

Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 10 Issue 2

December 2016

Book review

Gruwell, C. 2016. Book review of Downey, A. 2016. *Critical information literacy: foundations, inspiration, and ideas*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 10(2), p. 102.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/10.2.2146>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright for the article content resides with the authors, and copyright for the publication layout resides with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Information Literacy Group. These Copyright holders have agreed that this article should be available on Open Access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike licence.

"By 'open access' to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited."

Chan, L. et al. 2002. Budapest Open Access Initiative. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Accessed: 18 November 2015].

Downey, A. 2016. *Critical information literacy: foundations, inspiration, and ideas*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press. 204pp. 978-1634000246. £25. Pbk.

Cindy Gruwell, Professor/Research Librarian, St. Cloud State University. Email: cagruwell@stcloudstate.edu

As the Associate College Librarian and Director of Research Services at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, Annie Downey has had a substantial amount of experience with the role of information literacy (IL) and its intersection with library instruction and the students we serve in academia. In these changing times it is only natural that there is a shift and in many respects a refocus in the way professional librarians teach and assist students as they develop and enhance their IL skills. Gone are the days of teaching in a vacuum, that is the simple one-shots that provide only rudimentary skills. Today's students ask and need much more and with the advent of the ACRL Framework librarians are finding focused library instruction easier to deliver. Downey's book, *Critical information literacy: foundations, inspiration and ideas*, delivers a clear, concise explanation and motivation for moving in the direction of critical IL.

Beginning with the introduction by Jessica Critten, Associate Professor and Instructional Services Librarian at the University of West Georgia, and continuing throughout the book, this text provides a deep, informative discussion that lays out the foundation for a detailed explanation of what critical IL is, its interplay with the ACRL Framework, and its contribution to critical discourse. With an emphasis placed on developing "informed citizens" and their respective relationship to our networked society, Downey links the evolution of information during the information age to the cultural, political, and civic engagement of today (p.13). While for many years librarians have stressed the importance of those basic ACRL information literacy tenets that most of us know all know too well, the emphasis of instruction is shifting from the skills based focus of how information is found, to lending a much more critical eye that recognizes not only its power, but also the interplay of societal class and privilege.

Downey's early description of critical IL instruction as the encouragement of students "to analyze the power structures underlying the texts under study in an equitable and empowering learning environment" (p.39) gives a clear indication of exactly where her text is going. With timely references and examples from the works of pioneering educators and sociologists, John Dewey, Paulo Friere, and Jack Mezirow, she demonstrates the parallels between higher education and various aspects of library instruction. By providing just enough theory, she is able to focus on the practical application (praxis) of IL in library instruction settings and the need for librarians ensure that we are teaching critical evaluative skills in addition to the age-old search and find techniques that we are most accustomed to.

While several articles regarding critical IL have attempted to broach this important topic, many have missed the mark and are so complex that readers get lost in the verbosity of theory. Downey's well organised approach to this topic allows even the most uninformed readers to grasp both the theory and praxis behind critical IL. Her simple, yet rich explanations regarding pedagogy and learning provide the backdrop for the practical and important use of critical evaluation in library instruction. She makes an excellent argument for critical engagement that goes far beyond factual knowledge. In essence she asks us to take a deeper, reflective approach to our teaching and realistic understanding of the use of information.

Ultimately if you are looking to learn more about critical IL in general or have a strong desire to join the discourse, you will be well served to read this book. Not only is it a quick read, but also one that provides plenty of fodder for application to teaching and research.