‘Realizing’ Information Literacy: A Philosophical Argument

Jeongbae Choi

Syracuse University, USA

jechoi@syr.edu

ABSTRACT

Notable advancements in information literacy (IL) research and practice notwithstanding, fundamental concerns persist, including conceptual ambiguity, under-theorization, ill-defined boundaries, and a persistent theory-practice gap. This dissertation addresses these issues through three interrelated studies aimed at ‘realizing’ IL. Study 1, a critical review, provides a ‘reality check’ by examining key philosophical, theoretical, and practical conundrums through an ‘aporetic’ approach. The review reveals six enduring aporias in IL: truth; knowledge and data; information behavior; genericism versus contextuality; ideology and political economy; and illiteracy. Building on these findings, Study 2—comprising three sub-studies—develops a ‘realist’ IL framework by synthesizing three approaches: (1) the capability approach (CA) in political economy frames IL as ‘combined capabilities for informed beings and doings,’ highlighting informational well-being and agency beyond both skills and practices view; (2) social realism (SR) in the sociology of eduction foregrounds the primacy and internal logics of disciplinary structured knowledge domains and theoretical knowledge, locating IL in relation to these domains rather than as individual knowledge construction or knowing itself; and (3) critical realism (CR) in the philosophy of social science provides a stratified ontology and an account of causal mechanisms and emergence, clarifying how IL can be realized within information ecosystems and across knowledge domains. Study 3 applies this realist framework in higher education, outlining curriculum-design principles that help ‘realize’ IL’s aims in practice. Collectively, this dissertation argues that a realist approach can strengthen the IL field and offers a practical guide for researchers and practitioners.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Information literacy; Education; Curriculum; Pedagogy.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Information literacy; Philosophy of information; Critical realism; Social realism; Capability.

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