

## Book Review

**Madden, R. 2026. Book review of Taylor, N. G. and Jaeger, P. T. 2022. *Foundations of information literacy*. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 20(1), pp. 243–245.**

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Taylor, N. G. and Jaeger, P. T. (2022).  
*Foundations of information literacy*.  
Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman. pp. 245.  
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This ambitious book sets out to reposition information literacy (IL) not merely as a set of academic skills, but as a sociopolitical necessity; a survival skill for individuals and democracies (Taylor & Jaeger, p. 3). The authors argue persuasively that while humans have always made decisions based on the information around them, the scale, speed, and structure of today's information environment demand a far more critical and coordinated response. In the twenty-first century IL has become a civic imperative. It is striking that the book was published just months before the release of ChatGPT and the rapid transformations that followed; yet its core arguments have become even more urgent.

The book is well structured, opening with a valuable sweep through the *wide world of literacies* (Taylor & Jaeger, p. 33). The authors trace the evolution of IL from early standards-based, ICT-focused, and arguably paternalistic approaches to more expansive frameworks influenced by metaliteracy and critical IL. They arrive at their own comprehensive, if somewhat lengthy definition, that positions IL as a continual, socially situated process encompassing digital and media literacies. Although the book predates the widespread use of the term Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy, its arguments anticipate that development; the need to understand algorithmic systems and automated content generation feels even more pressing now. A major strength of the book lies in its treatment of IL as a sociopolitical construct, arguing that it should be considered a fundamental human right.

The section on psychology and IL is especially helpful. Drawing on concepts from cognitive science such as pattern recognition, cognitive dissonance, modelling, social norming, social contagion, and confirmation bias the authors explain why individuals cling to belief systems even in the face of contradictory evidence. Echo chambers and filter bubbles are not solely technological phenomena; they are reinforced by human tendencies toward lazy thinking under

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conditions of information overload. This interdisciplinary perspective is one of the book's most valuable contributions. The authors rightly suggest that IL educators can and should learn from cognitive science to design more effective pedagogical interventions.

The writing is engaging and at times humorous, for example when introducing three powerful chapters that explore what IL is up against, they admit "we are genuinely sorry to have to expose you to this mind-bending nonsense in the next few chapters, but we have to" (Taylor & Jaeger, p. 113). The authors use the term "information illiteracy" when discussing mis and disinformation. Though somewhat U.S. focused, examples such as the QAnon movement and the Pizzagate conspiracy illustrate the real-world consequences of unchecked misinformation and how conspiracy cultures flourish in fragmented information ecosystems.

The authors provide a useful history of censorship and propaganda, sections likely to be particularly beneficial to those teaching IL. By situating contemporary challenges within a longer trajectory of information control, they remind us that disinformation is nothing new. "Confidence men" in the nineteenth century, partisan newspapers, and state propaganda all demonstrate that manipulation has long accompanied every media innovation. However, this is now far more pervasive, persuasive, and difficult to detect. Early optimism about the internet, once heralded as a democratising force, opening access to knowledge, has given way to concerns about commercialisation, polarisation, and a small number of powerful corporations dominating digital spaces. The result of opaque algorithms and the harvesting of personal data, the authors suggest, is that our cognitive biases have become commercialised. Authoritarian governments, too, have harnessed technology for surveillance and suppression.

In their view the web has shifted from a liberating technology to one that can entrench control, enable conspiracy theories, and undermine democratic processes. Many of the chapters bear the imprint of the pandemic, including a chapter on health misinformation, where they make the stark claim that "disinformation kills. As does information illiteracy" (Taylor & Jaeger, p. 144).

Framing IL as a human right, they emphasise that access to technology is not equivalent to the capacity to interpret and evaluate information critically. The book critiques U.S. governmental cheerleading for the tech industry and its uncritical adoption of digital solutions. Policymakers focus more narrowly on internet access while the authors extend the conversation beyond skills training to one of social justice.

If Big Tech companies have failed to foster IL, the authors ask whether libraries have done enough. Libraries possess public trust and infrastructure, but require greater institutional support, funding, and recognition of their political role. At times, the authors could be accused of being a little partisan in their views, but they also explicitly acknowledge that libraries are not neutral institutions, just as information itself is not neutral. This candid stance strengthens the book's call for coordinated advocacy and professional collaboration.

The central thesis, articulated clearly in the later chapters, is the need for lifelong IL. The authors even propose the idea of a presidential envoy for IL in the United States, an idea that may now seem rather idealistic, yet signals the scale of their ambition.

The concluding chapters reiterate that while misinformation is not new, the challenges now are substantial: entire entities owe their existence to disinformation, and complacency and distraction pose additional barriers. People have "lost the sense that the future was at least somewhat knowable and predictable" (Taylor & Jaeger, p. 175). The book ends with a call to action: for information professionals to "lead out" (Taylor & Jaeger, p. 179) of IL. Lifelong IL

must be embedded at the heart of library education, supported by policy and funding, and recognised as essential to democratic health. This requires cross-institutional collaboration between information professionals and a coordinated professional response, which views IL as a “unifying concept that underlies the how and why of the information professions” (Taylor & Jaeger, p. 6).

Overall, this is a well-constructed, thought-provoking work that successfully unifies historical context, theoretical development, and practical implications and real-world issues for teaching. While there is an American bias at times, this is a valuable resource for library and information science students, information professionals, educators, researchers, and policy makers. Each chapter concludes with guiding questions to encourage further reflection and learning. The core message that IL is a social, political, and economic necessity has only grown more compelling in the era of Generative AI.

## References

Taylor, N.G. and Jaeger, P.T. (2022). *Foundations of information literacy*. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman.