Dismantling Information Poverty in Cultural Production for Young People

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ABSTRACT
This panel, comprised of an international team of scholars, will address children’s information poverty from three perspectives: 1) information poverty faced by populations who do not see themselves reflected within mainstream picture books; 2) information poverty faced by immigrant children who do not have access to appropriate learning materials; and 3) adults’ cultural information poverty around the meaning of young people’s encounters with art and culture as part of their everyday life experience.

Keywords
Information Poverty, marginalized populations, social justice, children’s literature, children’s culture

INTRODUCTION
In the case of cultural production for young people, information poverty exists on multiple planes, specifically when their own culture and racial and ethnic identities are not represented in the materials created for them and distributed in schools and libraries. Information poverty is experienced by children who do not see themselves reflected in the books they read, but it is also experienced by parents and educators who identify culture only as that which is produced for children, and not culture produced by children themselves. Using theoretical frameworks from Chatman (1996), Britz (2004), Bishop (1990), Huizinga (2006) and Gumbrecht (2004), this panel will examine ways of dismantling cultural information poverty as a path toward social justice.

PANEL PROPOSAL
Following the panelists’ paper presentations, there will be an open question and answer session with the audience, followed by World Cafe style small group discussions (Carson, 2011) that will center around questions posited by the presenters and questions generated by audience members. These discussions generate critical dialogue (Kaufman, 2010), by posing research and theory “problems” devised to elicit a variety of viewpoints and empower new and marginalized voices. Attendees will break into small groups and will have the opportunity to share perspectives, connect with each other, and discuss methods for future research in the areas of information poverty, children’s literature and publishing, and marginalized populations.

Through a combination of theoretical explorations and examples from research, we will discuss questions such as:

- How can library and information science professionals combat information poverty in practice?
- What role do library and information science educators play in this process?
- How can the lenses of information poverty and social justice inform library and information science education?
- How does information poverty exist in your own community, and how could it be addressed?

PANELISTS
Each of the three panelists contributes a unique perspective on the integration of children’s literature and culture, information behavior theory, and a social justice perspective. Speakers will discuss their current research endeavors in these areas and will share theoretical and methodological questions and considerations based on research they have conducted.

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information behavior in the online context, critical cultural information studies, and diversity and social justice in librarianship. She will present a paper entitled “Transmitting More Than Whiteness: Combating Cultural Information Poverty In Picturebooks.”

Children’s literature, particularly picturebooks, has long been critiqued for being too white, homogeneous, and lacking diverse perspectives. Lack of representation and diversity of thought can become dangerous, particularly to young and impressionable children who don’t see themselves in books and consequently are at risk of developing a skewed perception of what the real world actually looks like.

Bishop (1990) describes the landscape of children’s literature as being dominated by images of majority children (white children), which can serve to isolate minority children and conversely inflate the self-importance of majority children. This lack of reflection and diverse representations can be considered a form of information poverty (Chatman, 1996).

Information poverty explains knowledge gaps or barriers to knowledge that result from a lack of understanding of cultural patterns and/or a lack of processing skills, and can also reflect a lack of understanding resulting from limited or nonexistent access, in this case, a lack of representation in picture books. A lack of diversity and representations of social justice scenarios can constitute information poverty, with the deficiency rooted in the infrastructure of children’s literature, namely a lack of diverse authors, publishers, and distributors.

This paper will detail research conducted on a sample of children’s books thought to contain specific messages of diversity and social justice. A content analysis will be conducted through the lens of Bishop and Chatman’s works, and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and will identify instances of implicit and explicit depictions of social justice and equity. The research will also seek to identify instances of the precursors of social justice advocacy, such as self-reflection, empathy, and cultural competence, and will look for the messages contained in the texts, and consider how they can be incorporated into the education and practice of future librarians.

