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Intellectual freedom and library instruction: the centrality of the connection. (includes Appalachian State University policy statement).

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ABSTRACT

Effective library instruction is a necessary component of information literacy and intellectual freedom. Instructors should incorporate censorship issues and illustrate the complexities of combating censorship in library instruction presentations.

ARTICLE

The connection between intellectual freedom and library instruction has been on my mind since I became an ALA councilor in 1990 and helped to bring Moon Unit Zappa to speak at the Summer 1991 ALA meeting. The 1991 ACRL Presidential Program Committee asked Frank Zappa to speak on intellectual freedom issues related to library literacy. When he was unable to come, Moon Unit Zappa came in his place, read his testimony to Congress, and answered questions.[1] After Moon Unit spoke, Patricia Breivik, Associate Vice President for Information Resources, Towson State University in Maryland, gave a moving presentation on how she came to understand and know the importance of information literacy. Frank Zappa's death in December 1993 sent my thoughts again to the importance of the connection between intellectual freedom and library instruction, and to my own awareness that in my library instruction efforts, I had not often related intellectual freedom issues to the use of library resources.[2]

The Library Bill of Rights is based on the idea that individuals should have the right of access to ideas and information through libraries, their services, and collections.[3] Further, a fundamental point of the Bill of Rights is that libraries should include materials representative of differing points of view. Article 2 of the Library Bill of Rights reads

Libraries should provide materials and information Presenting all Points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.[4]

The idea of intellectual freedom in the United States is based on democratic and First Amendment support for the individual's right to freedom of expression and access to differing viewpoints.

Information Literacy

There is a direct connection, I believe, between information literacy and intellectual freedom. Information literacy, the ability to determine the need for, identify, and evaluate information, is an essential knowledge base for students, according to Breivik and Gee.[5] The authors provide three supporting reasons for information literacy:

First, the half-life of information is shrinking. We therefore believe learning, strategies rather than memorization of facts should be emphasized during college years. Second, effective problem-solving requires an adequate and accurate information base. Learning in college should therefore be structured around information resources that will continue to be available after graduation: books, magazines, television, and on-line data bases. Third, the information base is constantly expanding in all formats. Students must therefore develop the skills to select among available formats in accessing and evaluating information resources.[6]

I would propose a fourth reason, that students need to acquire an intellectual curiosity in order to continue to be lifelong learners and that an understanding of intellectual freedom issues will foster a desire to learn.

Breivik and Gee's book has a section on "information literacy for life-long learning and active citizenship," in which they state that information literacy will make individuals better-informed citizens.[7] An appreciation of intellectual freedom and its complexity also will make individuals more informed citizens. Connecting information literacy with intellectual freedom enriches the importance of information literacy.

I do not mean to imply that every student needs to adopt a librarians' interpretation of intellectual freedom. Parker J. Palmer and others are striking a nerve in higher education by calling for a reintroduction of values into college and university teaching.[8] What is important is that we challenge students to think about values and decide for themselves what they believe to be important. For example, some students might place a higher value on society's right to control violent pornography than on intellectual freedom. That judgment is a sound one if the student comes to the value choice through an informed process. One type of individual development is moral development, and intellectual freedom and censorship are moral and ethical issues worthy of discussion and exploration.[9]

Technology

Computers and electronic access to information have intensified the need to introduce students to matters related to intellectual freedom. Computers, of course, have been the impetus for reexamination of many fundamental issues, such as the importance of attributing ideas to their author and citing the source from which material is taken. In a similar way, intellectual freedom issues are taking on new dimensions with computers. For instance, there has been concern about pornography on electronic bulletin boards. The need to evaluate issues related to telecommunications and information access is thoughtfully and forcefully presented in the document entitled "Principles for the Development of the National Information Infrastructure." [10] A fundamental principle for the development of a national information infrastructure is intellectual freedom.

Making the Connection:

Some Suggestions

One of the central points of library instruction programs is introducing learners to the wealth of resources available through local library ownership or electronic access.

Another central point is the importance of teaching students how to evaluate sources. Both of these themes are based on the idea of intellectual freedom. Yet it is my suspicion that we often fail to bring this connection to students' attention for two reasons. First, we struggle continuously with the problem of limited time (fifty minutes, one hour, or even five sessions) and seemingly unlimited information to impart (e.g., how to use the online system and print citations from it, how to choose other indexes, which indexes are available online, and the library's circulation policies). Second, we hesitate to tackle big issues for fear of boring students and not knowing how to deal with larger themes on concrete levels, which might appeal to students.

In the hope that readers will inform me about successful programs and will share other ideas, I will offer a number of suggestions for incorporating intellectual freedom issues into library instruction presentations.

