The one disappointment in the book, and the project that it documents, is where it ends. While the authors provide a rosy, yet realistic, assessment of easy changes made, lessons learned, and the empowerment felt by all participants, very little change, other than in perceptions, have actually taken place, making the process a bit more theoretical than a real-world exercise. The plans are still on the drawing board, and the major hurdles of fundraising, remodeling, and repurposing the library is yet to take place. McKeldin Library, in a phrase often evoked in the text, remains to be reprogrammed.

Despite this fact, the book is a valuable tool for those institutions planning for, or in need of, change in their buildings. By describing the various students and task forces employed, the volume also shows what academic libraries do best—fostering the interconnectivity and interplay between various disciplines and users—no matter the condition of the building in which we work.—Harlan Greene, College of Charleston


In Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners, Mackey and Jacobson present a new framework for providing students with a means to recognize and synthesize information in the world around them. Thomas P. Mackey is Interim Vice Provost for Academic Programs at SUNY Empire State College, and Trudi E. Jacobson is Head of the Information Literacy Department at SUNY University at Albany. The authors previously presented their theory of metaliteracy in “Reframing Information Literacy as Metaliteracy” (College and Research Libraries, Jan. 2011: 62–78). This book builds on these previous ideas, incorporates a new metaliteracy framework developed through continued study on literacy issues, and provides concrete examples of metaliteracy in the library and classroom.

The foundational concept of Mackey and Jacobson’s book, metaliteracy, is contextualized and described in thorough detail in the first chapter as a concept that encompasses various literacies we have become familiar with: digital literacy, visual literacy, and others. The authors also explain relationships between metaliteracy and metacognition, multiliteracies, multimodal literacy, and transliteracy. While carefully navigating each of these various concepts, Mackey and Jacobson give strength to their framework of metaliteracy by stating that “rather than simply respond to the latest technology with a new literacy type, we need to identify connections to related literacies within an expanded framework” (27). This expanded framework is metaliteracy, and the authors make it clear that they aim not to present a new set of literacy skills, but rather to provide a means for individuals to relate to knowledge and information across changing formats and contexts.

Chapter 2, “Metaliteracy in the Open Age of Social Media,” shifts our focus to current information issues. The emphasis here is information as participatory, open, and based in community interaction; the authors make a case for the need to educate students on how to incorporate collaboratively built social media sources into information gathering. This focus on web-based, socially derived information lays a foundation for Mackey and Jacobson’s proposal that our concepts of literacy need to be enlarged: metaliteracy provides us with the necessary step back from discrete literacies that focus on specific information types. Their discussion of the social aspects of the Internet, however, presents participatory information creation as a new phenomenon; this section would have benefited from acknowledgement of the social aspects of information creation in older formats and communities of practices, from which our current social media climate has surely evolved.

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After making their case that today’s information world needs to look at literacy through a wider lens, chapter 3 evaluates other literacy types and sets them within a metaliteracy framework. The authors provide thorough descriptions of media literacy, digital literacy, cyber literacy, visual literacy, mobile literacy, critical literacy, health literacy, transliteracy, new media literacy, ICT literacy, and information fluency. All of these are compared in a clear chart (table 3.1) that compares characteristics of each of these literacies; the visually literate among us will rejoice in this and other clear illustrations. The authors also take time to point out shortcomings in some of these literacies, as well as ways that our current techniques for teaching literacy skills fall short: notably, they make a strong argument for how the most common single-session information literacy classes do little to foster the thinking and reasoning skills that are foundational to many literacy types.

Moving on from this discussion of related literacy types, chapter 3 continues with a clear outline of what metaliteracy is. In a significant development from the authors’ 2011 article on the same topic, they move away from framing metaliteracy with seven learning objectives and instead provide four larger goals, each with related objectives, to pull metaliteracy into a four-pronged framework of behavioral, cognitive, affective, and metacognitive skills. A thorough description of each of these four goals is provided. Mackey and Jacobson point out that metaliteracy introduces a new perspective on the way we interact with information by incorporating affective and metacognitive aspects of information behavior.

