

SLA Conference- Glasgow

The School Library Association conference for 2018 was held in Glasgow with the theme of 'Weavers of Dreams and Imagination'. The weavers theme definitely spread itself through the weekend with many sessions focusing on the role of school librarians in encouraging children to dream and imagination. I attended the Friday and Saturday as a day delegate as the two sessions I was most interested in hearing were Yvonne Mannings Friday update on the school library strategy and Dorothy Williams Saturday talk on the impact of school libraries. We were encouraged to tweet using the hashtag #dreamsSLA and I found this useful not only for recording my own experiences but also for following parallel sessions that I was unable to attend.

The opening speech by Alison Tarrant, director of the SLA, focused on the priorities of the School Library Association. These were given as encouraging training and advocacy and awareness raising of the role of school librarian with other groups (such as SLG) on the #greatschoolibraries campaign. Alison also used the application slid.io to gather the delegates opinions. I hadn't used this software before and as it is free to use, I immediately started to think of ways in which it could be used in a school environment with pupils giving instant feedback, questions or answers using their own devices.

The 2nd session was an author talk by Philip Reeve who spoke about how spending time imagining leads to his successful plots. He did a reading of his work with background music playing which led to a very atmospheric reading and, judging by the tweets, everyone was keen to replicate this in their own school.

The next session was Yvonne Mannings update on the school library strategy. We were given the background to how this came about which included a lack of understanding of the role of school librarians and how school libraries can support the Scottish Governments improvement agenda. There have been case studies through working groups and a lot of work has been done to highlight all of the work currently taking place in school libraries across Scotland. Yvonne stated that this strategy is an advocacy tool but that it needs to speak to the decision makers to show how school librarians provide excellence and equity and deliver Curriculum for Excellence outcomes. This will be promoted at the Scottish Learning Festival in September. She also stated that Scotlands experience in creating documents such as How Good is Our School Library (which runs parallel with HGIOS4) and the strategy documentation can support the wider UK school libraries campaign.

The last session before dinner was a whistlestop tour of new releases in childrens publishing. Each publisher was given a minute and a half to showcase upcoming titles. My personal favourite upcoming title is Angry Cookie by Laura Dockrill which I read in the exhibition area later on that night and loved!

After dinner was a talk by Lauren St John on her writing, upcoming work and encouraging children to look after the environment. I have read her autobiography previously but hearing Lauren speak about growing up in South Africa during war-time gave a new insight into her work.

The first session of the next day was on the impact of school libraries on learning by Dorothy Williams. Dorothy spoke about how strong school libraries can increase attainment levels in pupils by typically 5-15%. She also spoke about the strong link between reading and literacy attainment and school library use. The 2013 report published is found here:

<https://scottishlibraries.org/media/1211/impact-of-school-libraries-on-learning-2013.pdf>

My first parallel session was set as exhibition time which allowed me time to speak to publishers about upcoming resources and leave the room with a very full bag of books and a much larger to be read pile of books.

There was then a quick coffee break with the author Alom Shaha giving us a fascinating insight into the background to his writing, his beliefs and creativity- the theme of imagination continued!

The second parallel session was reflective writing by Anne Glennie which I knew I would enjoy but turned out to be a complete highlight of my weekend. We did a practical workshop looking at the link between numeracy and literacy, did an exercise on word substitution and discussed practical ways of encouraging reading. We all left with a pack of ideas that we could use along with some very handy chopsticks (which aren't for eating!)

The first session after lunch was on encouraging reading for pleasure by Tricia Adams. Tricia gave a very comprehensive list of resources, encouraged use of the SLA website and gave time to discuss various ways in which school libraries can encourage reading for pleasure.

The next coffee break included a talk by Sophie Cameron in conversation with Joy Court on her debut novel which sounded really interesting.

The last session of the day was a panel with Anthony McGowan, Jo Cotterill and Tom McLaughlin speaking about making books dyslexia friendly. I was fascinated to hear about the technical aspect of how Barrington Stoke books are written- they are not merely condensed versions of longer novels. Jo Cotterill spoke about how characters names are frequently repeated to allow children not to forget the names of the characters as they read slower and sentences are not put in that could be misconstrued as to not cause confusion.

Many thanks to CILIPS for allowing me the opportunity to attend this. I really enjoyed my time at the SLA conference and would highly encourage people to attend not only to attend the sessions and the exhibition but also to make connections with librarians from all over the country. I'm looking forward to the next joint SLA/YLG conference in Birmingham next year and hope that I can attend.