How does neoliberalism shape information literacy and how might the current crisis in the neoliberal system reshape information literacy?

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Provisional Answers

- By the same sustained hegemonic mechanisms of economic, political and media power that shapes business, industry, education, social welfare, workplaces and people's lives to fit the market.

- Information Literacy (IL) can become more engaged with challenging contexts/big ideas/larger units of analysis; and also explore Media and Information Literacy (MIL) strategies and critical approaches to media and communication.

Neoliberalism: Properties

- *Philosophy* of economic and social dominance by the rich and powerful at the expense of socialist and social democratic values e.g. Von Mises, Hyek, Buchanan et al; a long-term economic project to prize market values; develop an organised *thought collective*.

- *Practice*: shrink the state; crush organised labour; accept wage stagnation; deregulate enterprise; use zero hours contracts; minimise welfare systems; sanction claimants; install *austerity*.

- *Presentation*: there is no alternative; negative attitudes to workers, welfare claimants, immigrants, 'experts'; control of media messages to shape public opinion and voting behaviour; grab attention; stifle critical thinking; *faking the news*.

From the Radical Librarian's Collective

"The structures that govern society's understanding of information have been reorganised under a neoliberal worldview to allow information to appear and function as a commodity. This has implications for the professional ethics of library and information labour."

Lawson, Sanders and Smith. (2015)

Elmborg on Neoliberalism

"By equating freedom and personal responsibility to the shrinking of government investment in social institutions like schools and libraries, neoliberalism has been successful in convincing people to abandon the social structures that have made literacy education a moral imperative including, and especially …. libraries."

James Elmborg, 2017

Neoliberal Workplace Information Literacy (IL)

- Shaped by features of neoliberal organisation –subordination to market ideology; rhetoric of 'efficiency'; restrictive managerial control; unions marginalised, casualisation, audit culture etc.

- Example 1: UK Higher Education – the Research Evaluation Framework (REF) & Teaching Evaluation Framework (TEF) – auditing academic productivity.

- Example 2: Stress levels in teaching, health care etc.

- *We should challenge the orientation of current IL conceptualisations: (i) library service framing; (ii) information process models; (iii) context analysis; (iv) supporting business management objectives; (v)search for digital solutions.*

IL/MIL *after* the Workplace: Neoliberalisation of Ageing

- Situation of the 'retired' workforce - Dependency Ratio **V** Social Cohesion.

- Framed by Demographic Ageing and contentions about; intergenerational 'fairness'; reform of pensions and state pension age; future of retirement; social security; health and social care integration; welfare provision; equality and discrimination; media misrepresentation – *an IL/MIL agenda*.

- *Requires Media and Information Literate Ageing: health information literacy; overcoming isolation; digital inclusion; finance and rights advice; informed advocacy; challenging media stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice; developing intergenerational cohesion.*

IL/MIL and Neoliberalism: Directions

- Established IL *focus* is on stable workplaces – libraries, colleges, paramedics, firefighters etc.

- *Re-focus* IL to incude: precarious work; unemployment; migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; strikers; anti-fracking campaigners; peace camps; occupations; etc.

- Engage with MIL strategies for: understanding media culture; challenging assumptions; creating alternative narratives.

- *MIL becomes more explicit away from stable workplaces especially if the context challenges neoliberalism – 'hot stories'.*

Social Epistemology

"We are here concerned with a new discipline, a body of knowledge about knowing itself. …

The new discipline that we here envisage (and which, for want of a better name, we have called *social epistemology*) should provide an effective framework for the effective investigation of of the entire complex problem of the intellectual processes of society …"

Shera 1965

Social Epistemology Applied to Neoliberalism

- Neoliberalism as a large, complex example of Shera's "… intellectual processes of society …" – *remember the 'thought collective'*.

- Neoliberalism seeks to grab attention and shape consciousness to its philosophy, practice and presentation of reality.

- IL/MIL could offer a counter narrative of critical thinking, reliable knowledge.

Information Literacy Reconceived: Research, Development, Practices

Think Big!   Address Larger units of analysis & action such as:

➢ Education and Freedom to Learn
➢ Housing and Community
➢ Nature of Work and Political Economy
➢ Digital Media and Cultural Change
➢ Ageing and Longevity
➢ Health and Social Care
➢ Migration and Diasporas.
➢ Political Strategy and IL/MIL

 … debate contradictions, target major examples of neoliberal crisis, develop alternatives!

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