Marianne Martens, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor at Kent State University’s School of Library and Information Science (SLIS). Her research and teaching encompass the interconnected fields of youth services librarianship and publishing, including historical, contemporary, and international perspectives. Previously, Martens worked in children’s publishing. She will present a paper entitled “Subversively Addressing Information Poverty: Alma Flor Ada, Social Justice, and the Quest for Bilingual Books in America 1970-2014.” The advantages of being bilingual include: increased cognitive, social-emotional and interpersonal skills and academic aptitude, according to a 2014 white paper from Bank Street College. Yet in the 1970s, Alma Flor Ada, Cuban-born Professor of International and Multicultural Education at the University of San Francisco, struggled to find Spanish- language and bilingual books for teachers and children.

Using the work of Dr. Alma Flor Ada, this paper will address information seeking, needs, and use for marginalized populations through the history of bilingual and Spanish language books for young people from 1970-2014. This historical case study will use document analysis (Bowen, 2009) through the lens of social justice research (Bishop, Chatman, & Freire), to answer the overarching question of how Dr. Alma Flor Ada contributed to a paradigm shift in bilingual education and materials in the American classroom, helping to erase information poverty for Latino students. An examination of Dr. Ada’s work from the 1970s until 2000 reveals a gradual transformation in the availability of Spanish and bilingual materials that corresponds with changes in views on education, access, and social justice.

Beth Juncker, Ph.D., Professor, University of Copenhagen, is a leading expert in cultural policy and cultural strategies addressing young people. She is currently collaborating with colleagues on a new theoretical understanding of the meaning of cultural policy and cultural dissemination in young people’s everyday lives. She will present a paper entitled “Limiting Young People’s Expressive Life: Adults’ Information Poverty about Meaning and Value in Children’s Everyday Encounters with Art and Culture.”

According to Jelved (2014), social cohesion, social identity, social meaning, and value creation are central and independent contributions to children and young people’s everyday lives. Cultural policies in the other Nordic countries underline the same vision. But—in spite of these visions of late modern cultural policy,
across the Nordic countries, children and young people’s encounters with art and culture are still linked exclusively to formal learning processes in day care institutions and through school curriculum. While the concept of information poverty is generally associated with Chatman (1996), Britz (2004) defines it as follows:

Information poverty is that situation in which individuals and communities, within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately. It is further characterized by a lack of essential information and a poorly developed information infrastructure (p. 194).

In the context of this paper, lack of knowledge about children’s own cultural experiences, such as those created freely through play, increasingly become a type of information poverty for adults. What is at stake here, is the kind of learning that does not take class in a formalized classroom. Children develop distinctive kinds of creative, innovative and investigative skills and competencies by means of these aesthetic symbolic experiences and processes, which encourage presence, transformation, and participation (Huizinga, 2006; Gumbrecht, 2004).

Why do 21st century public cultural policies and strategies still link children’s encounters with cultural, media and artistic experiences and processes to formal learning processes in institutional settings, including day care and schools? Is this a case of strategic information poverty—or mere ignorance? Why does cultural policy and tax money support productions of literature, theatre, performance, dance, music, paintings, exhibitions, installations, films and media addressing children and young people? Why does cultural policy, cultural strategies, cultural dissemination and mediation find it crucial to support children’s possibilities to meet and to participate in these special aesthetic symbolic processes and experiences? This paper will address adults’ cultural information poverty around the meaning of young people’s encounters with art and culture as part of their everyday life experience.

STRUCTURE OF THE PANEL
The proposed structure of the panel is as follows:

- The moderator (Martens) will introduce the panel and give a brief introduction to the concept of information poverty in children’s literature and culture. (10 min)
- Each of the three panelists will discuss their research and experiences in this area of inquiry. (10 min each)
- Audience Q&A with panelists. (15 min)
- World Café style critical dialogues around theoretical and methodological questions and emergent research themes. (20 min)
- Concluding thoughts (Cooke). (5 min)

CONCLUSION
We expect that the interactive format of this international panel, which addresses information poverty within the realm of cultural production for young people, will generate discussion and new ideas around understanding, and dismantling, information poverty.

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