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Conference Corner

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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative.* New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

The Librarians Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) 2009 Cardiff

Owen Coxall, Samantha Abrahams, Susan Clayton, Veronica Cunnigham, Su Fagg, Katie Fraser, and Marion Funnell.

The Librarians Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) took place between the 30th March and 1st April 2009 in Cardiff. The conference, in its fifth year, attracted over 250 delegates from a variety of countries and sectors. An unusually large number of students (7 in total) were sponsored this year to attend the conference and in a true spirit of collaboration the group decided to collate their accounts of LILAC into a single report which was structured according to the themes covered by the conference.

Back row, from left to right: Jane Secker (LILAC committee), Marion Funnell, Owen Coxall, Samantha Abrahams, Veronica Cunnigham; Front row: Katie Fraser, Su Fagg, Susan Clayton.

1. Information literacy for life

Having recently helped establish a Community of Practice which links my university with Further Education and secondary school librarians in the county, I was particularly interested in the sessions dealing with information literacy (IL) across the education spectrum which were presented as part of the information literacy for life theme. John Crawford and Christine Irving gave an overview of the Scottish Information Literacy Project whose aim is to provide a continuum of information literacy education from school through to Higher Education (HE) and into the workplace. Anu Miettinen illustrated how the public sector in Finland has promoted IL through effective collaboration between the public library where she works and the staff at a local secondary school. HE was well represented as illustrated by the many sessions I attended demonstrating concrete examples of IL provision that engages students and provides measurable improvements in their academic work. The last day of the conference proved to be particularly relevant to my workplace. Simone Okolo and Catherine Johnson' session has already inspired me to become involved in our very own 'Research Support Day' here at Worcester. In addition, Maggie Fieldhouse, Helen Howard and Katy Sidwell gave further food for thought with their talks on IL programmes that support researchers within the academic environment. I look forward to hear about the establishment of a Community of Practice to share experience and knowledge, as it was suggested a related wiki on this subject could be established.

2. Importance of embedding IL into curriculum

In addition to the conference themes I was interested in the debate on how to embed IL in the curriculum. The delegates I spoke to were in favour of replacing the provision of 'stand-alone information skills sessions' with fully integrated IL education. During the course of the conference some interesting questions were asked as to who should be responsible for embedding IL in the curricula. Of particular interest to me was the view of Patricia Ianuzzi, one of the key note speakers, who spoke of the attempts at the University of Nevada, USA to embed information literacy within their curriculum following what was essentially the down-grading of the information professionals during the Bush administration, where librarians were at risk of losing their teaching role and assuming a 'technical support' role. The LILAC sessions I attended seemed to provide an effective solution to this conundrum by offering good examples of IL integration based on

collaboration between librarians and lecturers.   One of these examples was the talk delivered by Sonja Haerkoenen, a Subject Librarian, and Stephen Thornton, a Politics Lecturer, at Cardiff University. It was refreshing to hear a lecturer advocating IL and its positive impact on the students' academic work.   In addition to collaboration it became clear that the successful integration of IL also rests on the need to assess IL competences so that the students start taking IL education seriously and begin to appreciate the role that it can play in their academic development.

3. Supporting research

The most thought-provoking presentations within this strand were those looking at the emerging roles that librarians have assumed beyond the 'traditional' support of undergraduate students and staff. Jason Briddon, from the University of the West of England gave an example of this by presenting his experiences as a librarian 'on loan' to project teams where he helped staff to conduct systematic reviews. His talk showed that librarians can play a crucial role by bringing IL skills and training into research, despite the challenges of coordinating such schemes. As an ex-research student, I particularly enjoyed the presentations on the IL programmes delivered to support the research community. Alison MacKenzie discussed how the library at Edge Hill University, which only recently became a research degree awarding institution, embarked upon this type of IL programme. My favourite talk was delivered by Avril Patterson from University College Dublin on the IL needs of postgraduate research students, as many of the difficulties her students faced resonated with my own. Given that this is a particularly challenging group to support, her thorough analysis of their needs was very informative.

