

Praise for *The Qualitative Landscape of Information Literacy Research*

'This comprehensive, insightful and well-researched work is an essential and timely contribution to sustaining information literacy research and practice into the future. It provides an important foundation for researchers and practitioners who seek to engage deeply with the lived experiences of people, listen to their voices, and build deep understandings and interpretations of the complex dynamics and interactions that shape people's everyday life experiences with information. Founded on interpretivist frameworks and social theories of learning, and embedded in the author's research and theorizing centering on information landscapes, the work provides the necessary theoretical, methodological and ethical frameworks and tools to plan, design and undertake information literacy research that goes well beyond textual experiences that has characterized much information literacy research to date. This is a powerful, compelling and much needed contribution to the information literacy agenda.'

Dr Ross J. Todd, Associate Professor, School of Communication and Information, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

'It has been a great privilege to have the opportunity to read this volume. It is an extraordinarily rich introduction to qualitative information literacy research, and to the practice of such research. Annemaree Lloyd's ability to weave together the range of qualitative approaches, illustrate and illuminate them, will make this volume an entry point to the world of information literacy research for new researchers or those seeking a contemporary view of the field. As the importance of praxis expands, and the divide between researchers and practitioners blurs in many disciplines, this volume will be of significant interest to those for whom the experience of information use is dear, because it is seen to be transformational.'

Dr Christine Bruce, Dean, Graduate Research, James Cook University

'This is the book that information literacy researchers and practitioners have been waiting for – a clear yet fabulously comprehensive guide to information literacy research that has been written by one of the most influential scholars in the field. Focusing on introducing the key theories and methods that have been employed within information literacy research, the book stands out for the clarity of its explanations as well as the range of examples that Lloyd uses to contextualise her conceptual and analytical discussions. If you have ever been frustrated by superficial or checklist approaches to information literacy research, then this is the book for you: Lloyd has produced a real tour de force that will be influencing the field for many years to come.'

Dr Alison Hicks, Assistant Professor and Programme Director for Library and Information Studies, University College London

Lloyd's impressive grasp of the complex topography of information literacy shines in *The Qualitative Landscape of Information Literacy Research*. Addressing the needs of researchers and practitioners alike, the book provides an excellent summary of approaches for studying information literacy. Framing methods in a broader conversation of research paradigms and theories, this book offers a useful tool for comparing research methodologies. The book may be especially valuable to researchers and students selecting an approach with which to conduct information literacy research. For anyone seeking to understand the various theories and methods used to study information literacy, this is a must-read book.

Dr Clarence Maybee, Professor and W. Wayne Booker Endowed Chair in Information Literacy, Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies

The Qualitative Landscape of Information Literacy Research

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information professionals.

The Qualitative Landscape of Information Literacy Research

**Perspectives, Methods and
Techniques**

Annemaree Lloyd

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Published by Facet Publishing,
7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE
www.facetpublishing.co.uk

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-78330-405-9 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-78330-406-6 (hardback)
ISBN 978-1-78330-407-3 (PDF)
ISBN 978-1-78330-543-8 (EPUB)

First published 2021

Text printed on FSC accredited material.



Typeset from author's files by Flagholme Publishing Services in
10/13 pt Palatino Linotype and Open Sans.
Printed and made in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY.

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Foreword

This is a landmark book. When a book such as this arrives on the actual or virtual shelves it demonstrates that a subject area has come of age. Annemaree Lloyd has brought together the most important methods and techniques in qualitative research for information literacy into this new volume. What marks this work out from others is the numerous examples included from information literacy research which enable the reader/researcher to further pursue their interests. Equally valuable is that Annemaree emphasises that it is the research question or problem that drives the methodology and methods that follow. The explanations of research philosophies, paradigms, methodologies, methods and techniques and how they relate is second to none in this welcome addition to our research toolbox.

But why is qualitative research so valuable? I thought I would describe an incident which alerted me to the significance and the richness of carrying out qualitative analysis and how it can get beyond the numbers to create a rich narrative of the subject you are researching. It is these 'rich narratives' which give us in-depth insights into the participants or subject we are researching. For me this was my first piece of 'real' information science research. It was my PhD which provided me with an abiding motivation to continue with qualitative research for the rest of my career.

