

Building cultural competence through critical self-reflection

...

Tools for the instruction librarian



Chapel Cowden

(she/her)

Health & Science Librarian
UC Foundation Associate Professor
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga
chapel-cowden@utc.edu



Lu Gao

(she/her)

PhD Student
University at Albany (SUNY)
gaol314272@gmail.com

Today's Exploration



Theoretical Grounding

Culturally Responsive Teaching

- *Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)* is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning.
- *Major Theorists/Practitioners:* Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings
- *Cornerstones*
 - Academic success
 - Cultural competence
 - Critical consciousness

Adjacent Theories/Pedagogies



Critical
Pedagogy

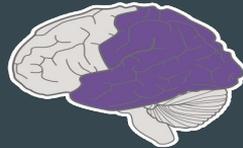


Multiculturalism



Intersectional
Feminist Theory

RECOGNITION NETWORKS:
THE **WHAT** OF LEARNING



Universal Design
Learning

Self- Reflection

“...the process of building and maintaining cultural competence is a multistep endeavor. Library professionals must engage in critical self-reflection and *then* become involved in the process of getting to know their communities...”

(Cooke, *Information Services to Diverse Populations*)

Before

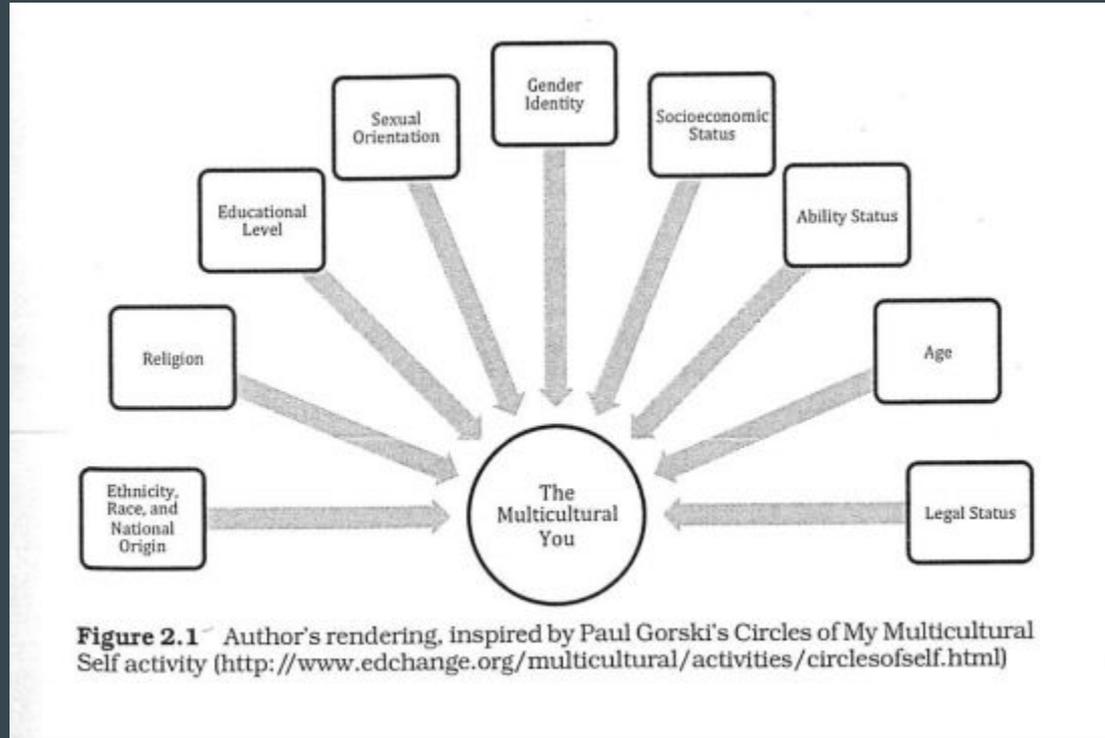
How We See Ourselves: The Cultural Artifact



How We See Ourselves: Your Cultural Background



How We See Ourselves: Your Cultural Background-Extended



How We See Ourselves: Your Approach to Teaching



How We See Ourselves: Your Approach to Teaching

“I think that Germans tend to be structured and logical, and I often approach teaching in that way--logical and also practical. I’m not sure that my background affects my librarianship, but I’ve recently been exposed to the POV that librarianship represents middle class white cultural values--particularly white female values. I suppose I fit in that respect.”

