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But we're Librarians not researchers: Building a research culture in the Library and Information Science Sector:

Summary of a discussion-based workshop

Tricia Bingham, based on a workshop delivered by Tricia Bingham and Stephanie Reid, (Libraries and Learning Services, University of Auckland), with the assistance of RLL1 workshop participants.

Introduction

In our work how often do we question standard ways of doing things? How often do we engage with research literature related to our profession? How often do we undertake research to improve our practice?

This paper summarises content and feedback from a workshop undertaken at the LIANZA RLL1 Symposium, on Friday 27th May, 2016, at AUT campus, Auckland. The workshop examined research culture in the New Zealand Library and Information Science (LIS) sector. Specifically the workshop aimed to identify what constitutes research, reasons for undertaking research, barriers and challenges to undertaking research and possible solutions for creating a robust research culture within our own institutions and the Library and Information Science sector as a whole.

Held at the end of the Symposium, the workshop provided an opportunity for discussion and reflection, not just on the Symposium itself, but on how we view ourselves as researchers individually and within our professional lives. This was a facilitated, discussion-based session where participants constructed their understanding through the shared experiences and knowledge of their colleagues in the LIS profession. The workshop produced ideas for fostering research mindedness and an evidence informed approach to practice as well as practical tips for fostering a robust research culture within the LIS profession.

Are you a researcher?

Facilitators began by presenting a somewhat evocative quote which shared a rather dismal view of librarians' involvement in research.

I generally find that librarians are **not that interested in research** into LIS practice **beyond** liaising with other local libraries to **'ask what they did'** on some issue which comes up in day-to-day practice. (Healthcare Researcher, as cited in Cruickshank, Hall, & Taylor-Smith, 2011, p. 10)

Participants were then asked to respond "Yes" or "No" to the following question: **I am a researcher.**

Responses were mixed but slightly more than half of participants did not consider themselves to be researchers.

Why are you a researcher? Why aren't you?

Participants were then asked to discuss why they did or didn't consider themselves researchers (Feedback included in Table 1).

Table 1: Responses to the question Why am I or why aren't I a researcher?	
I am a researcher	I am not a researcher
I am doing research – action research, basic research, surveys...	Not sure the work is research.
I like to learn, expand, grow & upskill.	Based on the teams worked with – internal only.

I am curious.	Work is done on behalf of others.
Part of the job description / Attached to project work.	Accustomed to thinking of my clients as the researchers + myself as facilitator.
I ask questions and find solutions /answers.	Research is not in our: time allocation, pay, job description, no PBRF.
I use research to inform practice.	Often no support/encouragement from institution.
I am an informed decision maker.	Definitions matter – research does not equal output.
I am user focussed.	If an academic hasn't done it, it's not really research.
I need to improve services and programmes.	Feel like I don't have time.
I consume research.	What should I research? So many options – too overwhelming.
I share my findings.	Don't have much experience. How to do?
I help others research.	Not published? = Not research?

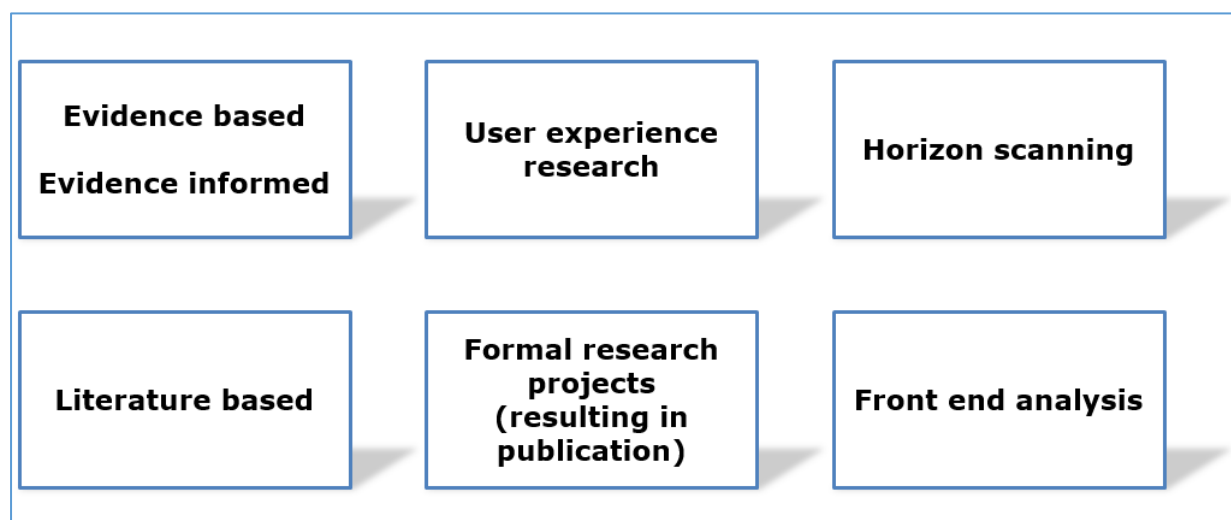
It is interesting to note that participants who viewed themselves as researchers reported a strong association between research and problem solving / decision making for practice based issues. Possession of key personal characteristics such as curiosity and a willingness to learn and grow also contributed to participants viewing themselves as researchers. Reading, doing or disseminating research similarly correlated with identification as a researcher.

