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Chapter 2 – A new framework for EBLIP

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The model for EBLIP that we use in this book is based on doctoral research results (Koufogiannakis, 2013b). It is not meant to be a rejection of previous EBLIP theory, nor does it stand in opposition to the model as put forward by Booth & Brice published in 2004. If anything, the model we propose in this book builds upon Booth and Brice's (2004b) model as it was first described, but reaches further, to embrace other types of evidence as appropriate for librarianship, and to consider how such a merging of different types of evidence can work in the context of librarianship. As such, the model is far more realistic with respect to the context in which librarians work and the appropriate forms of evidence on which to base decisions. At the same time, it attempts to encourage further research within our profession in order to strengthen the evidence base upon which we draw external validation of local practices.

Much credit must be given to Andrew Booth for envisioning this evolution of EBLIP, through his reflection on evidence based practice in librarianship following the EBLIP5 conference that was held in Stockholm, Sweden (Booth, 2009b). Booth, having been very involved with EBLIP since its start, and a keen observer of the general change in the field's discourse, noted the following limitations of the original model as it stood at the time: "first it is oriented to individual, not collective, activity; and, second, it seeks to simplify, and thus preserve the integrity of, the entire EBP process making no allowances for the realities of pragmatism and expediency" (2009b, p.342). Koufogiannakis (2013b) validated these observations in her qualitative doctoral study of how academic librarians use evidence in their practice. Her thesis proposed the use of Booth's "alternative" model to move towards a process that would be more meaningful and pragmatic for practicing librarians. This book provides the next step in making this model available for librarians of all sectors to use in their practice.

We doubt that any one model will perfectly fit all situations, or explain the complexity of evidence based practice in its fullness, because we can never look in detail at every situation or circumstance. However, we choose to use this model because we believe it is the best to date to provide structure for those who wish to approach their practice in an evidence based way and embrace the concept of being an evidence based practitioner. The model allows us to consider various elements of the process and talk through them as points for consideration; elements that a librarian should consider and think critically about. It is not meant to be the definitive nor a static process that you work through and easily complete. In this book, we encourage readers to consider the issues around evidence based practice in librarianship and then apply various

aspects to their own situation. As is the case with most things in life, the process is unlikely to completely fit or always work neatly. That is ok, as it is the mindset relating to an approach to practice; a way of thinking about practice, that is really most important.

The original model

As noted in Chapter 1, the original concept, model, and definition of EBLIP, or evidence based librarianship as it was known at the time, was based directly upon that of evidence based medicine (EBM). Hence, the model focused on research-derived evidence, and was largely discussed within the context of an individual professional making decisions and applying them to their practice. Eldredge outlined a conceptual model for EBL, with the following seven principles:

- 1) EBL seeks to improve library practice by utilizing the best-available evidence combined with a pragmatic perspective developed from working experiences in librarianship;
- 2) EBL applies the best-available evidence, whether based upon either quantitative or qualitative research methods;
- 3) EBL encourages the pursuit of increasingly rigorous research strategies to support decisions affecting library practice;
- 4) EBL values research in all its diverse forms and encourages its communication, preferably through peer-reviewed or other forms of authoritative dissemination;
- 5) EBL represents a global approach to information seeking and knowledge development, involving research but not restricted to research alone;
- 6) EBL supports the adoption of practice guidelines and standards developed by expert committees based upon the best-available evidence, but not as an endorsement of adhering to rigid protocols; and
- 7) In the absence of compelling reasons to pursue another course, EBL adheres to the hierarchy [...] for using the best-available evidence, lending priority to higher levels of evidence from the research.

(Eldredge, 2000a)

Booth and Brice (2004b) noted that there are five stages of evidence based practice:

1. identification of a problem or question
2. finding, as efficiently as possible, the best evidence to answer the question
3. appraising the evidence for validity and usefulness
4. applying the results to a specific population
5. evaluating the outcome of the intervention (p. 6)

While the model could be interpreted broadly and include many sources of evidence, it was interpreted to focus only on research evidence. The interpretation also focused on individual practitioners rather than a community of practice, and did not really consider how decisions were in fact being made in libraries. However, a research focus was, and still is, important in order to build a greater knowledge base for the field. There was also a concerted effort amongst

those in the community to develop critical appraisal tools, to critique the research literature, and to promote greater research skills amongst practicing librarians.

