What can we learn from our neighbours? From Digital Literacy to Independent Learning

By Nikki Curtis
Softlink Education, Director of Marketing

In November 2018 UK based global provider of e-resources, JCS Online Resources (JCS), hosted their inaugural conference in Birmingham — ‘From Digital Literacy to Independent Learning: challenges and opportunities for teachers and librarians’.

The conference brought together experts in the field of digital literacy, librarians, school and college leaders, and providers of authoritative sources to share their knowledge and good practice in supporting librarians and teachers to face the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly complex and digitised world.

I felt honoured to attend, delivering a presentation, titled ‘What can we learn from our neighbours? School librarian collaboration — an Australian perspective’, for which I interviewed Australian library staff and used data collected from the Softlink School Library Surveys.

This article presents an overview of the conference program and highlights.

I hope you find learning from our UK neighbours as useful as I did.

JCS 2018: From Digital Literacy to Independent Learning

In the lead-up to their 2018 conference, JCS described how educators and librarians have a crucial role to play in guiding and supporting their students to think critically about digital technologies and the opportunities and risks they present.

JCS Director, Joyce Martin, described the gap between students’ fluency in the use of technology and their ability to use digital tools to further their own learning.

She said:

"Students may spend most of their waking hours ‘connected’, but the majority of this time is spent socialising and consuming entertainment. They don’t necessarily know the best way to use technology for educational purposes, [to] identify authoritative information or recognise fake news from real. They lack what has become called ‘digital literacy’.

This was the topic discussed, and rigorously ‘tackled’ at the conference, by over 25 presenters in a series of keynotes, lightning talks and workshops.

Keynote presentations

The first three keynote presentations defined, explored and contextualised ‘literacy’ in a multitude of flavours as well as considering its current and future significance.

Dr Jane Secker, Senior Lecturer in Educational Development — City, University of London, presented ‘Developing digital and information literacies: teaching for lifelong learning.’ Jane’s presentation explored ‘information literacy’ within a context, or framework, of academic literacies, new literacies, media literacy and digital literacy.

She shared what she has learnt both from studying information and from teaching information literacy, and discussed the need to embed digital and information literacies in curriculum with schools.

Dr Graham Gardner, Librarian, Abingdon School presented ‘Creating a culture of critical literacy: three essential mindsets for school librarians.’ Inspired by Carol Dweck’s (2008), Mindset: the new psychology of success, Graham provided a refreshing and persuasive take on how school librarians can play a leading role in creating a culture of critical information literacy.

He showed how by reframing and redirecting their thinking in terms of the three key mindsets — teacher, marketer, and technologist — school librarians could improve collaboration with educators and help students learn to navigate digital information realms.

Hazel Rothera, Academic Development Team Leader, Oxford Brookes University presented ‘Can’t you just give us two sides of A4? Stepping up library use from school to higher education’.

In her presentation, Hazel explored the school library’s role in preparing students for higher education. She reflected on how students need support with the idea that it is possible to learn to be an academic reader (and then thinker and writer), but they need to put the work in to achieve that.
Lightning talks and workshops
The conference also featured two streams of lighting talks with six speakers in each, exploring the concepts of digital literacy and independent learning and sharing their own stories and examples.

I was lucky enough to attend the presentation by Terri McCargar, Librarian at Latymer Upper School in London, on ‘Collaboration with teachers and specialist libraries’. Her example of collaboration — in which she worked with the school’s art history teacher to develop a supportive but independent learning framework to assist students through their Art History Personal Investigations — was a truly inspiring example of project-based collaboration.

Students may spend most of their waking hours ‘connected’, but the majority of this time is spent socialising and consuming entertainment. They don’t necessarily know the best way to use technology for educational purposes, to identify authoritative information or recognise fake news from real. They lack what has become called ‘digital literacy’.

As part of their project, students had to demonstrate first-hand information, research skills, contextual consideration, and interpretation of the textual material used. Further collaboration and student support included a very popular site visit to the National Art Library in London.

