

UNDER OUR OWN UMBRELLA: MOBILIZING RESEARCH EVIDENCE FOR EARLY LITERACY PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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A critical perspective on evidence is taken as axiomatic in the practice of librarianship. MLIS students are schooled in techniques for evaluating information sources; policymakers, program developers, practitioners, and LIS educators are encouraged to base decisions on a solid foundation of research evidence; practitioners are urged to provide library users with a range of sources from which to choose. Rarely, however, are critical questions asked about the nature of research evidence, the purposes for which research evidence is mobilized and the political, economic, social, and material consequences that may attend privileging one form of evidence over another.

The article seeks to raise such questions. First we discuss how research and evidence have been mobilized in professional literature for children's services librarians working in public libraries and in children's services librarians' actual activities and talk about their support of children's early literacy. We then consider the forms of evidence being used by children's services librarians and ask what interests are served by the use or non-use of particular forms of evidence. Finally we identify implications of our findings. We argue, as does John Budd (2006), that more is at stake than which methods or studies are most effective. We argue too that consequences attend the selection of research evidence, and that the choice of research evidence has implications – often unexpected and sometimes negative -- for public libraries and for their users and staff. Indeed, we seek to demonstrate that the privileging of one form of evidence over others does not further the public library's democratic mission and may well undermine children's services librarians' efforts to advocate for library services.

Evidence-based Practice

Originating in response to calls for evidence-based health care (Cohen, 2004), the evidence-based practice model (EBP) has spread within other disciplines, including library and information science (Marshall, 2006) and

education (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, [NICHD], 2000). A strong evidence base promises to elevate the idiosyncrasies of practice to a set of rigorous, systematic findings that may be evaluated, compared, and generalized.

In its purest form, EBP mandates that practice decisions be based on a systematic critical appraisal of the research literature according to an established hierarchy of evidence (Marshall, 2006). In practice, there is great variation in how the model is implemented. Many argue, for example, that practitioners should not simply rely on research, but “mesh... research-based evidence with professional knowing and experience to make professional decisions and implement professional action” (Todd, 2008, p. 17). Orthodox formulations adhere more tightly to a rigid hierarchy of forms of evidence. At the apex of this hierarchy sit randomized controlled trials: studies that are “well designed and implemented, that demonstrate the absence of systematic differences between intervention and control groups before the intervention, and that employ measures and instruments of proven validity” (pp. 17-18).

EBP is not without its critics. One of the most significant concerns is that EBP’s strong commitment to a positivist empirical paradigm often corresponds to a very narrow understanding of the nature of good evidence as that derived from controlled experimental methods. This means that, in disciplines outside of clinical studies, little research makes the grade so there is little evidence on which to make decisions (Todd, 2008). Second, a narrow framing makes it difficult to ask the broad, contextual questions (LaFlamme, 2007) needed to understand the “the non-random reality” of real social settings such as libraries (Todd, 2008, p. 18). Third, a narrow definition devalues information important to professionals (Cohen, 2004; Bogel 2008), including information derived from qualitative research (Given, 2006) and, importantly, from practitioners’ own professional expertise and judgement (Todd, 2008). Finally, studies that focus exclusively on experimental research risk losing sight of the social and economic contexts and may run the risk of privileging the efficient administration of the library over the broader needs of the community (LaFlamme, 2007).

The implications of EBP go beyond choosing from a simple hierarchy of research methodologies. Research studies are implicitly or explicitly situated within paradigms that may determine which phenomena are of interest and what kinds of questions are askable and answerable (Blaikie, 2010). Choosing research evidence on which to base practice decisions is therefore not a neutral act, and may commit practitioners to a set of values and priorities that are at odds with professional goals.