Censorship and Other Examples

One idea is to use censorship as an example when preparing material for library instruction presentations. Censorship could work as an example in literature, history, political science, communication, journalism, education, and art. In fact, censorship is an example that would apply to all areas, including sciences. The history of science has many examples in which new data or theories have been repressed because they did not fit with the established view.

Censorship works well for illustrating how to search an online catalog and can be combined with other terms to show more sophisticated searching strategies. Censorship works equally well as an example for general and specialized indexes. Just a cursory search of a basic index like Expanded Academic Index leads to a multitude of citations from many different perspectives. The difference between popular and scholarly approaches in magazines and journals also could be demonstrated using censorship as a topic.

Another topic that would be a good example in many subject areas is that of banned books. As with censorship, it is broad enough to illustrate general and specialized searching and a number of different indexes. Banned books do not have to be used just during Banned Books Week. A pervasive topic on many campuses right now is political

correctness.[11] Using political correctness as an example would be a good way to show how many interpretations of an issue there can be.

In addition, there are a number of subjects related to computers that would make good examples for intellectual freedom. For instance, the introduction of computer viruses raises ethical and legal issues; ironically, there may be an intellectual freedom de as well. For example, computer viruses may be helpful in matters of national security.

The subjects of censorship and banned books, as well as the others mentioned, could be used to generate discussion among students and thus involve them more deeply in the learning process. In a loosely structured discussion, for example, students could be asked a series of questions at the beginning of a presentation: what censorship means to them, if they have experienced censorship themselves, or if they think censorship is ever justified. In a more structured participatory session, such as guided design applied to library instruction by Oberman and Linton, a simulated project related to censorship would be an excellent exercise.[12] In an education class, stimulating examples would be a guided design project on a book banning attempt in a school library or a parent's objection to a class reading a certain book.

An example of a longer session on intellectual freedom was developed in 1991 by librarians at Appalachian State University for Freshman Seminar.[13] Freshman Seminar, which provides an orientation to the university and to being a college student, is a credit course offered on a voluntary basis to all freshmen. The idea behind the module (see appendix A for a complete description) was to have students do limited background reading on intellectual freedom and censorship, to be presented with the issue in a controversial way, and to write a brief position paper on the issue.[14] The librarian presented the topic and supporting information at one class session; at a following class, after students had read the articles and completed the position paper, a discussion was moderated by the librarian. Students were asked to consider whether books that were controversial should be included in library collections. For example, one of the books gave information on how to commit suicide or help someone else to die.[15]

This approach introduced the students to the complexity of the issue of intellectual freedom and the conflict that often arises among values. Since issues of intellectual

freedom often come into conflict with religious, moral, or social values, it is important to acknowledge the difficulty of such issues and to help students realize that answers may not be clear-cut. Reasonable people may differ on what priorities they give to competing values.

A different approach that librarians might consider is to influence course content in other academic areas where First Amendment and intellectual freedom issues are taught. In the undergraduate curriculum in history, political science, communication, journalism, as well as other areas, some course content will deal with intellectual freedom issues. Librarians might want to suggest discussion topics, give ideas for research papers or presentation assignments, or share interesting intellectual freedom examples.

Conclusion

What Frank Zappa's legacy and librarians have in common is an understanding of the importance of protecting individual's rights to explore alternative points of view, even if some viewpoints may be offensive.[16] For library instruction, the importance of intellectual freedom has been a basic premise but a silent one. Since intellectual freedom is the foundation for the importance of intellectual access, it is time to make explicit the link between library instruction, information literacy, and intellectual freedom. I am often amused - and, to be honest, probably perplexed - to be on the same side of an issue with 2 Live Crew, but I am proud to be on that side as well.[17] When thinking at that 1991 Annual Meeting about the need for public relations for libraries, Moon Unit Zappa developed a meaningful slogan for library instruction and intellectual freedom issues: "Judge for yourself." Let's encourage students and all learners to judge for themselves by being able to find and evaluate information, and by understanding the value of intellectual freedom.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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[14.] Two of the articles assigned to the students were: S. D. Neill, "A Clash of Values: Censorship," Canadian Library Journal 45 (Feb. 1988): 35-39; and Celeste West, "The Secret Garden of Censorship: Ourselves," Library Journal 108 (Sept. 1, 1983): 1,651-53.

[15.] Derek Humphry, Final Exit (Secaucus, N.J.: Hemlock Society, 1991).

[16.] The Zappa family has established a Frank Zappa Memorial Fund to benefit the Freedom to Read Foundation and ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom. For more information, see *American Libraries* 25 (Feb. 1994): 140.

[17.] "Oh, Pretty Parody," *Time* 143 (Mar. 21, 1994): 21.