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**Information Literacy as an Emancipatory Process
Directed to Social Inclusion in a Knowledge Society**

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Abstract

Information literacy as an individual and a social emancipatory process is explored in this paper. It also examines the awakening awareness of the Latin American librarians towards information literacy. Specially in developing countries, information literacy is a key issue because there is a close connection with social inclusion. The incorporation and mobilization of attitudes, knowledge and skills directed to citizenship exercise is the core of social inclusion. It also includes the acceptance of the differences, valorization of diversity, the right to belong and the search for constant improvement of society. Information literacy, at a higher level, more than a sum of skills and attributes, is a continuous process of the adequate mobilization of interrelated contents. The learning path that begins with literacy, functional literacy, digital inclusion, informational inclusion, culminates in social inclusion. According to this, librarians and educators are conceived as mediators and social transformation agents.

Introduction

Nowadays, specially in developing countries, there seems to be a social subjacent movement around the social cohesion as a step beyond social inclusion. However, it is known that globalization has a perverse effect upon local communities and the common citizen. The world trend is the prominence of the corporative interests upon public interests, concerning the development of the local societies. The surge of globalization tears at local relations as a knife.

However, as globalization advances and a technocratic approach of society becomes stronger, its opposite is evidenced. In other words, local identities and networking have been valorized by government, not-for-profit organizations and communities.

Facing the complexity of the challenge of social transformation and the multiplicity of intervening factors, there is no miraculous solution. The process of construction of a democratic society, despite the technological advances, is long and difficult, and there is inherent resistance. The bases of cultural identities need to be preserved, as the only way to guarantee the social cohesion. At this point, information, knowledge, ethics and values become essential.

Thus, empowering people to actively control their lives and participate as citizens in a democratic society became an imperative for many educators and social agents, even among common people. It means to consider the existence of emancipated individuals with critical awareness about themselves and the society they build.

In that scenario, information literacy is conceived as a prerequisite for effectively participating in the Knowledge Society, and it is concerned with empowering people regardless of modes of information access and delivery.

Despite the existence of different concepts of information literacy, all of them converge to a common denominator that it is the attempt to build emancipated human beings, incorporating three levels of complexity: information emphasis (that can be defined as digital and computer literacy), knowledge emphasis (that can be defined as cognitive literacy), and learning emphasis (that can be defined as critical literacy).

Most of all, it is important to reflect on the challenges that lie ahead: the need for constructing an inclusive society, that prioritizes the democratic access to information, supported by an education that leads to emancipated individual formation. In order to reach social inclusion it is necessary to prepare people to be information literate.

In recent years, information literacy studies have been more popular in Latin America. Now, Latin American librarians are awakening to the information literacy movement, observing the need of disseminating and communicating their studies. Programs, projects and articles on the topic have gradually become more popular in the internet. Only from 2000 to 2006, in Altavista search engine, there were, in May 2006, 244 site references about information literacy in Brazilian (.br) domain, 153 in Argentina, 137 in Mexico, 78 in Chile, 57 in Colombia, 49 in Jamaica, 38 in Venezuela, 37 in Cuba, among others.