Methodology

The evidence that we present here comes from three independent but interrelated studies of the work of children’s services librarians in public

libraries and an analysis of professional children's services texts. All of the studies share an institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987, 2005) orientation, which requires starting from individual instances in participants' everyday/overnight life and untangling and following the institutional threads made visible in those instances to uncover the social organization of that life. Our data come from an interview study of Canadian public librarians' work in support of children's early literacy (Stooke, 2004), an observation study of ten Book Buddies programs for school-age readers (Stooke, 2007), and an ethnographic observation of multiple sessions of eight public library-based infant and toddler programs in two Canadian provinces (e.g., McKenzie & Stooke, 2007; Stooke & McKenzie, 2009). As we worked through our analyses we were struck by the similar ways in which librarians across the three studies talked about research and mobilized and deployed research evidence in their practice. These reflections led us to look at the data from all three studies together, and to complement it by turning to the professional literature for children's services librarians.

Our full data set therefore consists of numerous forms from the four sources. First are transcripts of in-depth interviews with 25 professional librarians from two Canadian provinces about their work in support of children's early literacy. Second are field notes from our observations. At each location, a research team including one or both authors and sometimes additional research assistants observed a number of consecutive program sessions. Observers were placed as unobtrusively as possible and observed program sessions and hand-wrote field notes. Both observations and interviews focused on concrete details; that is, on what participants were actually doing or on what they said they did, rather than on their subjective experiences or views about the work. Third is the contemporary and historical professional literature for children's services librarians, including professional guidelines (e.g., Association for Library Services to Children [ALSC] 1999/2009), books, and articles in journals such as *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*, *School Library Journal*, *Knowledge Quest*, and *Children and Libraries*. All data collection conformed to Canadian research ethics guidelines (Canadian Institute of Health Research, [CIHR], 2003). Informed consent for participation was obtained; all participants are referred to using pseudonyms; institutions, program names and locations have been anonymized.

Our analysis is informed by a social constructionist epistemology (Burr, 2003) that considers all knowledge claims to be rhetorical. A social constructionist approach enables researchers to critically examine the strategies employed and the evidence used to support knowledge claims or theoretical allegiances (Potter, 1996; Budd, 2006). We view both the printed texts and the field texts (our field notes and transcripts) as products of discursive processes, what Fairclough (2003, p. 3) calls "actual instance(s) of language in use." The goal of our analysis is to uncover how these instances of "language in use" are constructed and to suggest how they might be mediating social life in local sites of institutional activity.

We employed discourse analysis (Potter, 1996) as the primary method for examining ways that members of the children's library services community deployed particular framings of research in their work as authors of professional texts or as practitioners. Discourse analysis (e.g., Talja & McKenzie, 2007; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001; Budd, 2006) focuses on "the study of language in use" (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p.2): the understanding of language as constitutive and constructive and of meaning as emerging from complex social processes. Potter's (1996) approach to everyday fact construction is concerned with the ways that accounts are structured to appear factual (the epistemological orientation of discourse) and the rhetorical purposes to which accounts are put (the action orientation of discourse). Because it focuses on the ways that speakers and writers assemble their versions of the world and on the social functions those versions perform, this approach is particularly well-suited for analyzing the ways that evidence is mobilized and presented.

The analysis focused less on individual texts than on the connections among texts and between texts and observed practices. For example, professional texts that discussed children's librarians' roles and responsibilities with respect to early literacy research were examined in relation to librarians' talk about their work and researchers' observations. Historical sources that traced the development of public-library learning support programs for young children helped to contextualize the advice provided in the current sources. Analyzing these data in relation to one another reflects the goals of institutional ethnography by showing how things happening in one place, like a public librarian's decision to mention a research study to parents at her baby storytime, might be serving institutional goals such as library advocacy. The intention of the study was not to produce a definitive or generalizable analysis, but to explore how certain things came to be said or done and to identify potential consequences, including those consequences that fall most heavily on vulnerable groups.

