



Librarian, Heal Thyself: Professional Impediments to Open Access Initiatives in the English-Speaking Caribbean

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Abstract:

A careful perusal of the literature on Open Access Initiatives (OAI) from developing and some developed countries, suggests that their indisputable importance. Advances in the areas of science – agriculture and health, in particular, have benefitted significantly from collaborative developments in OAI. Globally, libraries and library consortia have supported OAI efforts through financial donations and the establishment of publicly accessible institutional repositories. In Latin America, to which the Caribbean is conjoined, there is an active community of Open Access advocates among librarians and scholarly communication specialists. In comparison, a reflection on librarians in the English-speaking Caribbean demonstrates less active advocacy although studies done by Caribbean librarians suggest OAIs hold the potential for a range of value-added activities among libraries that can significantly contribute to regional socio-economic development.

Part of the reason for this may be that the philosophical underpinnings of open access systems are fundamentally at odds with the Caribbean professional mindset. The BBB [Budapest, Berlin and Bethesda] Declarations all have strong philosophical foundations of supporting the ideas and principles of OA which are to maximise access and benefits to scientists, scholars and the public. On the face of it, the expansion of OAIs within the Caribbean would appear to be challenged not only by elements such as funding and weak ICT infrastructure but also by embedded professional “ologies” (epistemology, ontology and axiology), insularities and restrictive rules. While embeddedness in librarianship is regarded as an activity that allows the library to align its services more closely to users, thus raising the

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library's visibility, the concept can also be construed as librarians' acquisition of habits, customs and norms that are mechanically and automatically followed, irrespective of the situation. Accordingly, embeddedness can serve as an impediment to advocacy of OAI where it discounts opportunities for transformative pedagogy, user education, implementation of contemporary policies, and similar activities, which are critical requirements if OAI is to positively impact users, and impress influential stakeholders. The nexus between theory and practice therefore is significant for successful Caribbean OAIs implementation.

This paper sets out to explore the extent to which cultural and professional embeddedness combined with the absence of a clear philosophy of open science may constrain the adoption of OAIs within the English-speaking Caribbean.

Keywords: Open Access Initiatives; Caribbean libraries; Theory of Embeddedness; User Education.