

INFORMATION LITERACY AND ARTICLE NINETEEN

Paul Sturges
and
Almuth Gastingner

UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- Arguments from the idea of Human Rights make a powerful case for LIS work
- Article 19 of the Universal Declaration states
 - ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of expression;
 - this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference
 - and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.’
- A ‘passive’ right such as this arguably needs interpretation to produce active principles for the LIS profession

FAIFE and Article 19

- FAIFE is IFLA's Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression core activity
- FAIFE represents IFLA's commitment to Article 19
 - FAIFE seeks to defend libraries against threats to intellectual freedom
 - FAIFE interprets Article 19 as pointing to Access as the driving principle for libraries

FAIFE's Workshop Programme

- To encourage the adoption of access-related policies, FAIFE has
 - Developed a Workshop series with
 - Learning Materials available via IFLA's website
 - Train the Trainers Workshops in developing countries.
 - Topics so far are
 - The IFLA/UNESCO Internet Manifesto
 - Access to HIV/AIDS Information
 - Libraries and Transparency
 - Public Access to Health Information

Some conclusions from FAIFE's Workshop programme

- There is a need for
 - A more specific rationale connecting Article 19 with access-related library policies
 - This rationale can draw on theory and on progressive legislative programmes (such as Freedom of Information laws)
 - The rationale points onwards to a link between
 - Access-related policies, and
 - Information Literacy programmes

Access and legislation

- New Clause 100 of the Norwegian Constitution (2005)
 - Affirms the principles of Article 19
 - Specifies the right of access to official documentation
 - Calls for ‘conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse’
 - Leaves open the exact nature of these ‘conditions’.

Public Forums

- Habermas's idea of the 'public sphere', (thriving in the eighteenth century, subsequently in decay and requiring renewal) offers an answer this question
- It calls for the same response as does the Norwegian Clause 100
- The 'conditions' for 'public discourse' and Habermas's renewed public sphere both call for
 - Open government
 - Free media
 - Active civil society.

The Library as a 'Public Forum'

- A case for publicly funded libraries can also be derived from this argument
- FAIFE's programmes point towards access-related library policies
- FAIFE's argument needs to be extended towards ensuring that people have the skills to exploit their Article 19 rights
- This points directly towards Information Literacy programmes

The case for Information Literacy programmes (I)

- Many programmes are driven by librarians' priorities and are direct successors to User Education
 - “Information Literacy has been known by many different names: library orientation; bibliographic instruction; user education; information skills training.”
www.informationliteracy.org.uk
- This is not the case proposed here.

The case for Information Literacy programmes (II)

- A modern definition of Information Literacy is
 - “A set of competencies that an informed citizen of an information society ought to possess to participate intelligently and actively.”
- This definition rolls together
 - Computer and digital literacy
 - Web Literacy
 - Media Literacy
 - Critical Literacy
 - Civic Literacy
- They all cascade naturally from Article 19

Statements justifying IL

- There have been several recent broad statements on the Information Society
 - The Prague Declaration ‘Towards an Information Literate Society’ 2003
 - Goals of the World Summit on the Information Society 2004
 - The Alexandria Proclamation 2005
- These adopt the Human Rights approach in relation to Information Literacy

The potential of this argument

- Implications in terms of research include
 - Investigations of the synergies between the different ‘literacies’
 - Explorations of the potential for alliances with formal education to promote IL
- Practical implications
 - Skills-related support for individuals making enquiries under freedom of information laws
 - Building citizens’ ability to understand rights and entitlements so as to evade corruption

Conclusion

- By deriving programmes from arguments based on Article 19 we gain
 - Intellectual rigour
 - A sense of the place of libraries, access and IL in a broader social perspective
 - Greater understanding of the scope for alliances and partnerships
 - Directions for research investigations
- Information Literacy and Article 19 have a natural fit, which is rich in potential.