We present our findings under three broad themes. First, we consider *how* research evidence is used. We begin by sketching the recent history of children's library services in North America. We show that educational policies aimed at enhancing school readiness have prompted public libraries to compete with other social agencies for scarce resources and we show how research evidence has been mobilized by the American Library Association (ALA) to do this kind of advocacy work. Second, we consider *what* kind of research is elevated to the place of best evidence. Specifically, we argue that the emphasis on public libraries as places for early childhood education increased the value of scientifically-based reading research, in particular a groundbreaking meta-analysis conducted by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000) whose findings underpin the ALA's most ambitious initiative for young children's literacy, *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library* (ECRR). With reference to ECRR, we discuss some of the unintended consequences of using a narrow definition of research for public libraries, their users, and their staff. Finally we suggest

strategies for broadening the lens through which research is evaluated to inform public library programs.

Mobilizing Research for Practice and Advocacy

The Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC)'s *Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries, Revised Edition* (ALSC, 1999/2009) makes clear that a competent children's librarian "[s]tays informed of current trends, emerging technologies, issues, and research in librarianship, child development, education, and allied fields" (Section VIII.2). It is expected, then, that the children's services community would pay attention to highly publicized neuroscience research and scientifically-based research on reading.

[As] remarkable research on early brain development was finding its way into the mainstream news, the Public Library Association (PLA) and the ALSC both took note. (Ash & Meyers, 2009, p. 3)

Our interview data also provide examples of librarians mobilizing neuroscience research to plan and advocate for services.

Dana: I think the brain research is fabulous. My huge focus at the moment is the zero-to-two age group. . . . And [the report] gives me a tool to say to staff, "A Babytime is something that you need to offer." And a staff person might say, "Oh, they're just babies." And now I've got empirical research that says, "This is when the pathways are growing, and this is when the synapses are being formed and this is when the brain is actually being formed."

Practitioners are encouraged to mobilize research in incidental ways too. A companion book that expands the ALSC's *Competencies* (Cerny, Markey, & Williams, 2006) advises librarians to "have a few ready remarks and some basic facts . . . How does reading during the summer vacation encourage children's reading ability overall? How does free voluntary reading improve their ability to do well on standardized tests?" (pp. 72-73).

Field note: Janet's storytimes always seem to involve a discussion of some kind of research or 'expert opinion' on some topic related to child rearing. . . . It must involve some prior thought or research on Janet's part, since she always seems to know the source of the information and some details about it.

When public libraries in North America began serving children more than a century ago, they did not view themselves as parent educators or reading teachers. Reading as a field of study was in its infancy (Gillen & Hall, 2003) and for much of the twentieth century, librarians viewed children not as students, but as readers with their own reading tastes (Walter, 2001, p. 13). They were unperturbed that schools and libraries approached children's

reading differently and took pride in the differences (Ziarnik, 2003). At the same time, children's librarians struggled to be taken seriously by their colleagues in the LIS community (Hildenbrand, 1996). Wilson (1979), for example, admonished them to host fewer author visits and to attend to research in the field of child development. As the following excerpt from an interview demonstrates, some children's librarians even admonished themselves.

Pat: You know, there was just nothing happening and the administration was not happy with our progress either, but I wasn't able to dedicate myself to it. So . . . I went to my CEO and luckily he's very approachable. . . . And my CEO said, "We must do a study. You know, you have to do research. . ."

In the late 1970s, the emergent literacy perspective displaced reading readiness as the dominant model for thinking about beginning reading. Emergent literacy researchers promoted the use of high-quality children's literature in schools and identified storybook reading as the most important early literacy experience for young children (Gillen & Hall, 2003). For a short time during the 1980s and 1990s, kindergarten and primary teachers' reading lessons resembled traditional public library preschool programs. Librarians were pleased to see their work validated by educators and began to construct new professional identities as early childhood educators with specialized knowledge of books.

