



Resource Review

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Review:

Issues in Information and Media Literacy: Education, Practice and Pedagogy is the second of two volumes concerned with exploring issues and debates underpinning information and media literacy. Information and media literacy is something of a 'hot topic' at the moment so in many respects this is a timely publication and one that is certainly in tune with Ofcom's strategic work on developing media literacy (Media Literacy Task Force) and the European Charter for Media Literacy. Increasingly, there is a growing awareness that 'a media literate society is...not a luxury, it is a necessity in the twenty-first century - for social, economic, cultural and political reasons' (Ofcom). The unifying theme underpinning this edited collection of papers compiled by Marcus Leaning is also an understanding and recognition that information and media literacy in the twenty-first century will be central to (indeed a prerequisite for) full citizenship and effective participation in the knowledge / information society.

The book comprises of twelve chapters divided into four thematic sections as a means of organising what is essentially a diverse and wide-ranging collection of international perspectives and projects dealing with different aspects of information and media literacy. The first section focuses specifically on the development and impact of information and media literacy in the context of Higher Education. Section Two offers a collection of essays that are broader in scope and are concerned with the development and assessment of skills for information and media literacy in a range of contexts. Section Three focuses on different approaches to teaching information and media literacy whilst the two chapters in Section Four place emphasis on research concerned with both the uses and need(s) for information and media literacy in terms of, firstly, the population of a South African metropolitan

municipality (Averweg & Greyling) and secondly, information security in organisational contexts (Narasimhan & Das).

One key issue that is addressed both in the short Preface to this volume and in subsequent chapters to varying degrees, are differing interpretations and definitions of information and media literacy. This is perhaps not surprising as there does not, as yet, appear to be a singular agreed-upon definition of either media or information literacy in the existing literature and the chapters in this volume reflect that to a greater or lesser extent. A number of the authors (understandably) prefer to use the term 'literacies' as a means of acknowledging the complexity and multiplicity of skills and competencies involved in definitions of information and media literacy in the constantly evolving media environment. It is certainly the case that, historically, information literacy and media literacy have themselves been conceptualised (pedagogically) as separate concerns with each perceived as involving different types of knowledge, skills and competencies. However, as the editor Marcus Leaning points out, in the current media, communication and information environment, the commonalities are greater than the differences hence the term 'information and media literacy'. There is a sound rationale offered in support of this combining of the two terms. As information and communication technologies are increasingly becoming a commonplace and pervasive feature of everyday life and with the integration of text, image and sound available across a range of formats, channels, contexts and environments, the need for both an information and media literate society is an imperative. Indeed, Leaning makes the point succinctly when stating that as 'content becomes less and less tied to specific formats and the volume of media and information channels multiply, this distinction between being skilled users of media and skilled users of information becomes increasingly arbitrary' (Leaning, 2009: ix).

So, whilst the different authors of the various chapters define information and media literacy in slightly different ways, implicit in many of the essays is an understanding and insistence that, however defined, information and media literacy needs to be embedded in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of formal education and thoroughly integrated in course design both across and within subject areas. In terms of breadth and depth then, the chapters in this volume offer a fairly comprehensive selection of work that reflects the importance of media literacy at different levels and stages in formal education in a range of contexts. Chapter One (Pope & Walton) for example, offers a useful case study of a working model for thinking through ways to embed and map information and media literacies onto learning outcomes in a Higher Education context from Certificate Level courses right through to Doctoral level. Chapter Four (Di Blas et al) states the case for introducing media literacy in Italian schools with an emphasis on media literacy involving learning how to use technology in creative ways to communicate effectively. Chapter Eight (Smith) focuses on television, media literacy and the pedagogy of the pre-schooler whilst Chapter Ten (De Abreu) considers media education for 'middle-schoolers' (junior high school students aged ten – fourteen) in the United States and considers teaching strategies that implicitly recognise both the centrality and importance of media culture in the leisure time of this particular demographic.

Unfortunately, there are some minor errors and grammatical inconsistencies (slightly disconcerting in a book that takes 'literacy' as its central topic) but one assumes that these errors must have occurred somewhere in the editing / proof reading stages given the academic credentials and research experience of the various contributors. Overall, these inconsistencies do not undermine to any great extent what is, essentially, an academically sound collection of essays written by researchers and practitioners involved with, and committed to, developing and promoting information and media literacy.

To sum up then, this book will certainly be a useful resource for practitioners, academics, programme leaders, course administrators and just about anyone in the educational sector involved in course design and delivery who are looking for strategies to successfully embed or further develop information and media literacy in their programmes. And whilst many of the themes and issues raised throughout the book will indeed be familiar to colleagues working in media and communications departments in higher education colleges and universities, it is both reassuring and pleasing to see that media and information literacy is now being more widely recognised for what it is – a vital and important life-skill. On this point, a chapter specifically devoted to media literacy and lifelong learning would have been desirable. Lifelong learning is touched on but not really developed in a sustained way in this volume but, on the whole, there is much to be positive about here. The core message of the book, that information and media literacy will be central to the skills, competencies and knowledge(s) required for both employability and empowerment in the multi-textual and hybrid (global) cultural economy of the twenty-first century, is one that can no longer be ignored. This is what makes this volume an interesting and important contribution to debates concerning media literacy and the book should certainly find a place in schools, colleges and universities throughout the United Kingdom and further afield.