

Book review

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Janice Fernandes

Academic Support Manager,
University of West London.
Email: janice.fernandes@uwl.ac.uk.

Goldstein, S. (Ed.). 2020, *Informed Societies: Why Information Literacy matters for citizenship, participation and democracy*. London: Facet. pp. 256. ISBN 978-1-78330-391-5 £149.95. Hbk

The book aims to strengthen the relationship between librarianship and society in a politically conscious world through the critical context of information literacy (IL). At the onset the editor explains that this book is for anyone who cares about informed participation in society. This is underpinned with the basic idea that in addressing the information needs of society, its people are then empowered to take advantage of opportunities for democratic participation and engagement. The book consists of 11 chapters (along with some emotionally moving figures towards the end) dealing with the political and psychological aspects of information and societies from different countries and various perspectives. There is a foreword by Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe and an introduction by Stéphane Goldstein.

The quest for information seeking, finding, evaluation and ethical use is the focal point of the knowledge society that we live in today and in that context, this book is timely in its investigation of information and misinformation. At the beginning, author Gianfranco Polizzi explains that effective information evaluation is the key to the people of a democratic knowledge society actively participating in the decision-making process.

The chapter by Andrew Whitworth focusses on micropolitics through the relationship between IL and citizenship through the discussion of the critical political theories of Jurgen Habermas, Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault. The tragic story of the Hillsborough stadium fire in 1989 and the fact seeking investigation that followed is an excellent example of an actively participating informed society seeking the truth through sustained efforts. This example could be

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effectively used by teachers of IL in explaining how society can unearth the truth by being a part of the “information conversation”.

The book introduces its readers to newer concepts like intellectual empathy. Andrea Baer explains the predicament of the author returning to a socio-politically divided classroom after the U.S. elections and engaging with students through the framework of sharing information. In a politically unbalanced society struggling with its “web of beliefs”, it is intellectual empathy which will create spaces for discourse, evidence, and judgement. It is against this background that educators play an essential role in understanding cognitive bias and strengthening the critical thought process.

The political and psychological consequences of “fake news” have become important in a society where disregard for political truth has become commonplace. Stephan Lewandowsky brings to the forefront the harsh reality of a society following fake idols and ideologies in political election scenarios. He describes techniques like inoculation, prebunking, recommender systems and “technocognition” as steps to making a small difference in a world of post truth politics.

It has been acknowledged that mass hysteria and heightened emotions often act as techniques for obscuring truth. The emphasis on accurate information in society today makes the reader realise the importance of IL and the value of those teaching it to young citizens.

How do we know if the information presented before us is the truth? How do we ensure that people adding to the universe of knowledge are conscious of their responsibility to society? The Norwegian broadcaster asking for a comprehension quiz as a prerequisite for discussion forums is a good example to emulate.

Where do we find reliable information? How do we know it is accurate? Is IL the same as media literacy? What is information discernment? How are Ranganathan’s 5 Laws of library science, first proposed in 1931, still relevant today? How do national policymaking bodies include all stake holders in the information process to move from bibliographic instruction to participative citizenship? The latter chapters aim to explain these and other emerging issues through the lens and experiences of fledgling democracies, public libraries, migrants, 18-year-olds and senior citizens.

Overall, this book is very relevant for a good understanding of information related contemporary issues; it is illuminating, thought provoking and brings to the forefront various relevant issues for discussion. In recent times several books have been written on IL; however, this book is written in an unprecedented political and digital landscape and provides food for thought. A minor criticism of this book is the lack of engagement with SCONUL IL principles, which would have set the stage for considering what should happen and what doesn’t. Although the book bases its understanding on a lot of literature and theories, it is clear that readers, especially educators, would greatly benefit from more examples and case studies which could be used in university instruction scenarios to produce a democratically informed and participative society.