
Susie Andretta is a senior lecturer at the London Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom. She is well known for her advanced contribution to the discussions on information literacy among information specialists, predominantly through her earlier publications: *Information literacy: a practitioner’s guide* (2005), an edited book, *Information literacy for the 21st Century* (2007) as well as many articles on the related subject. The book under review is based on the author’s Ph.D. thesis entitled *Ways of Experiencing Information Literacy: Perception and Practice Amongst Information Management Postgraduate Students* that was completed at the Institute of Education, University of London and defended in 2010.

**Ways of Experiencing Information Literacy: Making the case for a relational approach** appeared in the Chandos Information Professional Series which is aimed at the “busy information professional” (title page). However, even though this book can benefit information professionals and librarians working in the field of information literacy, it is primarily intended for an academic audience that has deep understanding of information literacy theories and practice.

The concept of a relational approach is not new. It was first developed in the 1970s as a phenomenographic conceptual framework, applied to information literacy in the late 1990s, and received more and more attention in the early 2000s. The authors who contributed to the discussion of this conceptual model include Bruce (1997), Lupton (2004) and Edwards (2006), among others. The phenomenographic, or relational, approach “focuses on the relationship between people and information to investigate the phenomenon of information literacy from the perspective of people who experience it” (13). This dynamic connection between information and its learner is viewed through the context of the learner’s past and present life experiences. For Andretta, the experience of the user is more fundamental than competences required to complete a task. She states: “Experiences are more fundamental than competences, because they determine the approach employed to complete the task and include the attributes used to accomplish it” (30).

The organizational structure of the book is very clear and logical. It starts with the explanation of the relational approach and the phenomenographic terms, including an overview of its philosophical aspects, such as the structure of awareness, its application in the theories of learning, and a detailed literature review on the subject. It introduces the uninitiated reader into the concept of phenomenography and some of its challenging aspects, primarily terminological and philosophical. In the following chapter, Andretta talks about how the relational approach was employed in her research study, using the empirical method in examining information literacy experiences of the postgraduate
information management student. She discusses three stages of her empirical research: its methodology, ethical considerations, and the reliability of the phenomenographic perspective. The fourth chapter deals with the relational approach in multiple contexts as generated by the empirical research of the author. At this point, Andretta discusses four categories of information literacy: information literacy as functional literacy, as provision, as lifelong learning and as education – the terms used being somewhat ambivalent. Based on these categories, she then develops the “measuring factor” of the impact of information literacy experience for the learner as “transformation” of a learner, and “transfer” as the ability to apply information literacy concepts in information tasks. This is the largest and the most detailed chapter of the book. It presents multiple examples and students’ testimonials of both transformation and transfer in four outlined earlier categories. I found these testimonials extremely eye-opening and encouraging, as they share students’ perspectives, experiences, as well as doubts and concerns sometimes and how they were overcome. Chapter 5 includes individual case studies of four students which help to put into perspective the theoretical base of the previous chapters. In her conclusions, Andretta summarizes her contribution to the relational body of research and practice and draws on areas for future research, such as applying this model in different educational settings with a variety of different groups of learners (193).

All chapters start with a short abstract and a list of relevant keywords followed by a detailed introduction, which makes it very easy to work with. The book has multiple diagrams and tables to facilitate the user’s understanding of this rather complex subject. I also found that it is very easy to read; however, the concepts require careful examination, sometimes referring back to previous chapters to grab the definitions assigned by the author.

Andretta uses the relational model and elaborates on its application in the learning process in a practical way as well. She develops her terminological definition of the “relational” approach based on Christine Bruce (1997) and heavily relies on this author in her further work. Andretta’s original contribution is her study of the information literacy experience of the information management students. She also mentions the application of this study for other academic disciplines, which would have benefited from further elaboration. Furthermore, her unique contribution is the development of the ternary (three-way) relational approach based on the binary (two-way) relationship outlined in previous studies on this subject. For Andretta, it is not only the relationship between a learner and information but between the learner and educator as well that forms a synergic base for the relational approach in information literacy. Another major contribution of this work is its application of the author’s research in her professional practice, which might provide a valuable framework for librarians who practice information literacy at their institutions. Based on her research, she developed a course for practical application of the relational approach to information literacy education entitled Facilitating Information Literacy Education (FILE). This course uses three strategies as its theoretical framework: developing a customized information literacy profile for each learner, elaborating on learning outcomes of creating rather than just
finding information in order to encourage ownership of learning, and assessing through the evaluation of the outcome of learning through the reflective practice.

Overall, this book is a valuable contribution to the field of information literacy and would benefit information professionals involved in information literacy either as researchers or educators. It invites the readers to reconsider the way we teach information literacy and make it applicable and relevant for students.

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Works Cited


