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Editorial: Research methodology in library and information studies (LIS)

Judith Broady-Preston

1 Introduction

This special issue is an opportunity to share contemporary ideas in research methodologies, models, and methods originating from, or of relevance to any branch of the LIS discipline, sub-discipline, and wider information profession.

In 2011, a general call for papers was distributed globally to a variety of lists. Theoretical papers relating to research methodologies, models and methods were especially welcomed, as were philosophical papers, and papers presenting a fully developed process ready for wider use. In all cases, authors were encouraged to emphasise concepts and underlying principles, and to supply sufficient background information to orient any reader who was not a specialist in the particular subject area.

The papers published in this special issue for 2012 result from that original call and have not been published previously elsewhere, nor submitted to any other journal or conference. All selected papers have been through rigorous double blind peer review prior to acceptance, and thanks are extended to all those who participated in the review process.

As outlined below, the papers cover a wide range of topics; some written by established authors of international repute, with others written or co-authored by relatively new entrants to the profession and/or LIS research. The authors are based in a variety of different countries and contexts: Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, USA and Wales.

2 Open Access and Journal Publication

This issue has taken somewhat longer than anticipated from the original call to final publication for a variety of reasons. In many ways, it is in itself an interesting case study of some of the challenges currently facing all those engaged

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in the reliable and rigorous communication of research, be they authors, editors, reviewers or publishers.

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paper may be used freely, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.

(*Instructions for writing a refereed paper or an article for LIR,* 2000)

As of July 2012, there were more than 370 signatories to the 2003 Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (EIFL-OA, 2012). On 16 July 2012 the UK, the Government accepted in full the recommendations of the Finch Report (Working Group on Expanding Access to Published Research Findings ('Finch Group'), 2012).

Open Access (OA) creates the possibility of increasing markedly the reach, and potentially, the impact, of academic research. This view is reinforced by Swan (2012a), who makes numerous claims in respect of OA, significant amongst which is that it increases the visibility, use and impact of academic research. As discussed elsewhere, this will necessitate the development of new business models (Broady-Preston, 2012), a view reinforced by the Knowledge Exchange report published earlier this month (September 2012) written by Alma Swan, which recommends that if OA is to be sustainable, improved business planning by all the stakeholder groups is a key requirement (Swan, 2012b).

Pragmatically, OA journals such as *Library and Information Research* currently rely almost entirely on the goodwill and volunteer labour of individuals, from authors, and reviewers to editors, sub-editors, and to some extent, publishers. With increasing demands being placed on individuals in the workplace, the practical outcome is that the production process of a special issue particularly is exponentially extended, especially if double blind peer review is used. Clearly this is an issue to be addressed if journals such as this are to continue to be viable and to bring you reliable and rigorous reports on contemporary research.

3 Papers

The papers in this special issue range from the more applied, to the abstract and philosophical. Phelps and Campbell provide a critique of the theory and use of Systematic Reviews in LIS research, including an outline of the stages to be followed when conducting such reviews. As they observe, such reviews are used extensively in the health sciences but are less well known and utilised in LIS per se. They are time-consuming, and despite their seeming rigour, arguably open to individual author bias, especially in relation to decisions on relevance and selection. Nonetheless, they are increasing in scope and usage in the social sciences generally, and as Phelps and Campbell observe, they are especially helpful to library and information managers in analysing the scope and range of completed LIS research, identifying any gaps and therefore serving as an aid and guide to future research.

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The second paper from Davies is closely related, examining the usefulness of Content Analysis as a research method in ensuring reliable rigorous and relevant evidence to underpin Evidence Based Practice. The paper explores the concept via an applied analysis of research papers published in three Information Systems journals.

Professional knowledge and skills required for the information profession are seemingly the subject of almost continuous review. The CILIP *Future Skills* Project is currently underway (2012), with a key milestone being the production of the Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB) earlier in 2012 (CILIP, 2012). Harper's paper on the use of job adverts as s data source for tracking and analysing changes to job skills and the employment market is therefore apposite. His paper is a valuable consolidated guide to research design in this field, based on a sample of 70 LIS research studies which used employment advertisements as research data.