Those who did not identify as researchers highlighted some confusion over what the term research actually means. Some also saw research as being removed from their own role or more strongly associated with others such as academics. Others saw their role to support or facilitate research rather than actively participate. A lack of support or institutional mandate for research was also highlighted.

What constitutes research?

Facilitators gave a brief overview of categories of research commonly undertaken in the Library and Information Science sector. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Types of research common in the Library and information Science sector.



Facilitators emphasised that these types of research exist on a continuum, with the ability to undertake either low level research or more in depth and rigorous research within a particular research category (See Table 2).

The aim of this section of the workshop was to encourage participants to see how even low level initiatives can be considered research. As such, it served to encourage Library and Information Science staff to reconsider their perceptions of themselves as a researcher. At the same time it encouraged them to consider ways in which they might build and develop existing research capacities to higher level activities.

Table: 2 Research categories and examples of low level and high level research.			
Type of Research	Definition	Low level example	High Level example
Evidence/Based evidence informed.	Researching a focussed research question using “best evidence” – usually consisting of evidence from the literature, practitioner expertise and experiences and user needs.	What did “they” do and how well did it work?	Systematic review.
User experience research	Researching to users’ behaviours, motivations and needs/requirements., often in relation to undertaking a specific task.	User feedback.	A/B testing.
Horizon scanning	Researching the current environment and trends which may impact on your institution.	Hear third hand the contents of an LIS related report.	Actively and systematically seek out sources of information to assist with strategic planning and future proofing.
Front end analysis	Outlines project scope, gaps and potential solutions.	It’s broken and you fix it.	Understanding situation, context and stakeholders / SWOT analyses.
Formal research projects	Formal research projects generally involve some degree of rigour and planning. These projects may require ethics approval and may result in publication.	Survey.	Research for publication.
Literature based	Engagement with published literature about the LIS sector.	Auto alerts.	Literature review.

Are you a researcher? (Again)

Participants were then asked again whether they considered themselves researchers. There was a definite shift of opinion with the majority of participants now considering themselves researchers.

Where do you want to be in research? What's stopping you?

Participants were then asked where they wanted to be in research and the barriers to reaching that goal.

What does the literature say?

A brief critical review of the literature had already identified several common barriers to creating and maintaining a research culture. These include:

- Lack of time/support/funding barriers
 - Lack of motivation / Perception of and by ourselves and others
 - Low relevance to practice
 - No duty of care for research
 - Ineffective dissemination
 - Target audience not receptive
 - Real or perceived lack of skills
 - Lack of literature
- (Cruickshank, Hall, & Taylor-Smith, 2011; McMenemy, 2010; Wilson, 2013)

What do workshop participants say?

Participants related to many of the barriers identified in the literature, in particular, a lack of time, support, funding and skills. Key responses from participants are summarised in Table 3. Interestingly, perceptions appear to play a clear role in hindering the development of research mindedness, not just in terms of how we view our own roles within a research context but also how others view us. This is perhaps best summarised by one participant's use of the term "Imposter" syndrome."

