

Meeting Reports

Librarian's Information Literacy Annual Conference 2010

Conference Report by Sharon Lawler

This year's Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) was held in Limerick, Ireland – the first international location for what has become a popular date on the conference calendar.

As a student currently studying part time for an Information and Library Studies qualification at the University of Strathclyde, library conferences such as LILAC are usually too expensive to consider attending. However, thanks to UKeiG's generous support of my place, I was able to book a place and make my way to Ireland.

As well as studying, I work at the University of Glasgow, so I was particularly interested in sessions that addressed information literacy in Scotland, as well as those focusing on research and school libraries. As a copyeditor for the *Journal of Information Literacy*, the conference was also an opportunity to discover more about what was happening more broadly in information literacy to inform that role.

It was a packed schedule over three days, including a preconference session on the first morning, before the official opening. The conference was broken up into five themes: Making Connections; Developing the IL Practitioner; IL and Research; Innovative Practice and Measuring Impact.

Monday started with a busy preconference stream. As this had booked up quickly, I took the opportunity to start slowly and took the time to sit in on some quieter sessions and check my plan for the rest of the day. The Strand Hotel was already buzzing when we got there and the LILAC team, resplendent in their official T-shirts, were busily registering librarians from across the globe.

After the main conference was opened by the Minister for State for Lifelong Learning, Sean Haughey, the first keynote was courtesy of Tony Durcan, Head of Culture, Libraries and Lifelong Learning at Newcastle City Council. It was interesting to hear him describe the public library as "a pillar of interaction for citizens, and not just to read" and also that in Newcastle,

Internet access is not restricted to library card holders. In the discussion, it was noted that there was a lack of research focus on information literacy in public libraries, and that there were few if any public librarians attending the conference.

One session that did address information literacy in public libraries was John Crawford's session on employability training in public libraries. An interesting sign-off from the Scottish Information Literacy Project, which is currently being wound up in its present form, it highlighted that the fact that more work still needs to be done.

After the main thrust of the day, the evening heralded the networking evening at Limerick Institute of Technology. This was a great chance to meet up with other delegates, and we were treated to an eclectic mix of Irish dancing and a musical interlude from some members of the LILAC committee. Then it was back to the hotel to prepare for a packed day two...

A bright and early start on Tuesday with a 9am keynote from US researcher Professor Karen Fisher from the University of Washington Information School. Her research focuses on how some people (known as lay information mediaries or LIMs) seek information on the behalf of others. Fisher maintains that the "prevailing paradigm focuses on individual users" and that more research is needed to further understand social information literacy.

A full day of sessions followed on a wide range of subjects. The Pecha Kucha (Japanese for chit-chat, pronounced "pe-chak-cha") session featured various presenters, each given 20 slides and 20 seconds for each slide to present their topic. It was a fast-paced session and offered a taste of a wide range of subjects, particularly those that you may not have chosen for a full session, but without the opportunity for questions.

After a full day of sessions, it was time to head back to the hotel and get into my glad rags for the conference dinner, which was held at Dromoland Castle, a beautiful venue. After dinner, it was time for the awards ceremony and the following awards were presented:

- Information Literacy Practitioner of the Year: Anthony Beal, West Yorkshire College
- Honourable mentions: Andrew Walsh, University of Huddersfield and Nancy Graham, University of Birmingham
- Irish Information Literacy Award: Wexford County Library

Tuckered out, I headed out for the bus back to the hotel. Those with more energy stayed for the customary LILAC disco and much dancing ensued!

Sessions at 8:45am made Wednesday morning the earliest start of the conference. A busy morning included a session on information literacy support in school libraries, based on research from the School Libraries Group of CILIP, which is slated for publication in May this year, and an honest look at the training of users in the new British Library catalogue.

An interactive session followed, led by Lorie Khoda and Alison Brettle from the *Journal of Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice*, on interpreting information literacy research papers. This was really useful and we all came away armed with new resources.

Rounding off the conference was final keynote speaker, Dr Ralph Catts, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Stirling. Focusing on the academy, he spoke of the need for a large-scale research project to make a case for information literacy. In addition, he took the opportunity to summarise his thoughts on the conference and to critique the papers he had heard.

Catts admitted his aim was to be controversial and challenging, to encourage debate. His words were certainly thought-provoking. His idea of approaching educational researchers for assistance didn't necessarily take into account the research experience that some librarians or information departments already have, as some commentators pointed out, which he took on board. The lack of sabbatical time available to enable librarians to conduct research was also mentioned in the discussion. I thought this point may go some way to explain the issue of research in public libraries – if academic librarians struggle to get time off for research, then how will public and other sector librarians make their case?

All in all, LILAC was a great opportunity to meet librarians and learn more about information literacy, particularly in relation to higher education. As I work in higher education, this was highly relevant for me. However, as the keynotes by Durcan and Fisher in particular showed, information literacy is just as important in other sectors, including public libraries.

Social media also played a key part in the conference, particularly Twitter. There was an active twitter feed (#lilac2010) during the conference, to which I contributed (although not as much as I would have liked! Am now investigating smartphones....) and even a #lilacenvy thread! Twitter also played a part in connecting delegates before the conference, easing the pressure of going to a large conference without knowing anyone, for the many of us who were new to the conference.

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