Other presentations in the Lightning talk streams included:

- Importance of research and referencing skills using online databases.
- The Library and the EPQ (Extended Project Qualification) enabling students to become ‘digitally savvy’ in a real-world context.
- Exploring the information-seeking behaviour of secondary school students.
- Developing an online offer for pre-university entry information and digital literacy.
- Listen – Collaborate – Observe – Repeat: how to implement a safe BYOD culture.
- The library in the digital world.
- Embedding digital literacy skills in Year 9.
- How effective are our students’ digital searching skills?
- Tackling plagiarism in the digital world.
- Developing independent learning skills in Year 9–13 through project-based learning and librarian-led support.
- Preparing students to become independent learners and digitally literate.

In the workshop stream, I attended the session ‘How librarians can use online resources to enhance information literacy skills, collaborate with teachers and win time in the classroom’, presented by Elizabeth Hutchinson of Guernsey School Library Service.

The workshop explored how teachers want librarians to link resources to the curriculum, save them time and make finding resources easy. Resource curation and collaboration with teachers to support curriculum goals and projects is a big topic and it was interesting to see the Guernsey School Library Service’s examples.

Additional sessions in the workshop stream included:

- Using images in teaching — what you need to know about copyright.
- Innovative ways to increase student engagement.
- How to spark creativity, imagination and autonomous student-driven research in the classroom.
- Digital literacy in practice — lifelong literacy skills.
- Developing your research project: preparing students to succeed at a Russell Group university.

What can we learn from our neighbours? School librarian collaboration — an Australian perspective
The initial concept for the presentation I delivered at the conference was developed from a feature document Softlink Education producedattheendof2017—SchoolLibraries Share: Ideas for school-wide collaboration. The feature document highlighted the voices of real school librarians globally in response to a question posed in the 2017 Softlink School Library Survey: How do you currently collaborate, or what ideas do you have for greater collaboration between the library and the rest of the school?

While not strictly related to digital literacy or independent learning, a number of responses related directly to digital research skills and resources, and it was clear from the presentation summaries already received that collaboration was going to be a key theme at the conference.

As well as incorporating Australian content from the Ideas for school-wide collaboration feature, I set to work interviewing some of the many wonderful and inspiring teacher librarians and library professionals we at Softlink have the pleasure of working with on a daily basis.

The interviews provided feedback and real life examples of how Australian teacher librarians are tackling digital and information literacy as well student engagement and support. Their ideas were well received by the UK school librarian audience.

If you’d like to explore this further, the SchoolLibrariesShare:Ideasforschool-wide collaboration feature document is available through the Softlink web site—Resources.

A few of the additional Australian teacher librarian interviews take video form and are available on this blog.
Report from the inaugural Australian Children’s Laureate Summit
28 February 2018

By Margo Pickworth

ASLA was recently invited to participate in the inaugural Australian Children’s Laureate Summit, which was held at the Women’s College, Sydney University. The Administrative Officer, Sophie Partington, and Board member, Margo Pickworth, attended the Summit on behalf of ASLA.

Noni Hazelhurst, the Patron, opened the event, highlighting the negative effects on children of continual exposure to technology and the decline of children’s reading as a result. She emphasised the importance of ‘story’ in children’s lives and the value of bringing like-minded groups together to support reading in children’s lives.

The Summit began with each of the Laureates relaying their experiences of their roles, including their discoveries about reading and literature, encouraging children to read and highlights of their time as Laureates. All five Laureates were present, including:

- Alison Lester
- Boori Monte Prior
- Jackie French
- Leigh Hobbs
- Morris Gleitzman

Following the discussion panel of distinguished Laureates, the Summit divided into four ‘themed’ sessions, in which delegates selected from the following promotion ideas, including:

- One Loud Voice
- Harnessing the Creative Impulse
- Crashing the Barriers
- Embedding a Reading Culture

Afternoon workshops were ‘Choose your own Laureate Adventure’, in which Alison Lester shared her experience of working in remote, Indigenous areas and Leigh Hobbs and Jackie French shared their passion for supporting the work of teacher librarians.

Several presentations from publishers followed and the winner of the best window decoration of Laureates’ publications was announced, the winner being ‘Bookface’ at Gunghalin in the ACT.

The Australian Children’s Laureate group is looking to make a unified approach to encourage children’s reading and children’s literature and it is believed that ASLA should be a strong part of this initiative.