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Book review

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Chan, L. et al (2002) *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. New York: Open Society Institute. <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> (Retrieved 22 January 2007)

Brabazon, T. (2007). The University of Google: education in the (post) information age. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. 234pp. ISBN 9780754670971. £30.

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Knowing only of the buzz around this book, I assumed that it would be yet another diatribe about how IT has destroyed education. Something like the rants that sweep regularly through the THES would be here collected in yet another bid to bulk out an academic CV. Yet Brabazon is a Professor of Media and Director of the Popular Culture Collective, not the likeliest field of study for an old fogey dreaming of an illusory golden age.

Sure enough, her purpose is quite other than a rehearsal of tired old arguments. For example, neatly sidestepping at least one dead-end, she writes: "Actually, content is not the key. Context is the imperative. Only when technology has a social purpose and appropriate context is it useful." (p.63) * While the book never fails to exemplify the scholarly engagement with authoritative and pertinent sources that she insists is proper to higher education, Brabazon is by no means retreating into the ivory tower. Subtle and beautifully textured, her writing demonstrates a concern for her students, for citizenship and for an improved society. But even better, she shows how to articulate such concerns in the present day.

Primarily aimed at university teachers, the book will nonetheless prove valuable to librarians. Indeed, the first chapter should be obligatory reading for all of us. Starting from her growing realisation that HE students are reluctant to read books, Brabazon moves on to provide a critical analysis of Google's place before turning to her own practical attempts to make a difference. (She is sufficiently self-confident to note the extreme success of her interventions and to quote the praise she receives from students.) The chapter's value to librarians is two-fold. First, the critical analysis offers sound and usable arguments for countering those who believe that Google is the panacea. Second, and more importantly, Brabazon here begins to develop the book's overarching theme: that higher education's purpose is to develop the student's capacity to engage critically with the world. It is within this context that librarians can rediscover and reassert their role.

Brabazon sees clearly that "Instead of stressing new and old media, teachers and librarians must focus on how we extend and develop already-held knowledge and competencies." (p.145) She places such 'literacies' at the heart of higher education and shows how they are essential for a modern society: thus, "if the knowledge economy is to be more than a slogan ... critical literacies will require primary attention" (p.25) Her assertion that librarians in HE have a crucial role to play in this is most welcome.

Nonetheless, what really takes her argument way beyond the tired and the sterile is her perception that “Literacy is not a goal or an outcome. It is a process and a politics.” (p.48) Now, if that’s not a rallying cry for librarians, then we are indeed a sad bunch!

**There are so many wonderful apercus like this. If you don’t actually read the book, at least raid it for slogans!*