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Book review:

Information Literacy Through Theory

Hicks, A, Lloyd, A & Pilerot, O. (2023). Information Literacy Through Theory. Facet Publishing.

In the field of library and information science (LIS), the concept of information literacy stands as a cornerstone, influencing research, education, and practice. Yet, according to the authors, information literacy often remains narrowly explored, with an emphasis on practicality over theoretical depth. Addressing this gap, *Information Literacy Through Theory* offers a diverse collection of theoretical perspectives that enrich our understanding of this multifaceted domain.

The book consists of 13 chapters, each authored by known theorists in the field of information literacy. These contributors explore the practical application of various theories to information literacy. The editors, Alison Hicks, Annemaree Lloyd and Ola Pilerot, guided the authors to address a specific set of questions in each chapter, ensuring a focus on key concepts and their relevance to the field.

In Chapter 1, Buschman highlights the critical role of information literacy in promoting democracy and the need for information literacy to combat misinformation and support informed political participation. Through theoretical analysis, he explains the evidence, the normative values of information literacy, and the actual role of libraries and information literacy in democratic societies.

In Chapter 2, Lloyd describes information literacy using a practice theory approach, emphasizing its connection to sociality and materiality. This perspective helps us understand how context shapes information literacy and its associated activities. By examining the interplay between people, information, and sociocultural context, practice theory reveals that information literacy extends beyond competencies, highlighting its integral role in everyday life and lived experiences.

In Chapter 3, Hirvonen explores mediated discourse theory (MDT) as a discursive theory of human action. According to her, MDT highlights the tension between individual and community perspectives

on information literacy. It examines actions and practices within their historical and situational contexts, focusing on both individual and collective aspects. MDT centers on social action while recognizing the critical role of discourses in these actions.

In Chapter 4, Bezerra and Schneider examine the foundations of critical information literacy, linking it to the concept of theoretically informed praxis - awareness of inequalities and oppression - rooted in Paulo Freire's philosophy. They argue that North American research often intentionally overlooks the influence of Marx's philosophical legacy due to political controversy, particularly in applied fields like information sciences. This omission creates a notable distinction between critical information literacy studies in North America and Brazil.

In Chapter 5, Hicks explores how information literacy is conceptualized through the lens of positioning theory, which sees it as a result of discursive construction within social contexts, closely connected to changing local values and norms. These concepts highlight the linguistic influence on information construction, revealing how social dynamics shape the information environments examined in literacy research.

In chapter 6, Rivano Eckerdal presents Chantal Mouffe's theory of plural agonistics, a radical strand of democracy theories, to shed light on how information literacy and democracy are possibly connected. Acknowledging that Mouffe did not use the concept of information literacy, Rivano Eckerdal presents core elements of the theory that helps to understand information literacy as a political concept and emphasize the importance of institutions for democracy as democratic sites.

In Chapter 7, Johansson comprehensively demonstrates how critical design concepts and theories can be applied to understand critical literacy. She aims to reveal and discuss the limitations and biases in information representations. Her approach is grounded in post-structuralist and sociomaterial definitions of critical design. Johansson argues that designers of information systems and critical literacy should expose and challenge biased information representations to transform them. Additionally, she offers insights and potential areas for future research on applying a critical design perspective to critical literacy.

In Chapter 8, Folk explores information literacy using Bensimon's concept of equity mindset. This involves using data to identify and analyze inequities within specific contexts and applying an equity perspective to data interpretation. Folk outlines three key assumptions for this approach:

1. Information literacy is shaped by community-specific value systems.
2. It involves complex thinking, knowing, and communication, not just transferable skills.
3. Power, privilege, oppression, and exclusion are inherent in the contexts where information literacy occurs.

Folk argues that traditional information literacy research must be re-examined to address systemic barriers, focusing on meaningful change rather than "fixing" marginalized individuals.

In Chapter 9, Haider and Sundin advocate using sociomateriality to understand information literacy, highlighting the interplay between social and material elements. They discuss the entanglement of humans and infrastructures, emphasizing that artifacts should be seen as entities with agency that interact with their environment. Introducing anti-anthropocentrism, they argue for focusing on the relationality of all actors in an interaction, acknowledging the significant impact of technology on human behavior. They note that traditional information literacy research often overlooks or portrays

technologies as neutral. Sociomateriality, they suggest, can provide deeper insights into how people engage with information through platforms and search engines.

