
LILAC 2012: Librarians' Information Literacy Conference

11–13 April 2012

Glasgow Caledonian University

Conference review by Michelle Blake & Samantha Halford

LILAC 2012 offered a very full and varied programme supplemented by parallel sessions. Three keynote speakers presented stimulating talks on information literacy (IL) from very different perspectives: Megan Oakleaf from Syracuse University's iSchool spoke about assessing and communicating the impact of information literacy within institutions; Lord Puttnam of Queensgate discussed developing literacy in a digital age; and Tara Brabazon, provocative as ever, argued that the time has come for 'enforced intervention and a digital diet'. The major themes of the conference were research support, employability and transitions across educational levels.

RESEARCH SUPPORT

There was a strong emphasis on research support throughout the conference. This topic continues to grow in importance, particularly with the recent reports *Re-skilling for research*

(<http://www.rluk.ac.uk/content/re-skilling-research>) and *The role of research supervisors in information literacy* (<http://www.rin.ac.uk/news/role-research-supervisors-information-literacy>).

Librarians are thinking about the skills they need to support research and what new services they can offer.

Dan Pullinger and Angela Newton from Leeds University discussed the programme they have developed for PhD students, focusing on two areas: 'search & save' and 'working with the literature'. They started by suggesting the students use bibliometrics to help them think about prioritising their reading. They have begun to map the research information landscape. They are also using the 'bag of fears' concept with their PhD students; this had already been used success-

fully with undergraduates. Speakers from the University of Sussex discussed the Hive, the library's designated area for researchers. Such spaces are becoming increasingly popular in libraries across the UK.

The team from St Andrew's talked about many different initiatives to support research; for example, academic departments are being helped to launch journals that are then edited, published and peer reviewed by students. Merinda Kaye Hensley from the University of Illinois discussed how the team there develops sessions for PhD students by using student feedback and by bringing in experts from outside the library. The promotion of skills sessions by academics for PhD students was also mentioned by delegates from several institutions. A collaborative project of the East Midlands Research Support Group to develop online open access resources (www.emrsg.org.uk) has produced *Essential information skills for researchers* (<http://www.slideshare.net/chrisbark/lilac-2012-essential-information-skills-for-researchers>). All the sessions on research support delivered at LILAC provided a great deal of food for thought.

EMPLOYABILITY

Megan Oakleaf's keynote speech touched on how important it has become for librarians to position their services in terms of institutional aims, and provide clear, focused statistics to prove value in each area of professional practice. For many of us, improving the employability of our students has become one of these key aims; small wonder, then, that a large number of papers this year focused on this topic. Helen Westwood of City University gave us a concrete suggestion to improve students' employability directly, through the Cass Certification Scheme. Students who attend three out of seven possible sessions, covering database and information sources likely to be useful in future employment, receive a certificate providing evidence of their ability to handle business information; this can be mentioned on their CV (http://prezi.com/-bqfb645ofop/copy-of-giving-students-a-competitive-edge-cass-certification/?auth_key=80da296395f32ad054828bd3ce8421239f8e85af).

Other papers covered ways of helping more indirectly to improve employability by embedding information literacy skills teaching into the curriculum; Serengul Smith, an academic, and Adam Edwards, a librarian, both from Middlesex University, told us how they worked together to

embed IL skills firmly into a core module which highlights the relevance of such skills to their assessments and to their subsequent careers (http://www.slideshare.net/infolit_group/smith-edwards). Similarly, Kaye Towlson and Jason Eyre from De Montfort University discussed the importance of engaging colleagues in other departments with the concept of multiliteracies (http://www.slideshare.net/infolit_group/towlson-eyre) in order to help students improve their employability.

TRANSITIONS FROM SCHOOL TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Several workshops focused on general information literacy, in terms of government policy (John Crawford's *Policy making in information literacy – what does it mean?* http://www.slideshare.net/infolit_group/crawford-12685021) and new developments in this area (Emma Coonan, Helen Webster and Jane Secker's *New curriculum for information literacy* http://www.slideshare.net/infolit_group/coonan-secker-wrathall); a particularly interesting theme emerged around how to support students through various educational transitions, particularly between secondary and tertiary education. Academic librarians were interested to learn how school and further education (FE) college librarians prepare their students for this transition, and how best to support new students in their first year at university. Conversely, school and FE college librarians wanted to know what sort of challenges would face their students at university, and what they could do to help bridge the gap.

