

Theoretical Frameworks for Thinking about the Work Ahead

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The Work Ahead

In the work ahead, we continue our efforts as educators to create inclusive schooling in a plural society (Zine, 2010). In Canada, these efforts have been framed by concepts such as “multiculturalism” and “diversity”—and by images such as the cultural mosaic, rather than the melting pot. However, much of Canadian schooling still continues to be Eurocentric, which leaves many students feeling marginalized for a variety of reasons, e.g.:

- The dominant narration of history that does not include you or your community erases your identity ...
- Not seeing yourself or your cultural realities represented in schools ... reduces the wealth of your knowledge and experience ...
- Being asked to “perform” your culture for others ... puts you in the position of being the “native informant” in a tourist spectacle ... [you are] the “Other” ...
- Not seeing anyone in the school administration who looks like you is a constant reminder of the glass ceilings that limit your chances ...

(Zine, 2010, p. 37)

Zine and her colleagues (Dei et al., 2001) have proposed a multi-centric model of education that actively works to de-center dominant Eurocentric knowledge and incorporate other worldviews throughout all aspects of teaching and learning. The model has four primary learning objectives: integrating multiple centers of knowledge, affecting social and educational change, recognizing and respecting difference, and teaching youth and community empowerment.

Changing our practice as educators often requires changes in the way we think about the world, that is, changes in our often-unexamined assumptions about what is reality. The work of considering new-to-us theoretical frameworks and discourses is difficult and often uncomfortable. Theoretical frameworks are interrelated theories and concepts that guide research or practice. We may not think about our professional practice in terms of theoretical frameworks but all of us have underlying beliefs about the world and how it works or should work. These beliefs are evident in the language we use—our discourse.

This year’s theme of Treasure Mountain Canada is based on the theoretical framework of “culturally responsive pedagogy” which, in the literature of library and information science (LIS), is considered more commonly within the framework of “cultural competence.” Neither framework is part of my personal area of expertise so I am drawing on the work of other researchers in this paper. I am sharing what I have learned, primarily from reading the literature, but also

from personal experience (albeit limited) as an administrator supporting various initiatives in Indigenous education at the University of Alberta.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Matthew Lynch (2012) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as “a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students’ unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student’s cultural place in the world” (para. 2). Lynch identifies three dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy: the institutional dimension, the personal dimension, and the instructional dimension.

In this paper, I examine first the personal dimension, the process by which individuals learn to become culturally responsive, using the theoretical framework of cultural competence. The cultural competence framework is not unique to LIS: other professions in health, education, and psychology have developed and implemented cultural competence frameworks.

Next, I examine the institutional dimension, the cultural factors affecting the organization of schools, school policies and procedures, through the lens of community engagement.

Finally, I examine the instructional dimension, highlighting the strengths that inquiry-based learning contributes culturally responsive pedagogy.

The Personal Dimension

Canadians generally are supportive of policies and practices that support diversity and multiculturalism, and in fact we can be quite smug about our nation’s reputation for integration of newcomers into Canadian society. Our reputation related to the treatment of Indigenous people, however, has earned us international reprobation (Amnesty International, 2013).

In much of our practice as educators, we avoid acknowledgement of race and culture—including our own race and culture--and sometimes we use terms such as “diversity” and “multiculturalism” without thinking deeply about our assumptions about the world that are encompassed within those terms. Our profession is predominately white, female, middle class, and well educated, but rarely do we engage in discussions, for example, about whiteness and white privilege, or about gender politics and power. Without recognizing and understanding our own culture, it is impossible to recognize and understand in any meaningful way the culture of others. Both are essential parts of cultural competence.

Patricia Montiel-Overall, well known to teacher-librarians through her work on teacher and librarian collaboration (2005), has proposed a cultural competence framework for LIS professionals. She describes cultural competence as:

The ability to recognize the significance of culture in one's own life and in the lives of others; and to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work and institutions in order to enhance the lives of both those being served by the library profession and those engaged in service. (2009, p. 190)

There are two perspectives on how humans come to know. The traditional perspective, from general psychology, holds that mind and culture are separate and that knowledge is acquired through practice, training, developing skills, and forming habits of mind. The other perspective, from cultural psychology, holds that mind and culture are inseparable and that knowledge is acquired through social interaction, that is, cultural values and norms are inseparable from the way humans think. This latter perspective underlies the cultural competence framework proposed by Montiel-Overall.

