
Introduction

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This issue of *Library Trends*, on the theme of *Research Into Practice*, has been designed with two aims in mind. Published in 2013, it marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Information School (iSchool) at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom by presenting a selection of papers that demonstrate the creativity and variety of research undertaken in the field of librarianship and share a unifying concern to make links, as well as establish meaningful connections, between research and practice. The issue is dedicated to Bob Usherwood, now an emeritus professor in the school, whose work and legacy at Sheffield are distinguished by an exemplary commitment to putting research into practice, and it is especially pleasing for us to be able offer this tribute to Bob in the year when he is due to celebrate his seventieth birthday. We also believe that an issue on this theme is timely and important for our profession. There has been a strong drive lately to promote evidence-based practice in library and information work and to develop a research culture in the practitioner community, exemplified in the United Kingdom by the DREaM project, amid continuing concerns about the disconnect between the research and practitioner communities (Hall, 2011a, 2011b).

The Sheffield iSchool was founded as the Postgraduate School of Librarianship in 1963. It was the second university-level school of its kind in the United Kingdom and the first to switch from the postgraduate diploma to a master's degree, the master's degree in librarianship (MA Librarianship), as a basic qualification for the library profession (the first library school in the United Kingdom was established at University College London in 1919, and it was not until after World War II that other schools appeared, many of them located in technical colleges and colleges of commerce) (Bramley, 1981). In 1967, an additional program, which offered the MSc in Information Studies, was introduced and the school's name changed to the Postgraduate School of Librarianship and Information

Science. Over the next forty years, the school continued to grow, to develop and expand its areas of expertise, and to introduce new programs, including bachelor's and master's degrees in information management and a master's in information systems, in addition to specialized master's degrees in cheminformatics, health informatics, information systems management, multilingual information management, and digital library management, while the master's in librarianship continued as its flagship program.

Throughout its history, professional education at the iSchool has been research led, incorporating research from Sheffield and elsewhere into the teaching of faculty and the learning of students. The school was a pioneer in library and information science (LIS) research in the United Kingdom, winning its first research grant (in the area of information retrieval) within months of opening and subsequently developing a very strong doctoral program, which now attracts candidates from all parts of the world. Sheffield has consistently achieved the top ranking in the United Kingdom for LIS research in every national research assessment exercise since the process was introduced more than twenty years ago. Research at the school can be broadly grouped into two main areas: library and information management, covering the use and management of information in a range of organizational contexts, and computational informatics, covering the computational tools required to support information systems of various sorts. In 2009, Sheffield became the first U.K. school to join the international iSchools group and formally adopted the name Information School in 2010.

Bob Usherwood joined the school as a lecturer in librarianship in 1976, after a distinguished career in public libraries, which included the position of chief librarian for a large library authority in London. After promotions at Sheffield to senior lecturer and then reader, he was appointed as a full professor of librarianship in 1998. Over a period of nearly thirty years in the school, Usherwood led the development and expansion of its teaching, research, and outreach in public librarianship, as well as doing innovative and seminal work of wider applicability in the areas of quality management, workforce planning, and leadership development. He deliberately set out to investigate the "big issues" in libraries and was an early proponent of impact studies, pioneering the use of social audit methods to explore the value and impact of public libraries in the 1990s. All of his work reflects a personal mission to make a valuable and lasting contribution to the field by doing relevant research and putting it into practice. Part of his legacy at the school is the Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society, which he established in 1996 to pursue this mission and to encourage interaction between academicians, professionals, and policy makers to promote and facilitate the take-up and transfer of research into practice. Usherwood's success in producing work of real

practical value to the library community is reflected by his standing in the profession: he was awarded an Honorary Fellowship of The Library Association in 1992 and elected as its president in 1998, a rare honor for an academician.

Our theme, *Research Into Practice*, can be interpreted at several levels. Conducting research into present or past library practice enables us to gain understanding and insights that have the potential to inform and inspire future practice by offering models to aspire to or providing lessons about what works and, equally important, what does not. Transferring the findings from research into practice takes things to the next level and is arguably more likely to happen when researchers clearly articulate the implications of their work for policy and/or practice (as several journals in our field commendably require authors to do) and make specific recommendations for particular audiences, including practitioners. Another interpretation of research into practice is reflected in efforts to develop a stronger research culture in the practitioner community by ensuring that practitioners have the understanding, skills, and motivation to interpret and evaluate research relevant to their work, to carry out their own investigations in the workplace, and to use research findings to innovate and improve their services.

