

Conference report

LILAC 2025: From Woody Guthrie to The Sex Pistols, the importance of being bold, making connections and enacting change

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As a first-timer, LILAC 2025 (14–16 April) was an incredible introduction to being at a national library conference. Being fortunate to receive a *Local to LILAC* bursary, I enjoyed the dynamic atmosphere and warm welcome from Cardiff University. From the first presentation, my neural pathways started to buzz with activity, linking key themes of connectivity, authenticity and social justice which inspired a bucket list of ideas to bring back to my role.

It is difficult to be bold and believe in yourself. An important step is to be authentic in your communication, breaking down perceived barriers. This feels like a political act, displayed wonderfully by Charity Dove in [The great wellbeing puzzle quest: Transforming the library space for neurodivergent teens through playful learning](#). By discussing her own learning style and challenges, she provided the perfect example of making libraries more inclusive spaces. I felt at ease when discovering our similar perspectives as neurodivergent librarians, and Dove's practical steps to make the library space welcome for neurodivergent 6th form students chimed with the compassionate pedagogy of Hao (2011), and Smith and Duckworth's (2022) theories of transformative teaching. The 'Puzzlequest' was fascinating and led me to a rabbit hole of ideas around chronograms and locked treasure chests.

Jane Secker's keynote ([Reflecting on information literacy: Lessons from a lifelong advocate](#)) drew together the themes of copyright, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and information politics with an engaging and hilarious storytelling approach. She infused stages of her library career with snippets of music from her life, 'Desert Island Disk'-style. Secker argued that these cultural connections help us to understand and relate to concepts more deeply. The poignant voice of Woody Guthrie singing 'This is your land', connecting the idea of private property rights to copyright, is still echoing in my head and was a revelation.

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Elinor Carmi made a similar point about connectivity in her keynote ([Data citizenship: Learning to take action in the datafied society](#)). She highlighted technology users' lack of power over the actions of rich companies who use their data for profit. Carmi not only asked how we can challenge big technology companies over their actions, but how to *inspire* citizens to make more informed choices in their technology use. She argued that contextual awareness is crucial, using the example of the Post Office scandal in which the company Fujitsu's AI-powered accounting system caused the prosecution of branch managers for theft and false accounting (Jack, 2024). The case only provoked public outrage after a television programme highlighted the impact on individuals.

Another inspiring example of using connectivity to develop IL was Annah Hackett's [Endorsement deals and information literacy: Meeting student athletes on their own ground](#). Hackett demonstrated the importance of IL beyond the bonds of formal education. Evaluating sports sponsorship deals are an excellent way to teach these skills, as the practical benefit makes the learning meaningful for students. Even though UK universities do not have an equivalent sports sponsorship system, there are work placements throughout many disciplines in further and higher education. The creation of an activity which evaluates their choice of work placement could be an excellent way of teaching practical IL skills.

Social change was a key theme which resonated with my outlook on the future of IL with the advent of AI. Carmi suggested challenging technology companies by forming 'networks of literacy' where we ask questions such as 'how do cookies work?' and share examples of misinformation within our social groups. Secker argued that libraries have always been political and that information is often controlled by the powerful in society. She cited Richard Ovenden's work which compares Henry VIII's destruction of monastic libraries with President Trump's deleting of his social media posts (Thomson, 2024). Secker argued that teaching IL is more important than ever. This tallies with my concerns about the bias of AI's natural language processing techniques and will factor highly in my AI literacy teaching!

At LILAC, issues of social justice were not confined to AI technology but included concerns about IL itself. IL is not neutral, and Amanda Folk and Tracey Overbey discussed the whiteness of IL in [Decentering whiteness in information literacy through critical theories and methods](#). They highlighted that the ARCL Framework (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016) does not explicitly mention social justice or race. They signposted to *Equity Talk to Equity Walk* which explains that "the whiteness question is not asked because racial equity is not considered a standard of quality, performance or accountability" (McNair et al., 2020, p. 106) for many institutions. Folk and Overbey's research project exposed the inherent bias of a research assignment towards students of privilege, as it assumes knowledge of the codes and customs of an academic environment.

[LibFest: critical information literacy and connected relations](#), from the team at the University of Sheffield was a motivating example of how to reach out to under-represented groups of students. Promoting an inclusive atmosphere, they feel welcome and a crucial part of the community is especially important when diversity, equity & inclusion initiatives are being drawn back in the United States (FitzGerald, Yousif & Epstein, 2025) and on the evening of this session, the UK Supreme Court ruled on the legal definition of a woman (Brocklehurst, 2025). The Sheffield team ran events "celebrating the liberation policies of our students" such as reading groups and creative workshops to coincide with Black History Month, Disability History

Month, LGBT+ History Month and Women's History month. Their tenacious attitude towards creating events which were inclusive and student-led, despite challenges they met along the way, was inspiring and has broadened my list of teaching activities to include digital knitting.

One session I could not attend, yet still fascinated me, was Maria King's [Punk pedagogy and information literacy](#). Convinced that my love of punk music did not provide automatic access to punk pedagogy, I asked Maria for a chat, and she kindly found me in a crowd of LILAC and explained the philosophy. In her slides she describes it as "a form of critical pedagogy [...] coming from a perspective of DIY and a resistance to a perceived status quo of dominant systems and expectations". With all the passion for social change weaving through the talks at LILAC, I am convinced that most librarians are a little bit punk, either in the spirit of the Sex Pistols or the likes of Woody Guthrie. As encouraged by Jess Haigh ([LILAC Stories: exploring the long-term impact of the LILAC Conference on the information literacy community](#)), LILAC has stirred me to take the following actions in my Teaching and Librarian role:

- Foster student inclusion by collaborating with my university's outreach projects in underprivileged local communities (for example by hosting targeted 6th form Extended Project Qualification visits) and providing makerspace sessions for marginalised groups in the student community
- Work on AI literacy activities which highlight the biases involved in deep learning techniques as well as concerns over equity, data privacy, copyright and environmental impact
- Be as authentic as possible to help break down barriers and combat the imposter syndrome that many in the sector experience

I hope to report back at LILAC 2026 and would like to thank all the presenters and organisers for a creative, engaging and welcoming conference.

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Declarations

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Ethics approval was not considered necessary for the nature of this report.

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