

Book Reviews

Literacy and Pedagogy in an Age of Misinformation and Disinformation, edited by Tara Lockhart, Brenda Glascott, Chris Warnick, Juli Parrish, and Justin Lewis. Parlor Press, 2021. 255 pp.

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The meaning of *critical literacy* depends on one's vantage point as its definition and application can be flexible. Still, regardless of one's disciplinary background or educational perspective, it is important to note that critical literacy is not a definitive skill; it is an evolving, multi-dimensional process of layered reading comprehension, contextual analysis, and honest reflection. In the simplest sense, it is a lens through which to view content. As of late, that lens has been made political according to the authors of *Literacy and Pedagogy in an Age of Misinformation and Disinformation*.

Published under the Parlor Press Working and Writing for Change series, this book is a larger response to the 2017 special issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies* titled "Literacy, Democracy, and Fake News." Building upon this groundwork developed by fellow teacher-scholars and activists, *Literacy and Pedagogy in an Age of Misinformation and Disinformation* still set out with formidable goals of providing a free (PDF only), 18-chapter volume that tackles a great deal in depth and breadth almost too much). The text covers a host of interconnected processes: software literacy, quantitative literacy, historical literacy, civic literacy, media literacy, academic literacy, and rhetorical literacy. The editors also included six chapters devoted to practitioner interviews representing leaders from *Americans of Conscience Checklist*, *Twitter*, *Wired*, *Goalbook*, the *Other98*, and an international baccalaureate program coordinator. On top of all this, the volume devotes an especially rich chapter to campus librarians, two chapters to discussing the fraught curriculum work of our K-12 colleagues, and two chapters to the plight of refugees and immigrants. Suffice to say, the editors and authors created an extensive compilation of updated theories, tested assignments, and focused dialogue on information literacy, especially as it pertains to first year writing.

Candidly, I understand the editors' ambition and immediacy. Over my near decade of teaching, what were once sparse comments doubting authority, has now manifested as a deliberate and defiant attitude in and of itself. As Eric Leake aptly put in his chapter from this book: "At issue now is not so much an unwillingness to question authority but a readiness to flatten all authority, to make no distinctions among claims to authority, so that news from *The New York Times* appears to be as legitimate, or even less so, as new from the *Christian Times Newspaper*" (74).

As suggested in the editors' introduction, gone are the days of applying our graduate learned (and outdated) traditional critical literacy skills to all of our 21st Century worldly problems. While they serve as an excellent foundation, we as composition instructors and fellow readers must go further to help novice rhetoricians navigate an insatiable, click-bait media landscape—one where the self-serving goal is mining personal data, over the traditional selfless objective to inform the citizenship. All to say, the volume's authors continually and correctly emphasize that literacy is not, and will never be, a conclusive skill. It is a learned process that will evolve as technology will always outpace the studied researcher. So, educators must learn to be even more comfortable proactively preparing for the authorless unknown, rather than always reacting to last year's technology trend. This text readies those tools.

In the introduction, the editors also suggest a handful of ways to read their volume. As previously mentioned, the editors took on several themes, making the chapter order uneven. Ideally, the volume would have kept like-minded terms or topics together. Nevertheless, where the text falls short in organization, it excels in practical content. That is not to say the text overlooks academic research; each chapter is grounded in rich theory spanning predominately across the fields of education, composition, literacy, and public policy discourses. Still, the treasure-trove of tested practices, all in one place, proves invaluable for the busy reader. Excerpts, or in some cases the entire length, of the aforementioned practitioner interviews could be assigned as supplemental classroom readings. Though every chapter contributes new information to the field, six chapters offer particularly noteworthy research and resources for readers.

Angela Laflen's work in chapter three, "Quantitative Literacy in the Composition Classroom: Using Infographics Assignments to Teach Ethical and Effective Data Use" was extremely illuminating. Laflen did an excellent job of slowing down and decompartmentalizing the almost instantaneous speed of infographic trickery by including not one, two, but three smartly scaffolded assignments—with student examples—as means to best support fellow instructors. As most of my students subscribe to what Sundar demystified in his earlier work, "cool is [not] credible" Laflen's took his research miles forward in practicality and practice.