Developing cultural competence is a learning process, often not an easy process, involving self-reflective and thoughtful examination of one's own mental representations of the world and of others' mental representations of the world. Developing cultural competence occurs in three domains: cognitive, interpersonal and environmental. Within each domain, key components contribute to increased cultural competence.

Cognitive domain – This domain refers to the way individuals' actions demonstrate how they make meaning, think, reflect and feel about the world around them. Two key components in the process of developing cultural competence in this domain are: cultural self-awareness and cultural knowledge. Self-reflection is one way in which we can examine cultural and ethnic differences and consider the effect of these differences between ourselves as professionals and the members of the community we serve.

Interpersonal domain – This domain refers to the ways in which individuals behave toward one another and communicate within social contexts. Three key components in the process of developing cultural competence in this domain are: cultural appreciation, an ethic of caring, and personal and cultural interaction. Cultural appreciation includes developing a positive emotional connection to the values, events, actions and objects that make up people's lives. An ethic of caring involves the desire to develop cultural appreciation and personal relationships with others who differ from us (not because "I have to"). Interaction with members of minority and underserved communities provides opportunities to develop appropriate communication skills and to find the knowledge-holders within communities.

Environmental domain – This domain refers to the surroundings, conditions and settings in which people live. Developing knowledge of environmental factors is

essential to mitigating barriers to library use as well as to developing library environments that are more welcoming to people from diverse communities.

The Institutional Dimension

Earlier in this paper, I shared some of the ways in which Canadian schools often marginalize minority students—students from non-mainstream racial and ethnic communities but also students who may be marginalized for other reasons such as social class, abilities, sexual orientation or gender identity. Making even small changes to stable and complex institutions such as schools and libraries is not easy. However, one promising approach to developing cultural competence at the institutional level, being tried in public library contexts, is that of community engagement (Sung & Hepworth, 2013). Sung and Hepworth identify eight key components of community engagement:

- accountability – the extent that the initiative conformed to or was driven by external organizational imperatives;
- belonging – feelings of ownership and emphasis on relationship-building between the service and the community;
- commitment – the degree of commitment to the project by the relevant stakeholders;
- communication – the way in which the service is communicated with the community;
- a flexible approach – the variety of methods employed to engage and work in partnership;
- genuineness – authenticity or a true reflection of what was said to be;
- relevance – the degree of relevance or benefits to stakeholders; and
- sustainability – the impact and continuity of the project. (p. 10)

Underlying the key components of community engagement are two variables that work against each other: influence of authority (the extent to which engagement initiatives are initiated, shaped or led by the organization, i.e., the school and/or library) and willingness to learn (the extent to which the organization has the capacity to embrace the community's leadership or preferred approach). In essence, the greater the organization's willingness to learn, the more authentic and sustainable will be the engagement with the community. Revising and/or developing institutional missions, policies and practices that are more welcoming and supportive of diverse communities requires that we be willing to learn from those communities.

The Instructional Dimension

Culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. This pedagogy has three key criteria: students must experience academic success; students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and students must develop a critical

consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Traditionally, students have been expected to adapt to the culture of the school; a culturally responsive pedagogy demands that schools find ways to adapt and change to the culture/s of the students. The Brown University website proposes Culturally Responsive Teaching (<https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0>) as a key strategy for teaching diverse learners and summarizes the What, Why and How of achieving seven characteristics of a culturally responsive pedagogy:

- Positive perspectives on parents and families
- Communication of high expectations
- Learning within the context of culture
- Student-centered instruction
- Culturally mediated instruction
- Reshaping the curriculum
- Teacher as facilitator.

These characteristics align well with many aspects of inquiry-based instruction. As teacher-librarians, we can enhance inquiry-based instruction with the insights that come from developing cultural competence. As teacher-librarians, we also can play a leadership role in helping other educators become aware of the ideologies that inform their teaching philosophies and practices (Kumasi & Hill, 2013).

Discourses for a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

As educators, we need to begin with examining our own ideologies. Kumasi and Hill (2011, 2013) studied how LIS students in two ALA-accredited programs in the United States perceived their levels of cultural competence, the source of their knowledge and the importance of that knowledge. The students rated 16 cultural competence items (see Appendix) such as “Recognition of how individuals from various cultures access information” and “Understanding of the term ‘literacy’ including cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives.” Initial analysis revealed gaps between the students’ prior knowledge and the knowledge they gained while in the LIS program.

