

Communication Summary

OVERCOMING TECHOCRATIC FICTION, TOWARDS A CRITICAL LIBRARY TRAINING.

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SUMMARY

Information literacy has become, since the last third of the last century (ALA, 1989), the dominant format for approaching library training, especially in the academic environment, whose purpose is to contribute to producing a *literate* subject, an individual competent in the use and management of information. In our country, the North American model, *information literacy* (ACRL 2000), was imported from the beginning of the process of convergence with Europe, a phenomenon that implied the incorporation in the academy of economic logic as the key to functioning.

The historical-interpretative perspective makes it possible to understand the meaning, profile or conception of *informational literacy*, a category that is usually presented as ahistorical, universalizable or neutral. In this communication some axes are taken into account to analyze the construct *information literacy*: its character of *competence*, eminently, technological; its technocratic aspect or its capacity to contribute to model adaptable subjectivities.

It is defended that, beyond teaching how to manage information, a critical librarian formation should provide tools to contribute to the formation of political subjects of knowledge.

INTRODUCTION / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In general, we can understand that a critical position is one that problematizes the existing hegemonic economic-social order as well as the different forms of domination, regulation or exclusion on which it is based, produced by dominant narratives, educational curricula, diverse canons, etc. Perspectives called critiques try to denaturalize oppression and seek to evidence, besides its injustice, the fact that iniquity is not something necessary or irreversible and therefore devise alternatives to think of us as subjects and collectives with more symmetrical relations.

Within the critical librarianship (Accardi, Drabinski, Kumbier, 2010; Elmborg. 2006), authors such as Leckie, Given, Buschman (2010, p. xi-xiii) raised a decade ago the need for a librarianship based on critical theory: "critical theory expands the boundaries of what we know and how we think, and thus opens up new possibilities and avenues for LIS (Library and Information Science) research".

These authors argued the relevance of critical theory for several reasons; first, to counter the dominant positivist and *technocratic* tendencies in the field and profession; second, to foster interdisciplinarity and move away from the recurring "discourse of information"; finally, they argued, because critical theory is potentially useful for analyzing many of the

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problems facing the library world, such as the unthinking use of technology (Leckie, Buschman, 2009), or to counteract the great neoliberal story (market and management) that organizes and measures library services according to their exchange value.

Indeed, in the scenario described, and as far as our topic is concerned, the dominant perspectives of *informational literacy* present it as a universal and aseptic discursive practice that dissociates subjects and learning contexts. It is usually conceived as a set of skills that pursues that individuals are competent using or accessing *information*, conceived in a positivist way, in the abstract (ALA, 1989; ACRL, 2000; CRUE-TIC, REBIUN, 2009).

This type of training will also be profiled as a transversal *competence*, both in education and in the world of work, eminently coherent with the new capitalism, as it has its conceptual core in data management. In both the academic and work environments, the acquisition of certain skills related to the use of information has been related, if not confused, with *educational* processes. "We face a frightening constriction of our concept of education into a permanent training in information management," says Lambeir (2005, p. 351).

Critical library training, however, seeks to help students be able to understand different discourses, including scientists, and ultimately the world they inhabit in order to act (Accardi, Drabinski, Kumbier, 2010; Elmborg, 2006; Seale, 2010). The effort of understanding may involve *the use of information* but in no way can both processes be identified. The construction of meaning supposes to analyze in depth speeches, to confront points of view, to weigh statements...that do not necessarily pass nor are associated by an effective handling of electronic *information*.

OBJECTIVES / HYPOTHESES

Analyze hegemonic *information literacy* as a historical and technocratic *construct* - functional competence to late capitalism. Propose a critical library training that does not decouple knowledge from power or decontextualise the subject of knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

Following Leckie, Given and Buschman (2010) when they analyze a library field furrowed by technique and efficient logic and propose the use of interdisciplinary perspectives, here we have used genealogical optics and critical discourse analysis to understand informational literacy as a historical and theoretical-practical construct born in the crisis of capitalism. From this double perspective, *information literacy* can be understood as a praxis imbricated in a strategy of survival and updating of the formative facet of the librarian in an economic, political and university environment in which the coordinates were being modified (O'Connor, 2006; Enright, 2013; Nicholson, 2015).

The transition from industrial capitalism to what some authors have conceptualized as cognitive capitalism (Moulier-Boutang, 2011), meant that the new processes of accumulation had one of their nuclei in the circulation of information (*free flow of information*) in which the so-called *new* information and communication technologies were going to play a major role in sustaining the neoliberal fiction of the free and informed economic agent who chooses/consumes in a market society (Hayek, 1945). In order to produce the ideal subject - from which flexibility, polyvalence, and the capacity to constantly accommodate an ever-changing capitalism is demanded- education systems were oriented towards the development of skills, such as (self-) *learning* or *networking* in which the use of data is essential (Han, 2014).

