

Stuart A. Selber, **Institutional Literacies: Engaging Academic IT Contexts for Writing and Communication**, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020, 272 pp., \$35.00 (paperback).

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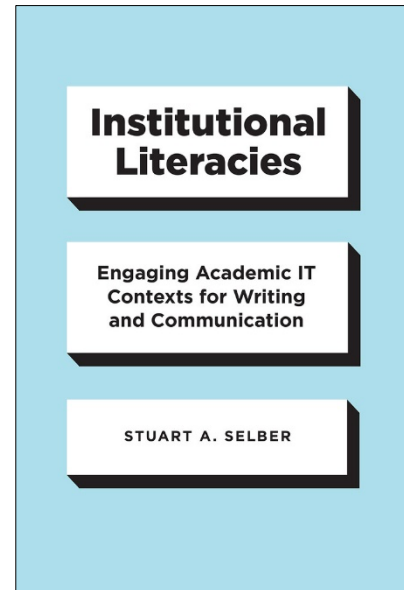
Stuart A. Selber's book, ***Institutional Literacies: Engaging Academic IT Contexts for Writing and Communication***, discusses the theories and practices of information technology (IT) literacies in academic institutions through historical, spatial, and textual dimensions. *Institutional Literacies* is a must-read for a diverse array of readers, such as academic IT specialists, teachers, students, school administrators, university stakeholders, and all of those in academia who are increasingly spending more time online, relying more on IT resources, and contributing more content to digital environments. This book introduces a great deal of academic IT courses, programs, and initiatives in a number of world-class universities and colleges, illustrating the influential power of academic IT and the prospects for change in literacy education. These are empowering educational

resources for a worldwide education paradigm shift in the digital age, especially when the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is pushing the teaching and learning of higher education into online spaces. The book's response to this shift highlights what academic IT means to distance education, why teachers, students, and administrators should collaborate to engage deeply with institutional literacies, and how they can manage this engagement.

Institutional Literacies includes a preface and five chapters. The preface summarizes the book's objective to conceptualize how colleges and universities treat ITs and why this matters to the learning and teaching of writing and communication. Then, it presents a brief history of IT literacy institutions and practices based on the author's own experiences. In the preface, the author points out that "ITs have become thoroughly integrated into the world of colleges and universities" (p. xi), and teachers of writing and communication can approach and influence this integration through historical, spatial, and textual dimensions. The last three chapters explore academic IT from historical, spatial, and textual perspectives, respectively, after reviewing the previous work that has been done to address academic IT units in chapter 1.

Chapter 1 "launches an investigation into the character and culture of academic IT in higher education, first reviewing the previous work" (p. 3), then shaping its contexts. This chapter argues that all academic IT units have historical, spatial, and textual dimensions that need to be understood and influenced by colleges and universities.

Chapter 2 focuses on the role of histories, such as the past standards, legacies, conventions, and rituals, in the formations, decisions, and dynamics of academic IT units. Chapter 3 addresses the role of



spatial structures, such as institution-organizing hierarchies, work-guiding processes, knowledge-producing methods, and human-machine interactions, as they relate to the arrangement, regulation, and implementation of academic IT environments. Chapter 4 emphasizes the role of texts and textual practices, including the metaphors, subjectivities, genres, and stories generated, in representing and shaping academic IT units. These three dimensions are multilayered and, most importantly, logically interconnected, establishing the key framework to understanding and influencing academic IT units. Finally, chapter 5 integrates the historical, spatial, and textual parts of the heuristic for conceptualizing the academic IT landscape, illustrating how they function together as a working whole.

New literacy studies have a long tradition of placing literacy in a wider context of institutional purposes and power relationships (Barton, 1994; Hamilton, 2001; Lea & Street, 2006; Mills, 2010; Street, 1984). Gutierrez (2008) differentiates the "powerful literacies" and the "weak literacies" (pp. 177–178) in schools and supportive learning environments, emphasizing that a broader notion of academic literacy is oriented toward critical social thought. Researchers have also identified practical problems of academic literacy, concerning oral and written communication, proposing a coordinated institutional approach as the solution (Reid & Parker, 2002).

Lea and Street (1998) outlined using an "academic literacies" framework and an "institutional approach" to understand student writing in new higher education, rather than adopting traditional models and approaches. Lea and Street (2006) also summarized that the previously utilized approaches to understanding student writing and literacy could be described as "three overlapping perspectives or models: (a) a study skills model, (b) an academic socialization model, and (c) an academic literacies model" (p. 368). Other studies conceptualize literacy as a social practice consisting of multi-literacies, exploring new literacies and their practical implications in the new millennium (Hagood, 2000; Kellner, 2000). As for Miller (2015), the "multi-literacies" framework identifies six domains in the university context, including: "(1) institutional literacies; (2) digital literacies; (3) social and cultural literacies; (4) critical literacies; (5) language literacies; and (6) academic literacies" (p. A19).

In recent years, digital communication has greatly transformed and reinforced literacy education and practices, and a digital turn has been observed in the landscape of new literacy studies (Mills, 2010). Thus, digital literacies have been intensively discussed (Caverly et al., 2019; Gourlay, Hamilton, & Lea, 2014; Hockly, Dudeney, & Pegrum, 2014; Lea & Jones, 2011; Nichols & LeBlanc, 2020). For instance, Newland and Handley (2016) examined the strategic context and policy development of a digital literacies framework aimed at academic staff from an institutional perspective, while Nichols and Stornaiuolo (2019) traced the genealogy of the concept of "digital literacy," comparing the historical use of the concept in education with its contemporary uses in digital environments.

Compared to previous literature in this field, Selber's work can be described as elaborate, interdisciplinary, and solid in many respects. *Institutional Literacies* adopts a more active stance on technological engagement and expands digital literacies studies to include the context of ICTs. The book contributes to the literature by providing an overall framework to understand and influence the workings, opportunities, challenges, and implications of academic IT units. To fulfill this, Selber mentions a number of systems, programs, apps, and devices used in various contexts of higher education, such as the Information

Technology Infrastructure Library, Learning Tools Interoperability, Virtual Desktop Infrastructure, Moodle system, and many technological devices in university makerspaces. Yet, he fails to illustrate vivid pictures or detailed examples to attract and convince general readers.

An important portion of this book deals with how to turn critique into action toward academic IT. In the concluding chapter, Selber presents six modes of institutional engagement available to teachers and educators: "maintaining awareness, using systems and services, mediating for audiences, participating as user advocates, working as designers, and partnering as researchers" (p. 198). With these detailed strategies, as well as rigorous analysis and thought-provoking arguments throughout the book, Selber fulfills his goal of encouraging teachers to intervene in and influence academic IT within their own institutions. Overall, the book is most successful in contributing new insights to our understanding of academic IT units and how they function. To render this work even more useful to teachers and educators, it could have been enriched with more vivid illustration and detailed examples of how different ICTs work in various educational contexts. Such explanations could assist teachers in determining how to proceed as institutional actors.

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