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# Information Literacy in Higher Education A Sociocultural Perspective



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# Information Literacy in Higher Education

A Sociocultural Perspective

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# Preface

The present volume is a theoretical and empirical contribution to the study of information literacy (IL) in higher education. As such, it offers a sociocultural approach to studies of IL in higher education, where personal accounts, skills, and performance(s) in learning situations and intersubjective relationships are examined and resignified for a more profound understanding of IL.

The volume reassesses the technical paradigm of IL, reifying information as a social category to inform pathways to university teaching. Research-based chapters include new methodologies to conduct studies about skills from the standpoint of information users so that they may characterize their information profiles. The careers of some university teachers are also included and analyzed, considering their own methods for developing their IL to improve their teaching practices. In a nutshell, this volume offers an interesting view of IL, whose current changes are transforming teaching in university contexts as well as in the information society.

The book is organized into six chapters. The first chapter “The study of information literacy in university education” reviews international research on IL in educational contexts. There is a focus on Latin American research and its influence on pedagogical practices. The chapter asserts the importance of supporting information-literacy-situated research in educational contexts, including local knowledge(s) coming from schools and universities.

The second chapter “The concept of information in the documentation and information science fields” provides a theoretical background to the concept of information as discussed in documentation and information science, in order to place the research in the following chapters in an established tradition. A historical review is offered of the theories proposed since the middle of the twentieth century, grouped into three paradigms, which are labeled as physical or objective, cognitive or subjective, and sociocultural. The chapter closes with the acknowledgment that, at the present time, it is the sociocultural paradigm that best frames the discussion of the research described in the remaining chapters of the book.

The next chapter “Methodological proposal for the observation of information literacies” (Chap. 3) introduces conceptual frameworks and methodological procedures that support a sociocultural approach to researching IL. The concept of IL is

revisited and a multi-level observation instrument is described, as well as its design process. Lessons derived from this information-literacy-observation instrument and process are discussed for the benefit of IL researchers.

The following two chapters directly focus on the IL of students and teachers. Chapter 4, “Informational literacy profiles of university students,” draws on an intertwined understanding (Chaps. 1 and 2) of IL, based on a semiotic and sociocultural framework. Data was gathered at two moments between 2009 and 2012, using an information-literacy-profile questionnaire (ILPQ), in-depth interviews, and think-aloud protocols while the respondents were doing an academic task (see Chap. 3).

The results showed that university students tend to maintain the same information literacy profile during their studies. Findings also indicated students’ tendency to move between profiles. These movements depend on students’ access to and evaluation and use of information for academic tasks. These findings suggest a number of recommendations for higher education which are discussed at length at the end of the chapter.

And, in Chap. 5, “Information literacy and experiences of university professors,” the skills of teachers and their ways of relating them to knowledge are explored. The chapter analyzes the generational changes in teaching and the diverse links teachers and students establish with technology. It also presents the results of a study of the path of two teachers as information users, and the changes in their teaching methods resulting from their use of digital tools.

The concluding chapter, “Shifts in information literacy research,” presents some of the conceptual and methodological changes in information literacy research, as well as emerging research issues in the Latin American context. The first section presents the work of the Colombian research group “Information Society and Learning,” which focuses on the study of IL in university courses. The second section discusses some of the milestones of IL in Latin America.

This final chapter focuses on the sociocultural approach, in which the social and cultural experiences of the subjects are important: this approach has guided our investigation of informational competences.

We believe that the changes in mentality and socialization which take place in the new learning environments are significantly affected by differences in socioeconomic status, gender, age, language, whether a person lives in a city or the countryside, whether a person participates in virtual or face-to-face communities and access to the mass communications media and the markets of material consumer goods and cultural capital.

They are likewise influenced by public policies, ideological and commercial interests, globalization, and the monopolies, in the public and private sectors, which manage education and mass communication.

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Finally, we owe much to students and professors who have shared their experiences with us and helped us to understand the diverse aspects of information literacy in the university context.

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