

Agneta Lantz & Christina Brage

The Citizen in the Information Society.

Theme: Information Literacy and citizenship

Information and knowledge are important conditions for a progressive development of society, and the wellbeing of society will increasingly depend on our ability to use globally produced knowledge and experience and the ability to change is largely determined by our ability to retrieve, process and utilize relevant information.

We would like to present what we have done in order to promote information literacy as a prerequisite for participative citizenship in the democratic process in our courses. We would also like to discuss the importance of developing courses, like ours, to meet the demands from the challenging surrounding society.

The Internet enables unprecedented flows of information which could lead to a lot of questions, e.g. how people can interpret, manage and evaluate this information. In order for people to interact through Internet in the democratic process to become informed citizens, there must be an understanding on how the Net works, and how to participate in it. But the uncertain quality and expanding quantity of information pose large challenges for society. The sheer abundance of information will not in itself create a more informed citizenry because information literacy alone is no democratic guarantor. Therefore we need a complementary cluster of abilities necessary to use information effectively. We need to extend the information literacy skills into a civic literacy.

In our course called: Civic and Public Information: The Citizen in the Information Society, 10 credits, we try to emphasise: theories of communication; civic communication in a democratic society; information design; information behaviour theories; information literacy theories; information seeking strategies, visual communication; theories of democracy; risk communication; media literacy and practical writing and publishing such as the students own production of civic information..

Another course is called Health Promoting Organizations, 20 credits. The course could be seen as an action-oriented interdisciplinary health education aiming at creating conditions for developing health promoting health organizations as well as visions and planning of actions to improve health promotion in different arenas in society. The course is focusing on three main concepts: Health Promotion, Health Literacy and Information Literacy and the connection between them.

The course comprises four parts: Information Literacy and Learning; Organization and Communication Theory – Research Methods and Strategies for Health Promotion and Change; Theoretical and Empirical Study of Health Promoting Organizations.

Information Literacy is looked upon as a core issue in health promotion theory and practice including the key process of empowerment in order to bring about a health promoting society. The concept of Health Literacy is introduced and an analysis is made of how this concept is related to Information Literacy, Civic Literacy and other crucial literacies necessary in modern society. Individual, organizational and societal level perspectives are analysed.

The outcomes of the courses are information, civic and health literate students capable to function as independent and responsible citizens.