A revised model for EBLIP

An holistic approach

The revised model looks at the whole of evidence based practice, incorporating research evidence as well as local evidence and professional knowledge (Figure 2.1). Good research evidence provides us with findings from quantitative and qualitative research that is undertaken according to methods which allow us to have confidence in the outcome of the research. Hence, we can have greater trust in the research than we would in someone's anecdotal account, for example. Of course, not all published research is necessarily of such a high standard, which is why we must be careful when using research results, and this will be explored further in Chapter 5, *Assess*. But in general, research is an essential part of evidence based practice because it brings us closer to building a body of knowledge that is based upon sound methods, well documented process, and rigorous interpretation of the data.



Figure 2.1. Bringing the evidence sources together (Koufogiannakis, 2011, p. 53)

Within librarianship, however, we also need to consider local context and circumstances, because the decision being made is specific to those circumstances. The populations we serve and their needs are not necessarily the same in all instances. While librarians should be consulting and learning from the broader research literature of the field, we also need to understand local needs and preferences, and incorporate these elements into good decision making. This means gathering and understanding appropriate forms of local evidence that should be considered depending upon the question.

All forms of evidence need to be respected and librarians, whether they are making solo decisions, or working together with a team, need to use their underlying professional knowledge

within the decision making process. The evidence that is applicable to a situation will need to be balanced within the context in which it is found, and only the practitioners dealing with that decision can appropriately assign value and importance within that context. This process itself, being a thoughtful and reflective one, builds and changes how practice works and how new initiatives proceed, further building professional knowledge which brings research and practice together rather than separating them.

There must be an emphasis on applicability, because decision making is ultimately a local endeavor. The context of the situation impacts our decision making and should not be ignored. For example, we must recognize that often, political or financial influences may be as or more important than what we learn from the research literature. That may be unfortunate, but it is realistic. These elements are facts of life and boundaries we have to live within. Within such boundaries we need to weigh appropriate evidence and make contextual decisions.

A cyclical process

The EBLIP model is cyclical in nature and takes a broad approach, allowing and encouraging different sources of evidence to be incorporated into decision making. It also places emphasis on existing professional knowledge. These elements were present in past definitions of EBLIP, but not explicit or given much attention in the original model. The process can be applied to both individual as well as group decisions. Groups can use the process to prompt questions and critical thinking within the group, as well as ensure that the process is transparent. This model is meant to be more holistic and encompassing of the complex process of evidence based decision making, as well as more realistic.

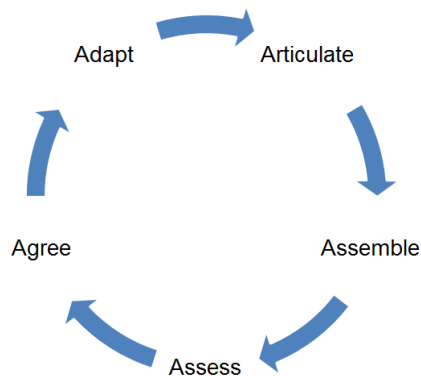


Figure 2.2. A cyclical illustration of EBLIP

The elements of this model are briefly summarized in the table below. Within the next five chapters of this book a more thorough examination of the aspects one should consider within each will be detailed.