How We See Ourselves: Your Approach to Teaching

“On one level, I would like to think I make an effort to call out ways in which my cultural background and positionality influence my approach to both, especially defaulting to the US-centric perspectives, being confined to English language sources, etc. On a much deeper level though the academy and the libraries within it are so rooted in a euro-centric knowledge tradition (emphasis on text, for example), it’s hard to separate oneself from it.”

How We See Our Students

What assumptions do you make about your students?

- “I assume students come to class ready to learn but there may be barriers preventing their access to instruction such as food insecurity, lack of housing, no transportation.”
- “The reminder that students don’t necessarily approach education from the same place that I do.”
- “I assume they [students] have an existing foundation of knowledge about US/Euro history...I generally assume they are going to agree with some scientific modes of thinking/knowledge...My default is to assume no vision or hearing disabilities.”

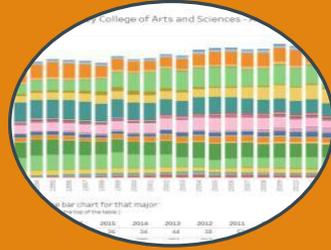
How Do We Learn More About Our Students?



Read
widely



Attend
continuing
education



Find your
Factbook



Participate
& Listen



During

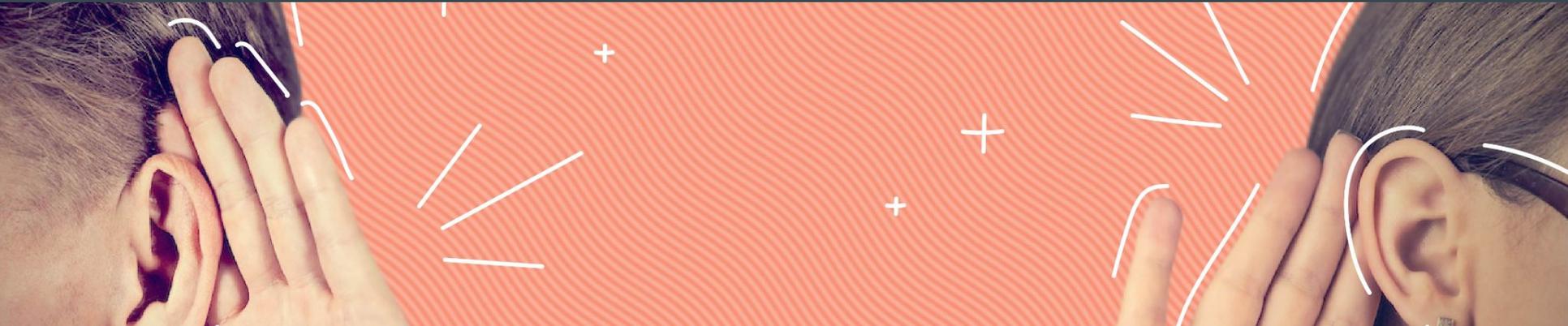
Self- Reflective Teaching

“Being an educator is about laying yourself on the line, opening up to criticism, and accepting vulnerability so that others may gain knowledge; every learning interaction becomes an opportunity to stretch or flinch.”

(Booth, *Reflective Teaching, Effective Learning*)

