

Book Review

Information and IT Literacy: Enabling Learning in the 21st Century

A. Martin and H. Hader (ed) 2003 London Facet Publishing ISBN 1-85604-463-7

This volume contains a selection of some two dozen papers from the 2002 IT&ILit Conference held in Glasgow in 2002 and the first in a conference series whose growing popularity indicates the relevance and topicality of the subject. Part of the value both of the conference and of this volume is the way in which it brings together a group of people from different backgrounds and disciplines who have a common interest in information literacy. Librarians from schools and universities, academic researchers, IT Training Staff and computing staff bring a rich variety of different approaches. Martin claims accurately that this is a “snapshot taken in the midst of change”. While this is undoubtedly true, those labouring a little further from the leading edge have still not caught up with much of the thinking and activity explored here.

The book is organised in four parts. The first consists of two papers by the editors and sets the context; the second of five papers explores elements of the SCONUL Seven Pillars model, with its rather self-conscious Lawrence allusion; the third is of eleven papers discussing a variety of practical implementations and the fourth of seven papers on research perspectives. Although the conference is avowedly international, the papers are staunchly Anglo-American save for a Canadian and an Iranian contribution, but the range of needs covered is a rich one from primary school to the professoriate and from cultural issues to geographical differences.

A reviewer can either provide a staid series of thumbnails of each paper or else cherry-pick a few highlights and attempt an overall judgement. The quality of the papers is generally high, no doubt in part due to a serious peer review process both for the conference itself and then the book. But some do stand out from the rather heterogeneous crowd. Rader’s noble attempt at a global survey is as attractive for its honest frustration over gaps as for its content; Peters and colleagues report a very well conducted study on whether information literacy is discipline dependent and conclude it isn’t; Reffell has a well argued, well written and enjoyable rant against ECDL; Beatty’s chapter on the Information Commons at the University of Calgary is particularly valuable to UK Librarians who will find this approach, common in North America and Australasia, somewhat novel.

Perhaps the only grouse is this reviewer’s personal dislike of the bullet-pointed list. A regrettably large number of authors appear simply to transfer Powerpoint presentations into barely concealed lists. The ability to write sustained prose is a diminishing art and this work has its fair share of bullet points to demonstrate the fact. One of the strongest elements of the book is the case studies. These are generally of a high standard, and many of them report interesting and useful data, sometimes regrettably briefly, which will help

to illuminate the readers own situation. The papers on the Seven Pillars model also cumulatively give a clear sense of how and why this important initiative has developed. Both of these sections are replete with internal institutional materials, documents and standards which will provide useful material for others to plunder.

Facet Publishing is to be congratulated on high production values with this book. It is well and clearly organised with good bibliographic details and indices and a plethora

of diagrams and tables which are very well reproduced. All in all this is a very good piece of work.

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