

Conference report

LILAC 2024: Conference report

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As a first timer to LILAC, and being nominated for the [LILAC Information Literacy Award](#), it was an excited, enthusiastic and slightly anxiously library professional from London who travelled by train to Leeds on the damp Sunday afternoon of 24th March 2024.

Checking into the Hamptons by Hilton hotel (which looked closer to the train station on Google maps than it actually is!) and with a wonderful view from the 9th floor, I wandered to the Adelphi Pub where the CILIP LGBTQ+ Network Committee had organised a casual pre-conference get-together; Karen Carney was lovely and so were the others ... I was making new friends.

The conference was held at the Rose Bowl, Leeds Beckett University; I arrived early enough to register and join other participants in sharing a hot cup of coffee along with amazing croissants and introductions. Helpful volunteers and smiling faces along with clear signposts directed us to the various lecture halls and other facilities.

I wandered to the sponsor stalls and saw the many products subscribed to by my institution subscribed, along with others we longed to be associated with, high subscription costs notwithstanding. These included Browns Books, EBSCO, PTFS, Keenious, and so on.

The first session I attended was [Humans are still needed: Developing Newcastle University's approach to AI literacy](#), by Emily Dott and Terry Charlton, who spoke about developing Newcastle University's approach to AI literacy, including the AI short course for students, [AI for Learning \(instructure.com\)](#). What struck me right from the start were powerful statements I could use like, "AI tools are not able to accomplish the human skill of criticality, the information questioning skill ..." and "is this still your own work?" The discussion about expectations of information professionals in universities leading the way with regard to AI tools gave me food for thought as I pondered on the value of librarianship (along with its responsibilities) in the information era.

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Figure 1: The author in front of Leeds Beckett University. Photo by author.



The keynote session that followed was a lively and interactive panel discussion that included Erin Nephin (as Chair), along with Sam Thomas, Josh Rodda, Masud Khokhar and Martin Wheatley. I learnt about the JISC, bias in AI generated content and the need to use AI to bring in previously unrepresented voices through the use of translation tools). Masud Khokkar very aptly stated that “we need to be more comfortable in a messy world”, while others stressed the importance of digital literacy before AI literacy. Another noteworthy question was “are AI tools disrupting research tools (or supporting them?)”. Through analogies with calculators, computers and scientific inventions, the emphasis was on the conclusion that “Humans are still needed”—a thought that was echoed throughout the conference.

After a scrumptious lunch of an array of hot and cold foods and tempting desserts, we were almost loath to leave the food court to proceed to the next session I had signed up for, [Plagiarism and AI tools: An example of linking information- and digital literacy in your teaching](#), by Anna-Lena Hoh,

which addressed Anna-Lena’s work on AI literacy at Maastricht University, where compilations of resources on the implications of AI include, for example, the resource page [Large Language Models and Education](#). The concept of “Battle of the literacies” struck me as funny and yet thought provoking—when we are still not confident with one literacy, another seems to have replaced it. The concept of assessment literacy and the idea of creating drop-ins for students to “come and play with AI tools” was something I had not thought of before and so we continue to unlearn, learn and relearn!

The session that followed on [Generating understanding: Opportunities for institution-wide development of information literacy in an age of AI](#), by Erin Nephin, included a well-made document for students on acknowledging the use of AI in your assignment, [Acknowledging use of Generative AI](#): this was a bonus that I hope to emulate at my workplace in the weeks to come.

Another session I attended (between cups of hot tea and the tempting nibbles that were always visible) was the one by Hanna Primeau and Amanda Larson on [Empowering future-ready students: Teaching AI ethics and information literacy through scaffolded assignments](#), which considered pedagogical best practice for integrating AI literacy into IL instruction.

The highlight of the day was the Networking Evening & Information Literacy Awards at the Howard Assembly Rooms, a short distance away from the University Campus. Alongside those participants who waited with bated breath for the results of the Information Literacy Awards to be announced (a select few), were those who waited for the delightful canapes stuffed with mushrooms, beetroot and an assortment of mouth-watering delicacies to make their way across the room (a great many). The event provided an opportunity to meet new colleagues from across the U.K. as well as other countries, as we shared experiences of professional and personal encounters.

Although I was nominated for the, I did not win , But I cheered loudly and clapped (while trying to balance my glass of white wine) for the winners: The Data Education in Schools team, Edinburgh University, for the Data Education in Schools programme [Learning with Data - Data Education in Schools](#), and The Digital Learning Practice Team—Teaching, Learning & Employability exchange, University of the Arts London, for the [12 Days of AI online learning programme](#).

Figure 2: Two views of Leeds. Photo by author.



The next day dawned clear and bright as I made my way to the Rose Bowl and the lecture theatre for the first session for the day, [The opportunity of narrative inquiry for information literacy research: Narrative thinking and storying data](#), by Rebecca Scott from the University of Hertfordshire. I quickly learnt that people love a good story (even in research and libraries) and that the narrative inquiry project emerged out of an AHRC-RLUK Funded Practice Scholarship, and as a lifelong researcher the concept of funding and sponsorships got me excited.

