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Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

News

The 5th International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference (EBLIP5): Conference Report and Reflections

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Conference Report
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The 5th International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference (EBLIP5) was held in Stockholm, Sweden from June 30 to July 3, 2009. The conference was attended by a total of 163 participants from 18 countries, of which approximately 70% came from university/academic libraries. The organizers were pleased with the unexpectedly high turnout from Sweden (68 participants), where EBLIP, until recently, was more or less unknown to most librarians. On the top five list of the highest number of participants after Sweden came Norway (17), Canada (16), the U.S. and the U.K. (15 each). The remaining participants came from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Iran, the Netherlands, Qatar, and Turkey.

The first and last conference days were reserved for five workshops, and 61 conference delegates took advantage of the opportunity to increase their knowledge in the subjects being offered. During the three main conference days there were six plenary speakers (five invited key note speakers and one conference showcase), as well as 35 presentations in parallel sessions, and 14 posters.

No conference can be successful without social events, and library visits are also important to include in the program. EBLIP5 offered plenty of opportunities for delegates to meet their colleagues in a more informal setting, and the invitation from the Stockholm City and County Council to a reception at City Hall was much appreciated. For the conference dinner the hosts had done their best to arrange a meeting with the Swedish royal family as well as dignitaries from the European Union, but they were a bit busy with the inauguration of the Swedish Presidency of the E.U. taking place next to the dinner venue at Skansen. The dinner was held in the restaurant Solliden, with one of Stockholm's best views of the city, where the guests were served Swedish specialties and a band kept the dancing going well after midnight. Both the reception and the

conference dinner were attended by roughly 130 people.

The library visits offered before the main conference days were also well-attended: 45 conference participants visited either the Karolinska Institutet University Library, the National Library of Sweden, or the Subway (public) library at the tube stop Östermalmstorg.

At the closing of the conference, Christine Urquhart from Aberystwyth University received an award for the best oral presentation, and Ann-Christin Persson, Maria Lång & Jessica Nilsson from Lund University for the best poster.

Heading to City Hall
Photo courtesy Virginia Wilson

Reflections

A number of conference delegates submitted brief commentaries to *EBLIP* about their conference experience, and what they learned, for the benefit of journal readers who were unable to attend.

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One of the most exciting aspects of the recent EBLIP5 Conference was the prevalence of sessions dedicated to information literacy practice and research. There were three parallel sessions, one round table discussion and countless informal opportunities to talk with other conference participants about our experiences teaching and assessing information literacy learning and instruction. The conference was a wonderful opportunity to gain international perspectives on many issues and to feel connected to a community of researchers and practitioners.

This was my first EBLIP conference and it was the best conference I have had the pleasure of attending. The entire conference was thoughtfully organized and provided a depth and range of presentations that were thought-provoking and inspiring. I felt energized to continue championing evidence based practice at my home institution.

The parallel sessions on information literacy were engaging and offered many different ways of assessing information literacy instruction, some of which I had never heard of or considered before. It was a relief to hear that some of the issues I deal with at my institution (such as trying to engage students, finding meaningful ways of evaluating student learning, and proving the worth of information literacy instruction to faculty) were fairly universal issues. Now, thanks to this conference, I have more colleagues to exchange ideas with about solving these issues. My hope is that together we can all contribute to the

evidence base in order to assist more librarians in their teaching and assessment work.

The inclusion of the round table discussions in the conference program was a great, semi-structured way for groups to get together and discuss issues more in-depth than was possible in the Q&A time after the parallel session presentations. The information literacy round table was very well attended and sparked a lively discussion about how best to implement information literacy instruction and assessment. Margy MacMillan of Mount Royal College did a fantastic job facilitating this discussion so that everyone's voice could be heard.

For me, some of the most helpful conference events were the morning and afternoon coffee breaks, which allowed time for networking and small group discussions about issues or ideas that had occurred to us in prior sessions. During the coffee breaks, I talked to colleagues about information literacy, library staffing structures and ideas about embedding instruction into the curriculum. Also, it was just a fun time to chat over a cup of coffee or tea and a treat.

Without a doubt, this conference was a worthwhile event to attend and participate in. I would unconditionally recommend the conference to anyone interested in EBLIP and I cannot wait for the conference in 2011.

