

# Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 8 Issue 2

December 2014

## Book Review

Walker, C. 2014. Book review of Mackey T. and Jacobson, T. 2014. *Metaliteracy: reinventing information literacy to empower learners*. Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman. 246 pp. ISBN: 9781555709891 £39.99. Pbk. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 8(2), pp. 169-170.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/8.2.1952>

**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.**

“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> [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

**Mackey, T. and Jacobson, T. 2014. Metaliteracy: reinventing information literacy to empower learners. Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman. 246 pp. ISBN: 9781555709891 £39.99. Pbk.**

**Christopher Walker, Librarian, University of Law in Leeds.**  
Email: [chris.walker@law.ac.uk](mailto:chris.walker@law.ac.uk)

Thomas Mackey and Trudi Jacobson are two experienced information literacy (IL) educators. In their opening sentence, they set out a clear and unambiguous aim which is to present a comprehensive and unifying framework of related literacies called metaliteracy. In practice this means that the authors attempt to present an evolution of IL and recast it in an overarching metacognitive framework. This is a book that covers a wide scope of work as it attempts to unify numerous associated 'literacies' that have propagated in recent years both as part of, and parallel to, IL. This attempt to unify a number of literacies is not unique to the authors and is becoming a crowded area of research with organisations such as Jisc developing their own models, each reflecting their own paradigms. Regardless of the nomenclature, the central thread permeating throughout the book is evangelical and its mission is to evolve traditional information and associated literacies, moulding them into an approach that is fit for purpose in a multi-literacy, post-modern social media age.

In terms of the general layout of the book, it is divided into seven chapters, with a clear contents page and a useful index at the end. In the first three chapters the authors provide a theoretical underpinning that presents a well-argued and often compelling case for metaliteracy. This is followed by a review of trends, as well as the results of a survey conducted by the authors, and concludes with examples from practice.

Chapter one provides a theoretical grounding, establishing a framework for metaliteracy by covering some of the wider literature. As much as I enjoyed this chapter, for the casual reader less familiar with the IL related literature, it may require a second read. The chapter examines a spectrum of associated theories including the critical social theory of Bourdieu, whose writing is so pivotal in the field of general information theory.

Chapter two focuses on the recent societal technological trends towards consumption of social and visual media and the impacts they are having in the way that we interact with and consume information. These trends, the authors suggest, pose a whole range of issues and challenges to traditional IL education. Metaliteracy provides learners with a means of developing the necessary competencies needed to successfully navigate work with the new social and visual world.

Chapter three is pivotal as it builds upon the foundations already presented. The authors' focus in this chapter is to develop and present a model of metaliteracy. A metaliteracy model, however, needs to provide an inclusive overarching structure which takes into account a range of related literacies and their common characteristics. Taken together, the first three chapters present a compelling argument for the theoretical foundations of metaliteracy as an evolution of IL.

Chapter four is an examination of the global trends and the blurring effect that technology is having on IL competencies and standards. The authors briefly summarise both UNESCO and IFLA's current stand on IL and also provide a succinct examination of the adapting standards developed through the likes of SCONUL's Seven Pillars model. Chapter five stands out as being different to the other previous chapters because it is a summary of a study conducted by the authors in 2012. The study, entitled 'Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy', was a survey of teachers of IL, both librarians and instructors. The study aimed to obtain preliminary answers to seven research questions, each designed to provide a snap shot of the current practices. There is a complete

summary of the research questions and findings as well as the inclusion of an overview of all the practical elements of the research such as its basic design, implementation, analysis and usefully, an appendix which includes survey instrument used.

The last two chapters are given as examples of real world metaliteracy instruction and should be taken together as they present two different approaches to metaliteracy pedagogy. Chapter six is an account of the evolutionary progress that has taken place on an IL course delivered at the University of Albany by the authors over the past decade. The authors describe the changing landscape and the need to adapt their course through the rise and developments of Web 2.0 and the social media revolution of the mid-2000s. Chapter seven presents a very different account of a metaliteracy which initially challenged me and my personal scepticisms. It is an account of a digital storytelling course at SUNY Empire State College used as a means of delivering metaliteracy instruction. The authors convincingly suggest that digital story telling requires that students learn a number of important competencies. These competencies are central to metaliteracy and include the technical aspects of creating a feature rich digital story and necessitate an understanding of audio and video media formats as well as learning about related concepts of privacy and intellectual property.

This book is a very welcome and timely contribution to the field through which the authors considered a well-argued path for the future development of “literacies”. This book has caused me to stop and reflect upon the changing nature of information literacies in general, and has really emphasised to me the need for a theory that is not languishing in the social and socio-technical scene of the early 2000’s. The main challenge facing metaliteracy will be its ability to gain traction among the IL academics and practitioners. This book is ultimately most useful for researchers and academics and may also help many dissertation students, but to deny its usefulness to well-informed practitioners would be doing it a disservice.