In Chapter 10, Lloyd highlights the impact of embodiment to approach information literacy theoretically, emphasizing that embodiment still is underestimated as secondary knowledge among the field of LIS. She advocates to foreground bodies as information sources, stressing the ontological value that emphasizes how knowledge emerges among communities or practices and epistemologically it gives answers to the questions about how we know and what it is that is worth knowing. By focusing on embodiment, researchers can explore the complex ways in which the body serves as a source of information and as a knowledge repository, both spatially and temporally.

In Chapter 11, Maybee describes information literacy through a lens of learning, highlighting that variation theory guides research aimed at understanding how people learn to use information. Additionally, it helps to recognize the link between information literacy and subject-specific learning.

In Chapter 12, Budd describes the importance of consciousness and cognition for information literacy. Relating to Habermas, he argues that the theory of consciousness can enhance our understanding of how individuals process information. Specifically, those who engage in critical thinking can utilize information to make well-reasoned decisions. Furthermore, he introduces his framework for phenomenological cognitive action, emphasizing the dialogical nature of reading, thinking, and reacting to information. According to him these elements are central to information literacy.

In Chapter 13, Pilerot emphasizes the importance of understanding information literacy through an institutional ethnographical lens. He argues that literacy is deeply connected to social practices, each with its own historically developed ways of knowing. The term “institutional” clarifies how knowledge, values, and discourses shape societal spheres like the market, healthcare, and higher education. Ethnography involves examining these institutions locally, focusing on interactions, behaviors, and texts that link local contexts to broader settings. Pilerot asserts that societal organization is influenced by ruling relations mediated through texts and documents. An institutional ethnography perspective reveals how information literacy is shaped by broader elements such as ideologies, governance practices, and accountability mechanisms, highlighting the connection between local practices and wider social and historical structures.

The editors have skillfully contextualized the individual chapters within the broader framework of information literacy theory. The introduction offers a comprehensive overview of the research conducted in the field over the past decades. The conclusion is particularly valuable, as it synthesizes the book’s 13 chapters into four overarching themes: discourse and power, decentering language, revising the premise of information literacy, and examining privilege as a critical reflection on teaching information literacy. This thematic organization enhances the understanding of each chapter’s contribution to the development of information literacy theory. The editors provide a table illustrating how each chapter aligns with these themes, with some chapters fitting into multiple themes. This approach highlights the interconnectedness of the book’s content and reinforces the importance of considering the broader context.

The book comprises 13 standalone chapters, each authored by different individuals, with each chapter focusing on distinct theory related to information literacy. As a result, the chapters exhibit variations in both style and quality. While the editors have provided guidelines, there remains space for each author’s interpretation, leading to diverse focal points and varying levels of pedagogical proficiency across the chapters. However, the authors frequently cross-reference other chapters, creating a rich web of intertextuality. This interconnectedness highlights the relatedness of ideas

across the chapters, contributing to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the field. By weaving these references throughout the book, the authors ensure that readers can appreciate the broader context and relationships among the concepts discussed, enhancing the overall coherence and depth of the work.

According to the authors, their aim was to provide a book for a broader audience of students, practitioners, and researchers - and they succeeded. Practitioners benefit from the clear and pedagogical structure of each chapter, which provides basic assumptions of each theory and connects them to information literacy. Students can also make use of this setup. On the one hand they can use this book to gain a comprehensive overview of different theories in the field of LIS. Moreover, it provides profound insights into the broad concept of information literacy and how to approach it theoretically. Therefore, the book would be highly valuable as course literature in the student program. Above all, researchers and students alike will appreciate the book's invitation to chart new territories, inspiring them to contribute to the ongoing evolution of information literacy theory. By reframing theory as a dynamic process, the book instills a sense of agency, empowering readers to actively participate in shaping the future trajectory of LIS scholarship.

In conclusion, *Information Literacy Through Theory* is a relevant book that transcends disciplinary boundaries to provide a complex examination of information literacy. Its combination of theoretical depth and practical relevance makes it essential reading for students, practitioners, and researchers. As we navigate an increasingly complex information landscape, this book serves as both a guide and a catalyst for innovation, reminding us that theory is dynamic, constantly evolving, and essential for continued discovery and growth. This aligns with Haider and Sundin's assertion in their chapter that "Theories are always in motion and not meant to be rigid templates; they are always being adapted and further developed in the research process." This quote encapsulates the dynamic and evolving nature of the theories explored throughout the book, underscoring its innovative approach and reinforcing its value as a key resource in the field.