Student participants also were given the opportunity to comment on the survey and the survey topic. Analysis of the student comments suggests that within the field of LIS there are dominant and competing ideologies within cultural competence discourses (Table 2). Kumasi and Hill’s competing discourse is most closely aligned with the underlying assumptions of a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Table 2.
Dominant and Competing Ideologies within Cultural Competence Discourses

Textual Theme	Dominant Discourse	Competing Discourse
Cultural competence terminology	An ideology of 'political correctness' and benign pluralism translates into the use of 'neutral' terms when discussing cultural competence concerns.	A critical theoretical orientation calls for naming specific modes of domination and axes of privilege when discussing cultural competence concerns.
The role of libraries/librarians in cultural competence	A service-oriented business/management paradigm informs how librarians talk about working with diverse library users.	A community engagement-oriented socio-cultural paradigm informs how librarians talk about working with diverse library users.
Prior experience in relation to building cultural competence	A dominant white cultural perspective translates into prior experience meaning working in non-white or non-English-speaking cultural contexts.	A non-dominant, pragmatic perspective recognizes any library experience as valuable in a competitive, predominantly white job market.

(From: Kumasi & Hill, 2013, p. 135)

The dominant discourse about cultural competence uses terminology such as “multiculturalism” and “diversity,” either to be consistent with official government or institutional practice or to avoid offending others. The competing discourse requires discussion of power and privilege; it requires that we name and understand our own culture as a precursor to understanding and appreciating other people’s cultural contexts.

The dominant discourse about the role of libraries and librarians emphasizes service which tends to place librarians and their clientele at a distance from each other (we design the services which people may or may not use). The competing discourse emphasizes authentic interactions with people and engagement with the cultural contexts of their daily lives (we interact with people to get to know them and to develop the services they want to use).

The dominant discourse about prior experience is that cultural competence is developed by living or working in non-white environments or having educational experiences that increase awareness of multiculturalism. The competing discourse recognizes that most libraries are white, middle-class cultural environments and that library experience of any kind would be valuable in preparation for work in that cultural environment.

Conclusion

“Cultural competence does not end with knowledge about diverse cultures. It begins a lifelong process of learning ...” (Montiel-Overall, 2009, p. 200). The

work ahead will be difficult at times, but in many respects it is not entirely new to us. As I re-read a chapter that I wrote two decades ago titled “A community of learning for the Information Age” (Oberg, 1999), I recognized many of the ideas that underpin the work we need to do today. In that chapter, I drew on research to outline strategies that teacher-librarians could use for building a community of learning by connecting to principals, teachers, students, parents and the community at large. The theoretical frameworks presented in today’s paper should strengthen our ability to do the work of building communities of learning that are inclusive of all, but especially those who feel marginalized in schools and libraries.

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APPENDIX
Cultural Competency Survey Items
(From Kumasi & Hill, 2011, pp. 261-264)

Survey participants rated each item from 1 (No or low level) to 7 (High level) to indicate Prior Knowledge, Importance of Learning, and Knowledge Gained.

Section I: Self Awareness.

1. Awareness of ways that my culture as shaped my life.
2. Awareness of cultural differences that may exist between myself and others.
3. Awareness of ways that my cultural beliefs impact my understanding of individuals from other cultures.
4. Awareness of ways to provide library service to patrons from various cultural backgrounds (for example race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and/or sexual orientation).

Section II: Education.

1. Understanding of the term 'literacy' including cognitive and sociocultural perspectives.
2. Knowledge of cultural differences among ethnic populations in the U.S.
3. Familiarity with the history of library service to individuals from various cultures.
4. Recognition of how individuals from various cultures access information.
5. Recognition of barriers to information access and use that may exist for individuals from various cultures.
6. Collection development strategies that reflect the information wants and needs of individuals from various cultures.
7. Recognition of the role libraries play in providing outreach and specialized services to various cultural groups in the U.S.

Section III: Interactions.

1. Having personal interactions with individuals from various cultural backgrounds.
2. Visiting libraries that are patronized by users from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
3. Collaborating with others to develop library services, programs, and outreach efforts for individuals from various cultural backgrounds.
4. Knowledge of professional development events designed to share information about various aspects of culture.

Section IV: Optional comments.

Please use the area below to include comments about the survey questionnaire and/or the survey topic.