Journal of Information Literacy

Conference Corner

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Introduction

As someone who has attended a number of information literacy (IL) conferences, but none linked to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) with its international perspective, I was very interested to experience a different approach to the subject. My particular focus at the conference was to find out more about what librarians are doing to encourage IL within their own services, as this is what I am currently researching. Needless to say, I received plenty of inspiration from other arenas too!

Keynotes

The programme kicked off with a keynote from Dr Nancy Fried Foster: *Studying students to advance information literacy*. I have heard a lot about anthropological and ethnographic approaches to studying library service use recently and it was great to hear directly from someone at the centre of this research. The key message was that IL is essentially what good researchers do and we need to learn from their practices.

The second keynote was an excellent reflection on education from Dr Conor Galvin: *Libraries as owned spaces in a changing world*. Like many others, he questioned the assumptions inherent in much discourse regarding digital natives, pointing out gaps in skills, knowledge and understanding. The main message I took away is that we should be focusing on the learning of those in education, rather than worrying about who in the institution owns it, but that libraries provide a key opportunity and space for reflection and critical thinking as part of the learning experience.

The final keynote was from Dr Michael Stephens, who brought his experience of providing distance learning to bear in his presentation on hyperlinked libraries and life literacies. A core message was that learning is messy, that skill sets have a short life and that we in libraries need to encourage innovation and interaction, always being within reach and putting the user at the centre of the experience. I couldn't agree more with Michael when he said that we should focus on the person, not the technology.

All three keynotes put the learner at the heart of IL and asked librarians questions about how they can enable this to happen. The parallel sessions showed that the library profession are tackling this in a variety of ways.

Parallel sessions

My own paper was on communities of practice in IL within a library service; looking at whether we can foster a learning community linked to IL within our own teams. A number of other presentations also looked at how we can ensure development of IL within library services; ensuring that library staff have the chance to enhance their own IL skills and share best practice. Queen's University in Canada have started assessing the impact of library instruction, which has led to a greater awareness of staff development needs and associated development opportunities in the areas of IL training for library staff and its subsequent delivery to others. Again, they wanted to take a community approach to this; working together to share expertise.

Another key strand was linking technology and blended learning to IL. Crystal Fulton and Claire McGuinness from University College Dublin, Ireland, reported on the success of e-tutorials as a learning tool within a blended learning model, especially in respect to the students' attitudes to them. Harriett Green from University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA, returned to my favourite approach of collaboration when reporting on how librarians found a role in digital humanities and pedagogy when new projects in this area were launched.

In all of the parallel sessions I attended, a theme of working in partnership and collaboration emerged. This resonated greatly with my approach to my role as an academic liaison librarian and is my main area of research, so it was inspiring to be part of a conference at which the delegates embraced this approach so much. I enjoyed getting to know librarians from a range of backgrounds (from across the world and from a number of different sectors) and the discussions we had over break-times, on topics as diverse as research support, cultural differences, and critical thinking, were just as valuable as the formal presentations.

Resources

More information is available from the conference website:
http://www.iflasatellitelimerick.com/