When early child development issues became a topic of for social policy makers during the 1990s, the public library community enthusiastically embraced "the discourse of shared responsibility" for preparing children to be "productive members in a global society" (Griffith & André-Bechely, 2008, p. 49). The children's services community nevertheless faced challenges. First, in order to position themselves as educational resources for young children's literacy, libraries were required to compete for funding with a plethora of new community-based programs. Library advocates, Feinberg and Rogoff (1998) wrote, "Not since the launch of sputnik has there been so much anxiety about improving education" (p. 50) and yet "in the search for community assets . . . public libraries are frequently overlooked" (p. 50). Second, by the year 2000, the emergent literacy perspective had been successfully challenged by advocates for scientifically-based reading research (SBRR), in particular the National Reading Panel (NRP). In preparing their famous report, *Teaching Children to Read*, the NRP employed only experimental or quasi-experimental

¹ Once it selected the topics for review, the Panel also decided how to choose which studies to include in its analysis. To ensure the quality of the work, the Panel agreed to base its conclusions only on studies that had appeared in English in a refereed journal. The Panel limited its review to studies that focused directly on children's reading development from preschool through Grade 12. The Panel also concentrated only on studies that were experimental or quasi-experimental in design. These studies had to include a sample size that was considered large enough to be useful, and the instructional procedures used in the studies had to be well defined.

studies with sample sizes “considered large enough to be useful.” Finally, the studies only assessed instructional interventions whose instructional procedures were well defined.¹ The voices of SBRR researchers quickly came to dominate educational policy conversations in the United States and evidence-based practice was firmly entrenched in educational policies.

In the area of literacy, both federal and state expectations have emphasized EBP to guide curriculum adoption and the evaluation of curriculum effectiveness. Evidence must be grounded in scientifically based research, a term used across a variety of fields that requires the application of systematic and objective procedures to obtain information to address important questions in a particular field. It is an attempt to ensure that those who use the research can have a high degree of confidence that it is valid and dependable. (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2005, n.p.)

The effects of the new educational policies have been felt intensely by school librarians. According to Todd (2008), school librarianship “is . . . driven by trends and requirements in education, particularly its focus on data-driven decision making, accountability, and measurement of outcomes” (p. 19). Public libraries, by contrast, are not directly accountable to educational policies. Traditionally they have aimed to provide opportunities for recreational literacy practices and self-directed learning along with support for school curricula. However, the drift toward school-style literacy practices is changing the nature of public library services too.

Now, as the research into early literacy is growing daily, it becomes important for these skills to not only be brought to library storytimes, but for them to be presented to the caregivers as something important to know and use with young children on a daily basis. (Albright et al., 2009, p. 15)

Both EBP and school learning have attained the status of “consensus vocabularies” (DeVault, 2008, p. 293) among community organizations. Their claims and directives “are woven into political discourse, budgeting, policy implementation, media reports, and so on, in ways that give them purchase with different audiences; as people take up these vocabularies, they take up beliefs on which they rest, which come to be widely accepted” (p. 293).

The discourse of school learning is hard to avoid, and has come to seem natural to community organizations. The more neutral role of the library as a place where self-directed literacy learning might occur is likely to be replaced by a view of the library as a place where parents take their children to reinforce school success. (Ward & Wason-Elam, 2003, p. 20)

It is against this backdrop that public librarians’ use of research evidence for young children’s literacy must be understood. With public library

programs for young children situated in relation to educational programs, it is not at all surprising that librarians are advised to – and do – turn to educational research literature as a source of evidence to support practice. We question, however, the extent to which one body of research has informed recent initiatives on behalf of young children’s literacy.

*Choosing the Evidence:
The Case of Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library*

As noted above, the NRP analyzed a large body of experimental and quasi-experimental research to establish a set of best practices for early literacy instruction. Of particular relevance to public librarians was the finding that it is unnecessary to delay intentional literacy instruction until first grade. In response to this finding some library programs for young children are now more didactic than in the past and some librarians have even described themselves as parents’ “first literacy coaches” (Albright et al., 2009, p. 16). For example, library programs for young children have always included language play that emphasized the sounds in words (for example in jokes, rhymes and tongue twisters), but some library preschool programs now explicitly teach phonemic awareness. The NRP also recommended that book sharing activities should include dialogic reading, a teacher-centred routine (Teale et al., 2009, p. 80) in which adults pose literal comprehension questions to children as they share a book. A librarian called Suzanne demonstrated dialogic reading as follows.