In the initial stages of my PhD on information literacy, longer ago than I care to remember, I recall that I was fixated on garnering numerical data for my thesis, thinking it was superior in quality to a bunch of quotes. How utterly wrong I was. The qualitative data I gathered through actually talking to people revealed insights and issues I had not thought of. It also gave a deep and nuanced meaning which the numerical data could never unearth.

I had asked students to tell me what they thought of the information literacy reflective practice exercise I had given them – thinking they would have loved every minute of it. They were very honest! They took me aback to be frank. The insights were hard to take at first but deeply revealing. Learners were asked what they thought about reflective practice and collaborative

learning. One learner responded thus: 'I did not find reflecting on the work of another useful' and 'I'm not really interested in other people's comments, I'd rather be learning'. This tells us some very useful things about perceptions of learning. First of all, reflecting isn't seen by this learner as having any utility and perhaps implies a stereotypical view. However, it's the second comment which gives the deeper insight into views about peer learning, in that the learner believes receiving feedback from a fellow learner has no value. I thought students would lap this sort of thing up given that the literature promotes reflection and collaboration. It became abundantly clear to me that what we needed to do was explain the merit of these approaches so that students have a worthwhile experience. A very important lesson. The most important learning for me was that, for research to be really valuable, we have to reveal the negative as well as the positive outcomes. In other words, stay faithful to the axiom of information literacy as underpinning critical thinking.

It is insights like these that make qualitative research so necessary because of the detailed stories they reveal. These were issues that hadn't even crossed our minds when I was setting up the study. In other words, qualitative research is far more revealing and interesting than the numbers; it tells a story in a human way which we can relate to, readily understand and empathise with. This is why qualitative research is so valuable and why I will be using this book for my teaching and my research.

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Acknowledgements

This book is the product of many discussions with information literacy researchers, library practitioners and students who are interested in moving beyond attempts to quantify and measure information literacy, *towards* trying to understand the deeper complexities that shape our understanding of information literacy as a practice.

Thanks to Marion Bannister, Dr Alison Hicks and Dr Geoff Walton who read final drafts of this book and provided very helpful comments and suggestions.

It would not have been possible to complete this book without the unwavering, confidence-building support and enthusiasm of my mentor, teacher, critical reader and friend Marion Bannister. Thanks Mazza.

Finally, thanks to Jim – who forged the time and space which allowed me to think and write.

Introduction: The Qualitative Landscape of Information Literacy Research

Over the last 47 years, information literacy has become a highly researchable field in education, workplace and everyday settings where it has been investigated and interrogated as a phenomenon, topic, social practice, competence and skill. Bibliometric studies, (Aharony, 2010; Kolle, 2017; Larivière, Sugimoto and Cronin, 2012; Pinto, Cordon and Gómez Díaz, 2010; Pinto, Escalona-Fernández and Pulgarín, 2013) report consistent growth in peer-reviewed published information literacy research and identify broad analytical frameworks, from which the field is explored.

The fundamental importance of information literacy to the contribution of practice and performance has led to its appropriation by other fields, where the core aspects of the practice are reshaped to accommodate contextual differences, leading to growth into areas such as health, finance, media, digital, and algorithmic literacy, to name but a few. Quantitatively, attempts are made in every field and discipline to measure the competency and skills of information use required to designate what it means to be information literate.

Qualitatively, researchers strive to dive deeper in order to understand the inherent dimensions, textures and relations of the practice and its performances, focusing on the contextual aspects, knowledges and social conditions which influence the shape of information literacy, its discourse and operationalisation and the various ways in which it is experienced. Drawing from social theory perspectives and qualitative methods provides information literacy researchers with theoretical, methodological and ethical tools from which to make sense of the information experiences and practices of people in a world which is rapidly changing and through which multiple versions of truth and ways of knowing exist.

Qualitative research perspectives and methodological approaches have the capacity to move information literacy research to a deeper analytical level, opening up new spaces for enquiry. This perspective encourages

researchers to move beyond the ever-present objectivist discourses of ‘deficit’ or focus on skills and competencies to consider questions linked to the politics of representation, about how and why these discourses are privileged, to questions which interrogate the role of power in the privileging of certain types or forms of information, or ways of knowing; and to account for the information experiences and practices of ‘other voices’ which have become marginalised, disenfranchised or silenced.

