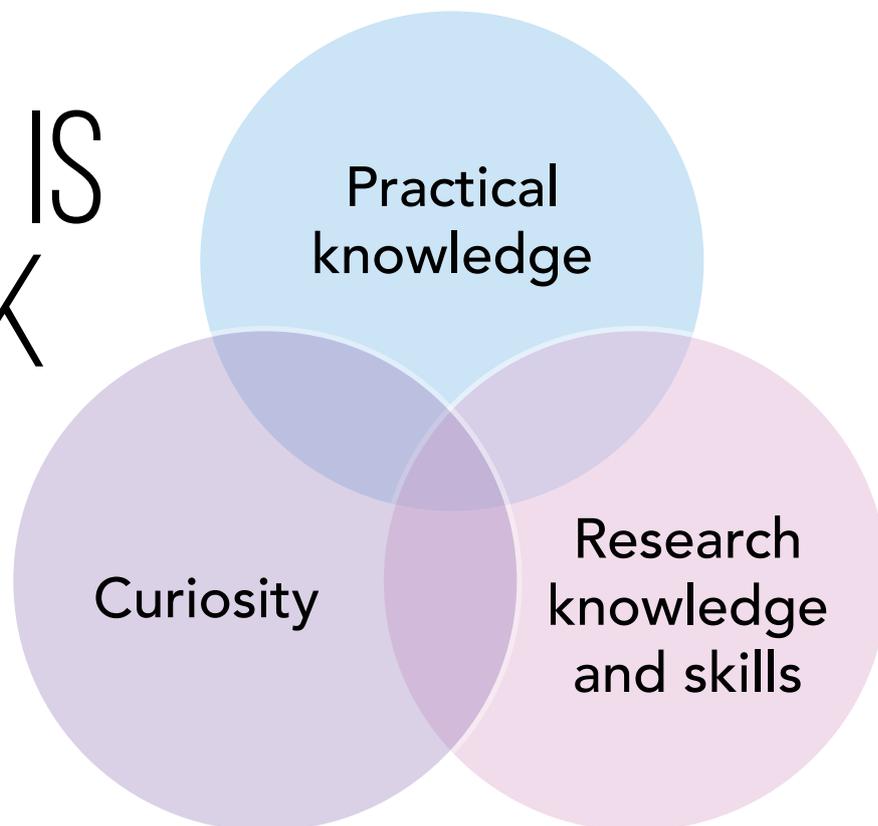


CURIOSITY IS THE SPARK

'Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel'
- Socrates



Undergoing part-time doctoral research whilst working full-time as an information professional can be challenging. So why do it? Yes, it's about the qualification, but it's also about so much more. **Mary Coe and Rebecca Muir** share how their desire to connect their practice with research started them on this journey. It will continue even after completing their degrees, as they become practitioner-researchers; a role that they love.

Practitioners and researchers are usually thought of as separate entities – a practitioner might work with a researcher or vice versa. Unfortunately, this can sometimes lead to a disconnect between research and the practical problems of the profession. In contrast, a practitioner-researcher is a singular occurrence – an individual who is practising and researching at the same time. Practitioner-researchers connect the gap, building on what they know from practice while conducting research that is methodological and grounded in theory.

Becoming a practitioner-researcher is a gradual process, building upon years of professional experience with academic training (or vice versa). It's about developing your research



Mary Coe and Rebecca Muir
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Figure 1. Connecting the spheres of practice and research

skills to match your professional skills and connecting them with the glue of curiosity (Figure 1). Why is curiosity important? We draw this idea from Virginia Wilson's 2013 article, *Formalised curiosity: reflecting on the librarian practitioner-researcher*, which notes that being curious is a trait of practitioner-researchers. It's about noticing that something is wrong or misunderstood in your professional practice and using your research skills to explore and find answers that you can share.

Being a practitioner-researcher means having a foot on both sides of the boundary. We think that working as a practitioner-researcher is a state of mind in which we create a bridge. To do this, we can't only develop our practitioner skills, we must also build our research skills – and we need training and experience in both. While some of our qualifications can seem scary to others or even create barriers, they are important. We both have Master of Information Studies degrees, which are the qualifications that have trained us and supported us in our professional lives. And we hope

that it will be our PhD degrees that will effectively train us and support us as qualified researchers, and ultimately as fully-fledged practitioner-researchers. This isn't to say that doing a PhD is the only way to gain these research skills – any form of higher education can spark this curiosity to learn more.

In the current climate of stressors on the library and information services sector, we are constantly being asked to justify the value of our work and knowledge. Consequently, our role as practitioner-researchers may become even more important. Kindling the research spark amongst other library and information professionals may just help us all to survive - and possibly even thrive. 🌱

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