In chapter six, Thomas Girshin and Tyrell Stewart-Harris write about their own take on Princeton's first year seminar "Great Books: Ideas and Arguments," co-taught years previously by Cornel West and Robert George. Their own Ithaca College course reading list is one to reference for future syllabi covering a host of communication modes, centuries, and racially informed political causes.

While life pre-2016 is briefly mentioned throughout the volume, only one chapter grounds its whole argument and challenges the idea that 'post-truth' is not remotely new. Author Drew Virtue's discussion of historical literacy in

“Historical Literacies: McCarthyism, Edward R. Murrow, and the Television” proved especially useful, as a main critique of the volume is a disproportionate focus on the Trump Administration. For as much as the book takes on, the majority of chapters focus on practical problems spanning the last five years. While the previous authors, Girshin and Stewart-Harris, allude to the disingenuous communication strategies of President Nixon and President Clinton, by and large, most authors focus on President Trump. Virtue notes, explicitly, these conflicting forces were at play long before President Trump took over and will be exploited long after. His chapter addition effectively filled a gap.

Chapter ten, “I am a Refugee and I am OK: Instructor Identity in Resisting Classrooms,” includes two writing assignments grounded in transnational pedagogy. As a first year instructor, whose teaching theme is “place,” I have forwarded this entire chapter to my department. Lava Asaad’s writing strikes a compelling balance of vulnerable and authoritative. She addresses freedom of speech in the classroom, apathetic rhetorical practices, and students’ impulsive resistance head on: “I am using ‘resisting’ here not in its positive meaning as circulated in social media. Rather, I am using it in the sense of students who challenge literacy, or misuse it, for their own pre-constructed ideologies” (130). For Asaad, the political is personal and she rightfully challenges her students to reflect on their own, often underdeveloped and unwitting, political identity. Her reading list, prompts, and learned experience are rich, honest, and humbling.

In Chapter twelve, Genevieve García de Müeller and Randall W. Monty’s “Don’t Give Me Bullshit”: Constructing a Framework of Response to Fake News” share their idea of assigning students to screenshot a sample of their own “everyday writing” and code for 1) the rhetorical situation, 2) “textisms”, and 3) worknet pedagogy (156). Interestingly, this practice was then scaled up by asking a student to code a previous piece of academic writing. Learning and framing ethos in terms of the self, compared to the other, cut to the core of understanding credibility; it was a very shrewd practice.

In chapter sixteen, “Keeping Truth Alive: Literacy, Libraries, and Strategies in an Age of Misinformation,” Nicole Allensworth shares six classroom activities devoted to information literacy, not to mention an appendix of resources that should be posted in every Blackboard course. Finally, Melissa R. Sande and Christine M. Battista’s call to action is a compelling note to conclude this review. “Developing Critical Consciousness: Literary Theory, Process Pedagogy, and Information Literacy” rightfully asserts: “If students are truly to understand IL [information literacy] as a process with relevance in every discipline and relevance to them as citizens, it must extend beyond first year writing and be reinforced continually in other writing-intensive and upper-level courses” (181). Throughout their chapter, Sande and Battista confront a hole not only in the volume, but also in our discourse literature: there is little interdisciplin-

ary study or classroom collaborations regarding information literacy. While most first year instructors are trained rhetoricians, we, as faculty, all rely on sources written in and out of the academy. Just as fellow disciplines support student writers, they must support them as critical readers and researchers. I sincerely appreciate Sande and Battista's addition and hope it serves to inspire more cross-campus collaborative efforts.

In closing, this readily accessible volume advances the teaching of information literacy by acknowledging that its underpinnings are fluid. Compared to a studied writing process, we as fellow citizens are experiencing these tectonic societal and communicative shifts right along with our students. To the authorless software, we are all data consumers. Still, the book's contributors motivate educators to do what we do best: inspire change. It provides readers, especially those on the frontlines in first year writing, with a bounty of classroom resources and cultural reassurance.

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Works Cited

Sundar, S. Shyam. "The MAIN Model: A Heuristic Approach to Understanding Technology Effects on Credibility." *Digital Media, Youth, and Credibility*, edited by Miriam J. Metzger and Andrew J. Flanagin. The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 73–100.