Librarian: What do you see in the picture?
Child: I see a mouse.
Librarian: Oh and what color is the mouse?
Child: It’s a GREY mouse.

The NRP’s recommendations have been highly influential and hotly contested in educational circles (see Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004). They have not been imposed on public library systems, but in 2001 the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Association for Library Services for Children (ALSC) forged a partnership with the NICHD to develop a preschool literacy initiative (Ash & Meyers, 2009) that evolved into *Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library* (ECRR). Background information on the initiative and its research base is posted to the ALA’s ECRR webpage along with ordering information for “posters and handouts and scripted workshops for libraries that could be presented to parents and caregivers” (Everhart, 2004, p. 77). ECRR is the North American children’s services community’s most coordinated and most successful effort to mobilize research-based practices for library advocacy. Indeed, an article published in the prestigious education journal, *Language Arts* (Ward, 2007) states that ECRR has helped to turn public libraries into “21st Century Learning Places” (p. 269).

Recognizing that the public libraries have the ability to reach
thousands of parents, caregivers and children, and to greatly

impact the early reading experience, the PLA and ALSC contracted educational experts in emergent literacy to develop a model research-based programme for parents and caregivers. The promise of these research-based materials is to enlist parents and caregivers as partners in preparing their children for learning to read and to provide the most effective methods to achieve this end (Ward 2007, 269-270).

We draw attention to ECRR for several reasons. First is the extent to which it has been employed as a tool for library advocacy. The uptake of ECRR resources in and beyond the LIS community is unprecedented. Second is the children's services community's uncritical adoption of recommendations derived from studies that frame research and literacy so narrowly. It is worth noting that some educational researchers who strongly supported NRP-informed programs in schools now voice concerns about a lack of results (Manzo, 2008; Allington 2009; Teale, 2008; Teale et al. 2009). For example, Teale (2008) questions the NRP's wisdom in excluding so much research from its analysis.

The ways in which the NRP findings have been applied to the practical questions have resulted in severely restricting the research evidence that is viewed as contributing to current knowledge about early literacy. Information from rigorous, systematic, objective case studies, correlational research and observational studies that have been accepted by peer-reviewed journals contribute substantive research knowledge that should also be used to draw policy and instructional implications in the field of early literacy. (Teale et al., 2009, p. 87)

Teale is concerned that the narrow framing of research by SBRR excludes widely-employed methodological approaches such as correlational studies and case studies. We note it also excludes without exception contributions to the knowledge base of early childhood literacy made by sociocultural research (Razfar & Gutierrez, 2003, p. 35). Sociocultural research foregrounds the roles played by language and culture in literacy learning. Learning and development in sociocultural research are viewed in terms of participation in a community and the appropriation of the valued practices of that community.

A coherent understanding of the cultural, historical nature of human development . . . builds on a variety of traditions of research, including participant observation of everyday life from an anthropological perspective, psychological research in naturalistic or constrained "laboratory" situations, historical accounts, and fine-grained analyses of videotaped events. Together, the research and scholarly traditions across fields are sparking a new conception of human development as a cultural process. (Rogoff, 2003, p. 10)

A lively and ongoing debate about the value of sociocultural research for language and literacy education has permeated both the research and the professional literature in the field of education. The school library community attends to this debate by calling on both cognitive and sociocultural research evidence (e.g., Shannon 2004, Coles 2004). Surprisingly, however, this debate is entirely absent from the professional literature for public library children's services. In fact, the question of how best to support early literacy has more than once been declared closed: In 2001, Virginia Walter declared that the NRP study had resolved struggles among educators about the best way to teach beginning reading "once and for all" (p. 63). More recently, Albright et al. (2009) described the NRP's findings as "the latest emergent literacy research" (p. 17).

