

Book Reviews



Patricia Steele, David Cronrath, Sandra Parsons Vicchio, and Nancy Fried Foster. *The Living Library: An Intellectual Ecosystem.* Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015. 138p. Paper, \$42.00 (ISBN 978-0-8389-8740-7).

It's the rare librarian who has not felt frustrated at one time or another by the building in which he or she works: patrons wander directionless in search of the right desk or stack as staff are relegated to cramped offices long outgrown. Sometimes the entire structure's design no longer makes sense; it can even seem hostile to modern-day needs. When they were confronted with issues such as these, the staff, faculty, and students of the University of Maryland Library came together in innovative ways to devise solutions for the university's iconic McKeldin Library, originally constructed in the 1950s, and added to (imperfectly) in 1990. The planning process undertaken by various players, users, and stakeholders is told lucidly and compellingly in this slender, well-written volume.

The book's layout is clear and logical, with chapters following organically; readers are given a history of University of Maryland, along with a very concise historical recap of the physical layout and development of libraries in the past centuries. Further chapters articulate the problems inherent in the structure of their particular library, while others trace the evolution and implementation of the information-gathering processes devised to find solutions. Several redesigns are presented, and the final chapter interprets findings and results. Forms, surveys, and drawings created by the various participants and teams are reproduced at the ends of chapters to simplify and encourage their use by others. The only fluke appears to be reference to colored areas of floor plans; the illustrations, graphs, and drawings are uniformly black and white. Unindexed, although with end notes and a useful bibliography, the text contains very few buzz words or jargon and presents a united voice unusual for a volume written by four different authors, all representative of the disciplines involved in the project: a library dean, a professor of architecture, a professional architect with library design experience, and an anthropologist.

All of the latter disciplines became involved in the design process for McKeldin Library, and a conscious effort was made to be as inclusive as possible; students were used frequently in the process. Anthropology students, with proper training and background, conducted ethnographic studies of the library to determine their peers' study patterns; library staff, broken into teams, conducted structured observations of library patrons, while others were part of co-design sessions, allowing various constituencies to articulate their thoughts on an ideal library, with the final team interviewing undergraduates, the major users of McKeldin Library. A not-too-technical analysis of the building, its siting, and its systems is followed by descriptions of the work done by architectural graduate students in drafting basic redesigns for the interior and exterior as part of their for-credit coursework.

Anyone who has dealt with architects and contractors in the redesign and renovation of his or her facility will applaud such a unified and holistic approach wherein solutions grow from the user base and are not handed down *deus ex machina* from on high. Too often, library and archival professionals are presented with plans for their work areas without being able to consult and offer information to prevent mistakes, misconceptions, or immediate obsolescence. The organic process outlined here, wherein study and observation and input move inevitably to workable solutions, is certainly a model for us to follow.

The one disappointment in the book, and the project that it documents, is where it ends. While the authors provide a rosy, yet realistic, assessment of easy changes made, lessons learned, and the empowerment felt by all participants, very little change, other than in perceptions, have actually taken place, making the process a bit more theoretical than a real-world exercise. The plans are still on the drawing board, and the major hurdles of fundraising, remodeling, and repurposing the library is yet to take place. McKeldin Library, in a phrase often evoked in the text, remains to be reprogrammed.

Despite this fact, the book is a valuable tool for those institutions planning for, or in need of, change in their buildings. By describing the various students and task forces employed, the volume also shows what academic libraries do best—fostering the interconnectivity and interplay between various disciplines and users—no matter the condition of the building in which we work.—*Harlan Greene, College of Charleston*

Tomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson. *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners*. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2014. 248p. Paper, \$67.00 (ISBN 978-1-55570-989-1).

In *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners*, Mackey and Jacobson present a new framework for providing students with a means to recognize and synthesize information in the world around them. Thomas P. Mackey is Interim Vice Provost for Academic Programs at SUNY Empire State College, and Trudi E. Jacobson is Head of the Information Literacy Department at SUNY University at Albany. The authors previously presented their theory of metaliteracy in “Reframing Information Literacy as Metaliteracy” (*College and Research Libraries*, Jan. 2011: 62–78). This book builds on these previous ideas, incorporates a new metaliteracy framework developed through continued study on literacy issues, and provides concrete examples of metaliteracy in the library and classroom.

The foundational concept of Mackey and Jacobson’s book, metaliteracy, is contextualized and described in thorough detail in the first chapter as a concept that encompasses various literacies we have become familiar with: digital literacy, visual literacy, and others. The authors also explain relationships between metaliteracy and metacognition, multiliteracies, multimodal literacy, and transliteracy. While carefully navigating each of these various concepts, Mackey and Jacobson give strength to their framework of metaliteracy by stating that “rather than simply respond to the latest technology with a new literacy type, we need to identify connections to related literacies within an expanded framework” (27). This expanded framework is metaliteracy, and the authors make it clear that they aim not to present a new set of literacy skills, but rather to provide a means for individuals to relate to knowledge and information across changing formats and contexts.

Chapter 2, “Metaliteracy in the Open Age of Social Media,” shifts our focus to current information issues. The emphasis here is information as participatory, open, and based in community interaction; the authors make a case for the need to educate students on how to incorporate collaboratively built social media sources into information gathering. This focus on web-based, socially derived information lays a foundation for Mackey and Jacobson’s proposal that our concepts of literacy need to be enlarged: metaliteracy provides us with the necessary step back from discrete literacies that focus on specific information types. Their discussion of the social aspects of the Internet, however, presents participatory information creation as a new phenomenon; this section would have benefited from acknowledgement of the social aspects of information creation in older formats and communities of practices, from which our current social media climate has surely evolved.