

Journal of Information Literacy

ISSN 1750-5968

Volume 7 Issue 1

June 2013

Book Review

Eyre, J. 2013. Book Review of Secker, J. and Coonan, E. (eds.) 2013. *Rethinking information literacy: a practical framework for supporting learning*. London: Facet. *Journal of Information Literacy*, 7(1), pp. 111-112.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11645/7.1.1829>

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].

Secker, J. and Coonan, E. (eds.) 2013. *Rethinking information literacy: a practical framework for supporting learning*. London: Facet. 224 pp. ISBN: 9781856048224. £49.95. Pbk.

Jason Eyre, Lecturer in Learning Development, De Montfort University. Email: jeyre@dmu.ac.uk

As information becomes ubiquitous and easy to access, so we – as a society – become less discerning and critically engaged with its content. This is perhaps the central paradox of the Information Age. The stakes are higher and the repercussions broader than the UK higher education context that this excellent book focuses on: the totality of our society, including its democratic principles and enlightenment ideals, is at risk when we cease to engage critically with this overflow of information. Editors Secker and Coonan issue a rallying cry to address this state of affairs, a call that is issued primarily to their fellow academic librarians. However, the stated hope is that the importance of information literacy (IL) will penetrate through the walls of the library to the lecturers, administrators and education policy makers beyond who perhaps hold more sway and are better positioned to effect change.

The book offers a detailed approach to the teaching of IL. The approach represents some of the fruits of the Arcadia Programme undertaken by the University of Cambridge, which funded 20 fellowships to allow librarians and researchers the opportunity to explore the role of academic libraries in the digital world. Such an initiative is laudable in a profession whose functional approach to research can sometimes be narrowly focused on the evaluative (what has been done) rather than the speculative (what might be done).

A New Curriculum for Information Literacy (ANCIL) was the first fruit of Arcadia, with the curriculum itself and associated reports available online for reuse under Creative Commons licenses. A second Arcadia project followed (involving the University of Worcester and York St John University), and this looked at how such a curriculum could be implemented, focusing on the development of teaching materials and an institutional-level audit of IL provision. Materials from this follow-up project are also available online. Substantive tools derived from both of these projects are helpfully included as appendices.

The book itself is an edited collection whose chapters are organised according to the ten ‘strands’ of the ANCIL curriculum. Other than the two editors, contributors to the collection number eleven in total with each taking a ‘strand’ as their chapter (one chapter has two authors, and Emma Coonan also contributes a chapter). Each chapter consists of a case study from the authors’ own professional contexts that responds to the focus of each strand. In addition, Katy Wrathall (one of the key contributors from York St John) provides a lucid afterword on the implementation of ANCIL. The authors on each of the strands are drawn predominantly from an HE library setting, though notably Sarah Pavey (who discusses the transition from school to higher education) is from a school library background, and Jamie Cleland (who co-authored the chapter on becoming an independent learner with Geoff Walton) is a sociologist. This represents a slight broadening out of perspectives from the confines of the academic library that is in tune with the call for partnership beyond the HE library.

A systems-tinged perspective dominates the accounts presented in the book. ANCIL focuses on the IL needs of university undergraduates and reflects a transformational paradigm as the student moves into, through and out of the higher educational setting and into the professions and disciplines. Following the course of this curriculum, the undergraduate makes a transition into higher education, develops principles and competencies along the way and eventually presents

and synthesises new knowledge within a disciplinary framework. The entire paradigm of ANCIL thus appears to be predicated, at least in part, on a systems-cybernetic worldview, with a strong impulse to map, chart, document, audit and classify pervading the book as a result.

It is arguable whether a project that seeks to pin down the messy world so it can be fully described and accounted for can ever be entirely successful, but even if this were the case it would be more than a little defeatist to suggest that we shouldn't at least make an attempt. It is also arguable that this is actually the book's aim. The ten strands of ANCIL may be interpreted as a totalising framework (it seeks to encompass 'the whole landscape' of IL), but they are also based on a constructivist paradigm that does therefore allow for a degree of interpretation that adds a 'granularity' to the present volume that is satisfyingly unresolved. This affords scholars and librarians (and scholar-librarians) space for their own interpretations, their own attempts at putting the ANCIL principles into practice – or even re-working the principles themselves – and this breathes life into a book which might otherwise have sought to present its readership with a series of ready-made answers (note for example that the editors have chosen to use the phrase 'good practice' rather than the more prescriptive 'best practice').

As with many edited collections, the varying interpretations and approaches to the common theme mean that that reader must recalibrate their perspective as they move through the text, although the format and subject is amenable to a dip-in, dip-out approach whereby the reader cherry-picks chapters according to their particular interests. An eclectic approach to the text suits the subject matter well, for the goal here is not to develop an over-arching argument but rather to provide practical insights into the various ANCIL strands. Each chapter is preceded by a short précis on how the given strand has been addressed which provides the necessary contextualisation.

The merit of this volume does not rest on whether or not the New Curriculum on Information Literacy is the 'best' approach possible (and there are plenty of models of IL on the market); its aim is for flexible interpretation and – most importantly – context-specific *application* of the ANCIL strands. The case studies herein are a foundation upon which actions as well as ideas can be built. Academic liaison librarians (particularly those involved in learning and teaching) and learning developers will find the book a useful contribution to the literature on IL. Its value lies not only in the possibility of their gleaning it for useable ideas, but also in terms of benchmarking their own activities and initiatives, and helping to calibrate their own views on what constitutes an effective IL curriculum in their own educational settings. The real challenge, of course, will be to convince those outside the HE library and learning development communities that any such curriculum is necessary in the first place, and if so, what shape it might take. On the latter point, ANCIL's strong sense of disciplinarity and its overt call for partnership building are reasons for some optimism.