Consequences of the Choice of Evidence

We argue that the narrow framing of research in children's services professional discourse could undermine the public library's ability to achieve important goals with respect to social inclusion, and that it works to position children's services librarians as educational technicians rather than professionals. We discuss each of these claims in turn.

An important goal for early literacy reforms in libraries is to promote social inclusion by helping to prepare all children for school. Privileging findings from experimental and quasi-experimental studies may seem like the best way to address this goal, but, as Emson (2003) observes, the success of community literacy programs "depends on two elements – personalized service and flexibility" (p. 27). Moreover, even the most carefully planned program may fail to meet the needs of the people it intends to serve (Willinsky, 2001). Practical problems in the social world are messy and may be better understood by broad questions to which only approximate answers are possible. Although those questions and answers are not considered "good evidence" in narrow formulations, they sometimes help people make sense of the uncertainties. Any attempt to address problems in the social world should also take into account the central role played by social and cultural factors in the production of problems and solutions. As do Razfar and Gutierrez (2003), we argue that literacy practices derived exclusively from cognitive research cannot be responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity that characterizes Canada and the United States.

Observational data from a public library Reading Buddies program for school-age children illustrates these points. The program we observed was informed by a robust research finding that the amount of time spent on independent reading at school is not enough for all children to become fluent and accurate readers (Rasinsky & Padak, 2004). The program aimed to support developing readers by pairing them with volunteers who would listen to them read aloud. It was a low-cost initiative and easy to implement. It was potentially helpful too – as long as the children who attended the program actually needed to practice reading aloud and as long as they were sufficiently like the children who had participated in the original research.

Unfortunately, neither was the case. Many of the children who attended the program were beginning readers. Finding materials that were easy enough for them to read aloud proved to be a challenge for the volunteers who often resorted to reading to the children instead. But more important, about 80% of the children who attended the program were English language learners whose primary need was for language support. While a few volunteers improvised support for vocabulary development, they had not been trained to do so and did not have access to the potentially helpful, dual language book collections owned by the library system. The following, poignant field note suggests that the program we observed, in spite of its strong research base, was far from flexible and could have offered more personalized service had planners attended to recommendations from sociocultural research.

Field note: Courage is about twelve years old, tall and willowy. He's African, maybe from Somalia. . . . He walks slowly but purposefully to the far corner of the meeting room where the coordinator greets him enthusiastically. He half smiles in reply, then goes to the display table and picks up an easy reader. Not much time choosing. He sits beside his Buddy and without any preamble opens the book and reads in a low monotone voice, a little haltingly. There's no chatting. When he's finished the book, the Buddy says, "I think we need a funny book, don't you?" She gets up, walks to the display and picks up a popular book of fractured fairy tales. Does Courage know the actual tales? What sense will he make of the wacky illustrations? He takes the book, opens it to the first page, and begins to read from the top. But the text in this book doesn't follow the expected pattern. Sometimes it starts at the top left, but sometimes the whole page is upside down and you need to turn the book around to read it. The Buddy tries to help Courage with the jokes, but he just keeps reading. It is as if their meanings are of no consequence.

Our second argument is that a narrow framing of research undermines children's librarians' professionalism. Framing research narrowly obviates the need for practitioners to critically reflect on the consequences of their actions. They need only to follow guidelines for best practice and adopt the research-based handouts and scripts developed by agencies such as the ALA. A narrow framing of research limits acceptable research findings to those derived from experimental and quasi-experimental studies, thereby making it difficult for librarians themselves to conduct research that would count. Consequently, children's librarians come to rely on the expert opinions of others rather than on their own professional judgment. It is salient to this argument that almost all participants' comments about research referred to research from fields other than LIS. The following comments made by a librarian called Chris are an exception. Chris bemoans the fact that librarians do not have research "under our own umbrella."