Table 3: Barriers to creating a Research Culture – Feedback from participants	
Funding and Support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funding• Resources• Privacy/ethical issues• Lack of recognition• Isolation /No experienced person to support
Perceptions and assumptions (our own and others').	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community willingness / Trust• Assumptions / "Imposter syndrome"• People feeling on the outer and always treated as an object• We don't value enough what we do - and others don't value• Self confidence
Systems and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Systems or processes /Politics or Policies• Ethics committees• Protocols and guidelines
Lack of skills, training experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New technologies/ new things we have to learn• High end can be overwhelming• Lack of training

Time constraints.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time - Stopping time. In rapidly changing fields • Priorities /Demands • Pressure to fix immediate problem
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of access to data / Data sharing • Deciding on the problem and scope

What can we do to strengthen a research culture in the LIS sector?

Having considered what hindered development of a research culture within the Library and Information Science sector participants were asked to look at ways to overcome barriers and move forward to develop a robust culture of research and research mindedness at an *individual level*, at an *institutional level*, at a *professional body level* and at an *educational level*.

To help frame this question we shared a brief definition of **research culture** as follows: “A culture of research provides a supportive context in which research is uniformly expected, discussed, produced, and valued” (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 5).

What does the literature say?

A brief review of literature identified seven key ways in which the LIS sector can foster a strong research culture as follows:

- Development of research activities and opportunities
- Development of a “research friendly” mindset
- Dissemination of research and methods which facilitate this dissemination
- Forging of the research-practice connection
- Documentation and infrastructure which supports research
- Provision of training and development opportunities
- Scholarships, funding and awards (Summarised from (McMenemy, 2010; Pickton, 2016; Wilson, 2013).

Table 4 lists examples of how to foster a research culture identified from the literature.

Table 4: How to facilitate a research culture – Findings from the literature			
Individuals	Institutions	Professional bodies	Educators
Develop Activities and opportunities.			
Organise discussion groups/events, e.g. lunchtime reading groups. Seek out colleagues for collaboration and mentoring.	Organise discussion groups/events, e.g. lunchtime reading groups. Provide research time on a regular basis or as a special case, e.g. sabbatical. Peer support		Provide opportunities for students who otherwise would have no opportunity to research.
Develop a research friendly mindset.			
Be enthusiastic. Implement formalised curiosity.	Encouragement	Encourage discourse – including dissent.	

Disseminate research and provide methods for dissemination.			
Be a disseminator. Seek out opportunities. Use research in multiple ways. Don't just do one paper about your research.		Encourage research output and dissemination. Create online repositories of resources.	
Forge the research-practice connection.			
Be a practitioner-researcher. Use research for purpose and impact.	Encourage an evidence based approach.	Encourage practitioner PhDs.	
Implement documentation and infrastructure which supports research.			
	Reflect research in strategic plans, service goals. Include/ Require in job descriptions.	Create a Research Working Group or committee. Make conferences more research oriented. Introduce a peer review process for accepting papers. Research forums	
Training and professional development.			
Take advantage of internal institutional research Courses Support staff to attend external research training - time off or payment.		Provide research training/ Continuing education.	Research curriculum including tools such as SPSS, nVivo.
Provide funds, scholarships and awards.			
	Set up research funds Recognition and award.	Awards / Project sponsorship.	Awards / Project sponsorship.
Promote research.			
		Promote article writing.	Promote research and its importance.
(Summarised from Mcenemy, 2010; Pickton, 2016; Wilson, 2013)			

What do workshop participants say?

Workshop participants largely echoed suggestions from the literature but they also provided a more specific range of methods for fostering a strong Library and Information Science sector research culture (See Table 5). Additionally, participants highlighted one additional category: the need to engage and collaborate with other researchers from both within and outside the Library and Information Science sector.

Table 5: How to facilitate a research culture – Feedback from workshop participants			
Individuals	Institutions	Professional bodies	Educators
Develop Activities and opportunities.			
Read more.		RSIG annually /RSIG continue to be active.	
Develop a research friendly mindset.			
Celebrate.	Determination. Encouragement to study.	Perception of who does research. Value. Enable culture of improvement.	
Disseminate research and provide methods for dissemination.			
Identify our research outputs in a more structured way. Disseminate your work.	Visibility and awareness of what research everyone is doing. Put up a database of topics which need researching eg. Google docs. Greater uptake of new technologies – social media eg. Conversation via blogs, twitter, conferences, workshops etc. Papers available. Better visibility and communication.	Contribute to Journal. Output for literature review. Page on LIANZA for sharing research interests. LIANZA website (“research”) – upload site. Numbers are easy to measure. How do we capture those stories?	
Forge the research-practice connection.			
Best practice + best evidence is enough.	Respond to findings/ Actions.		
Implement documentation and infrastructure which supports research.			
Becoming part of our job expectation. We need to improve processes/services and Research-based decisions and actions.	Organisational priority. Time / Time provided by organisation. Allowing time off. Opportunity.		