The economic logic implied that the academic milieu, a space for the privileged development of the new literacy, ceased to be conceived as part of the welfare states and incorporated market and business management devices (*New Public Management*): such as *marketing*, measurements or *benchmarking* in order to compete for subsidies, *clients* or financing. This

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adaptation process also meant the establishment of a new regulatory framework, *governance* (Estévez Araujo, 2016), or the devaluation of *theoretical* or reflexive knowledge, the overvaluation of *competencies* (the *know how*), the growing presence of technology or the impact on concepts such as *learning*, *lifelong learning*, and so on.

Information literacy is born in this scenario of mutations: it arises with the structural changes implied by the global processes of re-accommodation of capitalism since the last third of the last century (Boltanski, Chiapello, 2002). This type of training, which conceives *information* aseptically, is presented as an *ad hoc* literacy in the *information society* (ALA, 1989). One of the models with the widest worldwide repercussion is that of the *Association of College and Research Libraries* (ACRL, 2000), which defined the *literate* subject as one who, from a guided sequence of stages, is capable of defining his or her information needs, searching, selecting, evaluating, using and communicating information correctly. What discursive profile does this literacy acquire?

Although there has been a process of updating (ACRL, 2015), the congruence of the informational discourse with the system of production and power can be affirmed. Firstly, in line with the academic environment, it is conceived as a *know-how* and as a competence that can be measured and quantified; secondly, it is important to highlight the technological weight: information literacy and digital literacy are intertwined in such a way that it is not easy to differentiate them. Even in the 21st century, the concept of *information literacy* is eclipsed in favour of *digital skills* (*digcom*) (Rebiun, 2016), a concept that highlights the weight of technology and networks (*networking*) at university level (Day, 2012).

Finally, information literacy is promoted as a transversal skill because it is associated with *learning to learn* (i.e. the subject who is permanently recycled to remain employable). An essential ability to consume and produce in the so-called *information societies* defended in reports and statements of bodies and institutions of enormous weight in the materialization of the architecture of education systems since the twentieth century, such as the OECD (2003) or the European Commission (COM, 1995; 2002). The *literate* subject of informational literacy and the *homo oeconomicus* of neoliberalism are thus closely linked.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Information literacy acquires (another) meaning, beyond mere neutral and universalizable competition. Over the years, discursive practice has been promoted in different countries by networks of university libraries, mainly. This is the case of Rebiun (Red de Bibliotecas Universitarias) in Spain under the guise of the projection of CRAI (Centros de recursos para el aprendizaje y la investigación) from the beginning of the 21st century in a context that promoted *change* (business management), the promotion of information technology, the competency model or *lifelong learning* (Martín Valdunciel, 2017).

Given the computer literacy / information literacy nexus and the context of efficiency, the development models that have been extended usually take shape in *information packages*, susceptible of measurement/control, structured in modules of massive distribution through electronic platforms of *e-learning* or *b-learning* in an *educational* format, mainly individualized.

This technocratic way of understanding library training (literacy as a mere tool for self-learning and management) is functional to a university system focused on forming individuals adaptable to a scenario of constant precariousness (Hirtt, 2009; 2013) but not of people critical of this framework, with the capacity and knowledge to understand it and, if necessary, alter it.

This hegemonic model of leading library training is aimed at achieving *outcomes* (*measurable*, of course). It takes into account more an individual (*client*) who consumes data than a political subject of knowledge, which is constructed when it learns and understands, embedded in specific situations and contexts, not always identifiable and, therefore, difficult

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to measure and quantify. Building knowledge is far from being a guided or universalizable process: it does not allow itself to be trapped by the positivism of the use evaluations (*expected outcomes*) that are carried out in the academy or in its services.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSAL(S)

Critical library training does not conceive of knowledge detached from power. It is a practice that works, rather than with information, in the abstract, with situated discourses produced by subjects or groups with interests. This type of formation is committed to theory or reflexivity as a basis for understanding the logic of the fields of knowledge, both from epistemological and social perspectives, or questions how the production of knowledge is produced, processes neither objective nor neutral (Bourdieu, 1999; 2000). A critical librarian practice should not avoid introducing students or teachers into the non-neutrality of hegemonic sources of information or the use of language as a means of constructing and underpinning dominant discourses.

The materialization of critical perspectives of librarian formation implies another model of university (Giroux, 2002; Sousa Santos, 2005) inserted in the problems of the social majority, with democratic control, not with company regulation, and with *curricula* oriented to the integral formation of people not, specifically, to instruct *human capital*. This problematic approach requires coordination between teachers and librarians because they understand that the critical use of discourses, whether scientific or not, or the use of documentary sources and resources are inserted in specific frameworks for the construction of knowledge, cannot be thought of in an abstract, decontextualised or aseptic manner.

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