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Information Literacy Instruction Handbook (review)

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He makes the well-known point that media are more interactive in the digital age, with an emphasis on self-expression over authority (although I disagree that the reader of traditional media is necessarily passive).

Pavlik outlines the cataclysmic change that is transforming the media landscape in a disconcertingly deadpan tone. He uses the phrase “bottomless pit of mindless drivel” in relation to content available to children, but with no sense of outrage or urgency. Perhaps he really is sanguine about the future of media in the digital age, or perhaps he is whistling in the dark. The book ends with the admonition that “change in the media is not technologically determined” but does not provide evidence of it. Librarians also take comfort in this slogan, but it seems to me that technologies (at least those that are embraced by consumers) are precisely what are driving change in the media. The pace of change may have accelerated in the year or two since this book was written; newspapers today are shrinking and failing at an alarming rate and libraries are becoming increasingly marginalized.

Clearly Pavlik’s goal in this book is not to play the role of prophet or media critic. Even so, he might have further developed his ideas on some paradoxes of digital media, such as the simultaneous concentration and dispersion of media owners and outlets or the seeming contradiction between the speeding up of access to information and the abandonment of linearity. Do people still care about the latest news, or is the concept of time becoming irrelevant? No doubt the most profound impacts of digital media will only become clear from the vantage point of the distant future. In the meantime, Media in the Digital Age is a serviceable guide to the present.—Jean Alexander, Carnegie Mellon University.


In the summer of 2003 I had the privilege of attending the Information Literacy Immersion program run by ACRL. I had been a reference librarian for over 15 years, but by then had transitioned into a new position within our Instruction Office putting all my efforts into online course development and teaching. Like many reference librarians, I had given my share of presentations over the years and thought I knew a thing or two about teaching, but hoped to pick up a few tips. Instead, I was transformed.

Reading the Information Literacy Instruction Handbook reminds me (I assume on purpose) of my time at Immersion. Many Immersion faculty members are contributors to this work and many of the themes of that program are present in it. While reading a book certainly does not have the same effect as living in a college dorm, eating, and meeting with several peers for hours daily for a week, this volume does present the reader with the issues and perspectives on information literacy (IL) instruction present in that program and within the professional organization dedicated to promoting it.

The Handbook is a compilation of twelve chapters, each on a different topic, by nineteen total contributors. The reader should expect variations in tone, formality, and approach. Readers who belong to the ILI listserv, the ACRL Instruction Section, or who keep up with the literature of IL instruction will be familiar with most contributors and understand why they wrote on the topics they did. However, the rationale for the selection of some chapter topics is not clear. Although the volume lacks an index, valuable references accompany each chapter.

One defining characteristic of the IL movement is its focus on academic institutions, not libraries. Thus, it is appropriate that Craig Gibson opens the work with a history of the IL movement by way of
a brief history of higher education, not even mentioning libraries in the first few pages. While librarians have helped place IL on the agendas of many colleges and universities, it really belongs to the wider academic community. Even so, this volume is for librarians.

Throughout the Handbook the reader will find that librarians are called upon to understand changes within higher education generally, and how their own academic institutions function practically and politically. In their chapter on curriculum issues, Barbara Fister gives insights into the types and limits of course-related instruction through the lens of academic realities, and Tom Eland extols a curriculum approach to IL that requires a maneuvering of the economics of academic systems. Mary McDonald discusses how program management must be rooted in institutional knowledge, as much as knowledge of the library. In her discussion of leadership, Karen Williams discusses the role of librarians as grassroots leaders in various campus partnerships that advance IL programs.

As this higher education-centric vs. library-centric view transformed me in my Immersion program experience, so did the introduction to the psychology of learning it provided. Library schools teach us how to manage and collect information and materials but do not teach us how people learn. Joan Kaplowitz’s engaging chapter on learning theories reminded me of that enlightening introduction to and practice with learning theories. Besides its readability, her chapter provides some very practical examples that will help readers think about how to use these theories as tools for their own IL curriculum development.

