of topics.

Setting: EBLIP is an international, peer reviewed, open access journal published quarterly by the University of Alberta Learning Services, using the Open Journal Systems (OJS) Software.

Participants: The journal is comprised of an editorial team of four editors, five copyeditors, more than 40 editorial advisory board members, and more than 20 evidence summary team writers.

Program: This paper will detail the process of creating a new journal to support evidence based librarianship. The process of establishing the journal and the evolution that occurred over the first year will be discussed. The authors will discuss reasons why the journal was necessary and the various roles of sections and the content within. The importance of open access to the dissemination of this literature will also be discussed.

Main Results: By May 2007, EBLIP will have published 5 issues. We will examine the number of submissions to the journal for the first year, topics included, and average turnaround time from submission to publication.

Conclusion: With a full year's publication complete and moving forward into the second year, the editors will reflect on their experience and discuss future directions for EBLIP.

Introduction

The journal *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice (EBLIP)* was created as a concept in the winter of 2005. Within a relatively quick period of time, the concept formed into a concrete reality – an editorial team was determined, software chosen and a publisher found. The reason for beginning the journal was to create a vehicle for dissemination of research and articles about research that related to practice; a place for librarians and other information professionals who were interested in evidence based practice to discuss ideas and find information. Open access was very important to the journal's creators. Open access was seen as a way to ensure a barrier-free, web-based readership and to bring research to those library and information professionals who might otherwise not have access. This was also in keeping with a desire to establish an international journal where anyone could participate. Even the journal's name was ultimately decided by feedback from an open listserv (EBLIG) where many interested individuals gave suggestions and debated wording. We all know what won out!

The journal's purpose is to "provide a forum for librarians and other information professionals to discover research that may contribute to decision making in professional practice". Coverage is very broad, encompassing academic, health, public and school libraries, among others. The unifying factor is the integration of research into practice. The journal covers Articles, Evidence Summaries, Commentaries and News; there are also occasional Features on specific topics.

At time of writing, EBLIP has published 5 issues, the first issue being in March 2006, and quarterly thereafter. How the journal grew and thrived, where we are going and what our readers think will all be covered over the course of this presentation.

Building the Team

When we began, the journal's team consisted of 3 editors, 10 evidence summary writers and 20 peer reviewers. Soon after the first issue was published we realised that this was insufficient if we all wanted to maintain our regular day jobs! The first area that quickly needed coverage was copyediting. We added a copyeditor to the team, but again quickly learned that one copyeditor

was not enough, and slowly increased the copyediting team to our current complement of five. In those early days, we also added one more editor, responsible for Articles.

The evidence summaries team also faced some challenges. Initially, the evidence summary writers were to do one summary for each issue. When they began working on the second round of summaries, it became apparent that this commitment was too large and the window of time was too narrow. The writers would be putting final touches on one summary just prior to publication, while at the same time they were submitting another summary for peer review. We changed the requirement so that the team now writes 2 summaries per year, generally separated by six months. Because of this we doubled the number of summary writers to 20.

Similarly, after a couple of issues, it became apparent that our team of peer reviewers was too small. Peer reviewers were told to expect to review 4 manuscripts per year, which would translate to approximately one manuscript per issue. What we did not account for at the time was the fact that reviewers were not always able to review a manuscript each time it was assigned to them (after all, they all have full time jobs too!) therefore increasing the annual number of papers for other reviewers. As well, a third reviewer has sometimes been required in instances where the two initial reviews were polar opposites: a tie-breaker, so to speak. We needed more flexibility to address these issues and so we have twice increased the number of reviewers, to the current slate of 48. It has been important for us to have representation from a wide variety of disciplines so that manuscripts from numerous areas of research could be appropriately matched to a reviewer's area of interest. We have been fortunate to receive curriculum vitaes and resumes from people of varying backgrounds, thus ensuring that all areas of library and information practice are represented.

One early indication of success has been the number of submissions from our call for peer reviewers, evidence summary writers and most recently, copyeditors. For a new journal, we have unfortunately had to turn people away from these roles and encourage them to resubmit next time. The last call for evidence summary writers resulted in 40 applications, from which we chose 10. The last call for peer reviewers resulted in 24 applications, 18 of which we were able to add to the team. 13 people applied for the 2 most recently advertised copyeditor

positions. The high quality of those whom we have not been able to accommodate for any of the above mentioned teams should be noted.

The Content

Focusing on the first year of publication (4 issues), twelve articles were accepted for publication, spanning a wide variety of research types including: surveys, internal data analysis, cost effectiveness analysis, interviews, observation, citation analysis, usability testing, a systematic review and a randomised controlled trial. Classifying the articles into domains shows the topics where articles were published: Information Access and Retrieval (4), Education (3), Marketing (2), Collections (1), Management (1), Professional issues (1). There were no articles in the domains of Reference/Enquiries or Marketing/Promotion. There are too few articles to make any meaningful comparisons with Koufogiannakis, Slater and Crumley's content analysis of 2004. General turnaround for articles published in the first year was 2.7 months from submission to acceptance.

