

LIS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH AREAS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract

The importance of Information and Communication Technologies in distance learning has been acknowledged as an essential component of strengthening LIS education in the remote areas of the north eastern states of India. (Rath). The same could be said of the use of ICT for LIS education in remote areas of Australia and in America. The infrastructure of physical, human and financial resources all attract students to the profession. This reflective essay discusses Robert Stueart's 1999 challenge to information access in Asia: "One of the most important activities in information society is to maintain a cadre of qualified information professionals". (Stueart, 1999). Maintaining a cadre of information professionals is also an appropriate challenge to India. Information professionals themselves are the channel of globalization of education because they see the need for standards in computerisation initiatives and promote communities of practice worldwide.

Keywords : Librarianship/ Information Literacy

1. Introduction

Professors Daniel Dorner and Gary E. Gorman wrote that culturally and social determined differences between developed and developing countries may constitute a "highly insensitive approach to education." (p. 285), and educators need to question how cultural dimensions of a country, region or community affect the manner in which students become information literate. The Western model of LIS education may ignore the potential for culturally determined interpretations of theory and practice, and by doing so, block understandings of learning as a lifelong, intuitive and inclusive process. The disparity between what the students learn in the classroom and their worldview based on experiences of any particular situation can result in a loss of meaning and in application. Student understandings of information problems faced may in fact be multidimensional, but no response is attempted. Dorner and Gorman cite Hofstede – 'Western Truth derived from an ideal of rights-based individualism and stimulated analytical thinking, whereas Eastern Virtue derived from an ideal that emphasized the interrelatedness of individuals and led to synthetic thinking.' (Dorner & Gorman, p. 289) Bagnall also wrote of the imposition of Western thought as a contingency in international higher education: "The internationalization of higher education may

also be seen as counter-ethical to the extent that it is irremediably culturally hegemonic, regardless of the efforts that are made to be sensitive and responsive to the cultures into which it is marketed.” (p. 36). Pawley asked how successfully do curricular experiences introduce students to new ideas—such as the concept of “white privilege”—about race and gender, and how well do curricular experiences prepare students for diversity? She recommends strategies that include a critical analysis of language use and involving all users as consumers and producers of information. (Pawley, 2003). Such advice tends to heighten ethical concerns in library education. Barbara Ford wrote “A core value of IFLA is the belief that people, communities and organizations needs universal and equitable access to information, ideas, and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well being. (p. 270). In the 16th Annual Mortenson Distinguished Lecture, Dr. Alex Byrne (2006) spoke of IFLA as the global voice of libraries and information services and its responsibility to shape the information society. “If the peak body for libraries and librarians internationally is not to be involved in an endeavour to determine the shape of the information society, then we are implying that we are irrelevant to its development, and thus that our profession, a profession of information specialists, is irrelevant.” (Byrne, 2006). Ethical statements of values tend to center negotiations between nations to the common good, and are flagships of the interpersonal skills needed to achieve social inclusion.

2. Materials and Methods

A literature review of the subjects of LIS education and international practice was conducted in December, 2007. Themes appearing in the literature were coded inductively by the researcher and categorized for their ability to inform LIS educators of controversial aspects of internationalism. This essay stood firmly into the ‘interpretive’ form of research described by Merriam. (2002).

3. Discussion

The Draft Position Statement on Information Ethics in LIS Education clarifies why reflection on aspects of intercultural exchange are crucial: “Knowledge and understanding of pluralistic intercultural information ethical theories and concepts, including the ethical conflicts and responsibilities facing library and information professionals around the world, are necessary to relevant teaching, learning, and reflection in the field of library and information studies and information-related professions”. Objectives for the curriculum are the following: “to be able to recognize and articulate ethical conflicts in the information field; to inculcate a sense of responsibility with regard to the consequences of individual and collective interactions in the information field; to provide the foundations for intercultural dialogue through the recognition of different kinds of information cultures and values; to provide basic knowledge about ethical theories and concepts and about their relevance to everyday information work; and, to learn to reflect ethically and to think critically and to carry these abilities into professional life.” (ALISE Information Ethics Special Interest Group, 2006, p. 3). Qualified information professionals are aware of culturally and socially determined differences in learning the subject matter of librarianship and the potential

effect on learning of these differences. The concept of race and how cultural background and race affect interpretations of theory in LIS education is an important area of research because learners are affected profoundly by their cultural experiences in all nations. The majority of librarians in the United States are women, and many are aware of the “micro inequities” through which they have been treated differently because of this gender, race, age, or other “outsider” status. The creation of a “chilly environment” blocks inclusion of the personal aspects of self-esteem, confidence, aspirations and participation –these are all important aspects when using or consuming information. Women LIS educators might particularly empathize with students from India who experience micro inequities in their own society.

4. Conclusions

Despite apparent hypocrisies in higher education, LIS Educators can make curricular changes that contribute to the creation of libraries as race-neutral and gender-neutral spaces. They can do this by reflecting on their own experiences and implementing aspects of social inclusion and ethics into core subjects. The interrelatedness of individuals is an essential component of participation in world society, and information use is “a process that involves all users in both consumption and production”. (Pawley, 2003). Both consumption and production involve interpreting the meaning of information. This is a type of social information literacy which binds everyone. Tadashi Takenouchi (2004) defined social information literacy: “In terms of ethical issues, social information literacy is concerned with journalism ethics, intellectual freedom, protection or release of government information, and strategic business information. This field can be called “social information ethics.” (p. 2). Educators can introduce their LIS students to the challenge of transforming librarianship into a profession diverse enough to be socially inclusive of other races, cultures and nations because everyone consumes information and produces information when resources are built and archived. Dr. Bagnall wrote that even though the complexity of each university prohibits applications of general findings in the classroom, cultural tolerance and “a heightened uncertainty and the tentativeness with which we make judgments about what is desirable or not in cultural and organizational change” raises our consciousness – and that of our students.

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