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Book Review: Metaliteracy in Practice

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Review of *Metaliteracy in Practice*, Edited by Trudi E. Jacobson & Thomas P. Mackey

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Review of *Metaliteracy in Practice*, Edited by Trudi E. Jacobson & Thomas P. Mackey

The contributed essays in *Metaliteracy in Practice* (2016) describe a range of creative approaches to teaching information literacy through the lens of metaliteracy. Edited by Trudi E. Jacobson and Thomas P. Mackey, this collection builds on their earlier book, *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners* (2014), which focused on establishing a theoretical structure for the concept of metaliteracy. In the current work, contributing librarians and teaching faculty illustrate their practical applications of Mackey and Jacobson's metaliteracy framework and multiple avenues for engaging with metacognitive thinking and active engagement in online, participatory environments. Because metacognitive abilities are complex and develop over time, it is not surprising that most chapters describe credit courses that integrate information literacy instruction throughout an academic term, rather than one-shot library instruction.

Metaliteracy in Practice includes a brief foreword that helps situate information literacy in relation to today's students and their future, professional lives. This forward is authored by Alison J. Head, executive director and principal investigator of the national Project Information Literacy. The book's first and opening chapter, contributed by Donna Witek and Teresa Grettano, includes a helpful overview of the literature concerning metaliteracy, and both this and subsequent chapters demonstrate the relevance of metaliteracy to students in various learning environments. In the concluding chapter, professor Paul Prinsloo invites readers to consider metaliteracy in relation to the broader context of literacy education and theory, and to embrace the concept of literacy as multi-faceted, fluid, and resistant to any single framework.

I have often struggled to grasp the concept of *metaliteracy* and my review of this book provided an opportunity for me to develop a better understanding. Readers who feel similarly will benefit from the introductions to metaliteracy that are included in the book's contributed chapters and may wish to review Mackey and Jacobson's seminal article, "Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy" (2011), as well as *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners* (2014). While the term *metaliteracy* has been used since at least 2000 to refer to self-awareness of one's own literacy practices

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(Mackey and Jacobson, 2014), the authors' proposed model for metaliteracy "expands the scope of traditional information skills (determine, access, locate, understand, produce, and use information) to include the collaborative production and sharing of information in participatory digital environments (collaborate, produce, and share) prevalent in today's world" (2014, p. 1). The pedagogical approaches that are described in *Metaliteracy in Practice* frequently involve the use of multimedia and participatory environments, through which students may critically evaluate, share, and create information in ways that foster their reflection and their experience of voice and agency.

Metaliteracy is a key component of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015), and the concept has received added attention with the *Framework's* filing and subsequent adoption. Jacobson and Mackey observe that all of the essays included in *Metaliteracy in Practice* "examine issues relevant to the ACRL *Framework* in relation to metaliteracy" and that "both [the *Framework* and metaliteracy] are having a transformative effect on the field of information literacy" (Jacobson & Mackey, 2015, p. xix).

Several common threads run through the book and reflect strong connections among the authors' different approaches to teaching through a metaliteracy lens. A number of authors describe students using particular digital platforms and tools to evaluate and create information. These authors emphasize, however, that the use of these specific tools is less important than the transferrable knowledge and abilities that students develop through this work. Librarian Donna Witek and writing professor Teresa Grettano discuss their course on social media literacy, in which students engage with a range of social media platforms. Amanda Scull describes teaching students about library collections and information creation as they use library-provided platforms such as digital repositories and LibGuides. English professor Kathryn M. Moncrief and librarian Michele R. Santamaria describe a course that foregrounded metacognition and research-based learning through student contributions to the digital, open access project The Map of Early Modern London (MoEML).

The relevance of metaliteracy to professional contexts is evident in several chapters. Technical communication professors Barbara J. D'Angelo and Barry M. Maid discuss a writing and research course for nursing students in which students created and shared information through their use of e-portfolios and digital media. Sandra K. Cimbricz and Logan Rath applied metaliteracy principles to a graduate course in education, where pre-

service teachers reflected on their own literacy practices in order to develop instructional materials and curricula for grades five through twelve. This chapter demonstrates how metacognitive practices can be applied to both teachers' and students' lifelong learning and literacy development.

The social and political dimensions of information, and information practices that are vital to metacognitive thinking and knowledge creation, are addressed in all chapters but especially in the essays by the following authors. Librarians Lauren Wallis and Andrew Battista discuss an information literacy credit course in which they emphasized the contextual nature of authority and the role of students as information creators. Kristine N. Stewart and David M. Broussard describe how they reconceived of their library information literacy course through the lenses of both the ACRL *Framework* and metaliteracy. This approach further fostered student empowerment and self-directed learning. Librarian Irene McGarrity discusses how she and colleague Jennifer Ditkoff invited their students to co-create central components of their course, as a means of encouraging ownership and agency in the learning process. Their chapter offers insights into both the benefits and the challenges of having students create course content. McGarrity and Ditkoff invite teachers to consider how to balance the need for both open-endedness and structure in course content and activities. Paul Prinsloo's final chapter also addresses student agency, as he argues that the concept of metaliteracy can be enriched by "situating it within the broader discourses of structure and agency" (p. 189)—such as those articulated by theorists including Paulo Freire and Pierre Bourdieu—and approaching metaliteracy as part of "being-and-acting-in-the-world" (p. 189).

The pedagogical applications described by the book's contributing authors illustrate that the foundational ideas behind Mackey and Jacobson's conception of metaliteracy can enrich information literacy instruction, particularly as librarians and other educators seek to engage with the *Framework*. At the same time, I felt a disconnect between Prinsloo's expressed reservations about redefining literacy according to any single framework and contributing authors' implicit and explicit suggestions that Mackey and Jacobson's metaliteracy model may be *the* model through which metaliteracy can be understood. This tension may invite readers to think about metaliteracy and information literacy from numerous angles, however I felt uncertain as to how essential Mackey and Jacobson's metaliteracy framework may have been to the described projects: was it the authors' use of metacognitive practices, and an emphasis on information creation—neither of which is

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unique to Mackey and Jacobson's metaliteracy framework—that proved so pedagogically valuable to their teaching? As a reader who is sympathetic to Prinsloo's argument that there are limitations to adhering to any single literacy framework, I also wondered whether any of the contributing authors may have perceived limitations when drawing on Mackey and Jacobson's metaliteracy framework. I believe that any framework has its limitations and that through considering these limitations educators can explore how to draw upon and challenge theoretical frameworks in ways that enrich both their teaching and student learning. A fuller discussion of Mackey and Jacobson's metaliteracy model, to accompany the contributed chapters, might have helped to address these questions.

Metaliteracy in Practice is a valuable contribution to the literature of library and information science and explores many of the salient questions and concerns of instruction librarians and other educators, including how we may help students explore the more complex, conceptual dimensions of information literacy, such as the social, political, and ethical dimensions of information creation, distribution, and use. The book's collected chapters may serve as catalysts for librarians to reexamine their work with students and to consider ways in which they may partner with other educators to integrate information literacy (including metaliteracy) into academic programs and curricula.

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