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What is the present status, some 12 years after its appearance on the scene, of the "evidence based" ideology in the world of information and library services? What has changed? What has not? How far have we come, and how far do we have to go?

These questions were not openly discussed (or even expressly posed) at the 5th EBLIP conference in Stockholm. Yet I gathered, from the many sessions I attended, that answers to them *were* being given, even if merely in passing, unwittingly, or implicitly.

If asked to characterize the general drift of the answers I discerned, my impression was that many EBLIP advocates seem to have abandoned the positivistic mindset and the science-based approach that informed the movement's early development. More than a decade of additional reflection and experience appear to have eroded the confidence that unequivocal evidentiary (re)sources will be necessarily or readily available to us; the optimism that, if they are, their appropriateness and the application of them to actual situations can be considered a more or less straightforward affair; and the too facile supposition that empirical methodologies familiar from the medical and some social sciences can or should be, also for us, the great guiding light.

This is, then, the undercurrent which I saw flowing through many plenary and other sessions in Stockholm – in fact, already from the conference's beginning, and gaining momentum down to its very end. But what does this observation entail, more specifically? A brief summary of some speakers' pertinent thoughts:

We must construct questions, but also recognize the importance of *meta*questions (Eldredge, opening keynote). Good EBLIP approaches to practical questions can indeed be theory-driven (e.g., Dalrymple on

Wednesday morning; Lam on Tuesday). In order to define what the problem to be addressed is, one must first investigate what the world-views are of the persons involved (Mirijamdotter, Tuesday afternoon). Information professionals still base what they do far too insufficiently on a knowledge of the specific discourse-communities that exist among their user populations (Pilerot, Wednesday afternoon), and should furthermore be more community-oriented even within their own ranks (Eldredge, Urquhart). Our orientation to EBLIP should be more participative (Mirijamdotter), but also less cognitive (Pilerot, Mirijamdotter). Dalrymple emphasized the value of "insight", gained through *exploratory* research, and Pilerot that of "craft knowledge" – adding emphatically that it is also essential for us to "problematise rationality". Jandér showed that applying the principle of "constructive alignment" can be useful. Finally, there was a new recognition of the evidentiary value of narrative. Dalrymple and Lam were quite clear on this, and Herron, in his closing remarks to the conference on Thursday, spoke of the "exciting possibilities" which narrative-derived evidence may have to offer.

Jon Eldredge relaxing
Photo courtesy Virginia Wilson

In that same closing session, Björklund even implied that he could now detect two different kinds of EBLIP: the "classic" one, as it were, on the one hand; and the revisionary, more complex and world-wise version on the other. I would even go so far as to suggest that precisely such a heightening of awareness should be considered the most significant accomplishment of the 2009 EBLIP conference in Stockholm. And I would predict that, if founded upon that second, revisionary and more sophisticated, but also more hermeneutic, conception, EBLIP *can* have a bright future. It depends on our own determination. Making it work is going to be more complicated and subtle than many had perhaps previously thought, but also (therefore) more interesting and possibly – who knows? – more fun.

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After attending the EBLIP conference I developed a better understanding of the Western approach toward knowledge generation and theory building. At the plenary session on "Applying Evidence to Practice: Gaps, Barriers and Lessons Learned" moderated by Prudence Dalrymple, I learned that there is a trend in developing new sciences such as 'Implementation Science' and 'Team Science'. The session shed light on areas of concern including professionalism and the potential gaps and barriers faced when applying evidence to practice. Of particular note was the paper presented by Gordon Watson entitled, "Metadata Harvesting Seamlessly Adds High Quality National Evidence to the Local Library Catalogue Alongside User Knowledge and Library Resources". In his presentation, Watson explained how his institution had integrated high quality national public health evidence

with locally-held physical resources and user-generated knowledge in a web-based library management system. His explanation of how they assess high quality evidence was so convincing that it led me to believe that such practices should be adopted by library management systems everywhere, even in developing countries.

These are some of the observations I had and perspectives I gained; by and large it was a significant learning experience.

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As the only law librarian in attendance at the 5th International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice conference this past June, I was a bit worried about whether I would be able to get as much out of the conference as other professionals, specifically medical librarians who seem to make up the core contingent of the EBLIP movement.

