Citation:

Haigh, J (2021) "Developing a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: Some Critical Incidents." In: Brook-bank, E and Haigh, J, (eds.) Critical Library Pedagogy in Practice. Innovative Libraries Press, Huddersfield, pp. 223-228. ISBN 9781911500223

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:
https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/8107/

Document Version:
Book Section (Published Version)

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10. Developing a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: Some Critical Incidents. Jess Haigh

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Introduction

This chapter explores my experiences of trying to use a more culturally sustaining pedagogy, as defined by Paris (2012), as a pedagogy that seeks to "perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling"(Paris, 2012, p.93). Framing my experiences in the classroom through the reflective use of critical incidents, I aim to give examples of my practice in the hope that it will inspire others to reflect on their own pedagogy. I believe that Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is a beneficial critical pedagogic practice to use within information literacy in order to encourage students to firstly recognise their current literacy, and then to develop a critical skill set.

"Widening participation" agenda

Higher Education (HE) in the UK is structured to cater to primarily white, middle class students that live independently near to the location of the University. Historically, thousands of people with the same biases have created the culture that now exists in the UK; what Eddo-Ledge refers to as "the collective effects of bias" (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). Although holding racist views is rightly associated with a social stigma for individuals, structural racism is less immediately visible and therefore is largely still present in the institution's culture of whiteness—where white is the "norm" and any students who are people of colour are considered deviant (Bhopal, 2018; diAngelo, 2018, p. 25). Libraries are no exception to this. A literature review of attitudes towards underrepresented students in US libraries found language was often used by librarians that demonstrated an "us and them" narrative, where academic spaces "belonged" to the white, middle class librarians, who considered their users as "intruders" (Ilett, 2019, p. 181). Given that librarianship in the UK is "culturally homogenous" and could be perceived as a middle class profession, according to findings investigating a workforce mapping exercise in 2016 (Arkle, 2016), it is reasonable to assume that similar attitudes about academic libraries exist in the UK, even if these attitudes are unrecognised or masked by white fragility.

There are sometimes characteristics presented by students outside the white British middle- or upper-class hegemony that are described as these students failing according to the norms and values of the white academic culture. Research that focuses on students with these non-hegemonic characteristics uses terms such as "first-generation" or "non-traditional" as a way of bypassing having to speak openly about race or ethnicity (Ilett, 2019, p. 179). This may be to avoid challenging the whiteness of HE. Talking about having an "inclusive culture" therefore, instead of challenging whiteness head-on, focuses on addressing other student characteristics, which could include being "commuter students", speaking English as a second (or third or fourth) language, or having responsibilities outside of university studies. Rather than challenging the established practices, "interrogating that culture for the ways that it is complicit in the social and cultural reproduction of exclusion" (Burke, 2015, p. 22) these issues are seen as problems to be fixed to allow these students to feel they belong within the dominant culture (Tate & Page, 2018, p. 147). A more critical information literacy practice questions whether the curriculum itself and/or the culture of the library is the problem, and has as a goal that all students are able to succeed, not just those that Elmborg describes as "socially preselected for academic success" (Elmborg, 2006, p. 194)

Me as a white woman

As a white middle class woman who has been working in HE for almost five years, and who went to University twice myself, I am the fish that does not know they are in water (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 145). As Eddo-Lodge explains, I have never really had to think about what it means to be white because I am on the top of a structural system that has benefited me at the expense of others (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). I have privilege in the field of education and librarianship not only through my race, but also my class and other privileges I hold such as my able body, and my mental health. This chapter will focus on race and class as identifying characteristics, but cultures can be formed through any characteristic, with identities themselves often being fluid (Stahl & Habib, 2017, p. 269), and it would be valuable to see reflections on using culturally sustaining pedagogies within, for example, the Deaf community, the LGBTQI+ communities, or other cultures formed and forming.

"Librarianship may be notoriously white and female, but our communities are not" (Cooke, 2018, p. 122). Reflecting on the pedagogy used in my classroom is necessary if I want to support all my students in becoming

lifelong learners with information literacy skills. Further, as a white person it is beholden upon me to reject the notion that my bias is unconscious (Tate & Page, 2018, p. 146) and instead confront and reject my learned racism in order to better support the contemporary struggles for equality (Cole, 2017, p. 737). As Oluo explains, it is my duty, as a white person who has benefited from the construct of white supremacy, to deconstruct it (Oluo, 2019).

Like Cole, (2017), Keer (2016), and many others, I seek to make my teaching relevant to my students' lives, both inside and outside their academic work, in order to give them the tools to not only live in the world, but to be able to challenge and resist the oppressions they encounter. I also wish my students, like Cole's, to see themselves represented within their academic discipline (Cole, 2017, p. 740).

Me as a librarian

There can be a tendency for library workers to see their own work as one that spearheads organisational change and that, by changing the way we do things, our wider institutions will "magically transform" into "a wholly decolonised place of learning" (Clark, 2019). Within this discussion, therefore, I will be speaking of my own work in the classroom, and not attempting to represent the wider institutional strategy or culture in which I sit. This chapter aims to give examples of where I have tried to use a culturally sustaining pedagogy, in the context of working with students studying for mainly vocational degrees based on caring for and educating children, and youth and community work. These are personal reflections from my teaching and should not be taken to represent the workings of my institution in deconstructing racism and white privilege.

Academic skills/competence as contextual

Academic success involves firstly understanding the practices of academic reading and writing, which are applicable only within the Higher Education/Research world context (Burke, 2015, p. 21). Within this context, having these skills is presented as the norm, and any support in building these skills is presented as an extra service, in the form of an academic skills tutor or other parallel support mechanisms, thus reducing teaching what is a complex set of cultural ways of thinking to "remedial support for skills acquisition" (Burke, 2015, p. 22). Elmborg argues that librarianship should also be part of this support network, and that

information literacy involves comprehending the whole system of thought and scholarly information practices that make up academia (Elmborg, 2006, p. 196).

