The library and information professional as practitioner-researcher? A panel discussion

March 10 2016

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Please remember to mute your microphone and video (unless you are speaking) as you join the session thanks
Welcome to the launch of

Library & Information Science Research Australia (LISRA)

A three year research project funded by the Australian Research Council with the aim to encourage and enable research culture and practice within Australia’s library and information profession.
Guiding Questions

1. What are the research *priorities* in the Australian library and information profession?

2. To what extent is research valued and has *impact* on the practice of Australian library and information professionals?

3. What *capacity* does the Australian library and information profession have for research?

4. What are the existing and potential *links* between Australian library and information practitioners and academic researchers?

5. How can the Australian library and information profession build a *culture* of research, to enable the adoption of the “practitioner-researcher” approach to professional practice?
Key Outcomes

• Undertake a complete analysis of LIS research practices and issues in Australia.

• Establish an empirically derived evidence base on research within Australia’s library and information profession.

• Develop a framework that provides a set of strategic directions and recommendations for sustainable research LIS culture and practice in Australia.

• Establish a community of practice that brings together LIS practitioners and researchers to work on a research issue identified as important to the Australian LIS sector.

• Create an online space to support Australia’s LIS practitioners and researchers to engage in open dialogue on research in the profession and to establish research collaborations.

• Host a series of free events to facilitate the sharing and dissemination of LIS research issues and opportunities in Australia.
...rather than being on the outside looking in, the practitioner-researcher is someone on the inside looking around, observing and attempting to understand what’s going on for the benefit of how things are working on the inside. It is the practitioner reflecting on practice, being curious about practice in a formalized way, and wanting to know more about practice in order to make that practice better...
The Panel

• Professor Lisa Given, Charles Sturt University
  Twitter @lisagiven
• Dr Alex Byrne, State Library of New South Wales
  Twitter @libswell
• Jo Kaeding, University of South Australia & Adelaide Hills Council
  Twitter @kaedingjo
• John Shipp, Australian Library and Information Association
• Holger Aman, Law Courts Australia
  Twitter @leatherboundlib
Professor Lisa Given, Charles Sturt University
Researchers & Practitioners Working Together

Lisa M Given
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Professor, School of Information Studies
Research Fellow, Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning & Education (RIPPLE)
Charles Sturt University
My Background

- LIS Educator for 15+ years
- Information Behaviour Research – including:
  - 1) research methodology/methods development
  - 2) exploring research practices
  - 3) exploring societal impact
- Workshops, seminars, etc. with professional librarians (e.g., Thinking Qualitatively series)
- TLEF Grant – with academic librarians exploring information literacy
Global Trends

• Evidence-based Library & Information Practice
  – EBLIP journal & conference
  – Community of researcher-practitioners & academics
  – Extending beyond health information context

• Librarians increasingly taking on “researcher-practitioner” roles, especially in Canada, US
  – Employer support through dedicated research time, access to sabbaticals, formal recognition (merit, promotion) of research activities
  – E.g., Librarians Research Institute (UWO, Canada)
Global Trends

• Increased funding for applied research
  – ARC Linkage Scheme - research & practice partnerships
  – University schemes to support “scholarship of teaching and learning”

• Formalised assessment of “societal impact”
  – UK’s Research Excellence Framework (2014)
  – Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) – forthcoming in 2017/2018
  – Changing roles for academic libraries re: institutional repositories, etc.
Research in Practice

• Academics & practitioners working in partnership – i.e., mutually beneficial
  – Practitioners can gain research skills (possible PhD opportunities?), develop projects relevant to work contexts, co-author papers, etc.
  – Academics can gain experience with practice environments, ensure results inform work “on the ground,” link research to teaching/service roles, etc.
  – Break down the silos between practice & research (e.g., we have few opportunities to discuss our shared interests)
Dr Alex Byrne
State Library of New South Wales
The library and information professional as practitioner-researcher?
A panel discussion 10 March 2016

The Library and Information Science Research Australia (LISRA) Project

Alex Byrne
State Librarian & Chief Executive
State Library of New South Wales
Chair, National & State Libraries Australasia
My history as a practitioner-researcher
The pros and cons of practice based research undertaken in libraries

- The competence of practitioners to undertake research and to assess research
- The importance of research to practice
- Relevance of academic researchers to practitioners
- Potential for collaboration on a meaningful research agenda
LIS or LIS++?
PRACTITIONER RESEARCH
Jo Kaeding
ABOUT ME

- Teacher-librarian now in Public Libraries.

- Worked in the industry for 25 years (eek!).

- In 2014 started my PhD, ‘Access and inclusion in public libraries for children with special needs and their families’ at University of South Australia.