Maha Bali, connecting online from far-away Cairo for the [second keynote session of the conference, Teaching critical AI literacies](#), was amazing. Using metaphors to understand AI tools and why and how students use them brought in an element of understanding and empathy. She used the metaphors of “baking a cake” from scratch, following a recipe on YouTube, or using a ready cake mix, to explain the scenarios for use of AI tools, which sometimes involve not understanding the ingredients or quantities needed (how AI tools actually work). Mahasurpassed all expectations with her counter challenge: “ive your students assignments that need them to use AI – then you will know how they are using it.” We played around with Goblin tools as the empathy element became clearly visible. The deafening clap at the end of her session said it all.

As a subject librarian for the London College of Music, I am always looking for ways and means to embed AI literacy into my teaching while keeping it engaging and fun. A number of well-planned and beautifully executed talks and workshops at this conference provided me with that motivation and with “Eureka moments”. I was also constantly exchanging email addresses and phone numbers along with thoughts, ideas and queries.

One of these workshops was called, [“Moving beyond words”: using photovoice to understand international students’ information literacy practices](#), by Gillian Siddall from the University of Northampton. I had not fully understood the phrase, “a picture is worth a thousand words”, until Gillian showed us the power of critical reflection in interpreting a photograph of Birmingham city in many different ways. This teaching methodology is something I am going to use in my own information literacy (IL) sessions going forward.

Paul Newnham and Clare Shaikh, in their presentation on [Widening participation, information literacy and the transition to university: Reflections and initial findings from Lancaster University's Library Schools Engagement Project](#), touched upon a key takeaway about the expectations from student assignments: descriptive v/s analytical; this is one of the big challenges today.

Did I forget to mention lunch? The amazing spread of aromas, colours and taste had us all happily chatting away, making new acquaintances as we shared thoughts with different participants each time.

The post-lunch session (with coffee to keep us awake after the delightful dessert cakes and cream) also included a very lively session by Laura Woods, Pam McKinney and Alison Hicks on [Demystifying research](#). The resources as well as funding support available for information professionals and researchers were well explained. A good tip was to, "align your research to your library's strategy". Discussion of the importance of knowledge and ethical use of AI tools to help researchers ended with a very strong message "Students need to use AI tools more and more until they are no longer impressed by them".

Immediately after this session we all rushed off to dress up for the conference party which was scheduled to be held at the Marriott Hotel. Eventually there was a large group of old colleagues and new friends, all on the dance floor with a wonderful DJ helping us have "the time of our life"!

Figure 3: The author and cherry blossom at LILAC. Photo by author.



The third day had a keynote address, [Playful and compassionate approaches for inclusive Information Literacy instruction](#), by Andy Walsh, a Neurodivergent National Teaching Fellow, librarian, and trainer. The concept of playful and compassionate approaches for inclusive IL instruction and the fact that "time flies when you are having fun" was aptly brought out and made me consider how I could make my teaching fun likewise!

We used the lunch breaks to take amazing photographs against the backdrop of the University and Leeds—memories of time spent as students rather than teachers. One of the striking sessions of the final day was the panel discussion on "Information literacy: social class perspectives", with panellists Darren Flynn, Rosie Hare, Jennie-Claire Crate, Ramona Naicker and Andrew Preater. Conversations centered around topics like including critical theories within your information literacy

practice, middle-class librarianship and interrogating your own information sources before using them.

Some key takeaways from the conference included:

- GOV.UK, Generative AI in education policy paper: [Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/papers-and-consultations/generative-artificial-intelligence-in-education)
- JISC, A generative AI primer: [A Generative AI Primer - Artificial intelligence \(jiscinvolve.org\)](https://www.jiscinvolve.org/articles/ai-primer/)
- Russell Group, Principles on use of AI in education: [New principles on use of AI in education \(russellgroup.ac.uk\)](https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/ai-principles/)
- Newcastle University, Academic Skills Kit: [Artificial Intelligence and Your Learning | Academic Skills Kit | Newcastle University \(ncl.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/academic-skills-kit/artificial-intelligence/)
- Newcastle University, AI for students, Academic Integrity checklist: [AI Poster_v4 \(ncl.ac.uk\)](https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ai-for-students/)

Other takeaways included friendly and helpful faces, coats and suitcases taken care of, clean and easily accessible restroom facilities, amazing food (and drinks), lots of intelligent conversation and intellectual stimulation, great sights and everything just a few minutes' walk away.

Unfortunately, I had to leave soon after lunch as I had a train to catch. But I imagine that the final session must have brought on mixed emotions—relief at going home after two days in a hotel bed, sadness at missing some really lovely mealtime mates, and lots of promises to keep in touch!

It was an amazing conference: so much to see, do, learn and like. I am already in the process of planning a research paper with a new friend I met at the conference, so thank you, LILAC, and yes, I am definitely going next year ... Cardiff here I come.