

I was thrilled to be at the CILIPS 2024 conference for this year's stellar programme skilfully organised by the wonderful team at CILIP Scotland over two days on 3rd and 4th June. The conference banners unfurled against the heated backdrop of sunny Dundee and the less temperate run-up to the UK general election. Alongside equally keen library delegates, I was there to engage with a range of expert presenters united around the broad themes of censorship, AI, inclusivity and diversity, and to soak up inspiration and indeed, #WINspiration from peers and creative writers waxing lyrical over the significance of libraries in our polarised times. This year's conference was noticeably sustainable with green initiatives also being discussed at the breakout sessions.

Day one's keynotes by Library Director James La Rue from Colorado State's public library service examined the crucial role librarians must play in reflecting societal change by challenging cancel culture and making voices on the fringes heard. Far from marshalling delegates to militant action against the censorship of library books and politicised events, LaRue drew on his own practice to recommend an assertive *and* respectful model that shifted the responsibility of librarians away from understanding the nature of books, towards the nature of complaints. It was a measured and assured pitch for public librarians considering Drag Queen Story Time events or responding to complaints of racial stereotyping in children's books.

'Predictably', machine learning was day two's keynote courtesy of the library sector's leading authority Dr Mia Ridge, Digital Curator at the British Library. In a clear and illuminating presentation, Ridge spelled out the creative possibilities for library professionals that could be achieved through the implementation of an AI strategy that prepares libraries for an AI legacy - beyond short-term experimentation - including the technical infrastructure to integrate data across multiple systems. Rather than focus solely on the oft-quoted tenets of information literacy, librarians' relationships to their digital communities and the ability to extract and promote collective knowledge through crowdsourcing was explored as the formula by which libraries can lead, occupy and play in the space between real-world and AI boundaries.

Uniting these two excellent and subject-distinct keynotes were the shared themes of human interaction and intervention that are so important for coexisting in a safe, empathetic and pluralist society. The success of the presentations and sessions I attended at CILIPS 24 could be attributed to librarians' professional reflections and exploration of complex themes. With so much diatribe around election time, it was radically refreshing to be encouraged to think outside the box and to appreciate the reconciliatory role librarians play in making sure we are encouraging others to do likewise. For me, the takeaway is that librarians are at our best when we are critically aware of the world around us, creative in our activities and caring in our approach to our communities. Working within a sound ethical framework of values that engages with the political climate, acknowledges the culture wars and embodies a diverse range of voices and opinions is what we actively bring to the table. As poet Kevin P. Gilday concluded in his standout evening performance at the end of day one: "Libraries are not a luxury, they are vital indicators of a healthy society." Temperatures may be running high between now and the election, but CILIPS 24 gives me the belief that librarians are part of the remedy.

With thanks to CILIPS and all the fantastic speakers for an energising and enjoyable conference.