Variations of information literacy and different views on democracy and citizenship

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2016

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version (aka post-print)
Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

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Variations of information literacy and different views on democracy and citizenship

INTRODUCTION
Many activities in libraries and schools aim at strengthening the students’ information literacy, portraying it as tremendously important not only for school work and a future lifelong learning, but also for enhancing their opportunities to participate in the civic society. Research focussing on the relation between information literacy and democracy and citizenship is still scarce. This poster contributes to a critical strand of information literacy research suggesting how a more fine grained analysis of information literacy may be obtained by scrutinising the view on democracy that are drawn upon in the analysis. I draw on findings from my study (1) on young women’s information literacy practices on the arena of sexual and reproductive health.

THE INFORMATION PRACTICES OF CHOOSING A CONTRACEPTIVE
Information literacy is often portrayed as a key for enhancing each person’s opportunities to engage as citizens. However, few empirical studies have looked into information literacy related to democracy (e.g. 2; 3; 4; 1; 5; 6). When a young woman attends a counselling meeting about contraceptives with a midwife at a Swedish youth centre the negotiation between them relates to her identities both as a sexually active person and as a citizen exercising her right to have information about and perhaps prescription of a contraceptive. Thus when engaged in an information practice of choosing contraceptives the sexual and civic identities evolve (7). In this setting outside the educational arena it becomes apparent that information literacy is a judgement of the situation at hand. This judgement will differ depending on which view on democracy that is drawn upon and who is making the judgement (1).

DEMOCRACY AND INFORMATION LITERACY
The significance of information literacy and its democratic dimension vary depending on the understanding of democracy (8). Over time the meaning of democracy has evolved, two understandings being the liberal and the radical ones (9; 10). In a liberal model of democracy and citizenship the freedom of citizens is central, the state exists to ensure that they can live freely without harming each other. The citizens have a set of unalienable private/public fundamental rights and freedoms. However, few studies have looked at how information literacy practice of choosing contraceptives the sexual and civic identities evolve (7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding of democracy and citizenship</th>
<th>Understanding of information literacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Freedom individual rights and obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>Democracy as process, Radical autonomy (liberty)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Here it is proposed that information literacy related to a radical view on democracy would entail practices related to information seeking and use that in a community characterised by multitude and diversity. When midwives meet young women for counselling about contraceptives and invite them into a conversation about their need for contraception without passing judgement on their previous choices, the situation at least to some extent fits with a radical view on democracy and citizenship (1). Such conversations could be described as practices in which information literacy related to a radical view of democracy are enacted and have the potential to be situations where the sexual and civic identities coevolve.

IMPLICATIONS
If information literacy practices in schools should prepare young people for civic engagement according to a radical understanding of democracy, change is required. The results suggest that it would be of importance to invite the use of a broad range of information sources, online and offline, with varying producers and aims, engaging the students in discussions about how to evaluate them.

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REFERENCES