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Connecting with the underland

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I felt honoured and more than a wee bit flattered to be asked to write a guest editorial for this issue of *JIL*. My euphoria was short lived when I reminded myself that, as *JIL* readers and authors, we have all begun to get used to Emma Coonan's wonderful, insightful, and thought-provoking editorials. How to follow those? My panic subsided when I settled down to read the fascinating range of articles and reports in this bumper issue of *JIL*. They cover a wide spectrum of real-life contexts including workplace, professional life, health, community, older people and first generation students as well as a range of research approaches. In other words, all life is here and my role is simply to open the door to this issue and invite you to explore within.

The information literacy world I invite you to explore appears to be a richly layered one. Maybe it was because I have been reading lately about underlands* – hidden layers and deep networks, created by nature and by humankind, beneath our feet in cities and countryside – that I was particularly struck by the shift towards a deeper and contextualised approach to IL. Many of the papers in this issue are concerned with understanding and developing IL in relation to our multi-layered everyday existences, the different roles and experiences through which we all engage with information.

The complex way in which development of IL is influenced socially and culturally by everyday interactions is revealed in a community context by Linares Soler's study of older Australians' IL experiences with the use of mobile devices. Other papers focus on IL in the professional workplace environment: Sharun explores the ways in which health professionals experience and value IL, inviting library and information professionals to consider how such evidence from settings beyond academia could be used to inform IL instruction for students; Shannon, Reilly and Bates highlight a lack of knowledge and lack of confidence in integrating IL teaching within professional classroom practice, raising concerns for the teaching of IL in schools and the preparation of young people for life beyond the classroom.

An underland such as the wood wide web, the sophisticated network of trees and fungi below a forest floor, tends to be hidden from our view. So, too, our layers of active everyday information experience have often been hidden from view in IL education programmes. I was interested therefore to find a number of research papers arguing for IL programmes in formal education to take greater account of the IL strengths students may already have acquired elsewhere. Ilett's examination of IL in first generation students makes the point that these learners are not only students but individuals with multiple roles and experiences. The paper explores their engagement with information in communities, workplaces and households and suggests that IL programmes should connect with students' funds of knowledge from such life experiences. Pashkova-Balkenhol et al ask the question '*Should we flip the script?*' Through their systematic review of literature relating to IL amongst first year undergraduate students they question a tendency to focus on gaps and deficits in skills. Like Ilett, they suggest that IL programmes in higher education should focus more attention on the existing strengths which students may bring with them.

These papers present a view of IL education that is a world away from the skills-based IL programmes of some years ago. This may be another signal of the fundamental shift in thinking which has been reflected in recent revisions of IL definitions by CILIP and ACRL. I also see this as a welcome indication of more joined-up thinking between the traditionally separate research worlds of IL programme design and the wider value of IL.

The shift towards a more nuanced and critical understanding of IL can also be seen in the calls for more collaborative approaches in IL education. This is particularly evident in the paper by Hughes, Foth and Mallan which develops a new social living lab model for interprofessional and community education. The model is illustrated by a theoretical scenario in which health practitioners, librarians and community members collaborate in a social living lab to address challenges related to child obesity.

Others argue for new collaborative approaches to IL within academic settings. Smith's literature based research leads to her re-visioning of library support for undergraduates in health libraries, recommending a more integrated model of IL support, with greater alignment between IL education and the skills the students are already learning underpinned by strong collaboration between library professionals and faculty. Dalton is also concerned with a more integrated approach in supporting those undertaking systemic reviews in the social sciences: she identifies IL benefits from individual consultations with the librarian a part of the review process.

Throughout these papers a vision emerges of a more collaborative and personalised learning environment which makes connections with the 'underlands' of IL knowledge, and nurtures learning communities in which the learner is an active participant. This tough but exciting challenge will need new ways of thinking about programme design. Here the paper by Bailey and Jacobsen considers the potential of a Community of Inquiry framework as the basis for evaluating a range of IL instructional designs including partially- and fully-embedded librarian.

Further ideas and inspiration for IL education come from reports on new developments, many focussing on a range of high- and low-tech solutions to improve practice. Kean and Robinson report on the use of personalised video instruction in online IL teaching while Lierman and Santiago have developed asynchronous online instruction to supplement and replace classroom teaching. Taylor turns to an established tool, the online reading list, and discusses recent attempts to engage lecturers in maximising the impact of their reading lists, while Lowe, Macy and Stone consider a low tech option for gathering student data for assessment purposes. Wikipedia is used as a learning tool in a new module aimed at developing students' skills in writing for public consumption (Ball) while development of a National Media Literacy Campaign for Ireland (Russell) provides a timely focus on the need for all citizens to be able to engage critically with the media.

Our three book reviews point to further useful sources to support IL developments. Sam Aston reviews Pashia & Critten's edited volume of case studies on *Critical approaches to credit-bearing information literacy courses*, praising the refreshing mix of theory and practice and the fact that it takes IL beyond the bounds of education. Jane Potheary finds *The grounded instruction librarian: participating in the scholarship of teaching and learning* by Mallon et al to be an accessible and highly readable collection of case studies of relevance in academic settings. Heather Johnston reviews O'Brien & Jacobson's *Teaching with digital badges: Best practice for librarians*, finding that it offers much for both new adopters of digital badges and those who are already using digital badges.

Finally I found it refreshing to be swept back to the multi-layered IL world by a report with which I can truly empathise. Webber and Johnston propose a model for developing an age-friendly media and information literate (#AFMIL) city, centred on older people as agents rather than passive consumers, in three roles: as represented by the media; as consumers of information; and as creators, critics and innovators, a role to which I will now aspire!

Reference

Macfarlane, R. 2019. *Underland: A deep time journey*. Hamish Hamilton, 2019.