Thirty-four evidence summaries were published during the journal's first year of publication. Each issue contained between 7 and 9 summaries. The evidence summaries covered a wide variety of research types ranging from use studies, bibliometric studies, systematic reviews and comparative studies. Figure 1 shows the number of evidence summaries classified by domain. The categorization of the evidence summaries was done by Lisa Cotter as part of the EBLIP Toolkit <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/library/gosford/ebl/toolkit/>.
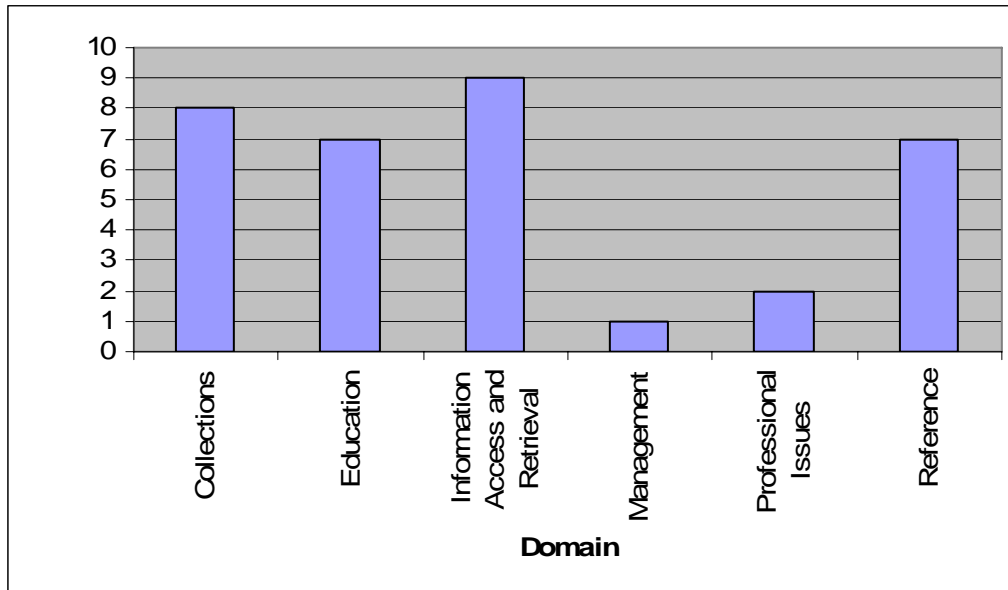
Figure 1. Number of Evidence Summaries by Domain

The domain with the most evidence summaries was Information Access & Retrieval, followed closely by Collections, Education, and Reference. Professional Issues and Management did not have many evidence summaries published in the first year.

The 34 evidence summaries critically appraised research articles from 22 different journals. Of these, two journals had the highest frequency, with four articles each: *College & Research Libraries*, and *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. All the research appraised in the evidence summaries was published between 2004 and 2006, with the majority (19/34) published in 2005. General turnaround time for evidence summaries was 3.5 months from time of submission to publication.

There were 11,338 full-text article requests over the three month period spanning November 2006 through Jan 2007. The article with the most downloads during this time period was "Name Authority Challenges for Indexing and Abstracting Databases" by Denise Beaubien Bennett and Priscilla Williams, which was published in our first issue. Of the top 10 downloads, four were Articles, three Evidence Summaries, and three were Commentaries. All had more than 300 downloads.

The Readers

The journal currently has almost 1300 registered readers with representation from around the world and from all library types. *EBLIP* has been added to the catalogues of 132 libraries world-wide (OCLC *WorldCat*). The editorial team recently surveyed our readers to hear their opinions on our first year of publication and learn more about what they would like to see in the future. By mid-March, just 80 readers (6%) had responded to the survey and these results are presented below. This very low response rate should be used only as an indication of what some of our readers think rather than evidence about the impact of the journal.

Half of the respondents work in academic or college libraries, followed by health libraries at 25% and public libraries, 10%. Other respondents were from school, law, or special libraries. Respondents rated the quality of both articles and evidence summaries very positively as either good or excellent. Most reported that *EBLIP* has been useful in informing their practice. Sample comments on how *EBLIP* informed practice included:

- o "Several articles and summaries have helped our library make a decision about how to conduct a survey or promote/offer our services."

- o "Colleagues are involved in a new library build and I was able to forward a copy of the Evidence Summary which appeared a few issues ago."

- o "I found it useful in looking for evidence that online teaching for information literacy can be effective. It was interesting to see how the effectiveness was measured in a similar library and with similar student cohort. It gave me the evidence to support what I am already doing in my practice."

When asked how *EBLIP* rated when compared with other journals of similar content, respondents were very positive with the majority rating *EBLIP* as good or excellent.

When asked what topics should be covered in future issues, there were almost as many suggestions as there were respondents. A number suggested more of an international focus,

more research articles and also a focus on libraries outside health such as special, school and public libraries. Respondents were also asked how *EBLIP* could be improved. Most did not offer an answer to this question, although some provided words of encouragement for the work of the journal to date.