The Qualitative Landscape of Information Literacy Research: Perspectives, Methods and Techniques introduces and describes some key theories, methods and techniques that have been used from 2010 to 2020 to shape our qualitative knowledge of information literacy and the approaches we apply to its investigation.

The central aim of this book is to develop and support readers’ understanding of how qualitative approaches to information literacy research and teaching is informed, framed, developed and produced. A focus on qualitatively informed approaches and methods is justified, as this area is underrepresented in information literacy research (Sproles, Detmering and Johnson, 2013).

This book will be of value to researchers already engaged in researching the information literacy landscape; to students who are developing or undertaking research or simply interested in identifying approaches to information literacy; and to practitioners who want to investigate the practice of information literacy to create an evidence base to support information literacy in their workplaces or institutions. Practitioners and students who are new to information literacy research and its application will find this book a useful tool to help them evaluate existing information literacy research.

Why do we need to undertake research?

Research is undertaken to provoke and sometimes (often) worry or problematise the status quo. All research should stir or prompt people into thinking about or seeing something in a different way. Research promotes new learning by creating new awareness. For example, in the 1990s information literacy was primarily connected to the information skill-set of librarians. However, our thinking about information literacy began to change with the emergence of the phenomenographic work of Bruce (1997), Limberg (2000a) and Webber and Johnston (2000), and the sociocultural/practice perspective of Lloyd (2005, 2010a) and Pilerot (2014) and critical perspectives espoused by Kapitzke (2003a), Elmborg (2006) and more recently Hicks (2019a) and Tewell (2017). Information literacy is now understood to be experienced in various ways according to context and the social, cultural,

political, historical relations that shape the social, corporeal and epistemic dimensions of the practice in action. These perspectives and approaches also influence how we enter the research arena of the practice/phenomenon/object of learning.

There are many reasons why we are motivated to undertake research into information literacy:

To explore: Information literacy is still a relatively and narrowly explored area in library and information science and is still often narrowly confined to the investigating of information skills in the context of school and higher education. When we undertake exploratory research, we are learning about the potential, possibilities, limits and boundaries of a topic to contribute to the social fabric of life. Exploratory research can provide new insights or approaches or fill in gaps in the existing knowledge base. Exploratory research can act as a baseline approach to prompt the development of new research questions or new avenues of exploration.

To describe: Descriptive research aims to provide rich descriptions of social life (Geertz, 1973). In information literacy research, this might focus on understanding how various groups (of students, refugees, workers, community) experience information literacy in the context of their practices. Descriptive research focuses on understanding how people make meaning from their experiences and, in the case of information literacy, how they make meaning of their experiences with information or knowledge or knowing practices.

To explain: Researchers, often in education settings, want to explain the cause and effect or correlations of why something is like it is (e.g. what factors might influence students' learning and information literacy practice). There is sometimes a focus on causal relationships, which suggest that if X then Y or that X causes Y in specific situations.

To change: Research is often undertaken when an issue or challenge presents itself that requires change or interaction. In this case, researchers might work with communities or communities may themselves undertake research to identify issues or challenges, determine causes and actions and then evaluate outcomes of the actions. Community or participatory research enables researchers to gather evidence, to be presented to policy makers at local levels.

To evaluate: Researchers who undertake evaluation research are interested in the effectiveness or impact of information literacy programmes or policies. Evaluation determines the merit or worth of something against socially or metrically informed criteria.

Balancing the quantitative narrative: focusing on qualitative research

Why focus on the qualitative landscape of information literacy research?

Research into information literacy has been largely undertaken in connection with learning (in academic and school-based settings) and as such there has been a focus towards quantifying information skills and competencies as measurable outcomes. From a quantitative perspective information literacy research emphasises *provision* and *attainment*: *provision* of expert knowledge in information seeking and searching and *attainment* relating to the development, operationalisation and execution of information literacy skills.

The application of a quantitative approach to information literacy has drawn a specific type of research landscape and established a narrative about information literacy, which problematises people as lacking skills and competencies necessary to make informed decisions. According to this view, the deficit narrative can be addressed through the provision of information literacy education that focuses on attainment of skills and competency, which enable and empower people in all aspects of life to 'seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals', as noted in the Alexandria Proclamation (UNESCO, NFIL and IFLA, 2006).

