Review of Information Literacy Through Theory

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Review of *Information Literacy Through Theory*, edited by Alison Hicks, Annemaree Lloyd, and Ola Pilerot

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Abstract


*Keywords*: information literacy, information literacy theory, social theory, sociocultural theory, sociopolitical theory, critical information literacy, Information Literacy Through Theory (book)

*Book Reviews*

edited by Jennifer Joe

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In *Information Literacy Through Theory*, information literacy scholars present a multifaceted set of perspectives on social theory relevant to information literacy practice. The volume is ideal for practitioners, researchers, and graduate students. In the introduction, the editors, Alison Hicks, Annemaree Lloyd, and Ola Pilerot, assert that social theory can help librarians better understand how information literacy practice is situated in social contexts. They explain that they conducted a scoping review of existing literature to identify theories connected to information literacy, which they categorized into eight broad theoretical perspectives: cognition, criticality, discourse, materiality, practice, sociocultural, sociopolitical, and sociotechnical. Readers should note that the theories can fall into more than one category. In this review, the theories represented in this book will be discussed using these broad theoretical perspectives.

Clarence Maybee and John Budd consider theories related to cognition in their chapters. In Chapter 11, Maybee presents variation theory, which focuses on learning and experience. This theory is “grounded in the belief that reality is created through interaction between individuals and the world and that knowledge is awareness of phenomena created through such interactions” (p. 183). Information literacy research can benefit from variation theory because it helps researchers investigate how lived experience impacts learning. The theory makes social context even more relevant to information literacy practice. Chapter 12 examines teaching and learning and the importance of theory to information literacy practice. John Budd notes that the changes in the ACRL framework are a good example of how teaching information literacy concepts has expanded from simply covering a checklist of standards to getting students to think about how information needs change depending on context. Consciousness and cognition are both equally important in information literacy practice.

Chapters 4 and 7 explore the theoretical perspective of criticality. Arthur Coelho Bezerra and Marco Schneider delve into critical information literacy and what they note as radical and radioactive concepts. Critical studies emphasize social consciousness and argue that before practitioners can concern themselves with knowledge, they must develop consciousness to critique the systems in place that present information to people. Veronica

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Johansson’s discussion in Chapter 7 on critical design and critical literacy is also essential to understanding how information works within different power structures.

Theories related to discourse and sociotechnical concepts are discussed in Chapters 3 and 5. Noora Hirvonen examines mediated discourse theory (MDT), which explores the role discourse plays in human action. Discourse is described as an action practiced in social settings. In MDT, actions are carried out through mediational means using cultural tools, such as a computer for research. MDT can help researchers think about information literacy as a mediational means. The theory also encourages researchers to understand community and historical influences on information literacy practices. Alison Hicks explores the link between positioning theory and information literacy. She explains that this theory highlights how people navigate the world through interactions shaped by discourse. Positioning theory asserts that not everyone has the same position in society and, therefore, not everyone has the same rights. In information literacy practice, researchers can use this theory to empower people to understand what questions to ask and teach them to examine information landscapes critically.

Chapters 9 and 10 focus on theories related to materiality. Jutta Haider and Olof Sundin discuss how science, technology, and feminism are explored in relation to how information is arranged and represented. Sociomateriality advocates for anti-anthropocentrism, which argues that everything is connected and has the agency to shape the social and material world. The sociomateriality perspective can help information literacy practitioners think more deeply about meaning making and information literacy. Annemarie Lloyd investigates corporeal experience and explains that the body engages in acts relevant to information literacy. Embodiment theories focus on the physical body, senses, and lived experiences that all work together. In information literacy, this approach helps practitioners understand how physical actions are not isolated practices but interconnected with sociocultural contexts.

Practice theories are discussed in Chapters 2 and 13. These theories explore society and culture and how information literacy is a practice “enacted in a social setting” (p. 27). Annemaree Lloyd highlights the epistemological and ontological aspects of understanding information literacy in relation to practice theory. Practice theory’s strength lies in its ability to highlight opportunities for investigating the relationship between information literacy and the social sites in which it is practiced. Ola Pilerot asserts that information literacy practitioners can examine how they teach information literacy using institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography examines the nature of organizations shaped by
shared values and rules. In this case, information literacy is defined as an institution because there are expectations of behavior and learning that “should” occur. This perspective can help information literacy researchers better understand how power structures play a role in information literacy instruction.

Sociocultural theory is highlighted in Chapter 8. Amanda Folk focuses on the equity mindset, which encourages people to understand how communities, organizations, and institutions impact the ability to access information. Using an equity mindset can help researchers ask questions that will help bring information to people who have been excluded in dominant narratives. Along with other theories presented in the volume, this approach emphasizes the sociocultural aspects of information literacy and power dynamics involved in information access.

Sociopolitical theories are addressed in Chapters 1 and 6. John Buschman posits that information literacy is essential to a democratic society. Civic republicanism is presented as the paradigm through which information literacy practice is commonly acknowledged to be enacted. However, Buschman notes that the complexity of a democratic society does not readily facilitate this process. He asserts that in current society, there is a problem of lack of engagement, fake news, and mistrust of the government, and information literacy practitioners must reframe the conversation around democracy and information literacy to align their practice with the challenges society faces today. Johanna Rivano Eckerdal presents the connection between plural agnostics and information literacy. Plural agnostics theory focuses on class and the process of democracy. The theory acknowledges that democracy is a process, and conflicts will always exist between people. People should not seek to eliminate disputes but look for counter-hegemonic practices using this theory as a framework. This approach can help researchers understand information literacy practice as a political practice.

The theories presented in this book highlight the value of social theory and their implications for information literacy practice. Readers should take the time to digest each chapter in this volume to understand the concepts carefully. Missing from this volume are discussions of critical indigenous theory and critical race theory and their impact on information literacy practice.