Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Australian Academic Librarians' Experience of Evidence Based Practice Involves Empowering, Intuiting, Affirming, Connecting, Noticing, and Impacting

Miller, F., Partridge, H., Bruce, C., Yates, C., & Howlett, A. (2017). How academic librarians experience evidence-based practice: A grounded theory model. Library & Information Science Research, 39(2), 124-130. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2017.04.003

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To explore and enhance the understanding of how Australian library and information science (LIS) practitioners experience or understand evidence based practice (EBP) within the context of their day-to-day professional work.

Design – Constructivist grounded theory methodology.

Setting – University libraries in Queensland, Australia.

Subjects – 13 academic librarians.

Methods – Researchers contacted academic librarians by email and invited each participant to take part in a 30-60 minute, semi-structured interview. They designed interview questions to allow participants to explain their process and experience of EBP.

Main results – This study identified six categories of experience of EBP using a constructivist grounded theory analysis process. The categories are: Empowering; Intuiting; Affirming; Connecting; Noticing; and Impacting. Briefly, empowering includes being empowered, or empowering clients, colleagues, and institutions through improved practice or performance. Intuiting includes being intuitive, or using one's own intuition, wisdom, and understanding, of colleagues and clients' behaviours to solve problems and redesign services. Affirming includes being affirmed through sharing feedback and using

affirmation to strengthen support for action. Connecting includes being connected, and building connections, with clients, colleagues, and institutions. Noticing includes being actively aware of, observing, and reflecting on clients, colleagues, and literature within and outside of one's own university, and noticing patterns in data to inform decision-making. Impacting includes being impactful, or having a visible impact, on clients, colleagues, and institutions. Together, these categories represent a model that explains the nature of academic librarians' experiences of EBP. The theory describes academic librarians' experiences as complex and highly contextualized phenomena. There is no clear relationship between these categories, as data analysis did not generate a specific hierarchy of categories.

Conclusion – Based on the research findings the authors hypothesize that their study is one of a growing number of studies that has begun to establish an empirical basis for EBP in the LIS profession.

Commentary

This study highlights how academic librarians experience EBP in the workplace. The findings build upon the understanding of experiences identified in a study by Gillespie (2017) that revealed similarities in the way that academic and public library professionals experienced evidence. Gillespie concluded that library professionals were able to draw upon more than one source of evidence and apply their professional knowledge and experiences. Librarian experiences also match the recommended practices of EBP, identified by McKibbon and Wilczynski (2009), which include defining the question, finding evidence, critical appraisal, applying evidence, and evaluating the process. No divergence from recommended practices was noted.

This research study explored the lived experiences of 13 academic librarians from Queensland universities at a particular point in time. Further qualitative research of how EBP is experienced by LIS professionals from other work settings, on different groups of participants, such as public librarians, special librarians, or academic librarians in other countries, and over a longer period of time, would strengthen the key findings and applicability of the study. The constructivist grounded theory methodology discussed by Charmaz (2006) succeeded in enhancing awareness of the various experiences of EBP, how it is used, and how EBP actually happens in terms of emotional, mental, and physical experiences in a workplace setting. However, the study methods did have some weaknesses. Researchers report recruiting participants via a purposive sampling approach, yet the details of this approach were not explained. While those selected were employed in a variety of roles, the results would be enhanced if the specific selection criteria had been revealed. Authors also make a reference to memos, but their purpose is not clear. In addition, the study would have been more impressive if it had also identified the researchers who conducted the interviews, carried out the initial line-by-line coding of interview transcripts and memos, and conducted the data analysis.

This study has succeeded in providing new insights into how the realities of EBP are enacted, experienced, and understood for a particular group of LIS professionals, at one point in time. The findings of this research study have the potential to assist library schools, associations, and others involved in educating, preparing, and supporting LIS professionals at every career stage to develop the actions, knowledge, mindsets, and skills needed to facilitate and advance EBP. For example, this study could influence library schools to design and deliver new EBP curricula, or LIS professionals may be inspired to start a discussion group, organize a journal club, or conduct further research on this topic. The findings may also serve to inform the design of professional development programs in evidence based library and information practice, as well as leadership in academic libraries and more broadly, within the information sector.

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