Inclusive Cultural and Social Pedagogy in the Library Classroom

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Instruction librarians are among the most welcoming and supportive colleagues on campus due to deeply held beliefs regarding the democratization of information and the accessibility of knowledge for all. Librarians are dedicated to supporting a wide-range of learning and inquiry and endeavor to engage all academic disciplines and co-curricular departments in order to identify the needs and influence the experience of the *whole* student. Having the opportunity to engage with all types of students both in and beyond the classroom, we recognize students as complex social beings whose education must expand beyond cognitive functioning to encompass emotional and spiritual awareness as well. This holistic approach to students' higher education experience is increasingly informed in academic librarianship by critical theory, which takes the traditionally welcoming presence of the library a step further toward facilitating agency for our users. Inclusivity and agency share the stage in the holistic student experience, and librarians are well-positioned to create learning experiences at this intersection. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief overview of inclusive pedagogy as it applies to the socially and culturally diverse higher education classroom, and share strategies for practical application of inclusive pedagogy in one-shot library instruction.

The origins of inclusive education are rooted in special education research that questioned the efficacy of separate special education classes in the 1960s (Florian, 2015). "As we have come to understand it [today], inclusive pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that supports teachers to respond to individual differences between learners, but avoids the marginalization that can occur when some students are treated differently" from the majority of the class, or excluded due to assumptions made by the instructor (Florian, 2015, p. 289).

The first step to inclusion is to understand the critical role emotions play in learning. Research suggests that the cognitive skills that we emphasize heavily in information literacy like critical thinking and decision making are profoundly affected by emotion (Immordino-Yang & Damasaio, 2007, p. 4). In fact, simply helping students remember the content we teach requires care of their emotions. According to Cavenagh, (2016, p. 36), students' memory functions are highly affected by the emotions experienced when consuming information and the actions of the instructor plays a major role in the cultivation of these emotions.

Any instruction librarian can attest to the difference between students who seem emotionally open to learning in the classroom and those who appear less open, or even shut off. The goal of inclusive pedagogy is to help all students feel like a valued member of the classroom because of the unique background and perspective they bring to the experience. The difficulty inclusive pedagogy poses is the additional responsibility placed on the instructor to develop a classroom culture characterized by opportunities that are available to everyone, so that all learners are able to fully participate in classroom life, making a richer experience for all (Florian & Linklater, 2010, p. 372).

Socially Focused Pedagogy

Traditional pedagogical approaches to learning are historically instructor centered, placing the emphasis on the instructor as expert, who distributes knowledge to the students. In this context, students are present to absorb the content acting only as recipients of information. In contrast, the purpose of inclusive pedagogy is to place the emphasis on the learner as a contributor who carries their own unique and valuable perspective that enriches the learning experience for all (Florian & Linklater, 2010, p. 371). While emphasis is placed on the value of the learner, inclusive pedagogy places the responsibility of creating a space of equity for all on the instructor. In order to do so, the instructor must eliminate social constructs that stifle students' abilities to play a central role in their own, and each other's, learning. For example, instructors who privilege the perspectives of a majority are tacitly stating to their class that these are the only perspective that matter, leaving people of other races and genders to wonder if their voices matter during class discussion (Quaye & Harper, 2007, p. 34). Therefore, the onus is on the instructor (or whoever is the coordinator of the learning experience) to consider where oppressive social constructs lurk within a lesson plan and break them down in the name of equity for all.

Inclusive pedagogy pulls from principles of other socially centered learning theories including critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy. Broadly speaking, all three theories embrace the role of social justice in education and seek to create agency for the learner. The aim of critical pedagogy is to identify where educators and learners participate in systems of oppression and find ways to intervene upon these systems (Tewell, 2016). Similarly, feminist pedagogy seeks to overcome the estrangement and alienation of marginalized groups in education in order to reach a more enriching and equitable experience (hooks, 1989, p. 49). Inclusive pedagogy incorporates these theories to embrace all identities and cultures as meaningful contributors to learning. Indeed, inclusive pedagogy has received criticism from education scholars for lacking a clear definition, or acting as an umbrella term for more specific learning theories (Florian, 2014, p. 287). For the purposes of this article, inclusive pedagogy serves to connect these other established theories in

order to create an overarching, informed approach to inclusivity in the library classroom.

Creating an Inclusive Classroom

Like the majority of scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education, the literature on inclusive classrooms is focused on credit courses rather than one-shot instruction common to instruction librarians. Therefore, its practical application can be difficult to execute within the confines of a single class session. Gorski (2010) shares suggestions for becoming a more inclusive educator. Among these are learning to pronounce each student's full name accurately, scrutinizing all course materials to make sure they are free from bias, soliciting anonymous feedback from students and taking their critiques seriously, and taking personal responsibility for those students who are not succeeding in class to see how systems of oppression might be contributing to their falling behind. The scope of these suggestions lend themselves to context where the instructor has extended time with students and more control over the curriculum. While plenty of librarians teach in such circumstances (e.g., for-credit information literacy courses), this article seeks to translate best practices from core resources to the even more prevalent one-shot context.