- Currently on a 12 month study sabbatical from work, due to return July this year.
WHY I BECAME A PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER

- Fell into it – had not really thought about it.
- Had been running a program for children with special needs at my library and had become aware of a gap in knowledge in LIS literature.
- Encouraged to apply for a government grant to find out more.
- Secured two more grants – ALIA and SA Public Libraries.
- PhD seemed like a logical step.
- Craving an intellectual challenge which my work was not giving me.
- Believed by working in and experiencing the area I had something different and tangible to give.
HURDLES I FACED IN BECOMING A PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER

- Belief in myself – do I really have something valuable to add, do I have the skills necessary to be researcher.
- Support from my workplace – Library and Council.
- Attitudes towards doing a PhD from work colleagues, industry colleagues, friends etc.
- Issues of leave from work – financial, work replacements etc.
- Balancing parenthood, work and study (how much can my brain juggle?)
MY EXPERIENCE OF THE CULTURE OF PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

- There is no culture of research amongst library practitioners.
  - So no mentors or examples to look towards.
  - Librarians do not understand the value of it – i.e. how will it be helpful to their role
- Divide between academics and practitioners (very few actually know an academic) – not so education or medicine.
- No culture of professional development (often training related how to use the new software system)
- Within public libraries there is a ‘deskilling / devaluing’ of professional positions:
  - Cataloguers
  - No reference desks
  - Council services being absorbed
  - Children's services
  - Managers (do not necessarily need LIS qualifications – called Team Leaders)
BENEFITS OF BEING A PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER

- Rejuvenation of interest in librarianship.
- Greater depth of understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.
- Bridge the academic and researcher divide.
- A level of ‘buy in’ that may be difficult to get other ways:
  - willing contacts and networks for research participants
  - ready-made audience to share research with
  - Greater chance of implementation of trialing of research results.
- Real-world examples and ability to understand how and where the research sits in practice.
- Encouragement to break out of what you know and look at things differently and more critically.
- Expand your knowledge and horizons of what is happening in the greater LIS field.
- Possible opportunities to the see full circle of your research.
- Possibility of taking your workplace on party of the journey with you.
DRAWBACKS OF BEING A PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER

- Risk of your research being ‘too’ practitioner based and not analytical enough.
- Hard to juggle work, study and family life.
- Colleague negativity (seen as reaching beyond your station).
SHOULD WE AS A PROFESSION ASPIRE TO INCREASE PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

- Absolutely yes!!
- Developing a culture of practitioner research would help to maintain and develop the professionalism of our industry (particularly in places like public libraries where the role is seen as checking books in and out).
- On going professional development should be an essential component of the role of a practicing professional.
- Higher degree research would be beneficial for librarians going into leadership positions.
- Needs to be recognition of higher degree qualifications in industry.
John Shipp
Australian Library and Information Association
Questions

How will research really change my day to day working life?
Questions

Does a LIS researcher-practitioner have to be limited to LIS when considering his/her focus, or should they also be investigating and aiming to improve the broader context in which they operate – for example in education, or in a specialist field (eg law, health)?

Our future as a profession requires us to be bolder in promoting our skills and showing how they intersect with other disciplines – can/should this apply for researcher-practitioners as well?
Questions

Perhaps the panel can address methods of dissemination of practitioner research (where appropriate and relevant ie when research not for internal purposes such as decision making only) and the role of the ALIA journal/s and conferences, other journals and conferences in that dissemination. It is an issue I hear frequently from practitioners.
Questions

Do current LIS programs focus on the practical at the expense of the theoretical; and do students understand the value of knowing the theory of the practice?
Questions

How much of the current deskilling (and associated devaluing) of the LIS profession is attributable to the lack of understanding of theoretical practice?  
(A library qualification is no longer a requirement for many library positions, particularly in public libraries where council, community and library services are becoming blurred).
Questions

Just thinking ahead about the #LISRAproject webinar. Are there any Australian LIS research methods courses or modules around?
Questions

What scaffolding and support is available (from universities) for practitioners to become researchers, particularly those who want to research formally to get a research degree? I’m thinking along the lines of research methodology/methods etc.
Questions

Given the choice, would you seek advice from a consultant or a researcher? Why?
Questions

If there was one thing you could change that would encourage LIS professionals to engage in more practice-based research, what would it be?
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Special Issue on EBL 101

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Virginia Wilson

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EBL 101

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Su Cleyre, Julie McKenna
Would you like more information on the project or to become involved?

- **Email:** Professor Helen Partridge ([helen.partridge@usq.edu.au](mailto:helen.partridge@usq.edu.au)) or Professor Lisa Given ([lgiven@csu.edu.au](mailto:lgiven@csu.edu.au))

- **Web:** [http://lisresearch.org.au](http://lisresearch.org.au)

- **Twitter:** @LISResearchAu
Thank you for your time and participating in today’s session.