Reflections

Now that we've been doing these jobs for about 18 months, we can reflect back upon what worked well and what didn't. There were many challenges along the way, and lessons learned. Overall, the Open Journal Systems (OJS) software has proven to be an effective and useful tool. Our authors, editorial advisors, and editorial team have adapted well to working within the system. That said, OJS is not without its quirks: the editors have worked through some growing pains and developed a series of troubleshooting tips and work-arounds to ensure the smooth management of manuscripts and the review and editorial processes. We have been fortunate to have access to a programmer to work with to resolve some of the more technical problems. This service is as part of the support offered with the University of Alberta Libraries' Open Journal Systems hosting service.

Another challenge has been building our team as we proceeded to publish the first issues of the journal. Every day has been a learning experience as the editorial team has tried to determine the complement of staff needed to produce a quality journal. We have also had some issues with consistency and the need to develop guidelines that became more important as new people joined our team, particularly in the area of copyediting where attention to detail is paramount!

The four members of the editorial team are located in the UK and two different regions of North America, resulting in a 7 hour time difference between us. This has proved challenging when we need to meet via teleconference, but useful when we have deadlines to meet. We have grown accustomed to the time differences and intuitively recognize when we are all at work or at home and therefore, more or less likely to be in front of a computer. It is an unusual experience to work so closely with people whom we have never met in person yet we feel as though we know one another well. Given our distance, we have done ok, but a couple of face to face meetings

along the way would have benefited us greatly! For some of us, EBLIP4 will be the first time we will officially be able to put a face to a name.

A further challenge for articles is similar to that faced by the early evidence summary writers. As the final touches are being put on one issue, articles and peer review comments are coming in for the next issue. Promising a quick turnaround for journal articles means there is often juggling to do in order to meet this aim. Adding more copyeditors and ensuring deadlines are kept helps to do this.

The editorial team prides itself on the quality of the work that is published in *EBLIP*. Ensuring that the final output meets our standards requires close attention to all steps in the editorial and publishing process. Quality assurance, therefore, is essential. This means paying close attention to peer reviews (i.e. ensuring that the reviewers are not too harsh or discouraging) and helping to foster a supportive and encouraging environment for all team members and authors.

Although we expected to work hard on the journal, we probably underestimated the amount of time that we have to devote to ensure a high quality output. It is particularly busy for the 4-5 weeks prior to publication during the final author revisions, copyedits and publication layout.

After more than a year of publication, we can certainly also recognize areas of satisfaction and the positive things that keep us motivated to continue. The great feeling of seeing a journal issue published is certainly motivating, even more so when we can see the usage statistics showing that people are accessing the articles, or when we receive positive comments about the content in the journal. As editors, it is very rewarding to hear the positive comments from authors when their article has been accepted. The high level of response to our call for peer reviewers and evidence summary writers has been very motivating, particularly given the interest from all library sectors. Finally, as we work with just a modest budget directed to producing promotional materials, the hard work and dedication of our all-volunteer work force keep the four of us on the editorial team motivated to ensure that their work is not in vain.

Future Directions

With 5 issues now published, *EBLIP* has established a solid beginning and we hope it will continue to prosper over the coming years. The journal should continue to change and respond to the needs of the community of readers and researchers in our field. We hope to incorporate some of the suggestions from our readers' feedback. For example, we have been working towards getting the journal indexed in more sources. *EBLIP* is currently indexed in *Library Literature & Information Sciences Full Text*, *Library Information Sciences and Technology Abstracts* (*LISTA*), and *Library and Information Science Abstracts* (*LISA*). *EBLIP* articles can be searched in the *Informed Librarian Online* as well as the *Directory of Open Access Journals*.

While the Evidence Summaries section has proven popular, we recognize the need to further develop the original research section of the journal, including more articles from outside the health domain, and more randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews. Increased marketing efforts, combined with additional calls for papers is in order. We hope that over time and as the journal becomes more well-known, the numbers of submissions of original research articles will increase.

In the December 2007 issue we will publish a feature section on classic research articles. This section will highlight summaries of classic research studies that have impacted practice, had an influence on LIS researchers, and stood the test of time. The classic summaries will use a format similar to that of the current Evidence Summaries published in *EBLIP*, but with a commentary that focuses on the impact of the research since it was published. Nominations are welcome until May 30, 2007.

The current editorial board will have served for over two years once Volume 2 is completed in December 2007. To transition to a new editorial board, there will be a call for new members in summer 2007 to assume positions in fall 2007. This will permit the current and new boards to co-produce one issue before the transition takes place. The current board and the Co-Chairs of the Canadian Library Association's *Evidence Based Librarianship Interest Group* will select the new *EBLIP* editorial board members.

Having made it through the first hectic year of *EBLIP*, our editorial team will plan for the future and the smooth transition with new editors who will undoubtedly breathe new life and new ideas into the publication. The core foundation of the journal remains as a commitment to bring together research and practice in an open access format and as long as there remains an interest in this topic, *EBLIP* will continue to meet the information need of its readers and bring evidence to library practitioners.