Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis

By Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins (eds.). (Sacramento,
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Reviewed by Kenny Garcia

Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis, edited by Lua Gregory and Shana Higgins, is a collection of essays that nurtures the incorporation of social justice values and practice in information literacy sessions or courses. In the preface of the book, Samek summarizes concisely the outcome I came away with after reading all of the essays in that the readers "who engage with this text won't get smarter (most of us don't). But they just might see information literacy more clearly for what it has been, what it has the potential to be, and how and what they, as people, might be while performing it" [ix]. This compilation not only serves as an exercise in reflecting on critical pedagogical practices, it also highlights the importance of seeing information literacy from a social justice-based perspective.

In the Introduction, Gregory and Higgins state that "the work of Berman, Samek, and others before them have led to a generation — not a generation based on age — of librarians that see their profession as not neutral but as politically charged and activist in nature" [2]. Many of the authors acknowledge the importance of contextualizing information within the social constructions of neutrality and objectivity in order to have students think critically about how information is produced and presented, why information is produced and presented in the way that it is, and how to use information for self, communal, and systemic liberation.

The first section of the book is titled Information Literacy in Service of Neoliberalism. Giroux (2013) describes neoliberalism as "a mode of pedagogy

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and set of social arrangements that uses education to win consent, produce consumer-based notions of agency, and militarize reason in the service of war, profits, power, and violence while simultaneously instrumentalizing all forms of knowledge" [459]. Neoliberal processes transform information literacy into an individualized act, which must be challenged and critiqued. These interventions, though, should be based on concerns over power, politics, and privilege. If not, the conceptual relationship between information and citizen produces a limited understanding of what an informed citizen really means. Enright's chapter on neoliberalism and human capital focuses on an Australian case study to contextualize the relationship between the state, capital, and information literacy. It is a valid presentation of the relationship, but the relationship might shift or change if one is looking that it from within the United States. Seale's chapter on the neoliberal library intervenes in the discussion on critical information literacy and argues that "librarianship must employ the interventions of scholars in other disciplines around power and politics in order to understand and critique its framing of information literacy specifically and education more generally," which can then also include librarians in the broader discussions occurring in other disciplines surrounding knowledge and information production [40]. Lilburn's chapter focuses on citizenship and information literacy instruction. The placement of this chapter in a section focused on neoliberalism is an interesting one and Lilburn's argument that Kazuo Ishiguro's fictional, representative portrayal of citizenship is applicable to information literacy instruction is logical, but the author ultimately fails to make an impression on the relationship between neoliberalism and information literacy.

The focus of the second section is on challenging authority. The process of searching for, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing scholarly communication, whether in digital form (i.e., digital humanities) or in print form, is an iterative one that should be translatable to the searcher's professional and public life. Related to Lilburn's focus on the informed citizen, Battista's chapter focuses on the curation of information on social media platforms and its use in democracy-centered educational processes that develop engaged citizens. It is an informative and critical take on the use of technology and social media in participatory practices and classroom discussions with critical information literacy frameworks. Baer's chapter focuses on digital humanities and information literacy instruction. It includes an important section on critical pedagogy for academic information literacy, discusses class activities, and challenges a regressive view of digital humanities as inherently positive and progressive. Donovan and O'Donnell's chapter focuses on librarians' teaching limitations due to traditional models of information seeking and evaluation that privilege commodified forms of information. The sections on use-centered instruction, empowered authorship, and new information paradigms discuss

how to transform these traditional paradigms into more student-centered forms of scholarship.

The following section focuses on liberatory praxis. The Freirean approach of viewing students and teachers as co-learners and co-teachers allows for students to be seen as both researchers and producers of knowledge. During this process, students can then become more active participants in the educative process and apply what they learn and already know to deal with oppression within and outside of classroom spaces. Leonard and Smale's chapter discusses a credit-bearing information literacy course at New York City College of Technology where the authors "work with students to explore and interrogate the lifecycle of information in depth" [143]. Leonard and Smale acknowledge the privilege of teaching a credit-bearing course. Even if one only teaches one-shot instructional sessions, there are important points made regarding the process of developing a course and its impact on teaching and student engagement with social justice issues. Ellenwood's chapter demonstrates how hip-hop can be used in information literacy instruction. Ellenwood's reflection within the essay on his own racial and gender privilege is as important and valuable as the discussion on activities and lesson plans, which is a reflection that I hope all librarians are doing, especially librarians who are interested in incorporating social justice in their work. Gregory and Higgins's chapter interrogates how neoliberal discourses impact students' abilities to critically engage with free speech and censorship. Gregory and Higgins outline the material forces that legitimize "objective" ideology and how to facilitate counter-hegemonic discussions/reflections/assignments. Harker's chapter on critical legal information proposes that legal research be seen as a social construct and provides strategies for critical legal research education. One crucial aspect missing from this chapter is a discussion of critical race theory within a critical legal information literacy framework.

The fourth section is titled Community Engagement. Swygart-Hobaugh's chapter is on student engagement with power using a dialogic, problem-posing learning framework. Similar to Leonard and Smale's chapter on teaching a credit-bearing course, Swygart-Hobaugh highlights the process taken to teach critical information literacy in a credit-bearing course through an examination of a case study of an honors freshman course taught at Georgia State University. An interesting aspect of this chapter is the discussion on qualitatively analyzing students' assignment texts. Community engagement with information literacy can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. One such way is using service-learning to take what gets taught in the classroom into community projects. Sweet's chapter focuses on information literacy and service-learning projects. Sweet incorporates Freire's concept of praxis, to reflect and act in order to transform, which is instrumental in fusing service-learning and information literacy. Ryan and Sloniowski's chapter focuses on the public nature of academic libraries.

Using two case studies, an Iraq War teach-in at Leddy Library at the University of Windsor and an Occupy Movement event at Scott Library at York University, Ryan and Sloniowski discuss the benefits of student engagement, community engagement, public intellectualism, and socially responsible citizenry that pushes classroom learning into a sphere of public praxis.

In conclusion, I highly recommend *Information Literacy and Social Justice: Radical Professional Praxis*, especially for academic librarians interested in working through and incorporating critical information literacy methodologies into their library pedagogy. One missing element is the inclusion of essays on how K-12 libraries, public libraries, and special libraries develop information literacy sessions within social justice frameworks, a limitation acknowledged by the editors. *Information Literacy and Social Justice*, along with *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods and Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction*, proposes critical discussion points and models for social change to occur in library instruction sessions and library courses.

REFERENCES

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