



Editorial

Weaving Evidence, Reflection, and Action into the Fabric of School Librarianship

Carol A. Gordon
Associate Professor
School of Communication, Information and Library Studies
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
New Brunswick, New Jersey, United States of America
E-mail: cgordon@scils.rutgers.edu

Ross J. Todd
Associate Professor
School of Communication, Information and Library Studies
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
New Brunswick, New Jersey, United States of America
E-mail: rtodd@scils.rutgers.edu

© 2009 Gordon and Todd. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

This issue of *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* is the first devoted to evidence based practice (EBP) in school librarianship. The focus on EBP in school librarianship has a shorter history than its counterparts in evidence based education and evidence based librarianship. That history began with a speech given by Todd at a conference of the International Association of School Librarianship in 2001. In this speech the convergence of two critical concepts defined a 21st century mission for school libraries. The first was an extension of the definition of information literacy:

In order for school libraries to play a key role in the information age school, I believe

there needs to be a fundamental shift from thinking about the movement and management of information resources through structures and networks, and from information skills and information literacy, to a key focus on knowledge construction and human understanding, implemented through a constructivist, inquiry-based framework." (Todd "Transitions")

This statement complicates the teaching of information literacy. It is no longer enough to teach location and evaluation of resources; information literacy now encompasses the full utilization of information in the process of constructing new knowledge and connecting to

existing knowledge. The second critical concept addressed evidence-based practice:

Information is the heartbeat of meaningful learning in schools. But it is not the hallmark of the 21st century school. The hallmark of a school library in the 21st century is not its collections, its systems, its technology, its staffing, its buildings, BUT its actions and evidences that show that it makes a real difference to student learning, that it contributes in tangible and significant ways to the development of human understanding, meaning making and constructing knowledge. The school library is about empowerment, connectivity, engagement, interactivity, and its outcome is knowledge construction. (Todd "Transitions")

These paradigm shifts prepared school librarians to look at their practice differently. It is with this new mission that school libraries embrace evidence based practice "...where day-by-day professional work is directed toward demonstrating the tangible impact and outcomes of sound decisions making and implementation of organizational goals and objectives." (Todd "Learning" 7).

This laid the groundwork for evidence based practice to become an organizing principle for the continuous improvement of school librarianship. School librarians had traditionally taken a holistic view of continuous program improvement through the collection of evidence that measures the status of facilities, collections, access to information, staffing and funding. Typically, these measures are quantitative; they document size, age, capacity, and amount. This statistical approach supports evidence based advocacy in terms of inputs, but is not particularly effective in assessing the value that the school library adds to the school's mission, which focuses on targets learning outcomes. In

recent years there has been a shift to a more qualitative approach to program evaluation. For example, school librarians incorporate questions about perceptions of school library efficacy when surveying students and staff. With a more qualitative perspective, instruction emerges as an element of the school library that could be evaluated in terms of what worked and what didn't.

Since its emergence in 2001, a community of researchers and practitioners has contributed to a growing body of literature that is represented in this landmark edition of *EBLIP*. The article by **Ballard, March & Sand** describes two action research projects on plagiarism. One project is set in an American high school, the other in an elementary school. The two school librarians who conducted the action research applied skills acquired through the use of Gordon's three dimensional action research training model to assess whether their students were ethical users of ideas and information. "The use of action research as a means to provide a rich and meaningful professional development opportunity for school library media specialists and teachers has transformed instructional practice in the Londonderry School District... a collaborative research culture has been created in which all those responsible for student learning engage in meaningful reflection on instructional and program practices at the local level through an examination of evidence provided through the process.."

Farmer examines the field of special education and its relationship to educational librarianship. A review of studies about school library media specialist practices relative to special education personnel was conducted, and cross-study factors were identified that facilitate collaboration between school library media specialists and special educators in support of student achievement. The paper concludes, "school library media specialists and special education personnel have much expertise to share with each other and with others in the

school community. Increased research and documentation of those efforts can strengthen their collaboration and contribute significantly to student achievement.”

Part I of a paper by **Gordon** develops the concept of action research as a tool of evidence-based practice in the context of inquiry learning in the school library. It traces the evolution of evidence based teaching, a pedagogy that triangulates inquiry learning, the information search process, and evidence based practice. Action research emerges as a viable tool that facilitates the collection of evidence that is basic to the continuous improvement of student performance as information searchers and users. Part 1 lays the groundwork for an emerging theory for evidence-based teaching. “The emerging theory indicates that a model for a culture of inquiry in the learning environment of the school library is interdisciplinary, bringing together user-centered information searching and learner-centered educational theory. It points to a research agenda and informs the methods appropriate for the study of evidence based information literacy instruction in school libraries.” Part 2 of this paper will be published in the fall edition of EBLIP.

Todd provides an overview of progress and developments in evidence-based practice in school librarianship, and provides a picture of current thinking about evidence-based practice as it relates to the field. He notes, “A focus on evidence based school librarianship shifts the basis on which value statements can be made about school libraries if they are to be perceived as playing a strong role in the school. By placing emphasis on measured outcomes, evidence based practice in school libraries shifts the focus from the medium to the message and articulating what school librarians do in their day-to-day work, to articulating what students become. By placing emphasis on systematically gathered evidence, it moves school library advocacy from a “tell me” framework to a “show me” framework.”

Yukawa and Harada analyzed the effects of a practice-based model of professional development on the teaching and collaborative practices of nine teams of librarians and teachers who created and implemented units of inquiry-focused study with K-12 students during a yearlong course. The authors describe how the collection and analysis of evidence guided the development team in the formative and summative evaluations of the outcomes of the professional development, as well as the long-term results of participation in this initiative. “The practice-based model of professional development described in this study appears to be effective and sustainable.”

It is with great pleasure that we bring you the work of this community of formal researchers and practitioner-researchers who are pioneering the application and study of evidence based practice in school libraries.

Works Cited

- Gordon, Carol A. “A Study of a Three-dimensional Action Research Training Model for School Library Programs.” *School Library Media Research* 9 (2006). 19 May 2009
<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aas/l/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/slmrcontents/volume09/gordon_study3daction.cfm>.
- Todd, Ross J. “Learning in the Information Age School: Opportunities, Outcomes, and Options.” Keynote paper. International Association of School Librarianship Conference, Durbin, South Africa, 7-11 July 2003. 19 May 2009
<<http://www.iasl-online.org/events/conf/conference2003-virtualpap.html>>.
- Todd, Ross J. “Transitions for Preferred Futures of School Libraries: Knowledge Space,

not Information Place. Connections,
not Collections. Actions, not Positions.
Evidence, not Advocacy." Keynote
address. International Association of
School Librarianship Conference,
Auckland, New Zealand, 9-12 July
2001. 19 May 2009 <[http://www.iasl-
online.org/events/conf/virtualpaper200
1.html](http://www.iasl-online.org/events/conf/virtualpaper2001.html)>.