Library and information schools, such as the Sheffield iSchool, have a key role to play in connecting research with practice by teaching new professionals how to design and conduct research, by undertaking research that contributes to solving problems or enhancing practice, and by involving practitioners in research studies as participants, project sponsors, or coinvestigators and research team members. The articles in this issue demonstrate the school's commitment to linking research and practice in many different ways. Most of the articles are authored or coauthored by current or former doctoral or master's students; all students receiving an MA or MSc degree at Sheffield are required not only to take a research methods course but also to complete a substantial research project during the final part of the program. The iSchool has a strong tradition of encouraging graduates of the MA Librarianship program to publish papers based on their dissertations, and often the experience of conducting the dissertation project and writing a journal article has led to further study at the doctoral level (as in the case of Elizabeth Chapman and Liz Brewster, two MA graduates whose work is featured here) or additional publications based on personal research after graduation (as in the case of Ray Harper, another contributor to this issue).

All the articles included here go beyond simply reporting the results of the studies described to identify in explicit terms the implications of their findings for practice, which also extends to implications for practice in professional education. Most of the articles conclude with specific recommendations aimed at practitioners; in two cases, the genuine concern

of the authors to have their recommendations implemented is further evidenced by their reference to additional articles on their recommendations for library practitioners and professional bodies that they have written for professional journals. The author of the single historical study here also gives due consideration to the relevance of his work for contemporary policy and practice.

The studies featured here illustrate the breadth and depth of research in librarianship undertaken by Sheffield iSchool faculty and students, in terms of the settings represented, the topics investigated, and the methodologies adopted. They are all authored or coauthored by present or former members of the iSchool's four research groups in the library and information management area, which focus on libraries and the information society, knowledge and information management, educational informatics, and health informatics.

The first article of the issue is distinctive in being an investigation with an explicit focus on both the issue theme of *Research Into Practice* and on research carried out at the Sheffield iSchool. Coauthored by a current doctoral student, Angharad Roberts; a longtime research associate, Andrew Madden; and a former head of the school, Sheila Corrall, the article examines the relationship between research and practice in library and information management through two lenses: the views expressed on the subject in focus groups by current Sheffield research students and faculty members and a content analysis of published papers by iSchool members. Previous studies have looked at the connections and, particularly, the disconnections between research and practice in LIS but more often from a practitioner perspective, and not with a focus on a single LIS department. The report, appropriately, concludes with specific recommendations for strengthening the research–practice relationship in library and information studies.

Three studies focus on the public library sector, which has been an area of interest and expertise at Sheffield for a long period, as shown by the numerous dissertations, papers, and reports listed on the web pages of Sheffield's Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society, originally established by Bob Usherwood and currently directed by Briony Birdi, one of his former students, who is now a lecturer in librarianship at the iSchool. The three articles all investigate important dimensions of contemporary library practice, related to community building, fiction collections, and bibliotherapy services. Two of the three are based on studies submitted as part of the MA Librarianship degree, one of which is currently being followed through in depth as doctoral research. The third, on bibliotherapy schemes, draws on Sheffield's strengths in public libraries, social inclusion, and health informatics and reports on related studies at both master's and doctoral levels.

The methodologies used in these three articles illustrate well the thought and effort expended by iSchool student researchers on the design

and conduct of their studies, even at the master's level. The study by Dan Grace and his master's dissertation supervisor, Barbara Sen, on the role of the public library in building community resilience combined autoethnography and situational analysis, using a reflective journal as the method of data collection. Elizabeth L. Chapman's investigation of the provision of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender-related fiction for children and young people in public libraries adopted a pragmatic mixed methodology, using a questionnaire survey of public librarians and a checklist study of library catalogs, complemented by focus groups and interviews with lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender young people and their parents. In the third article, Liz Brewster and her two doctoral supervisors, Barbara Sen and Andrew Cox, examine provider and user perspectives on bibliotherapy schemes. The authors also used focus groups and interviews to collect their data (from library practitioners, health professionals, and service users) but also, as part of an ethnographic methodology, used interpretive interactionism as an analytical framework well suited to evaluation research to examine gaps between service provision and user experiences.

The three students whose public library research is featured here were awarded prizes for their accomplishments in the MA Librarianship program: Dan Grace and Liz Chapman were each awarded the West Riding County Library/Annenberg Award for outstanding performance in the field of public librarianship in their respective years, in each case based partly on their dissertations and partly on other coursework related to public libraries. Liz Brewster's master's dissertation won the SINTO Bob Usherwood Prize, which is awarded annually by SINTO, the information partnership for South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire (chaired by Usherwood for many years), for the dissertation representing the most significant contribution to improving professional practice or understanding related to cooperation and partnership. (SINTO originated in 1932, as the Sheffield-area "Scheme for the Interchange of Technical Publications," and was renamed in 1953 as the "Sheffield Interchange Organisation.")