Training and professional development.			
Professional development. Continuing education.	Staff development /Support P.D of staff even for those not engaged in formal study.	Workshops.	
Provide funds, scholarships, awards and resources.			
	<p>Funding - Might be funding for project, might be financial recognition.</p> <p>Financial reward.</p> <p>Put some of our budget into research this year.</p> <p>Financial support / Reimbursed study.</p> <p>Space.</p> <p>Buying resources to support research.</p>	Scholarships.	
Promote research.			
		Promote what librarians have done /existing research.	
Engage and collaborate with other researchers.			
Support others. Collaborate.	<p>Encouragement to participate in any form. Not necessary as a researcher per se but contributing to a project.</p> <p>Mentoring by experienced researcher.</p>	Liaise with other research bodies.	
(Summarised from Mcenemy, 2010; Pickton, 2016; Wilson, 2013)			

Round up

What now?

It felt important to end the workshop on an aspirational note, so to round off facilitators concluded the session with the following quote:

It can be strongly argued that research is critical for the creation of professional knowledge and therefore critical to the survival and growth of the Library and Information Science profession. Without a commitment to research, we will not be a profession as such, but merely an occupation that focuses on routine processes. (Hallam, as cited in Bhatti and Chohan, 2012, p. 2)

Participants were encouraged to think about how they might take the content of the workshop and use it to instil/develop individual research mindedness as well as a culture of research at an institutional and professional body level. Understanding that sometimes smaller, incremental steps are easier to take particularly for those who are only just beginning their research journey, facilitators asked participants to quietly reflect on the following questions.

What is your takeaway? What one thing can you do?

Facilitator Reflections.

It was a privilege to attend the inaugural LIANZA RLL1 Research SIG. Symposium. The event was well organised, engaging, and provided inspiration for both novices and more seasoned researchers. Despite doubts raised in our workshop about librarians' roles as researchers there is no doubt that there is a vibrant and robust research culture operating in the Library and Information Science sector in New Zealand. This workshop presented at the end of the Symposium provided an opportunity to reflect on the day as a whole, bring together key threads and themes from the Symposium presentations and to examine ways to further build and develop research readiness and activity within the sector.

Where to next?

Workshop participants recognised collaboration as one of the key ways in which librarians can develop their research capacities and capabilities. The advantages of a collaborative approach were highlighted on a number of occasions during the Symposium. It was heartening, for example, to see the research synchronicity between different library sectors. For example as librarians involved in teaching information and academic literacy skills to foundation and first year students at university it was fascinating to hear the results of Elisabeth Marrow's (2016) research on New Zealand High School students transitioning into tertiary education. We can see real potential for collaborative approaches between school and tertiary library sectors to ensure students start university information capable and equipped to undertake their studies. It is also our hope that the day served to foster ongoing research collaboration and communication.

As workshop participants clearly indicated, dissemination is also key to fostering a research culture. Through dissemination we can raise our own research profiles as well as perceptions of ourselves as researchers, not just as research facilitators for those outside the LIS sector. The day itself was testament to the importance of dissemination. It was great also to see Librarians such as Abigail Tarbotton actively espousing the suggestion to disseminate not just once, but in multiple ways and multiple forums. The Symposium was also a good opportunity for MIS students and new graduates to showcase research undertaken as part of their study when they might not otherwise of had a platform to do so. Even more encouraging was to hear two library managers indicate that they

intended to disseminate students' research in their libraries and to look at ways in which research findings could be actively implemented in their workplace.

Funding was raised on several occasions by workshop participants as both a barrier to research, and a way to encourage a research culture. It was heartening therefore to end the Symposium with Philip Calvert's announcement of a new LIANZA Research Award. More details are available here:

<http://www.lianza.org.nz/research-award>. The online submission form is available here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LKFTX89><<http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LKFTX89>

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