Sarah Coulbeck, Emma Hadfield and Peter Field's paper was an *Information journey* (http://www.slideshare.net/infolit_group/coulbeck-hadfield-field) through secondary education and FE college to graduating at UCL. They presented an ideal picture of timely interventions, starting with regular junior school lessons on using the library and basic evaluation techniques for internet information, each stage building upon the last. Their research showed the importance of introducing scholarly concepts such as referencing early in students' school careers and building confidence through activities like EPQs (extended project qualifications) to prepare students for university courses and libraries. Sarah Pavey and Russell Monk of Box Hill School, Dorking, presented their success in using assessments to engage year 8 students with good scholarly practices and to entice them away from a copy-and-paste culture (http://www.slideshare.net/infolit_group/pavey-monk). Sarah Bird's paper showed how

Newcastle University library helps EPQ and other secondary students with their information literacy skills, encourages them to apply to university and prepares them to use their university's resources when they arrive (http://www.slideshare.net/infolit_group/bird-12684844). Conversations around this theme permeated the whole LILAC conference.

LORD PUTTNAM OF QUEENSGATE CBE: KEYNOTE SPEAKER

David Puttnam was perhaps an unexpected choice of keynote speaker at a major library conference, as he is best known for his work as a film producer: his films, which include *Chariots of fire* and *Bugsy Malone*, have won ten Oscars and a host of other awards. However, since 1998 he has been heavily involved in public policy relating to education, having founded the National Teaching Awards and been Chancellor of both the Open University and the University of Sunderland.

Lord Puttnam started by talking about how fascinating it was to observe the House of Lords Library develop from being a largely print-based service into a blended and digital one. He focused on this shift in culture and how we interact with information; new modes of access and an increasing tendency to create content as readily as we consume it have helped bring about this change. Librarians and teachers are 'trusted learning guides' in this brave new world, and are vital in guiding today's students towards the skills they will need to work in a world that we cannot possibly predict.

He postulated that technology is both driving and supporting change, citing the example of voice-recognition software as a key area that will undergo development in the next few years; he suggested that it will be important for us as librarians and teachers to understand and participate in the technology cycle of introduction, hype, widespread adoption. Keyboard skills are likely to become less relevant and will not be a path for technological change; there is likely to be a revival of the importance of orality, which will become a vital skill (evidenced, perhaps, by the popularity of new media such as online video production and podcasting?), and we and our students will need to become better at speaking articulately. Lord Puttnam pointed out that we need to teach the art of rhetoric as a crucial life skill. Teachers need to talk less and students to talk more. This point was new to many in the audience and was much discussed later, as it is increasingly perti-

nent in the light of developments such as Apple's Siri app.

Lord Puttnam identified a danger point for educators in the growing disparity between how people behave with technology at home, and how we use it in teaching spaces. He identified two different approaches to learning technology: on the one hand, using existing and outdated technology simply to teach the same things in the same way but slightly more quickly; on the other, engaging actively with new and developing technology to create a new, more imaginative digital pedagogy, changing both what and how we teach. IL skills will be paramount in this second approach. He asked us to imagine both a surgeon and a teacher from the nineteenth century; the former would be unable to perform his job in the technology-enhanced environment of modern medicine, but for the most part, a teacher would be able to carry on easily, because we have not yet begun to integrate technology fully into our experience of learning.

Policy changes, he posited, will be necessary to achieve this, both in the UK and abroad. Improvements must be made, partly to keep the UK competitive, but mainly because we need a generation of well-educated people who can fund and create sustainable lifestyles, better social care and the type of society he would like to live in: education will be the cause and consequence of such a sustainably transforming society. Puttnam added that in his view women in particular need to be better educated in this new approach so that they can be encouraged, as the hearts of their families, to facilitate positive change. His final word was a quotation from American writer Stuart Brand, advocating that technology be used effectively to create a better world: 'We are as gods. We might as well get good at it.'