Chris: [Finger plays are important for making] essential brain connections and motor skills that are being developed that will develop into writing skills, which is something that was made

very apparent when we had our guest speaker. But it's almost as if we don't have the literature under our own umbrella to be able to advocate in that way.

To sum up, we have argued that the public library community's uncritical commitment to a narrow framing of research in the field of early literacy has constrained practitioners' access to important literacy research and discouraged them from drawing on their own professional wisdom. Hence we assert that an uncritical application of EBL can promote the adoption of the "implicit and naïve rhetoric" alluded to by Budd (2006, p. 221) and we concur with commentators such as Dennis et al. (2007) "that uncritical application of EBL [evidence-based librarianship] can lead librarians to suspend professional judgment in the name of following evidence" (p.118).

Conclusion

Children's services librarians in public libraries are expected to – and do – attend to research. They do so for practical purposes – to support children's literacy and for rhetorical purposes – to advocate for the public library as an educational resource. We have shown that reliance on a single set of standards for judging knowledge claims mediates an uncritical adoption of certain practices and an equally uncritical rejection of others. Concern about the lack of debate in professional literature for children's librarians led us to examine ways in which research was being taken up in librarians' practice and in their talk about practice. We concluded that adopting a widened lens on research, one that is a more inclusive understanding of what might count as research and evidence, opens up new questions and new understandings about early childhood literacy.

By employing a widened lens, questions important to children's services staff could be addressed in ways that illuminate rather than denigrate the unique learning opportunities afforded by public libraries. The provision of access to learning resources, including games in digital formats, is a library literacy practice that embeds myriad learning opportunities. Attention to the physical environment as demonstrated by Family Place Libraries, attention to children's reading tastes and the public library's traditional focus on children's engagement are all areas of librarians' expertise that should not be overlooked.

It would be disingenuous, of course, to single out public libraries for criticism. Healthcare professionals, teachers, school librarians, and community workers all routinely expose their practices to "the glare of enlightenment science" (Bowker and Star 2000, 249) and sometimes find them wanting. What is missing from the children's services professional literature, and from much of the research literature, however, is a counter narrative. Many healthcare professionals are encouraged to engage in reflective practice, an activity that validates and supports experiential learning and situated problem solving (for example Gunn & Owen, 2010). Professional literature for teachers encourages them to be discerning

consumers of educational programs (Hibbert & Iannacci, 2005; Coles, 2004). School librarians too are encouraged to integrate the best empirical research evidence with “knowledge and understanding derived from professional experience, as well as with local evidence” (Todd, 2008, pp. 19-20) and community development practitioners are told to seek out new sources of evidence.

The effort will require different ways of doing business and different ways of conceptualizing evaluation on the part of funders, practitioners, public policymakers, and researchers. Across the field, we need to dig deeper around some key questions, draw on different sources for evidence, and develop a broader knowledge base. (Auspos and Kubisch 2004, p.6)

Following Auspos and Kubisch, we suggest only that the children’s services community (including practitioners, researchers, and educators) dig deeper around key questions about early literacy and advocacy. It is in librarianship’s long-term interests for members of the LIS community to contribute to the knowledge base on which the profession draws. As Chris wisely pointed out, to advocate successfully, children’s librarians need a literature under their own umbrella.

Finally, the benefits of a widened lens extend beyond the improvement of early literacy programs (Budd, 2006; Given, 2007). Talja, Tuominen, and Savolainen (2005) observe that social practice approaches have been taken up in LIS research more broadly, with the consequence that new questions are opened up for information researchers. Unfortunately, although LIS educators have made sociocultural contributions to other aspects of literacy (e.g., Mackey 2007), the openness described by Talja et al. has not so far informed framings of research in the field of early literacy. To be effective, EBP must go beyond a critical evaluation of the evidence it calls on to take an equally critical look at the universe from which it draws its evidence.

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