The next three studies focus on the academic library sector, another important specialty at the Sheffield iSchool that can be traced back to its founder, Wilfred Saunders (who was deputy librarian at the University of Sheffield), but that has gained particular prominence over the past decade as a result of the appointment of new faculty with substantial experience in university library, information, and other academic support services. The first of the three articles deals with a historic, but still relevant, concern for university libraries, namely the size and growth of their *collections*; the other two investigate pressing current challenges in university library and information *services* related to their traditional parallel roles in the academic community of supporting the curriculum (examined here in the context of distance education) and supporting research (explored in relation to bibliometrics and research data management). The three

articles again showcase student research at both doctoral and master's levels but also include faculty research and, in addition, move the locus of inquiry beyond the United Kingdom to the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland. Two of the three studies involve collaborations with other institutions, in one case with a practitioner from the academic library at Sheffield Hallam University that served as the primary site for the investigation, and in the other case with two faculty members at Charles Sturt University in Australia, whose shared interest in emergent models of library services for research enabled the project to be conceived and conducted on a broader scale than would otherwise have been possible.

In the only example of historical study in the present collection, David E. Jones critiques the policies and practices giving rise to the accumulation of very large collections in the research libraries of postwar America; his critical history is based on a doctoral thesis, which he began under the supervision of Bob Usherwood (and then continued with Sheila Corral, after Usherwood's retirement). Charlotte Brooke's investigation of library support for distance learners was commissioned by the Distance Learning Support Service at Sheffield Hallam, but she investigated library practice nationally in addition to user experience locally through a mixed-methods strategy, using interviews with librarians and online questionnaires with librarians and students. The article is coauthored with Angie O'Donoghue, who manages the Distance Learning Support Service at Sheffield Hallam, and Pamela McKinney, who supervised the MA project; the dissertation on which the article is based was awarded the Ann Percy Memorial Prize for the best dissertation in library/information service management leading to practical improvements in service delivery.

The study of emerging trends in research support services also used an online questionnaire to survey academic library practices and plans in four countries, informed by a global review of literature on the subject; it was conducted by Sheila Corral (when she was based in Sheffield) in partnership with Mary Anne Kennan and Waseem Afzal of the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University.

The final two research articles take us into less familiar territory, namely one-person libraries in Ireland and knowledge management jobs in the United Kingdom. Both articles have a professional development focus and use a qualitative methodology. Eva Hornung reports on the findings from her doctoral investigation of one-person librarians' conceptions and experiences of continuing professional development. She chose a phenomenographical approach for her study, which involved semistructured interviews with thirty librarians based in corporate, health, and other special libraries, in addition to some very small academic and public libraries. The doctoral thesis on which the article is based was Highly Commended in the Emerald/EFMD Outstanding Doctoral Research Awards for 2011. Ray Harper, another graduate of the MA Librarianship program, whose

career has taken him from an academic library to a research consultancy and the National Health Service before returning to Sheffield in a planning role, reports here on his personal research into the competencies required for knowledge management roles and their relationship to the skillsets of library and information professionals.

The issue concludes with a bibliographical essay that selectively reviews the published work of Bob Usherwood in the context of our theme of *Research Into Practice*—a theme that was largely inspired by Usherwood's strong personal commitment to maintaining the links among teaching, research, and practice, which he has continually argued are of crucial importance in our discipline. Ten years ago, in the editorial of a special issue of the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* that celebrated the first forty years of the iSchool at Sheffield (then the Department of Information Studies), Usherwood and Anne Goulding (one of his former doctoral students), discussed the meaning of “research-led teaching” and its contribution to the development of practice in the field. Their editorial includes some pertinent observations on the implementation of research findings in the library community, which they describe “as a major organizational task and not something simply to be bolted on,” concluding that “it is about taking a ‘GRIPP,’ that is Getting Research Into Policy and Practice” (Goulding & Usherwood, 2003, pp. 138–139). Our final feature is accordingly about how Usherwood, founder of the Library Management and Public Policy Research Group at Sheffield (now the Libraries and Information Society Research Group), contributed to this “GRIPP.”

We cannot conclude our introduction here without acknowledging and thanking the many people within and beyond the University of Sheffield who have contributed to the publication of this special issue on Research Into Practice. We are especially grateful to all the current and former students and faculty of the iSchool, as well as their collaborators, who submitted a set of articles that has enabled us to showcase the quality and diversity of work undertaken in the School, just within the library and information management area. We are also particularly indebted to colleagues, both at Sheffield and at other U.K. schools, who very generously gave up their time to serve as anonymous reviewers of the manuscripts submitted and whose penetrating and constructive comments significantly enhanced the final versions. Finally, we must thank Peter Willett, another former head of the school, for suggesting the idea of a special issue to mark its fiftieth year and, of course, Bob Usherwood, for giving us such a rewarding theme for the issue.

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