Conference report

LILAC 2022: Conference report

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In August 2021, I began a new role as a Teaching and Learning Librarian at the University of Manchester, moving from a role in research data management. I was delighted to have the opportunity to attend LILAC to improve my knowledge and understanding of the rich and varied world of information literacy (IL) as a newly minted librarian! In my role, I am part of the copyright team and the systematic review team, so I was particularly interested in sessions focused on these topics and keen to find out about the innovative ways other institutions support researchers and staff in these often complex areas.

It wouldn't be possible to do justice to all the interesting, informative, and thought-provoking sessions I attended during the conference, so I'll provide an overview for each day with some session highlights and common themes:

Day 1 keynote

Jane Secker encouraged us to take some time out to photograph the flowers and smell each other (and no, I haven't got those the wrong way round). The conference allows us a long overdue opportunity to connect or reconnect with other peers and colleagues across the sector. Jane highlighted the teachings of Brené Brown on the importance of mindfulness and choosing where we put our focus rather than multitasking.

Andy Dainty welcomed us to MMU which is currently developing its new strategy and shared his hopes that IL would be at the very heart of this in helping to build on the successes of online, blended and hybrid delivery while learning from the challenges it posed.

The LIS student panel talked passionately and with great insight about the importance of centring safeguarding staff wellbeing in IL roles and the pressures and challenges faced across the sector. There were many thoughtful questions submitted in advance and equally thoughtful reflections from the panel. I will paraphrase a couple here:

- When we are under stress, we might feel like we are fighting this battle alone. Communities of practice can offer reassurance that others are going through similar things and provide a sounding board.
- Invisible labour is one of the biggest challenges to wellbeing. Often extra tasks are added to our responsibilities without sufficient consideration of the impact on our workload.
- We are not mental health professionals so need to be very clear about this when facilitating wellbeing events to manage expectations and safeguard wellbeing for service users and staff.

It was refreshing to hear that staff wellbeing and health benefits form part of the criteria on which the students will judge prospective employers and provides hope for a healthier, happier IL workforce in the future.

Parallel sessions

On the first day of the conference, I attended sessions covering:

- Consultations to support students with systematic reviews
- HEA accredited teaching course for librarians
- Increasing inclusivity for neurodivergent students
- Developing a plagiarism resource
- Critical Sustainability Research
- Copyright Literacy Community of Practice

As I mentioned, I am part of the copyright team at University of Manchester so it will come as no surprise that this session was one of my highlights! We heard from Céline Gareau-Brennan and Amanda Wakaruk about their development of the Copyright Anxiety Scale and I enjoyed the world cafe style discussion of how this may intersect with the work of IL professionals. This exposed a variety of levels of engagement with copyright by students, staff and researchers across different institutions and led to interesting discussions about how we can encourage greater confidence in using copyrighted materials appropriately.

I also found Maria King's session on increasing inclusivity for neurodivergent learners enlightening and packed full of practical advice on how to ensure we are creating a positive learning experience for all. It reinforced the importance of consulting with our service users about what works for them and always being willing to learn from others' lived experiences.

Day 2 keynote

The second day of the conference began with a keynote from Marilyn Clarke on decolonisation as a means to creating an equitable future. Marilyn outlined the wide variety of decolonisation and social justice work being done at Goldsmiths including the Liberate Our Library initiative. The questions and answers in this keynote were enlightening, informative and suitably confronting. They made me reflect on how I — as a white person who benefits from the privilege and power structures at play in the current academic as well as wider social landscape — can use my position to be an ally to minoritised people and to promote hidden or unheard voices through IL practices.

Parallel sessions

I attended sessions covering:

- Fake news and misinformation
- Using educational technology to cover complex topics
- Prioritising Inclusivity in IL
- Systematic review training course
- IL: Elements of a Maturing Discipline

With fake news and misinformation being so prevalent in the media, I was intrigued to see how these can be tackled from an IL perspective. The session by Kat Phillips and Joel Burkholder used a variety of sources and activities to encourage us to think about how misinformation can masquerade as legitimate by adopting the conventions and style of credible sources. Much like the keynote, this session prompted me to question my own biases and to question whose voices are really being heard.

The mainly asynchronous nature of the systematic review training course outlined by Maria O'Hara and John Woodcock provided a solution to the problem of time constraints faced by

researchers who have a very short time in which to learn and carry out an effective systematic review. As an advocate of playful learning and innovative practice, the use of Gather as a more engaging alternative to Teams for drop-in sessions really stuck out to me as adding an important human element to the course. There were a lot of elements of the course that would be interesting to explore for systematic review support in my own institution so I will certainly be following up on that session!

Day 3 keynote

The final keynote from Emily Drabinski looked at structure, power, and IL for liberation. There were many common themes with Marilyn Clarke's keynote, most notably the need for individuals to band together to harness collective power to make change. Emily outlined the paradox in needing to organise information to make it accessible but by doing so creating structures shaped by inherent biases. A comment that particularly resonated with me was that students often feel disheartened when they use databases and don't get the results they want due to a lack of knowledge of the structures underpinning those databases and governing the precise language needed to interrogate those databases. Emily neatly summarised this by stating that we must move towards a mindset of 'I am not failing, the system is failing me' to empower ourselves to change these structures.

Parallel sessions

I attended sessions covering:

- Hybrid and flexible instruction
- Student experience of IL learning
- The future of feedback

Siobhan Dunlop described their session on feedback and evaluation at the end of day three of the conference as having the 'headline slot' and they did not disappoint! As with many of the sessions, I left with a head full of questions about how we evaluate our teaching and how we may better gather and use student feedback. I particularly liked the idea of incorporating formative assessment into the teaching activities themselves, a sort of 'feedback by stealth' which would allow us to gauge effectiveness as we went along and get away from the transactional feeling of end of session surveys.

Common themes

- Questioning everything! — Whose voice am I hearing and why?
- The importance of evaluating current practice and new initiatives — What works and what needs work?
- Adapting and developing existing resources to meet needs — How can we adapt/improve what we have already?
- Using educational technology to teach complex topics — How can we make this enjoyable for learners?

My first LILAC experience was an overwhelmingly positive one. I was inspired by the keynotes, learned so much from the parallel sessions and relished the opportunity to network with the IL community outside of Zoom boxes. Now I just need to come up with a session to bring next year!