However, I can safely say that not only did I come away with an incredible amount of great ideas stemming from EBLIP, I was also able to gain insight into how librarians in other sectors conduct their jobs. For example, while I will likely never train rural clinicians on the use of PDAs, I found Rick Wallace's presentation on this topic to be very interesting—not only because it allowed me to see how EBLIP is carried out in the "real" world but also because it was fascinating to learn that many medical professionals do not consult published information when treating a patient which was a shock to me!

EBLIP5 Banquet
Photo courtesy Virginia Wilson

Further, I picked up many great ideas on a variety of topics, including: Diana Wakimoto's use of the web-based presentation tool Prezi in her session on information literacy instruction; a set of criteria to evaluate virtual reference programs that were found in the course of Lorna Rourke and Pascal Lupien's systematic review of virtual reference literature; and a number of fantastic "light bulb" moments during the course of Sue McKnight's plenary on how to rectify customer expectations and service provisions in the library. One of McKnight's most memorable points was something to the effect of, "Why should we be comparing ourselves to other libraries when our customers only ever use our library?" These ideas and a host of others gave me much to think about in relation to how things are done in my own library, despite the fact that none of the examples given occurred in a law library setting

The conference was exceptionally well organized, and I cannot praise the organizers enough for distributing our conference materials in a designer tote bag. You can be sure my colleagues back in New York were green with envy recalling their disused collections of plastic, vendor-sponsored bags accumulated at various inferior conferences!

In short, not only would I enthusiastically encourage any interested librarian to pursue EBLIP in his or her own work in preparation for attendance at the 6th EBLIP conference, but I would also encourage librarians to look "outside the box" when considering which professional organizations to belong to and conferences to attend. Although cost is always a limiting factor, there is an incredible amount of value in exploring new areas and learning how other sectors undertake tasks that transcend librarianship as a whole.

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I was thrilled to be part of the 5th International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference (EBLIP5). As a new step in my professional development, the conference gave me an excellent opportunity to attend inspiring and thought provoking presentations, meet like-minded peers, and learn from them.

I am relatively new to the concept of Evidence Based Library and Information Practice. Prior to attending the conference, my observation was that research and library practice are like rails that exist parallel to each other without crossing. EBLIP5 provided me with a new perspective on the profession. As a practitioner, I am always looking for ways to increase the effectiveness of services. Searching for evidence when making decisions is one approach to take in order to be successful in one's professional practice. This resonates well with the topic of Jonathan Eldredge's keynote speech entitled, "Bridging the Gaps: Linking Our EBLIP Questions to Our Decisions". I really liked his engaging way of communicating with the audience, which was a combination of group work and think-pair-share exercises. In her talk "Bridging the Gap Between Service Provision and Customer Expectations," Sue McKnight gave an interesting insight into research undertaken in Australia and the U.K. to identify customer values and "irritants" to service delivery. This research that challenged library staff assumptions and helped to define an action plan to bridge the service gaps.

During parallel sessions I had a chance to listen to my colleagues, passionate adopters of the EBLIP concept. I especially appreciated the presentations by Margy MacMillan and Diana Wakimoto (Theme: Information Literacy) as well as Denise Pan and Mary M. Somerville (Theme: Management). The materials referenced in these sessions can be accessed through the following web site: http://blogs.kib.ki.se/eblip5/parallel-sessions.html

I would like to thank the local organizing committee for all the work they have done. The conference organization was beyond praise, from the city center location, clear signs and helpful staff to the comprehensive program. I was pleasantly surprised by the exquisite food and superior venues of the EBLIP5 receptions, unexpectedly shared with launch events for Sweden's Presidency in the E.U.

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This was my first time attending an EBLIP conference, and in fact, my first

international congress which made it all the more exciting.

My experience began with the pre-conference workshop led by Jon Eldredge on Monday morning and a visit to Karolinska Institutet Solna Library in the afternoon. These were perfect occasions to get acquainted with a small group of colleagues before jumping into the crowds of the conference opening on Tuesday. Throughout all of the lectures, parallel sessions, workshops and poster presentations I was amazed by how many roles librarians play in all kinds of libraries everywhere to enhance their professional practice. My interest was mainly focused on information literacy and reference desk work, which meant that I couldn't possibly attend all of the sessions I was interested in. This is, in fact, a luxury and by no means a complaint.

