

Book Review: Libraries Promoting Reflective Dialogue in a Time of Political Polarization, edited by Andrea Baer, Ellysa Stern Cahoy, and Robert Schroeder

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Volume 6, 2020

Special Focus on Academic Libraries and the Irrational
Dossier thématique sur les bibliothèques universitaires et l'irrationnel

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072161ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v6.34040>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians / Association
Canadienne des Bibliothécaires en Enseignement Supérieur

ISSN

2369-937X (digital)

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Cite this review

McGinniss, J. (2020). Review of [Book Review: Libraries Promoting Reflective Dialogue in a Time of Political Polarization, edited by Andrea Baer, Ellysa Stern Cahoy, and Robert Schroeder]. *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship / Revue canadienne de bibliothéconomie universitaire*, 6, 1–4.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v6.34040>

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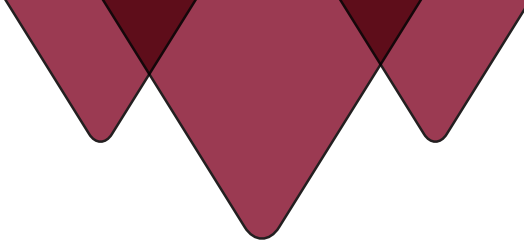
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Book Review: *Libraries Promoting Reflective Dialogue in a Time of Political Polarization*

Baer, Andrea, Ellysa Stern Cahoy, and Robert Schroeder, eds. *Libraries Promoting Reflective Dialogue in a Time of Political Polarization*. Chicago, IL: ACRL Press, 2019, 391 pp, \$80.00 USD.

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Keywords: *information literacy · reflective dialogue*

When considering an edited book, one often looks first to the editors to ask what perspective and insight they bring to the shaping of the collection. Baer, Cahoy, and Schroeder have established themselves as compelling voices in librarianship through their collective scholarly output. Baer’s outstanding 2018 article, “It’s all relative? Post-truth rhetoric, relativism, and teaching on ‘Authority as Constructed and Contextual,’” discusses how interpretations of authority and credibility are shaped by class, race, lived experience, and affect. Similarly, Cahoy and Schroeder have written on the role of interpretation and affect in library work (2012). Cahoy’s 2004 article “Put Some Feeling into It!” encourages librarians to consider the affective elements that shape how students interact with the library and library personnel. Schroeder’s 2014 book, *Critical Journeys: How 14 Librarians Came to Embrace Critical Practice*, details through personal accounts how the application of a critical practice to librarianship is instrumental in reframing how librarians understand their purpose, role, and work.

Thus as editors, Baer, Cahoy, and Schroeder bring significant experience and demonstrated insight to the work of editing this collection, whose chapters broadly address the construction of authority, the complexity of changing one’s mind, the role of interpretation in building knowledge, and how these processes combine to construct an understanding of how the world is perceived to work. *Libraries Promoting Reflective Dialogue in a Time of Political Polarization* is a superb contribution to the discussion of the interdependency of authority, knowledge, affect, and interpretation. Each of the book’s chapters addresses the broad discussions of these elements in



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librarianship, employing reflective dialogue as a means of engaging others in an environment of disagreement over the nature and state of what is true, and how what is true can be known. This collection features a variety of librarian's voices, perspectives and experiences, which work to challenge and provoke the reader to consider the multiple ways by which reflective dialogue can be put into practice in the daily work of academic librarianship.

One of the reasons this book is such a privilege to recommend is the manner by which reflective dialogue is embodied in its structure. The editors have masterfully placed chapters in conversation with one another. The authors' shared commitment to the application and practice of reflective dialogue emphasizes the sense of participating in a thoughtful and perceptive group discussion. Throughout this collection, the threads of an argument in a particular chapter are consistently revisited and further broadened or commented upon in other chapters. For example, the roles of affect and interpretation are discussed throughout this book.