Breakdown Social Barriers from Minute One: Share an Inclusive Statement as Your Introduction

It can be difficult to begin a library instruction session for a number of reasons. There are the logistics of helping students log into computers or situate themselves into a new setting. There is also the issue of the instruction librarian introducing himself or herself into an established classroom culture where they may be unaware of operating norms and social constructions. So, how can we establish an inclusive environment within the first few minutes of class? Literature suggests to immediately break down barriers by placing a statement of inclusivity in the course syllabus (Cornell University Center for Teaching Excellence, 2012). Since librarians teaching one-shots seldom have control of a course syllabus, an alternative strategy is to create an opening statement, shared by the librarian, that establishes a safe and inclusive atmosphere for all learners to share at the beginning of the class. Because of the limited time available, it may be difficult to briefly encapsulate your complete intentions for inclusivity. However, one can begin to draft a short statement by considering the following questions:

1. What privilege do you bring to this learning experience? How can you acknowledge your own bias, status, or cultural lens through which you view the world?

2. What feeling would you like your students to remember about this class a week from now?

3. What could you say that would help everyone feel this way?

Librarians can look to their organizations for language to incorporate into these opening statements. Some libraries have even published inclusive statements that can be incorporated into an opening statement to strengthen its depth and weight for students (University of Iowa, n.d.). Additionally, librarians can find inspiration for their personal inclusive statements from the profession using documents such as the *Code of Ethics of the American Library Association* (2008). While actions speak louder than words, a statement of inclusivity can help set a tone for the classroom as a safe place to explore information and without judgment or marginalization.

Create a Respectful Climate with Interactivity Guidelines: What is the Communication Agreement of the Classroom?

Establishing ground rules or a code of conduct for communicating in the classroom is another suggestion for instructors creating inclusive classroom (Cornell University Center for Teaching Excellence, 2012). Establishing these ground rules can help to foster community in a short period of time and help students understand the social expectations of the class. Ideally, these ground rules are established by the class to engage a sense of ownership. Again, the time constraints of the one-shot can prevent us from following this best practice to the letter. Instead, instruction librarians can prepare a list of ground rules and ask students to add to the list as they see fit at the beginning of class. An example of ground rules for a one-shot instruction session are as follows:

- Respect the opinions of others: you all bring something unique to the research process. We can all learn from you and your experiences.

- Ask questions: your questions are important and may help others in the classroom, including the instructor.

- It's okay to challenge the librarian: there is nothing wrong with questioning or challenging what the librarian says; my perspectives may not represent your own.

Once you have established some beginning ground rules, give students a moment to consider if they would like to contribute to the list. Additionally, librarians can share communication ground rules ahead of time with the course instructor who can contribute with guidelines already established in the course.

Adapt Lessons to be Flexible and Open to Change

While instruction librarians do not have the opportunity to investigate the individual backgrounds, identities, and learning abilities of our students and adapt our lesson plans accordingly, we can create learning experiences that are flexible, varied, and cater to a diversity of learning preferences, giving all students opportunities to express themselves through individual, small group, and large group discussion (Tanenbaum, 2015). Often when we encourage class participation, we tend to use our preferred strategy that so-

licits the thoughts and opinions of those who share our own preference. Students who are comfortable sharing in a small group may not be comfortable doing the same in front a large class and vice versa. Using a variety of participation strategies will encourage more students to utilize their individual backgrounds, interests, and identities to enhance the learning experience.

Conclusion

This article is not meant as a comprehensive overview of inclusive pedagogy. Higher education literature provides many more strategies that can be adapted to the library instruction context. One limitation of the strategies depicted in this article is they are primarily instructor driven rather than propelled by the class as a whole in order to establish a community consensus. This is, unfortunately a byproduct of one-shot instruction where time-intensive, and community-driven instruction is less realistic. Librarians are encouraged to explore more strategies for inclusive instruction that engage the class as a community of learners rather than students following the guidelines of one instructor.

In closing, perhaps the most important strategy instruction librarians can employ to create inclusive learning spaces is undertaking professional development in diversity to become more aware of our own bias, privilege, and learning preferences (Samuels, 2014). Self-awareness, however, is only one step in creating an inclusive classroom. Additionally, librarians should continue to seek learning theories and pedagogical practices that challenge traditional structures and advance our instruction through informed approaches acknowledging the complex identities of our students. Research on multicultural education outlines a threefold process for educators (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Chrobot-Mason, 2003):

1. The educator becomes aware of their own assumptions, values, and prejudices

2. The educator engages in learning about the worldviews that are different from their own

3. The educator develops specific skills and techniques for building inclusiveness

As we experience increasingly diverse classrooms, we are obligated to adapt our skills and techniques to fit the dynamic needs of our students. Through inclusive pedagogy, we can begin to create classrooms that not only accept, but celebrate our students as individuals who bring value to the research experience.

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