Qualitative research into information literacy has the capacity to balance this narrative and deepen our understanding about our complex relationship with information in all its forms. Undertaking research that favours this approach enables us to focus our attention towards interrogating and understanding the lived experience of people as they interact, connect, engage, produce, circulate and create with information as part of their everyday, educational or working life. The landscape produced by qualitative research emphasises the 'what' and 'how' of information literacy practice as it is shaped by people's conditions of being in their world, the knowledges that are valued, their practices and ways of knowing. Understanding how information literacy emerges and the conditions that enable or constrain its emergence allows us to understand the deeper social and material complexities associated with the practice.

Researching this book

This text has some boundaries. Search parameters for examples of information literacy research included in this book were set at research literature published in peer-reviewed journals and monographs between 2010 and 2020. However, this did not preclude an older published example being included when necessary.

Major databases (Scopus, Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA), Web of Science) were searched, along with individual journal titles where information literacy was listed in the remit. Abstracts and conference papers from major conferences where information literacy is a topic were also searched – European Conference on Information Literacy, i3 (Information, Interaction, Impact Conference) CoLIS (Conceptions of Library and Information Science). However, it is acknowledged that not all publications or reported research have been included in this book. Not included in this study were information literacy research publications that focused specifically on school-based experiences of the practice. This decision was primarily made on the basis of the size and scope of this literature.

The structure of the book

This section provides an overview of the qualitative research landscape of information literacy, identifying key themes and perspectives. There are many reasons why information literacy research is undertaken, and it is important to note that the field has been shaped by practitioners and academic researchers (many of whom started their careers as practitioners). The topic of information literacy is consequently grounded in the unique knowledges, expertise and reflexivities specific to the practice of librarianship.

The first three chapters situate information literacy research in a qualitative context, describing the nature of qualitative research, and the perspectives and theories which have influenced the establishment of this space.

1. Situating Information Literacy Research

This chapter describes key concepts that are foundational to developing qualitative research design and to understanding how research which is framed through this approach is executed. Additionally, the chapter sets out a theory of information literacy landscapes and literacies of information developed by the author (Lloyd, 2010b, 2017a) and uses this theory and model to guide an understanding of how researchers and practitioners approach and enter information literacy research from a qualitative perspective.

2. Informing Information Literacy Research

Describes social theory frameworks that have been applied to information literacy research. The chapter explores a range of theories that continue to influence information literacy research, i.e.:

- phenomenology
- constructionism
- practice theory
- variation theory
- postmodernist theory
- critical theory
- social capital theory.

3. Framing Information Literacy as an Educational Practice for Research. Learning Theories and Models

The construction of sound pedagogical/andragogical practice has its basis in research and draws from a variety of theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 describes how information literacy is connected with learning and the theories that underpin this connection. This chapter will allow researchers, practitioners and students to gain an understanding of these theories, and how they influence research into information literacy in an educational setting. Some theories and approaches described in this chapter are :

- behaviourist and social cognitivist theory
- sociocultural theories
- situated learning
- problem-based/inquiry-based learning (IBL)
- collaborative learning
- blended learning
- postmodern theory.

4. Qualitative Methods in Information Literacy Research

This chapter describes a selection of qualitative methods that have been used to shape our understanding of information literacy:

- action research method
- case study
- critical incident technique
- Delphi method
- discourse analytical approaches
- ethnography
- grounded theory methods (traditional and constructivist)
- phenomenography

- participatory action research
- visual methods and arts-based approaches.

5. Data Collection Techniques

Chapter 5 discusses the core qualitative data-collection techniques that have been employed in information literacy research:

- interviews
- focus groups
- diaries
- observation
- photovoice/photo elicitation
- drawing
- mapping
- doing information literacy research online.

6. Planning for Research

This chapter focuses on developing research plans, questions, design, sampling, and the role of ethics and working with a range of participants and evaluating information literacy research. Topics include:

- elements of a research plan and design outlined
- developing a research question
- coding and analysing data
- sampling
- ethics
- identifying core elements of research description
- the characteristics of good research
- assessing the credibility of information literacy research
- piloting a study
- evaluating information literacy research.

7. Qualitatively Speaking and Doing Information Literacy Research

This final chapter identifies the themes emerging from qualitative information literacy research from 2010 to 2020.