Table 2.1. Elements of the EBLIP process

Process element	What do I need to do?	What types of questions do I need to ask?	What action do I need to take?
Articulate	Come to an understanding of the problem and articulate it	What do I/we already know about this problem? Clarify existing knowledge and be honest about assumptions or difficulties that may be obstacles. This may involve sharing background documents, having an honest discussion, and determining priorities. Consider the urgency of the situation, financial constraints, and goals.	Set boundaries and clearly articulate the problem that requires a decision.
Assemble	Assemble evidence from multiple sources that are the most appropriate to the question/problem at hand.	What types of evidence would be best to help solve this problem? What does the literature say? What do those who will be impacted say? What information and data do we have locally? Do colleagues at other institutions have similar experiences they can share? What is the most important evidence to obtain in light of the problem previously articulated?	Gather evidence from appropriate sources including research evidence, local evidence, and professional knowledge.
Assess	Place the evidence against all components of the wider overarching problem. Assess the evidence for its quantity and quality.	Of the evidence assembled, what pieces of evidence hold the most weight? Why? What evidence seems to be most trustworthy and valid? What evidence is most applicable to the current problem? What	Evaluate and weigh or balance evidence sources. Determine what the evidence says as a whole.

		parts of this evidence can be applied to my context?	
Agree	Determine the best way forward and if working with a group, try to achieve consensus based on the evidence and organizational goals.	Have I/we looked at all the evidence openly and without prejudice? What is the best decision based on everything we know from the problem, the context, and the evidence? Have we considered all reasonable alternatives? How will this decision impact library users? Is the decision in keeping with our organization's goals and values? Can I explain this decision with confidence? What questions still remain?	Determine a course of action and begin implementation of the decision.
Adapt	Revisit goals and needs. Reflect on the success of the implementation.	Now that we have begun to implement the decision, what is working? What isn't? What else needs to be done? Are there new questions or problems arising?	Evaluate the decision and how it has worked in practice. Reflect on your role and actions. Discuss the situation with others and determine any changes required.

(adapted from Koufogiannakis, 2013b)

EBLIP in action

EBLIP asks librarians to think critically about their practice and the process they use in making decisions. As such, EBLIP prompts us to ask lots of questions. When faced with a problem or question in practice, first one may ask more about the problem itself to try and dig deeper into what the actual question is. Then you ask, "what do I already know?" about this problem at hand. Reflecting on this question draws upon both professional experience and knowledge of the specific situation at hand. Asking what is already known allows for reflection on the situation and the factors that may influence future action. Next, ask yourself what are the best potential sources of evidence that would help you solve this problem? Determine if there is local evidence available that may be directly relevant. From there, a practitioner can look to the literature and see if there is any research that would be relevant to the problem or decision required. This is where the skills of critical appraisal and knowing how to read different types of research are

useful. Sometimes, there may not be any research on the topic, but there may be descriptions of similar situations at comparable institutions that can help.