A third personal transformation eloquently discussed in this book is instructional and program design through assessment as addressed by Deb Gilchrist and Anne Zald. Instead of designing instruction around what content the librarian wants to include, instructors and librarians collaboratively agree on outcomes students should be able to achieve and work backwards to plan the instruction or program. When outcomes are specific and measurable, they allow instructors to know if their teaching method worked. Assessment then becomes more about the strategies and tools of teaching and less about personal performance. Various methods for assessing the success of student learning (outcomes) in turn will dictate necessary changes to teaching techniques (inputs).

Two emphases this compilation lacks are active learning and curriculum content. While given brief mention by several authors, active learning is an umbrella term for a variety of strategies that seek to put the responsibility for learning on the learner and is an important trend in higher education. The chapter on teaching gives good information on the use of problem-based learning (PBL), but this is just one active learning strategy. Perhaps the reason the subject is not an entire chapter, if in fact the book was meant to mirror much of the Immersion experience, is that in Immersion, active learning strategies were largely modeled, not preached. (I still remember being part of a human Likert scale.)

Clearly the purpose of this Handbook is more toward IL instruction process, not product, leaving room for a fatter handbook in the future that addresses curriculum content. As is mentioned in several places throughout the book, the ACRL Information Literacy Standards serve as the basis for IL curriculum content. How, though, do these lists of performance indicators turn into course content? While Lynne Lampert capably discusses academic integrity and plagiarism, her focus is more on librarians as participants in campus process—and certainly this is also only one content area for IL. The course-related or curriculum-integrated debate illustrated in the Fister and Eland chapter provides glimpses into a conceptual and rich content base, but providing specific examples was outside their scope. However, Eland does provide

Documentation is often taken for granted among scholars; we all use various forms of it in our work, yet we rarely stop to consider the history of such seemingly mundane items as footnotes or annotations. Modern scholars often think of documentation primarily as a way to cite a reference or acknowledge an influential person. As Hauptman relates in this fascinating volume, there’s far more to the history and evolution of documentation than you might imagine. As the subtitle implies, Hauptman’s study covers a lot of territory. He begins his narrative by identifying six purposes for documentation: providing acknowledgment, giving attribution, tracing sources, validating work through notation, “protection against accusations of misconduct,” and adding substantive, if sometimes tangential, commentary. He wraps up his introductory sections with a brief chapter on the development of documentation, beginning in antiquity with the oral tradition of acknowledging a predecessor and ending with some observations about modern use of APA and MLA citation styles. Hauptman then delves into several substantial chapters on commentary, marginalia, illustration, and footnotes. He examines how documentation styles and purposes vary in such diverse fields as biblical scholarship, legal scholarship, and the sciences. After noting that scientific papers can be brief and to the point, he gives examples of lengthy footnotes by legal scholars, noting that “Science requires data; the law sometimes obfuscates with verbosity.” Such contrasts, with accompanying succinct commentary, fill the pages of this book. Erudition goes hand in hand with mirth, making this an extremely enjoyable work to read.

Hauptman spends some time examining the early development of the footnote, citing examples from Pierre Bayle and Edward Gibbon, writers he ranks among “the great footnoters.” He illustrates his points with page facsimiles from Bayle’s 1734 work, A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical, and includes a lively discussion on Gibbon’s placement of notes in The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire that provides insight into the development of the footnote form. Gibbon initially placed his “witty and sardonic” annotations at the end of the text, comments so critical of their sources that “they offer a parallel but divergent history of Rome.” David Hume complained about the notes’ placement, and Gibbon responded by placing his comments at the bottom of the page. In a fine example of how well Hauptman cites and acknowledges other sources, he punctuates his discussion of Gibbon with a quote from Chuck Zerby’s history of footnotes: “Someone once said that notes ran along the bottom of Gibbon’s pages like dogs yapping at the text.”

Hauptman’s narrative, while part historical analysis, is also concerned with modern usage. He includes a chapter on the development of modern citation styles such as the Chicago Manual of Style, the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, and the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. He also delves into how scientific notations and legal citations are used. He describes