Academic librarianship is increasingly engaged with affect, as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects" recognizing it as an essential part of pedagogy, particularly as foundational to processes of interpretation, evaluation, and knowing (Ahmed 2010, 29). Many of the chapters address how and why it is necessary to understand the role of affect throughout the process of engaging in reflective dialogue specifically, and in information literacy generally. This collection provides insightful examples of how to bring an understanding of affect into information literacy pedagogy and library practice. For example, multiple chapters challenge the idea that fake news can be addressed through "better" sources or "better" evaluative measures. The authors throughout this collection recognize how affect actively mediates perception and recognition of authority in, for example, a discussion of the value of a source or a means of evaluation.

Affect and interpretation are understood as intertwined, as mutually constructing "senses of self and social belonging" (Baer, Cahoy, and Stern 2019, 9). In her chapter "TRUTH Always Wins: Dispatches from the Information War" Hartman-Caverly acutely observes "interpretation [...] is the connective tissue between the facts" (207). Interpretive practices, which shape how new information is processed, tend to serve one's own cognitive biases. As Miller, Ording, Tans, and Vergara perceptively note in their chapter, "'The Earth is Flat' and Other Thresholds," for a person to change their interpretive practices, it is necessary "to get them to change the entire way that they think about the world and themselves, which is hard to do" (286). The interpretive practices by which a person makes meaning are shaped by and through class, race, parental influence, political views, and lived experience.

These also tend to be transparent. Reflective dialogue, recognizing interpretation is intertwined with the affective reception of information and thus to a person's sense of self, holds a mirror to interpretive practices. Incorporating reflective dialogue as a practice provides opportunity to construct information literacy approaches and other library service models that engage the whole person. Reflective dialogue is a valuable tool to model and encourage the work of hearing, listening and, hopefully, learning. This book provides many valuable examples of preparing for and doing this work.

The reader is invited to participate in the work of reflective dialogue through the act of reading. Engaging with this book is to enter into the process of reflective dialogue with the book, and one's self, on the way to practicing this with others. Two of the chapters feature authors' voices in dialogue with each other (chapter 2 "Confronting the Limits of Dialogue: Charlottesville, 2017" and chapter 12 "'The Earth is Flat' and Other Thresholds: A Critically Reflective Cross-disciplinary Conversation in the Post-Truth Era"). While many chapters are written from an information literacy perspective, chapter 10, "Between Accession and Secession: Political Mayhem and Archival Transparency in Charleston, South Carolina" and chapter 11 "Red Shirts and Citizens' Councils: Special Collections and Information Literacy in the College Classroom" approach reflective dialogue from the perspective of engaging with archival materials.

Overall, this collection is characterized by deeply thought-through, engaging chapters that explore the theoretical and philosophical means by which to engage in reflective dialogue across a variety of academic library contexts. The authors provide support for their arguments, drawing from theory and lived experience. In the concluding section of each chapter, the authors close with suggestions for application, demonstrating their own reflective practice. This book is a valuable asset to any librarian working with faculty, staff, and students, but the price of \$80 may cause it to be found more often in a library than in a librarian's personal collection.

Libraries Promoting Reflective Dialogue in a Time of Political Polarization is a significant and timely collection that will challenge and provoke its readers pedagogically as well as personally. In a time of quarantine and social distancing, further complicated by the changing flood of information and political maneuvering, reflective dialogue is essential. While we are not face-to-face with students, staff, and faculty, we remain in dialogue with them. This difficult time invites us to locate opportunities to practice reflective dialogue in our pedagogy and interactions. Political polarization poses a substantial challenge to meaningful interactions in all aspects of library work. As such, this book is certainly engaged with this particular moment in time. This collection's treatment of reflective dialogue extends beyond addressing political polarization, thus serving as a means to grow and develop library pedagogy and practice.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACRL Press permits authors to post electronic versions of their chapters to their respective institutional repositories. A companion website for *Libraries Promoting Reflective Dialogue in a Time of Political Polarization* can be found at <https://librariesdialogue.wordpress.com/>, where many of the chapters are available for reading and download. Thanks to Robert Schroeder for providing this update.