The remaining papers contribute to our understanding of the human experience, how we retrieve and share information, how this is situated in virtual and 'real' worlds, together with an exploration of how we derive and ascribe meaning to such experiences. Alan MacLennan's paper is based on an evaluation of his use of Grounded Theory in a large scale project based at Robert Gordon University, in which he sought to determine user preferences for the design of virtual worlds for information retrieval. Crucially, MacLennan approached designing virtual worlds from a user-centric perspective, adopting Naturalistic Inquiry as the research approach and provides a useful and readable critique of the use and applicability of iterative methodologies. His sections on the schism in Grounded Theory and his evaluation of the criticisms of one of the most established social science methodologies should serve as a useful starting point for anyone contemplating the use of this largely misunderstood and often misapplied methodology in their research design.

The next two papers are both concerned with the human experience in relation to their engagement with, experience and use of information. Coincidentally, the authors are all based in Queensland University of Technology. The first of these two from Hughes is an evaluation of the use of an Expanded Critical Incident Approach (ECIA) via a case study of the experiences of international students' use of online information resources as part of their learning at two Australian universities. Yates, Partridge and Bruce focus on Information Experience as a means of understanding holistically how individuals engage with information via an exploration of students' experience of web-based information searching, using Phenomenography as the research approach. Phenomenography allows us to investigate and explore how individuals experience and perceive phenomena in the world around them. Essentially it is concerned with how we derive meaning and understanding from our engagement with and experience of information allowing for the interrelationship of individuals with their environment.

These themes also form the basis for the final two papers in the special issue. Vasconcelos, Sen, Rosa and Ellis explore Grounded Theory specifically in relation to Arenas/Social Worlds Theory via a discussion of three studies with a common theme of discourse. Echoing MacLennan's earlier paper, this Sheffield

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and Aberystwyth based group offers a discussion of three different research studies which combine Grounded Theory, Arenas/Social Worlds Theory and Discourse Analysis, and as such, is more philosophical in style. Their combination of methodologies and approaches resonates with and echoes some of the key themes identified in the Australian papers above, especially in relation to exploring concepts of the individual, information, sense-making and meaning in relation to environments or worlds, beyond that of mere language, be it spoken or written. Their analysis of the relationship of the work of Foucault and Strauss in this context resonates with earlier analyses of the relevance of Wittgenstein in relation to language, meaning, information and knowledge (see, for example, Broady-Preston, 2005). Of especial interest is that the three studies are all situated in an information context as opposed to that of an LIS, thereby extending consideration of research methodologies as widely as possible within the scope of this review. The studies are of (1) the implementation of a management information system in a Higher Education Institution; (2) a local authority e-government project; and (3) the use of health information in coping with long term illness.

Finally, Bawden is again concerned with methods for deriving meaning from information in the specific sense of gaining understanding. His paper is a broad-based review of a range of methods designed to help us understand how individuals derive meaning in messy real-world information contexts, together with some of the issues involved in deciding which method to use, without being unduly prescriptive and simultaneously acknowledging the paucity of commentators in the field who address the practicalities of such studies.

4 Conclusion

This is the first issue addressing purely methodological issues in LIS research published in the journal. The call for papers elicited an enormous response from the LIS community as a whole, including those designating themselves practitioners, in addition to the more traditional "research" community, and as such, clearly demonstrates an interest and engagement in the concept and process of research which bodes well for the future of the discipline and the profession. On a personal note, I have enjoyed reading and editing the papers enormously. All have developed and extended my awareness and understanding of the breadth, scope, and richness of research being undertaken currently, in addition to conveying some of the sheer interest and excitement engendered when we try to systematically investigate and make sense of our information world. I hope you all enjoy the papers and the issue as much as I have done, and find them useful in making sense of what we do and why we do it.

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