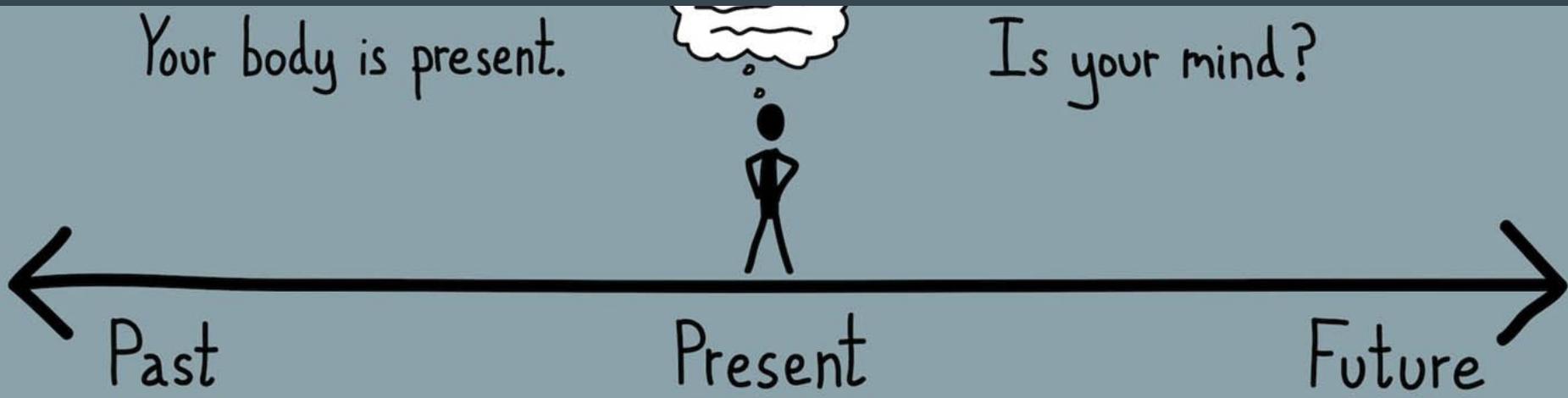
Actively Listen

- Restate comments & ask frequent questions
- Reframe inaccurate answers/comments rather than correcting errors
- Employ non-verbal communication (nodding, eye contact, leaning towards speaker)



Vary Communication

- Be mindful of what you are saying & try to focus on word choice.
- Develop awareness of your use of directness and indirectness, and non-verbal communication
- Alter communication mechanisms when needed



Avoid Idioms, Jargon, & Habitual Word/Phrases

- Consider the words that you may use often during instruction and deeply reflect upon whether those words can be problematic
- Beware of library-speak (& not just the term Boolean!)
- If you do choose to use idioms, you must define them

Cat got your tongue?

Can't you speak?



Snug as a bug in a rug

Warm and cozy



Go the extra mile

Make an extra effort



Decenter Yourself

- Decenter by assuming a facilitator role
- Decentering frees the instructor to practice active listening, informally assess comprehension and learning, and adjust instruction mechanisms in real-time.



Additional Tips

- Don't try to do all of this work in one class or even in several classes. Consider taking one aspect, jargon perhaps, and commit to being mindful about jargon in your instruction for the week.
- Ask a peer to observe.
- Ask a non-library peer to observe.
- If your library has a peer-review of instruction program (highly recommended), ask that the reviewer observe for these things.
- Make notes in your reflections (discussed in our next section).

After

Class Plan Reflections

Reflection

This class went well as always. Work with the professor more closely to tailor the sample searches to the assigned topic for the class. Work with her to ensure that students are aware of the main course topic before attending the session.

CRT:

- It is particularly important that I define terms in this class--even some of the scientific ones.
- Explicitly describe the “body of evidence”; consider a different phrase
- Rework the in-class activity to be entirely student-centered so that informal assessment can occur more easily.
- Forgot to add pronouns to my slide; do that for next time
- Remember to be mindful when responding to students & listen closely rather than rushing on to the next point.

Journaling

- Identify attitudes, beliefs, and student expectations & track their manifestation in the classroom.
- Code or index for cultural competence or culturally responsive teaching (CC or CRT)

Accountability



Final Thoughts

- Be gentle and patient with yourself as you work through this process.
 - Critical self-reflection and educating yourself are iterative processes.
 - Encourage others to get involved. Join or form a community of practice.
 - Access the worksheet at <http://bit.ly/Exploringtheself>
 - Self-reflective practices are the tip of the CRT iceberg.
 - Please get in touch and share your experiences--we'd love to hear from you!
-

Further Reading

Booth, C. *Reflective teaching, effective learning: Instructional literacy for library educators* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2011), xi.

Cooke, N. (2017). *Information services to diverse populations: Developing culturally competent library professionals*. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited.

Cowden, C., Seaman, P., Copeland, S. Gao, L. (2021). Teaching with intent: Applying culturally responsive teaching to library instruction. *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 21(2): 231-251.

Cuesta, Y. (2003). *Developing outreach skills in library staff*. In R. Osborne & C. Hayden (Eds.), *From Outreach to Equity: Innovative Models of Library Policy and Practice* (112-113). ALA Editions.

EdChange. Circles of my multicultural self. <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html>

Foster, Elizabeth. (2018). *Cultural competence in library instruction: A reflective practice approach*. *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 18(3): 575. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2018.0034>.

Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). *Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy*. *American Education Research Journal* 32(1): 465-491. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>

Questions?