Lord Puttnam's speech was very well received, and he was asked some searching questions. For instance, what ought we to do when not everyone can afford such things as iPads for their children? He answered that if, as a society, we value education, we will find a way to fund such things, comparing the use of technology to the use of slates in the nineteenth century: the cost to a poor family was crippling, but those who valued education (families or philanthropists) found the means; we must not allow education to become unaffordable. Technology is vital; cost must not be used as a barrier to advancement. This answer did not satisfy everyone but it did raise a valid issue. One delegate asked how people with regional

accents or second-language-learners would manage in a world of voice-recognition technology; he answered that this problem is becoming less serious as technology improves and becomes more forgiving. More importantly, we will rediscover the lost art of composing aloud. In answer to another question, he warned us that image change is vital for librarians: we have highly pertinent skills, knowledge and abilities, but are held back from the main stage by our dowdy reputation, which prevents us from being heard. It is, therefore, most important that we change how the profession is perceived; he cited the British Library as an example of recent excellent practice.

Lord Puttnam was a great choice of keynote speaker and he made a powerful case for the importance of a wide variety of information-handling skills, as well as strongly advocating for librarians and our role in managing information and teaching people how to use it.

TARA BRABAZON, PROFESSOR OF CREATIVE MEDIA AND HEAD OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND CREATIVE MEDIA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOLTON: KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Tara Brabazon's presentation was one of the highlights of the conference. She took us through a 'digital detox' in order to build intellectual fitness, looking at three distinct areas: 'information obesity', 'digital detox' and 'digital dieting'.

She started with 'information obesity' and the fact that our culture values beauty over intelligence, recommending that we aim to reduce the number of information choices. For example, Google limits these choices by ranking; as choices decrease, so does thinking about them. However, there is a problem of lack of information before we even get to Google – for example, a lack of disciplinary knowledge, which may mean you don't retrieve the best information. The strength and weakness of Google is that everyone can find something to satisfy them. However, Tara argues that the education experience should not satisfy us: it should make us feel uncomfortable. We don't know what we don't know. In order to improve search results and information management and sorting skills, we need to present a curriculum, assessment and IL programmes that limit the choice of media and information while also providing 'information scaffolding' for students. There needs to be a partnership between teachers and librarians. Tara gave an example of an annotated bibliography exercise she used with fourth-year students; it was based on different media and how they transformed different information. Her students

struggled with this assignment. The problem is the lack of information literacy before students get to the search engine, which means that they don't know what search terms to use. By using closed environments where they feel safe, students can learn how to search courageously. We need to give students permission to fail and teach them to take risks – 'you jump and I will catch you' – Tara used the analogy of a trampoline.

The second part of the talk centred on the 'digital detox'. In order to 'know what we don't know', we need strategies from the outside. The proliferation of platforms, over-sharing student culture and the possibility that students will view education as a commodity are completely changing the higher education landscape. In Tara's opinion, this environment creates a dependency culture rather than creating independent lifelong learners.

We need to think about how the speed of delivery affects the evaluation of the content. Tara suggested that assessed stand-alone programmes based on information literacy are essential. An example of this is StartSmart, a tutorial and quiz offered by the library at the University of Wollongong; it is compulsory for all first-year students and is recommended for all postgraduate students.

Tara's concerns about what students are actually learning through over-sharing have led her to ask 'What if less is more?' and 'Can I gain more meaning by using fewer media?' – i.e. by controlling our information environment. She believes intervention is required to activate the digital detox. *Academically adrift* by Richard Arum and Josipa Roska (University of Chicago Press, 2010), presented a longitudinal study that shows that if we demand more of students their study skills will improve.

The final part of her talk focused on 'digital dieting'. The first key strategy for this is sustainable searching. She compared the process to trying to convince a friend to eat fruit and yoghurt rather than pizza even though the pizza tastes good. Her strategies for implementing a digital diet include:

- reducing use of textbooks – introduce to scholarly sources
- students to answer ten questions about each source they use
- raise students' awareness of the importance of knowing what they do not know
- Many students are unused to taking notes
- Teachers should look at the bibliography before assessing research

- Slowing the process down and reducing dependency on social networking would result in a higher quality of information becoming part of the student diet.
- Visual literacy is dominant nowadays; using podcasts will encourage the development of auditory skills.

Questions Tara left us with included whether using fewer media would help to create more meaning, and to think about the benefits of using our senses in a different way in order to open up new ways of thinking. She left us with the anecdote of a fourth-year student who could not find a book at the end of their degree course. If this sort of thing can happen, she argues, the time has come for intervention. This was a fantastic and very inspiring talk.