4. Inquiry-based learning

The key message from this theme is that inquiry-based learning (IBL) and IL are interlinked, as shown by Sheila Corrall & Pamela McKinney's presentation on IL provision through inquiry. The implicit link between IBL and IL was demonstrated by addressing any gap in the students' IL competences through IBL activities. The inclusion of a lively group work activity in this talk certainly dispelled any end of day one lethargy.   An interesting approach came out of the session Information Obesity – Critical Theory and IL by Andrew Whitworth. In his talk Andrew promoted the use of IL and community-based learning to solve community issues. This was particularly innovative because it examined the benefit that IL can bring to communities as opposed to the more common focus of the impact of IL on individuals covered by other papers. Whilst all of the presentations on IBL were extremely informative these two talks epitomised the importance of IBL. The first was an excellent example of using IBL to develop IL in educational practice, while the second one highlighted the importance of IBL/IL skills in "real life".

5. Emerging technologies

All of the Key Notes speakers discussed emerging technologies, highlighting the need for librarians to be the forerunners in incorporating new technologies, particularly in the HE environment. For me the main point of this theme is the advantage of using technology to enhance the students' learning experience. This key issue was promoted by the talk by Julie Adams, Alison Pope and Geoff Walton from Staffordshire University who identified the ways in which emerging Web 2.0 technologies can be incorporated into the Virtual Learning Environments in order to provide opportunities to tailor learning styles. A debate arising from the incorporation of emerging Web 2.0 technologies highlights the challenges faced by IL educators of supporting learners with diverse digital competences. Conor Galvin's talk gave a clear example of this diversity by depicting the native users of digital technology who enter university equipped with technological skills that ranged from "the unremarkable to the unrecognisable". In practice this means that some students

take full advantage of the digital resources at their disposal which they use to create podcasts, videos and mash ups, while the students at the other end of the digital spectrum are equipped with basic technological competences characterised by the creation of simple word processed documents.

LILAC 2009 promoted the use of Emerging Technologies within the learning and teaching environment, drawing our attention towards the relationship between IL and Digital Literacy. Librarians need to 'Manage their Flamingo' as Melissa Highton describes it, combining all areas of technology to create an environment which is conducive to student learning.

6. An international dimension of IL

The complexity inherent in the development and delivery of IL strategies in a variety of countries (from Syria, to Finland and Norway, Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales and from across the Atlantic) was also highlighted by LILAC international presenters. The main point promoted by the talks in this theme is that the establishment of an information literate society depends on the development of flexible collaborative partnerships between government, the business community, library and information practitioners, the education profession and the learning communities we collectively serve. From an international perspective our ability to meet the needs of a global knowledge based economy hinges on our potential to customise IL education in order to address a number of challenges. These include the emerging cultural diversity of the communities of learners and the different educational contexts, whether these are set in formal conditions such as primary, secondary and tertiary, or whether they occur in less formal settings such as in a public library, the workplace or through virtual learning environments. As a postgraduate research student I need to reflect on the connections between national and international IL education expectations, strategies and standards and the extent to which our local current practice may be aligned with set international standards and with the IL needs of a global knowledge based economy. So wherever we are positioned today as information literacy learning promoters we need to continue to invest time to critically reflect on our current local IL education practice in the light of global IL competency needs.

7. Personal favourites

As a mature undergraduate student, I didn't follow any particular theme but attended sessions that appealed to me personally. Along with the keynote speakers, two particular talks grabbed my interest. Fiona Forsythe presented some innovative ways of approaching IL inventively by helping children become protagonists in their searching and to answer 'How can **I** find what I am looking for?' rather than 'Can **you** help me find …?' The session detailing a local partnership between the public library and secondary schools was also of interest as my dissertation is on this subject. I found the collaboration of public library staff with teachers within the school, rather than the school librarian, very informative particularly as it suggested that this type of collaboration is emerging as a trend in a number of regions in the UK and beyond and should be seen as an opportunity for future research.

8. Final reflections

What is obvious is that LILAC 2009 was a great opportunity for us all to learn about new areas of research and practice, to become aware of current trends, discourse and concerns within the wider IL debate, and for a couple of us LILAC turned into a competition on how many new people you can talk to in one day.

The busy daytime sessions were followed by two evening events which were equally enjoyable; the first one was a drinks reception at Caerphilly Castle.

The second event was a formal dinner in the National Museum Cardiff (shown on the right), featuring some enthusiastic dancing. The packed schedule of the conference did not leave much time for reflection, however looking back the points which struck me were the importance of working with non-librarians in addressing the IL needs of diverse audiences, the wide range of topics and interests covered by IL practitioners and researchers, and the enthusiasm and friendliness of everyone involved in making LILAC a great success. We would all like to thank the committee for allowing us the experience of attending. It is something that will stay with us for a long time.