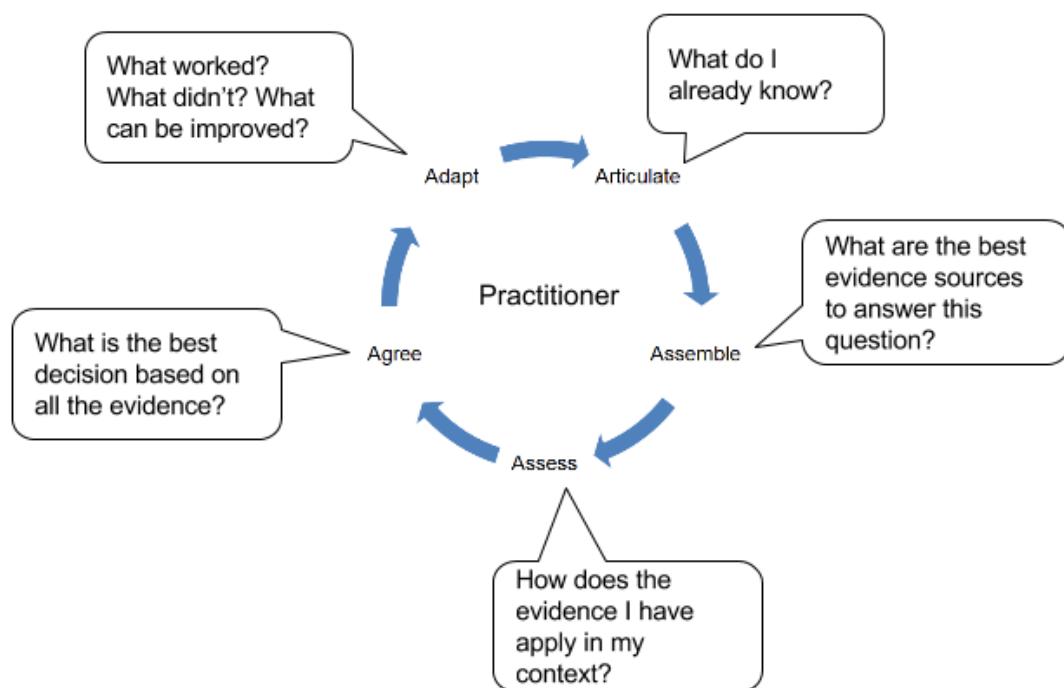


Figure 2.4. Key questions a practitioner should ask

At this point, it is good to review all existing evidence and ask “what other information do I need to gather?”. Doing so allows gaps in knowledge to be identified. You can then determine if more data is required, speak to appropriate groups of people, or begin planning a research or assessment project. At the same time, consider all the evidence and how it applies to the situation or problem at hand. This is a crucial professional knowledge skill that puts the evidence in context. Depending upon the urgency of the situation, or deadlines, proceed to make a decision; ask what is the best decision based on all the evidence gathered? The decision will need to proceed based on the best evidence available at the time; evidence may change over time, but in that moment, a decision must be made. Finally, after implementation, reflect on the process and ask questions such as “What worked? What didn’t? What did I learn?”. Taking the time to assess the situation and learn from it is a key part of enhancing professional knowledge.

This process puts the practitioner (or group of practitioners) in the centre of the process and in control of their decision making. It incorporates the use of best evidence, whatever that may be, depending on the situation. It enables librarians to practice in an informed and thoughtful manner, bringing together the art and science of the profession.

Implementing the model

The model described above follows a process that appears to flow neatly from one step to the next, while accounting for differences in context and sources of evidence. However, this is notably an ideal, providing a model of how the process could work well. In reality, the process may not necessarily work as planned; however, it can be a guide. For example, obstacles to moving ahead could occur at any stage in the process, and progress may be stalled. The organizational climate may not facilitate an environment of open discussion, and individuals may feel excluded from the decision making process. Regardless, every librarian can take steps towards being evidence based by trying to implement aspects of this process and by questioning and seeking evidence.

In order for EBLIP to be successful, both individual librarians and employers have a leadership role to play. Employers, or senior library managers, need to create a climate in which evidence based decision making is valued. They should foster a culture in which decision making processes are transparent, and use evidence sources that are important to the question, as opposed to implementing decisions that leave librarians wondering why a particular decision was made. Clear communication within the organization is paramount. Senior managers can also set the tone in relation to the importance of asking questions and engaging in professional education in areas related to research and assessment. Having clear goals and work expectations regarding those elements is one way to bring the use of evidence into daily use. Managers can identify areas for which local data is regularly collected, and done so in a useable manner for future decision making. They can also prompt collaboration within workplaces and encourage that both internal and external sources of evidence are used. Ensuring that significant time is given to projects that require involved decision making and emulating behavior by asking questions and requiring evidence are also important.

Individual librarians must also take responsibility for ensuring the success of this model by acknowledging that uncertainty is acceptable, and that questioning practice is a healthy part of growth. Individual librarians must foster collegial relationships and contribute to a positive workplace. When working in groups, librarians must be attuned to some of the possible pitfalls such as individual biases and group-think by ensuring inclusion and diversity of opinion, as well as a range of evidence sources are consulted. They need to take responsibility for their own continuing education, filling gaps in skills related to research, evaluation, assessment, and critical appraisal, as well as softer skills such as decision making and collaboration. They must also make time for this approach of incorporating evidence into their decision making, rather than pointing to the barrier of time as being beyond their control. It is up to individual practitioners to be actively reflective in their practice, so that they recognize problems and potential solutions sooner and can trace progress in their own decision making within the context of their organization. Being actively reflective may lead to greater awareness and innovation in practice. It will lead to more questions and continual renewal of both individual and organizational approaches to practice.