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Book review: Digital literacies: Concepts, policies and practices. Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (Eds., 2008)

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Digital literacies: Concepts, policies and practices
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This timely book provides a historical overview of digital literacy. The authors present a sociocultural perspective on literacy that emphasizes the plurality of the concept as 'literacies'. This is in contrast to a focus on technical skill, as is traditional in IT education. The authors examine digital literacy in several contexts including Norway, the U.S. and policies in the European Union.

The various chapters of the book seek to delineate the different types of digital literacy, challenging or adding to more traditional definitions of the concept. Just as the skill set necessary to make sense of various types of reading material varies, so do the skills required to read and write via computer technologies and applications. The authors attempt to operationalize the process of meaning making in the digital context, by looking at its various forms popular today from blogging to online searching.

The first few chapters concern themselves with defining and conceptualizing the types of digital literacies. They also provide a historical perspective about how the use of such technologies has changed over time. Indeed, the first chapter traces the conceptual evolution from the skill-based 'computer literacy' model to the more broadly based 'digital literacy' that encompasses diverse forms and uses of technology. Authors in the first four chapters each put their own 'spin' on how they define digital literacies. The complexities and problematic nature of defining digital literacy too specifically are underscored because of the challenge of keeping pace with rapidly changing technologies. Inherent in the collection of papers is a sense that the authors seek to legitimize the digital context as a valuable form of literacy.

The last few chapters address more broadly the social practices in relation to digital literacies like blogging and social networking. Chapter 7 outlines three levels of digital literacy: competence, usage then transformation. The last stage encompasses usages that enable innovation and creativity. The book contains several varied examples on the application of specific forms of digital literacy. For example, chapter 8 briefly describes three cases involving media production in K-12 schools. Chapter 9 discusses a case study of weblog use in a corporate setting. However, at a time when access is no longer enough to build a bridge across the digital divide, the final chapter on the intersection between digital literacy and the law, based on Lawrence Lessig's ideas on copyright and free culture, does not sufficiently address important issues of ethics and social justice related to the topic.

Some of the chapters promise to discuss implications for instruction but do not deliver in terms of relevance to higher education. For example, in Chapter 2 Johnson admits that studies have shown that no formal training is needed for computer users to develop functional internet literacy. Nevertheless, the end of the chapter introduces the reader to a test to measure technological literacy then discusses that one may target instruction directed towards identified skill deficits based on the assessment. Chapter 3 calls for more research on information literacy programs. Chapter 4 turns the focus onto the evaluation and critical use of information technology and finally provides a brief discussion of instruction to these ends, in the form of the web evaluation approach and analysis of games as cultural forms. As discussed previously, subsequent chapters presented cases in K-12 and corporate settings; chapter 10

looks at online shopping and chapter 11 looks more specifically at social networking. Therefore, the book has limited discussions on how the technologies may be applied in higher education.

Since students in higher education in the Gulf are known for being technologically adept, this book can be a valuable introduction for educators who would like to expand their knowledge of computer technologies that may be applicable in the classroom. Although there are not many references to specific ways in which digital literacy may be successfully applied in higher education, the book does provide one with ideas about how the concept has evolved and inspires one to consider future possibilities. This book is a good primer for people who do not consider themselves to be technically savvy but would like to have a better understanding of the digital world.