The overall atmosphere in Stockholm was warm and welcoming. While the temperatures outside were tropical, inside the Folkets Hus we had good accommodations with fantastic lunches and coffee and tea buffets. Participants walked around proudly with their linen bags of colourful Swedish design. It was also convenient to find computers at every corner, allowing me the opportunity to answer enquiries from my patrons at home in Leiden, although the Swedish keyboards are still a bit of a mystery to me. The local organizing committee was always helpful in directing and accompanying anyone with questions. And last but not least, the reception and buffet in City Hall and the dinner at Skansen restaurant were perfect for viewing Stockholm. I enjoyed the excellent food and drink, music and dance, together with nice company and interesting conversations with colleagues from all over the world. Fortunately, I had some spare time to visit some of the Swedish shops before taking my train back to Holland.

I would like to thank the organizing committee for this impressive event. I will surely tell my colleagues about Evidence Based Library and Information Practice and the *EBLIP* Journal and try to apply the learned principles and practices whenever possible.

Andrew Booth at his preconference
Photo courtesy Virginia Wilson

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As our work lives become busier and busier, we find ourselves setting priorities that we previously thought unimaginable. At one time, I tried to attend most professional conferences related to my job duties. Now I find myself setting rigorous standards for determining whether I will attend a conference, and afterward how I will evaluate its utility. My shorthand categorizations for these time-conserving goals are: transactional, content, and catalytic.

EBLIP5 succeeded in meeting all three criteria. The first category, transactional, involves the kinds of interactions I have with colleagues at conferences. At EBLIP5 I made a point of joining groups of colleagues I did not know who were engaged in conversations during breaks or meals. Over the years I have found these discussions at various conferences to be rewarding for learning other experiences and perspectives. Every conversation that I joined during EBLIP5 yielded wonderful insights. I also made contacts that I hope to pursue for the Virtual Peer Mentoring (VPM) project I described during my opening keynote address.

This transactional goal also involved my spending time with colleagues whom I have known for quite a few years. As mentioned in my keynote, many colleagues have served as VPMs for my own practice and research projects. These VPM contacts are my most treasured professional relationships. The VPMs in my own circle who I was able to see at EBLIP5 included Andrew Booth, Alison Brettle, Anne Brice, Pru Dalrymple, Maria Grant, Denise Koufogiannakis, and Joanne Marshall. Two of the biggest highlights of EBLIP5 were having long-time colleague Anne Brice introduce me as keynote speaker and having the opportunity to spend large blocks of time engaged in in-depth discussions with Andrew Booth.

The EBLIP5 plenary sessions, presentations, and posters yield significant content. While overall, the plenary sessions tended to focus on offering new perspectives, Sue McKnight's plenary on Customer Value Discovery exposed me to new methods of evaluating libraries. Recent research findings delivered in presentations or posters formed the evidential core of EBLIP5. The award-winning contributions generally represent the most recognized evidence reported at EBLIP5. Yet, I found some promising directions for further research among some of the less recognized or polished communications. Almost all EBLIP5 paper and poster sessions were unique opportunities to inquire about challenges faced and eventually resolved by presenters as they pursued their research. The sessions also allowed for the presenters or EBLIP5 participants to engage in possible interpretations, or perhaps speculations, about the meanings of results.

The third category, catalytic, could apply to either the transactional or content categories, except that I wish to elevate its worth as a reason for attending conferences. EBLIP5 exceeded my already high expectations of providing new insights for both my applied research and for my practice of EBLIP. Most of the trip from Stockholm to Madrid via Prague was spent recording my thoughts prompted by EBLIP5 on how I could improve my practice or how I might design new research projects.

Conference Bags
Photo courtesy EBLIP5 Local Organizing Committee

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This was my first time participating in an

EBLIP conference, and I found that the content and quality of the presentations were a good reason to plan to attend again. I also found Stockholm to be a warm and welcoming place to stay.

"Information Literacy" (IL) was the track I chose to follow throughout the meeting, as this is a major research topic for the field of library and information sciences to which I hope to contribute actively in the future. The different presentations on this topic focused on various methods of teaching and evaluating information literacy skills and how to integrate the teaching of these skills into a curriculum. The lectures were very inspiring and I am sure they will help me in my future research. I learned, for example, that the assessment of information skills depends on different factors and there is no consensus yet about the best way to evaluate the real literacy skills of our stakeholders. Developing methods for evaluating information literacy, therefore, is our first research challenge. However, IL is not just relevant in libraries; it is the keystone of our learning capacities. Therefore, I would suggest that researchers from the field of pedagogy could be involved in future conferences or invited to be keynote speakers.

