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FestivIL 2021: Silence in the library

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FestivIL 2021 was my first experience of attending a LILAC conference. This year the conference was held entirely online. I am three years into my current role as an Academic Librarian at the University of Leicester, which is the first role in my career where I've had to teach in a formal capacity. I am currently putting together my FHEA (Fellow of the Higher Education Academy) application and FestivIL was an opportunity for me to reflect on my practice and seek inspiration for self development. I went into FestivIL with a particular interest in accessibility and decolonisation.

Silence

The emerging theme of the conference for me was the idea of silence which appeared in a few sessions over the three days. Dr Emily Drabinski, in her keynote talk *Teaching the radical catalogue* (Drabinski 2021), highlighted how we as information professionals need to learn how to teach students to retrieve information from systems where the language used to catalogue material is not only exclusionary and/or offensive, but also where the language required to describe the material accurately is actually missing. Often the language used in subject headings flattens the subject matter being discussed, resulting in the language needed to make the information retrievable not being present. Therefore it is important for us to think critically about cataloguing and to consider what critical thinking can do for how we teach students to use our systems to locate materials in our collections.

Sae Matsuno also raised the issue of silence in the second keynote session *Black Lives Matter, Brexit and Covid-19: Information literacy in a post-2020 world* (Hicks et al. 2021). Sae spoke about silence in relation to information that is missing from health data and the implications this has for healthcare for people of colour. What resonated with me was how Sae spoke about how she had felt both challenged and inspired by difference. Sae made the point that real change is within the scope of all of us and it is our responsibility to ask ourselves critical questions and to make change happen.

Frances Marsh presented an interesting information literacy (IL) session titled *Unsettling information literacy* in which the decolonial lens that is often focused on diversifying collections in libraries was shifted instead to decolonising how we teach IL (Marsh 2021). Frances presented five provocations based on research for her Master's dissertation. These were also woven through with the thread of silence in terms of missing information and voices. Throughout the provocations there was an emphasis on embracing non-traditional and non-textual information, centring underrepresented voices even if they are not in European languages, and looking beyond Anglo-American publishing models.

Accessibility

Hossam Kassem, Benjamin Williamson and Greg Leurs delivered an excellent masterclass session on *Making online Information Literacy teaching engaging, interactive and accessible* (Kassem, Williamson, & Leurs, 2021). This masterclass was packed full of practical ideas to apply to online teaching. On a completely different note, they highlighted the importance of embracing silence when teaching online. For me one of the challenging aspects of online teaching has been not being able to see my students as they often keep their cameras and mics

turned off. However embracing silence is a big part of creating an online environment that is conducive to learning by allowing students the space and time to contribute on their own terms.

Making my teaching material and sessions accessible is something I'm trying to learn about and improve on all the time. Some of the most useful practical advice I'm taking away from this masterclass includes:

- Make the content inclusive by thinking about the examples we use in teaching, particularly if they are pop culture references that may not make sense to all students.
- Use clear explicit instructions. For example when instructing students to click on a button, describe it ("click on top right hand button").
- Enunciate when speaking to make lip reading easier.
- Make the mouse pointer dark and larger so it is visible clearly on the screen.
- Provide written instructions in HTML or Word format so they can be reformatted by students.

Reflections

Overall FestivIL 2021 has been incredibly useful in helping me to reflect and find ways to improve my teaching. Whilst writing up my FHEA application I've been reflecting a lot on previous IL sessions I've taught. I have taken away some really useful practical advice that I can immediately implement in my teaching sessions to help make these sessions more accessible. I'm still unsure what my teaching sessions will look like in the new academic year but there will be a hybrid element to them. As I begin to plan teaching material to be delivered in a mixture of face-to-face and online modes it's useful to have the checklist of practical advice I have accumulated from FestivIL.

Reflecting back on some of my previous teaching sessions post-FestivIL has highlighted the need for further learning on my part, particularly in terms of critical practice and unlearning the way I have been taught to think about IL. Within my FHEA application I have to complete a section for future CPD (Continuing Professional Development) activities. There is a lot to unpack and learn from the talks at FestivIL and my future CPD roadmap is now full of plans to continue to learn more about these concepts and how to apply them to my own practice.

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