MEGAN OAKLEAF, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK: KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Megan is an excellent speaker and delivered a very impressive keynote speech. She is the author of the Value of Academic Libraries Report (http://www.acrl.ala.org/value/?page_id=21), the outcome of a project commissioned by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), which aimed to explore the impact on libraries of the changes taking place in higher education and to shift the focus from the collections themselves to how people use them.

Current economic conditions are one of the major drivers of this project; librarians are expected to demonstrate that what they do in the library has a positive impact on the institution's mission, and to deliver supporting evidence. There is sometimes a view that 'In God we trust, all others must bring data'. Two particular areas of focus in the report are impact and return on investment.

It is necessary to develop systems to collect data on individual user behaviour while maintaining privacy, in order to link the information gathered to other data; thus it will be possible to see if behaviours are correlated – e.g. whether students who ask more questions get better marks. The library is the second most important building for students on campus in the USA (after their own subject-specific building); the reason for this is not clear.

Megan questioned whether libraries and librarians have any influence on student marks. She mentioned the ongoing work at Huddersfield

and Wollongong where student attainment has been correlated with the use of library resources (both physical and electronic). She also mentioned an evidence-based Wisconsin study that has found that library instruction after the first year seems to impact positively on Grade Point Average (GPA) at graduation; however, it is not clear why. There is a need to demonstrate and develop library impact on student learning. Most studies have been 'one-offs' rather than coherent longitudinal projects, so we cannot know how much students learn and whether they transfer their skills. There need to be systems in place to organise assessment data over time. We need to think about the kind of impact the library has on the student experience and what difference we are making.

Megan had many suggestions and tips for librarians to think about in this area, including linking up with careers services to make available companies' profile information on our databases so that students can research potential employers, and assisting with teaching and instructional support so that academics have more time for their research. Megan reiterated that we cannot know if impact exists unless we keep records; this would help us develop means to improve, and would encourage a continuous cycle of improvement. We should communicate any impact we make to our stakeholders, and try to explain how and why we have achieved it (or not, as the case may be).

We should tell our library's value story, perhaps in the form of a monthly newsletter. This could include, for example, information on who is citing researchers' publications and how to find this out. Make sure that the titles of news items will engage your target audience, including academic staff. Again, Megan talked about the need to think about how we communicate the value of what we do. We need to ensure that our website tells how we meet institutional goals. She suggested highlighting the areas important to the institution, e.g. student retention, student experience and employability.

Megan looked at ways of gathering evidence and how as librarians we may have a tendency to go straight to surveys and tests. However, it is crucial that we look at the work students are actually doing for their courses to inform our thinking about what to change in the classroom. After considering learning outcomes we need to think about activities and assessment. The more time students are actively engaged the better. Megan recommends writing IL assessment plans and

suggested that librarians may find RAILS (www.railsontrack.info) useful for improving teaching and learning outcomes.

INFORMATION LITERACY AWARDS AND CONFERENCE DINNER

The dinner was held at the Old Fruitmarket in Glasgow city centre. It was a fantastic venue and a perfect setting to announce the awards and for some post-dinner dancing. Andrew Walsh was the recipient of the Information Literacy Practitioner of the Year for his work at the University of Huddersfield in promoting the use of mobile learning technologies and active/game-based learning techniques in information literacy teaching.



Andrew Walsh

Skills@Library Team (University of Leeds) won the Credo Reference Digital Award for Information Literacy for the Skills@Library lecturer pages. This is an extensive online portfolio of teaching resources to support academic staff in the development of student IL skills. The prize was accepted by Skills@Library team member



Michelle Schneider.

The Skills@Library Team, University of Leeds

The winner of the 2012 Student Award (sponsored by the CILIP CSG IL Group) was Thasya Elliott, a Learning Resource Centre Assistant at Haringey Sixth Form Centre who is studying for an MA in Information Management at London Metropolitan University.

Once again the LILAC conference provided a very valuable overview of current developments in information literacy practice. The keynote speakers were inspirational and the individual sessions full of practical tips to take back to the workplace. Selected papers from the conference are available at <http://lilacconference.com>