Academic BRASS

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Emerald Research Award 2009 Report: Reflections on Research Methods and Best Practices of Business Instruction in Academic Libraries

The initial purpose of this research was to search for published articles to use as models for my business instruction sessions. What began as a search for model instruction sessions evolved into a systematic review of the literature of business information instruction. The question resulted in two studies—the first to identify those that qualified as high quality evidence-based articles and the second to summarize the articles into categories that would be useful as a planning tool for business information literacy instruction. If the results of my first study (Fiegen, 2010) could be summed up in one sentence it would be that, after accessing more than one thousand articles on business instruction in academic libraries published over a 30 year period, fifteen met the criteria for high quality, validated evidence-based research following the Glynn (2006) EBLIP Critical Appraisal Checklist. Now I would be able to gather best practices to answer my original question. The results of the second study are reported in "Business Information Literacy: A Synthesis of Best Practices" (Fiegen, 2011).

This research was made possible, in part, by the BRASS Emerald Research Award grant I received in 2009. The formal studies that resulted can be accessed through the citations in the reference list. Here I will offer the research tips and "trips" I experienced along the way. Experienced researchers will likely empathize, and for others I hope you will find it useful and possibly inspiring. I learned a lot more about the research methods we use and the foundational thinkers' methodology we adapt for our teaching and research. I am still discovering a bit more about better instruction practices. Much of the reading left me with even more unanswered questions—as it should.

Research tip number 1: When doing an exploratory literature review it is alright to begin with only a general idea. Your hypothesis does not have to be the first line of a research project. What a relief!

After a diligent and fairly comprehensive search of library databases for all articles associated with the topic, I was left with lots of articles and a long list of objectives. I struggled with a final research question but found relief in Cooper's advice that in exploratory reviews it is okay to let the literature reveal the finished research question.

Research tip number 2: Take an interest in selecting research methods titles for your library collection. You might have to learn how to do the research before you can answer your research question.

I discovered that I needed to learn a lot more about qualitative literature reviews before I could do any of the research. So I set out to school myself in the research methods of literature reviews and evidence-based practice research. These authors set me in the right direction. Light and Pillemer's *The Science of Reviewing Research* got me started as did Fink's *Conducting Research Literature Reviews*, Yin's *Case Study Research* and Booth and Brice's *Evidence-Based Practice for Information Professionals.* Eldredge (2002) and Glynn (2006) provided the models for the methodology. The point I want to make for would-be researchers is that, even as a seasoned professional, I still really needed to study these authors in order to fully understand how to conduct this literature review. Only afterwards could I proceed with my research question: What were all those articles telling us about business instruction in libraries?

Research tip number 3: Seek out and attend different conferences and learning opportunities.

Attendance at The International Evidence Based Library and Information Practice Conference in 2009 provided valuable guidance and a breakthrough to my research approach and the ever expanding set of articles. Only two business librarians were among what was largely a health and human services librarian gathering, but it was a research defining opportunity that gave me the focus to complete the study.

Research tip number 4: Read up on evidence-based practice and consider continuing education opportunities as part of a research plan.

Two evidence-based models served to frame my research. The Eldridge (2002) model for Evidence Based Levels of Evidence guided that research. The forty-seven articles that qualified for my study indicated business librarian authors prefer and do well when framing their inquiry using intervention questions and using an exploratory design research method. The best opportunities for improvement, those articles which scored in the middle range of Glynn's EBLIP Critical Appraisal Checklist, are intervention questions and the use of the cohort design (Glynn, Table 1). Authors prefer using the case study method, but surprisingly, most of those articles lack rigor as defined by Glynn's checklist. For details about these results, read *Reference Services Review* (Fiegen, 2010) and *Journal of Business and Finance Librarianship* (Fiegen, 2011).

Research tip number 5: Reach out to colleagues through the literature, form a learning community and encourage dialog about your research findings.

One of the purposes of an active research agenda is the benefit gained from immersion and close scrutiny of a topic, but it is often conducted alone or with a co-author. A goal of this project was to find a way to increase dialog with those authors who had a shared interest. The use of inter-rater reliability and paired response would increase validity and also serve as a way to engage others in a dialog about common research interests. The BRASS Emerald Research Award grant provided the opportunity for five authors represented in the study set and one library science student to participate. Their role was to read and rate the articles using Glynn's EBL checklist. Raters commented positively on the opportunity to read, reflect and discuss articles about business instruction in libraries. Details about the inter-rater reliability and paired-response process and the benefits gained from being part of the study are in the published articles.

Reseach tip number 6: Pay attention to recommendations for further research in the articles you read.

As for my original purpose of finding best practices, there is more to report on whom and what we use for our theoretical foundations, instruction objectives, instructional design and our learning outcomes. I can tell you that standards and guidelines are a driving force. There are missed opportunities for collaborations detailed in the article as well. See Hildreth and Aytac "Recent Library Practitioner Research" for motivation to improve the quality of our research. The author is grateful to BRASS and to Emerald Group Publishing for the opportunity to conduct this research and encourages others to respond to the call for proposals for the BRASS Emerald Research Award.

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