

Umbrella 2013: another student perspective

2-3 July 2013, Manchester University

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The CILIP Umbrella conference for 2013 took place at Manchester University on 2nd and 3rd July, and I was able to attend thanks to a UKeiG grant. It was a packed conference programme, with a huge variety of sessions, and some excellent guest speakers. The delegates were all very friendly – as you’d expect from librarians! – and it was great to chat with people I’d met in other settings; during my trainee year in Oxford, at LibraryCamps, and on my work placement at Manchester Public Libraries. Some of the students on my course from MMU had also received grants to attend, so we could compare notes on different sessions at break times, and agonise over which to attend next.

There was so much choice within the parallel sessions that it was very difficult to decide which to go for! I felt I made good choices though; I certainly took a lot away from the ones I saw. My favourites included Simon Barron’s talk about the importance of being a cyborg librarian, and

developing your ‘techie’ skills to reduce your library’s reliance on IT departments (<http://www.slideshare.net/simonxix/rise-of-the-cyborgs-the-growth-of-librarianit-hybrids>). As information providers, we have to be able to break down the technological barriers to access what users experience, so if we can combine librarian knowledge of e-resources, metadata and licensing with IT skills such as programming, coding and web design, we can future proof ourselves, *and* offer more streamlined service to users.

Another presentation I felt was excellent was Jo Alcock and Annmarie Lee’s talk about collating research on using mobile phone technology in libraries

(http://www.slideshare.net/joeyanne/umbrella-2013-alcock-and-lee-23701486?from_search=3).

The rapid pace of change makes it hard to justify investing in particular technologies, and around the country there are lots of libraries experiment-

ing with small projects such as apps, QR codes, or SMS. The compiled research on these projects provides a one-stop shop for finding ideas and details of how to accomplish tasks such as inducting new users or accessing e-resources using mobile technology.

Jonathan Bamford, head of strategic liaison at the ICO, described some of the upcoming changes to data-protection laws, a talk that was particularly interesting for me, as it followed on from a module I had taken about the Internet and the law. Essentially, the updated laws should give individuals more control over and more access to the information collected about them, but there are concerns about the increase in data marketization at an individual level, and the possible exacerbation of the 'data divide' between those with access to their data profiles, and those without.

Geoff White's talk was a fascinating and entertaining insight into Channel 4 news production (apparently there's a lot more caution and quiet concern than in Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom*). The parallels between how TV news and libraries function were striking; we both compete with the Internet for people's interest, but our advantages are that we are trusted to provide well researched and accurate information without requiring people to wade through a maze of choices and information overload to find it.

The drinks reception at MOSI (Museum of Science and Industry) was lovely. It's a brilliant museum, and a very good setting to show off Manchester's history. The Libraries Change Lives award was inspiring, and really made me realise that public libraries should be as much of a social club, youth

group, town hall, health centre, job centre, and education college as possible (<http://www.cilip.org.uk/news-media/Pages/news130703a.aspx>). With increasing numbers of libraries becoming 'community managed/run/supported' (a topic of several sessions at the conference), librarians are worried that public libraries' focus will shrink back down to just the collection. Phil Bradley phrased it well in his closing speech; libraries don't collect cookery books, they help people cook. They don't just support reading or studying, they support everything the community wants to do.

On a final note, I was lucky enough to win one of the prizes on offer from the suppliers exhibiting at the conference; a 'quick picks' unit from FG Library Products. As I'm currently not working anywhere, I donated it to my local library - which happens to be the first library I ever worked at, back when I was fifteen and a Saturday shelver. They were very pleased (if surprised) to have the



new unit, and it's now helping to display their 'crime scene' promotion.

References

Jo Alcock & Annmarie Lee 'Putting research into practice':
http://www.slideshare.net/joeyanne/umbrella-2013-alcock-and-lee-23701486?from_search=3

Simon Barron 'Rise of the cyborgs':
<http://www.slideshare.net/simonxix/rise-of-the-cyborgs-the-growth-of-librarianit-hybrids>

Libraries Change Lives award winner:
<http://www.cilip.org.uk/news-media/Pages/news130703a.aspx>

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Figure 1 The new display unit in situ at Congleton Library.