In the fourth chapter, “Global Trends in Emerging Literacies,” the authors step back from their own work to look at international trends in information literacy. Initiatives from UNESCO and IFLA are discussed, among others. Mackey and Jacobson have done themselves a favor by making their book internationally aware and by placing their own work within this larger conversation. The global perspective of this section lends the presentation of their own metaliteracy theory much more credibility, and it also provides a helpful context for understanding how groups around the world are working on similar issues. As part of this chapter, they also provide an excellent discussion on OERs (open educational resources) and how these present both new learning environments and new information sources around the world.

As part of their research on literacy types, the authors conducted a global survey titled “Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy”; the complete survey tool and findings are presented and discussed in chapter 5. They describe their findings as “a snapshot of the range of the knowledge, perceptions, teaching, and learning practices connected to emerging literacies” (148). Common themes in survey responses included a lack of time to properly teach literacy skills, as well as the constraints of typical one-shot instruction sessions. The survey also identifies a shift in how literacy skills are taught, including an increase in collaborative learning for information literacy. The authors stress a need to improve the use of technology beyond the current level indicated by survey respondents, and to provide new avenues for faculty and librarians to improve their own technology skills. While technology is surely a critical part of today’s information age, this section could have been balanced with reflection on contexts where technology is less relevant, or locations where the likelihood of improved technology is low enough that finding other ways to teach information skills would be prudent.

The last two chapters provide case studies of new means for teaching information literacy, focusing on Jacobson’s work at the University of Albany, Web 2.0 information literacy instruction described by guest author Gregory Bobish, and Mackey’s teaching of an online course on digital storytelling. These chapters provide a useful way to fit the concepts and ideas presented earlier in the book into the practical work of day-to-day reference librarianship and information literacy instruction. A brief discussion of how to
teach critical evaluation of nontraditional sources is especially useful. Reflections (200, 204) on the value of teaching metaliteracy within the context of another class provide a useful starting point for rethinking delivery of literacy instruction.

*Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners* will provide thought-provoking insight for any librarian who interacts with students and faculty in an educational context, and it is a must-read for information literacy librarians. While much of the book is theoretical, it provides a valuable current perspective as well as suggestions for future development of literacy instruction. The book includes concept illustrations and a detailed index.—*Jen Hoyer, Artstor; Interference Archive*


Anderson and Cvetkovic’s objective is to contribute to the literature examining how reference librarianship and the delivery of reference services are being reimagined. The editors both are reference librarians at Rutgers University and have published extensively on a variety of library and information science topics. The contributors to the volume include public, school and academic librarians and library consultants. The book’s authors place reference into historic and contemporary context. They also scrutinize how reference will change in the future and propose strategies to flourish in the evolving reference landscape. This collection is a worthwhile read (although the quality of contributions is very uneven).

The book’s treatment of reference is extensive. The topic is presented in nine chapters, which are organized into three parts. The chapters address a range of topics including the history of the reference desk and department, professional ethics, demographic changes, social media, emerging technology, data collection tools, assessment, and many other subjects. The volume examines reference in a spectrum of libraries including public, school, academic, and special libraries. Sources used in the list of references include academic books and articles, newspaper articles, blogs, and professional association websites. The book also contains an adequate index.

Part I of the book, which is entitled “Understanding Reference,” contains three chapters that place reference into an historical and contemporary context. According to the author of chapter 1, there is very little written on the history of reference. The author seeks to correct the lack of historical knowledge about reference, and her overview succeeds in demonstrating that, although the tools that reference librarians use in their work have substantially evolved, certain aspects of the work remain constant. For example, reference librarians past and present aim to provide the best resources to information seekers. Furthermore, some of the challenges that libraries are facing today, such as insufficient funding, are not new ones. Chapter 2 examines the “Code of Ethics of the American Library Association.” The chapter also discusses some fascinating ethical issues librarians have confronted related to privacy and intellectual freedom. Finally, the chapter determines if the Code is adaptable enough to deal with the ethical challenges that reference librarians will confront in the future. Chapter 3 provides a solid overview of the technological changes that have occurred in libraries over the past seventy years. The author also discusses how these changes have altered the provision of reference services and users’ expectations with respect to the delivery of these services. For example, patrons no longer have to be in the library to locate information; they are able to search for information remotely through the library’s website and pose questions to a librarian via a variety of tools including phone, e-mail, chat, or instant messaging. Despite these technological changes, the author maintains that librarians continue to play a vital role as “the link between the users and the information they seek” (42).

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