Throughout the conference, several librarian colleagues mentioned how difficult it is to get IL in the student curriculum. It is worth investigating the reasons behind this. Some potential research questions include: How do IL assessment tools from different suppliers compare to one another? What are the experiences with these tools? Have they been appropriately standardized? Are they comparable across languages? So many unanswered questions underscore the necessity for further, ideally interdisciplinary, research on IL.

At the end of the conference, the discussion forum was rather disappointing. Many participants in the IL track were eager to contribute to the discussion, but we were thrown into the session without any preparation, reference texts, questions to be solved in advance, etc. The fact that the chairperson was only appointed at the beginning of the session was another proof of lack of preparation.

In spite of this minor disappointment, all of the participants openly shared information and experiences, as could be expected from persons who develop their careers within information sciences. The general spirit of the conference was excellent, and the overall feeling was great satisfaction.

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I took a lot of photos in Stockholm. As I reflect on my third EBLIP conference experience, I find images flipping through my head like a photo slide show:

- Jonathan Eldredge sitting on a beanbag chair watching *Madagascar* while waiting to meet someone prior to the opening reception;
- Lyn Currie and Denise Koufogiannakis casting long shadows as we walk by the water on our way to City Hall;
- My husband Darryl dancing with my friend and former colleague, Pat Moore, at the conference dinner at beautiful Skansen;
- The colourful and unconventional conference bags designed and made by 10 Swedish Designers that caused such a buzz;
- Pretty much everyone trying to avoid me and my camera!

My photos represent the way I experienced the conference and the EBLIP community that had gathered in Stockholm.

Poster session
Photo courtesy EBLIP5 Local Organizing Committee

After the conference was over and everyone went their separate ways, I thought about the case of the warm fuzzies that developed for me during the conference. What in particular made me feel so happy, so exhilarated, so enthused? The sessions, the posters, and the opportunities for networking and connecting were definitely inspiring and thought-provoking. The chance to meet like-minded colleagues from around the world was an opportunity not to be missed. Andrew Booth's workshop on implementing EBLIP was interesting and invigorating. The food was fantastic. But it was more than all that. My positive experience seemed greater than the sum of the conference parts.

When I got home from my travels, I thought about the notion of belonging and the feeling of community. Poking around on Google (gasp!), I stumbled across McMillan and Chavis' theory of the sense of community. Perusing Wikipedia (gasp, again!), I discovered that the four elements that make up a sense of community were present for me in my EBLIP conference experience.

The Four Elements[1]:

1. Membership
2. Influence
3. Integration and Fulfillment of Needs
4. Shared Emotional Connection

My (informal) membership in the EBLIP community gives me a sense of belonging and identification. I am personally invested in it, and the common symbol system (the steps of practicing EBLIP) provides a common language with which to communicate with other members. Influence works both ways: I as a member feel I have some influence in the community, while I also feel influenced by the community. The notion of influence is necessary for group cohesion. A sense of belonging to a community also provides a feeling of integration. Needs are fulfilled by group involvement and acceptance. I feel a shared emotional connection with the EBLIP community. Evidence based practice can be hard work. Having others who know the challenges and the rewards boosts the sense of community.

These four elements are dynamic and there is movement between them. It is in this movement that I can place my EBLIP5 conference experience. People from around the world attended the conference because of a shared interest in EBLIP and the desire to better inform their individual practices (element 3). The group members are bound by the EBLIP structure and their desire to learn more about it or to better incorporate it

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[1] "Sense of community." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. [Please insert date of access] <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sense_of_community&oldid=291089681>.

into practice (element 1). We, as a group, present sessions and posters, attend sessions, network, and connect based on our shared interest in EBLIP (element 4). And we work together to shape future conferences and the group as a whole based on our needs (element 2).

That's the long way of saying the EBLIP5 conference has given me a sense of community and a sense of place. I value that in my professional life. I say a hearty "well done" to the conference organizers, and a big "thank you" to everyone who contributed their knowledge, experiences, and ideas. I can't wait until EBLIP6!