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LILAC 2019: The diary and reflections of a first-time LILAC attendee

Hannah Slater, Library Assistant, The London Library. MA student, Library & Information Studies, UCL. Email: hannah.slater.18@ucl.ac.uk
Twitter: [@hannah_slater](https://twitter.com/hannah_slater)

Wednesday, 24th April

At St Pancras, bright and early, to catch the train to Nottingham for my first ever LILAC! Suitably caffeinated, I used the journey as an opportunity to think about the next three days and what I hoped to gain from the experience. Lisa Gardner's article (2018), reflecting on her experiences at LILAC as one of last year's student award winners, was packed full of useful tips for a first-time attendee, and helped to calm my nerves.

The first keynote was a whistle-stop tour of Nottingham's literary and cultural history by Sandeep Mahal, and a galvanizing (and, at times, stark) reminder of the power of literacy to increase social mobility and change lives. We must reach out to all corners of the community and encourage curiosity, and that curiosity should start with us. I left feeling excited for the parallel sessions.

Today's sessions really drove home the message of today's keynote: that to build more literate and cohesive communities, our practices must be inclusive and context-driven. Shirley Yearwood-Jackman (in her session, 'Looking at inclusivity through the lens of race') got me to think about how I could create a safe space for BAME voices to be heard and drove home the importance of inviting diverse experiences to be reflected in teaching and learning, for the benefit of all.

The team from The Open University led a workshop session ('Here's one you made earlier?') where we looked at the gap between students' understanding of their information literacy skills and their articulation of these to potential employers. I really enjoyed being able to share ideas with other attendees and think about how the profession can help to bridge this gap and get students to feel more empowered about the knowledge and skills they possess.

Day one concluded with a networking event at Nottingham Contemporary: wine, tagine and zines! A lovely end to a very stimulating first day.

Lesson of the day

Engage with the conversation

I dusted off my inactive Twitter account and sent my first ever tweet on my way to LILAC (tagged with #lilac19, of course). Following the hashtag was also a good way to see what else was going on at the conference, to gauge other attendees' thoughts on the keynotes and parallel sessions, and often allowed me to formulate and expand my thoughts if I wasn't sure about anything.

Thursday, 25th April

Day two started with a really engaging keynote speech from Ruth Carlyle, which spoke to my own research interests around health literacy. She described health literacy as the place 'where information literacy gets real' and gave us a taste of what it might be like to navigate the often-

impenetrable healthcare system as a patient with poor information literacy skills. I was particularly interested in hearing about how she views patients as producers of knowledge, as well as consumers, and how social media can help and hinder in this regard. A lot of food for thought for my research project!

I spent much of the rest of the day attending sessions centred around work carried out in school libraries. I haven't spent any time in school libraries since leaving school, so I thought it would be useful to get an insight into a sector about which I knew very little. I was so glad I did. I was struck by the passion of the speakers and the urgency with which they spoke about the necessity of school libraries to build information literacy and inquiry skills from a young age. The presence of school libraries engenders good practice from the start and will support the creation of the next generation of informed, engaged and critical thinkers. One of Darryl Toerien's comments particularly struck a chord: that any school without a library 'impoverishes' its students. We must look to protect school libraries at all costs!

The day finished with the conference dinner at the beautiful Colwick Hall, where I learnt just how quickly librarians can run when there are free books on offer! A really fun evening and a great way to celebrate after all the hard work of the previous two days.

Lesson of the day

Be open to new experiences

As a current library school student, I found signing up to a variety of sessions from all areas of the profession was a great way of learning about different sectors that I have not yet worked in or experienced. It's always exciting to be introduced to new topics that spark an interest!

Friday, 26th April

It can be quite easy to feel overwhelmed at LILAC, when surrounded by so many highly experienced and well-renowned colleagues. Hannah Hickman's brilliant parallel session on imposter syndrome reassured me that this feeling is not just confined to brand new professionals! I came away feeling less attached to the trope of 'librarian as expert' and empowered to treat interactions as an equal collaboration between librarian and patron.

The final session of LILAC, the panel discussion on critical library pedagogy, felt like a fitting end to three days of lectures and workshops that stimulated curiosity, conversation and collaboration. I found it incredibly valuable to hear how the panellists have been examining and reconstructing the power structures present in their organisations, and the profession at large, and took this as a call to action to build my own practices on a solid critical foundation. As I look to make my mark on the profession, I am determined to be a reflective and engaged practitioner, even if this means that things 'could get messy'!

Tired but inspired: the only way I can think to sum up three intense days of learning from, engaging, networking and collaborating with so many passionate professionals at LILAC. What a brilliant experience; thank you, LILAC, for the wonderful opportunity afforded to me by this year's student award, and for a truly memorable first conference. I'll be back!

Lessons of the day

Ask questions

LILAC's reputation as one of the friendliest conferences is not unfounded. Everyone I met and spoke with was incredibly generous in sharing their expertise and advice. I didn't always feel

brave enough to ask questions in front of everyone, but connecting on Twitter, or chatting in the queue for lunch or coffee, offered space to engage without the pressure of an audience.

Take time to reflect: As I think about the kind of impact I want to make on the profession, I'm determined to critically reflect on my current (and future) practices, to ensure that I promote inclusivity and collaboration. A reflective journal (in my fancy LILAC notebook) seems like a good place to start!

Reference

Gardner, L. (2018). Thinking of going to LILAC? How to get the best out of the experience. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 12(1), 137–138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/12.1.2479>