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Chan, L. et al. 2002. Budapest Open Access Initiative. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Accessed: 18 November 2015]

ECIL 2021: Virtual but still connected

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After being postponed for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the [7th European Conference on Information Literacy](#) (ECIL) took place in a virtual format from September 20-23, 2021. While the virtual format meant that I was not able to meet new colleagues from across the world in person, or have the chance to explore Bamberg, Germany, the location originally scheduled to host the conference, I was nonetheless excited for my first international conference experience. Participants and presenters attended from locations across the world, including Australia, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Turkey, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The theme for the conference was Information Literacy in a Post-Truth Era, and sessions covered topics such as fake news, misinformation, metaliteracy, information creation, and approaches to teaching information literacy (IL) in a variety of different contexts. The conference offered several types of sessions, including Papers, Best Practices, Panels, and Workshops, each with different formats. In a Best Practices session, for example, participants had the opportunity to view multiple short (around 15 minute) video presentations during a single session, and then engage in live question and answer with the presenters, while workshops were active sessions focused on a single topic or practice and lasting the entire session period.

The conference got off to a great start, although a very early one for someone in the United States. I think it says a good deal about my interest in the first keynote presentation, *Information Discernment in the 'Post-truth' World* (Lewandowsky 2021) that I was able to convince myself to get up at 4:30 am to attend live. In the presentation, Stephan Lewandowsky, from the University of Bristol, outlined his understanding of what the post-truth world is and offered insights into why some people are inclined to trust post-truth politicians. Using the example of American presidents, he described a shift from a situation in which a politician might tell a lie in order to achieve a specific purpose, to one in which the purpose of lying is to create so much misunderstanding that our understanding of what is true changes, creating an opening for "alternative facts." Lewandowsky outlined a strategy for dealing with a post-truth world based on the idea of inoculation, which involves warning people ahead of time that there is a likelihood that they will be misled and refuting potential counter arguments in advance. Lewandowsky then described several experiments he had conducted with colleagues which demonstrated that inoculation can be an effective strategy, including one in which participants first viewed a video describing how they might be misled through the use of emotionally charged language and then were asked to evaluate Tweets. The results indicated that those who had been inoculated were better able to discern false information.

For librarians who teach IL, a primary focus is how we can help students to identify credible information and avoid misinformation. It can sometimes seem like an overwhelming task, so I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about a technique that has the potential to create positive change in how people engage with information.

In addition to Lewandowsky's presentation, I was also intrigued by a workshop led by Sara D. Miller of Michigan State University (Miller 2021), which explored the spiritual (very broadly defined) dimensions of IL, encouraging participants to consider the whole person in order to better understand why we believe what we believe. Miller points out that we often describe the information seeking and evaluation processes as ones that are based only on logic. In reality,

there are many other factors, related to how we think about ourselves and our place in the universe, that influence how we react to information. Participants were encouraged to consider a model of spiritual development in comparison with our understanding of the threshold concepts that inform the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. While in many ways outside of my comfort zone, this workshop encouraged me to expand my thinking about how we might approach teaching IL in a more holistic manner.

Other sessions that caught my attention included a presentation on how fake news has influenced librarians' perception of their role in teaching IL in the United Kingdom (Thorpe & Webber, 2021), and a presentation in which the presenters described a project to compare multiple IL frameworks in order to create a new taxonomy (van der Meer & Post, 2021). As at most conferences, with so many exciting offerings, it was often difficult to decide what to attend. The good news is that many of the conference presentations are publicly available on the [ECIL YouTube channel](#).

Throughout, I enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about the exciting IL-related work that librarians and others are doing, often in contexts very different from my own. It can sometimes be too easy to focus only on our own little corner of the world, so it was great to have the chance to open my mind to new possibilities and the recognition of how different things can be. For example, while I am an academic librarian and not a school librarian, I have been dismayed by how many school districts in the United States no longer have school librarians or libraries, or have a single librarian across multiple schools. Learning that all primary and secondary schools in Slovenia are required to have a school library with a qualified librarian, and that there is a national curriculum related to libraries and IL, was certainly eye-opening, as it represented such a difference from the American context.

And finally, for me, one of the best aspects of attending ECIL was that, even with participants all attending virtually, the conference still afforded opportunities to connect with colleagues with similar interests and forge new relationships. For example, shortly after the conference, my co-presenter and I were contacted by a librarian who works at a library in Italy to learn more about the work we have been doing. And another colleague from my institution, who also attended and presented during the conference, noticed a similar theme across a few different presentations and is now working to organize the presenters, from several different institutions, to explore a scholarly publication on the topic. These types of new connections are one of the greatest benefits to attending conferences, and it was wonderful to see it happen even when conference participants were geographically dispersed.

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