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LILAC 2007 conference report



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The 3rd annual LILAC conference (LILAC is the Information Literacy Group of CILIP's Community Services Group) took place at the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) from 26 to 28 March 2007. The conference has been growing, in both size and impact, ever since its inception at Imperial College in 2005. This year almost 200 participants were given a large range of parallel sessions to select from which covered all library sectors. In addition, no fewer than four keynote speakers presented challenging lectures that successfully brought the themes of the conference together.

This year's event began with pre-conference workshops which focused on writing articles for publication and on creating effective e-learning and e-learners. These sessions set the tone for the conference, the themes of which were recognising the need; providing new ideas and practical approaches; and facilitating/encouraging research. After a mouth-watering lunch (a theme continued throughout the three days) the conference 'proper' began with an introduction to the city and the university from MMU's Vice Chancellor, John Brookes.

Following this, the first of the keynote speakers, Dr Ross Todd, gave his lecture. Ross is associate professor in the school of communication, information and library studies at Rutgers University. Despite having only landed at Manchester airport from New Jersey that very morning, he gave a motivating talk in which he presented information literacy (IL) as both a problem and a solution for libraries and information agencies. Ross expressed concerns regarding the lack of critical examination and evaluation of the impact and benefits of IL and asserted the need for a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve and how we serve different users who have different needs.

During the remainder of the afternoon delegates had a dizzying array of parallel sessions to choose from, which focused on all manner of IL-related subjects from embedding and engaging users to developing IL strategies and plans. The first day of the conference was rounded off with a networking event at Urbis, a spectacular glass building in Manchester's cathedral gardens. Urbis is an exhibition centre focusing on life within cities around the world, but its main attraction for the delegates that night was the mini fish and chips, Lancashire hotpots and chicken kebabs that were on offer.

The second day provided a very full timetable with parallel sessions taking place throughout the day that considered areas and issues such as collaboration, non-stop information change, learning, training, technology, referencing, plagiarism and IL development. During these sessions, much good practice and innovation within the IL arena was presented to, and shared amongst, attendees. In addition to the myriad of parallel sessions on offer there was also an opportunity for delegates to listen to a keynote speech from Sir Muir Gray, programmes director both of the UK national screening programme and of clinical knowledge, process and safety for the national programme for IT. Sir Muir talked about the provision of health care information in the UK and how technology is driving huge changes in how the population accesses such information.

The night of 27 March saw the conference dinner taking place at the magnificent Manchester town hall. An imposing Victorian-gothic building, this was an impressive location for delegates to discuss and reflect upon the ideas and information imparted and investigated during the past two days. The after-dinner speaker was Caroline Williams, executive director of Intute, who gave pause for thought about the future direction of

information literacy and also managed to get in a number of laughs.

There were a few less lively looking delegates the next day when we again met for the closing morning of the conference. Some final parallel sessions took place before the delegates assembled en masse for the concluding keynote speeches. Christine Bruce, who had been invited over from Brisbane for the conference, got us all thinking with her absorbing lecture on the current models of information literacy, including her own 'seven faces of information literacy'.¹

After Christine's address there followed the launch of Lollipop, 'an information literacy course for enquiry desk staff'.² The purpose of the programme is to develop IL skills in all library staff but the ultimate aim is to ensure that these skills are transferable and can be easily moved from the training suite, to the workplace, to real life. Although currently written for the higher education market, Lollipop is easily customisable and is free to those who want to use it for their own organisation's use.

The closing keynote speech was given by John Dolan, head of library policy at the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). John talked about the cost to society of not advocating, providing and developing literacy for all and of how libraries can help contribute to producing a multi-literate nation.

This year's LILAC event was both thought-provoking and fun and provided an excellent opportunity to meet and speak to colleagues from all sectors. Information literacy is an issue that is affecting us in all walks of librarianship. LILAC gives us an excellent opportunity to share our experience and expertise within IL and helps us to gain an understanding of the challenges facing those working in other areas. On previous performances LILAC 2008 promises to be bigger and better and just as much fun. We look forward to seeing you there.

1 C. Bruce, *Seven faces of information literacy*, Adelaide: Auslib Press, 1997

2 <http://www.lobelollipop.com> (accessed 7 August 2007)