Academic literacy is a much narrower range of skills, which do not apply anywhere else in someone's life in the modern era, than what could be seen as a "sociocritical literacy" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 149). The task of librarians to instruct students in the concepts of selecting appropriately "academic" sources and then referencing them using an extremely complex style guide is to introduce an entirely new set of capabilities and ways of thinking. The idea that all this can be done in a one- to two-hour session should seem risible, and yet this is the often bemoaned standard in UK Higher Education.

Freda et al. argue that all students should be supported in developing competencies which encourage self-reflection and resilience, as a way of providing an "inclusive" education (Freda, Nunzia, Stiano, & Valerio, 2016). I would argue that a critical library pedagogy should focus instead on giving students the tools to practice resistance, not resilience. As practitioners, we should look for ways to influence change so that the competencies that students already have are better understood and appreciated in the classroom. Ignoring students' existing sociocultural literacies, or dismissing them as not relevant in academia, is a missed opportunity to use what is already known (Preece, 2009, p. 43).

My students' identities

Students in my classes have multiple identities, including race, class, and culture. Cooke reminds us as teachers to understand the "variability of cultures" with our classrooms and learning spaces (Cooke, 2018, p. 124). A person's identity is "fashioned" by their narrative, and should not be seen in terms of a series of binaries such as "modern/traditional" (Hussain, Johnson, & Alam, 2017, p. 422).

Elmborg links the practices of communities with their own literacies; people interpret information within communities, rather than in isolation. These cultures, and therefore literacies, are in constant flux, with the literacy to understand individual cultural situations being one that could include many parts of one's being (Elmborg, 2006, p. 195). Elmborg was writing in 2006, and since then the amount of varying literacies a person must maintain has increased to include social digital competencies that

could include performing digital labour on behalf of corporations (Paakkari, Rautio, & Valasmo, 2019, p. 161).

Stahl and Habib discuss the theory that globalization has led to contemporary youth cultures no longer being underpinned by factors such as social class, and that within neoliberalism one can be constantly adaptive to one's circumstance (though Bhopal argues that neoliberalism fails to acknowledge racism, as through reinforcing the importance of social networks it disregards whiteness and white privilege (Bhopal, 2018, p. 163)). Stahl and Habib's study of young working class people's ideas surrounding identity explored how what the young people felt they "belonged" to was an amalgamation of various factors, including a sense of valuing their immediate environment, and was constantly being negotiated (Stahl & Habib, 2017, p. 282). With this in mind, in supporting students one must understand that if they do not place a value on the university as a space, then they may not identify as belonging to it.

The "norm" in HE in the UK, which does not reflect the majority of the students I teach, is for white, middle-class young people who are living away from home in private accommodation, who will complete the whole course in three or four years (Bhopal, 2018). This reflects the "traditional" student model found in other western countries, including the U.S. (Ilett, 2019, p. 180). Many of the students I teach on courses relating to Childhood and the Early Years are BAME women from majority South Asian or Asian British backgrounds, and over half of the students at my institution live at their family home address throughout their time at university.

Evaluating information through a framework

The media in the West, including social media and media sharing platforms, is part of the dominant white, middle-to-upper class, predominantly cis gendered heteronomative patriarchal culture (Cole, 2017, p. 740). Critical interrogation of the information landscape that most students now encounter every day is not part of the National Curriculum in the UK outside of teaching students to consider their privacy, reporting concerns, and recognising "inappropriate" content (Gov.UK, 2013). A 2017 report by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on "Fake News" recommended that an educational framework should be created that would "equip children with the necessary tools to live in our digital world" (House of Commons Digitical, Culture, Media and Sport

Committee, 2018, p. 64). I would argue that this is too little, and way too late.

Students in HE who have gone through the British educational system may be coming to university with very little understanding about who owns the information platforms they use, how the algorithms behind those platforms are created, or what information is gathered from users and why. A 2011 report from Demos found that one in four 12-15 year olds did not check any information they access on the Internet at all, and a third believed that if a search engine listed information then it must be truthful (Bartlett & Miller, 2011, p. 5). These young people are 20-23 in 2020. I have often used these statistics as examples in classrooms of students training to work in schools and colleges, and when asked if they believe anything has changed, most believe it has not. In classes I have taught, students will, for example, frequently uncritically use platforms such as YouTube without evaluating what videos come up as suggested to watch next, or why. Students I have spoken to also see Google as the only viable way of searching for information, and do not examine who writes for which website, or who owns the news platforms they frequent.

I believe that my duty as a librarian and information professional granted time within a classroom is to at least make students aware of the ways oppressions are perpetuated within the information society (Elmborg, 2006, p. 193), and to help them become lifelong learners who can effectively recognise and challenge subjugation of oppressed groups by information systems and medias (Cooke, 2018, p. 127).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy

Why?

Our role as librarians teaching information literacy should be to support our students not only in acquiring specific skills that are only ever used within an academic context, such as referencing, but also skills needed in everyday life. Students should be able to make informed decisions and balanced judgements (ILG, 2018). Information literacy transforms lives by giving people and their communities the intellectual tools to be able to discover, share, and evaluate information appropriate to their own contexts. This allows people to understand and effectively criticise the oppressions they and others encounter.

Kinloch explores how students may have had experiences where aspects of their cultures, such as the ways they express themselves linguistically, were dismissed or erased in classrooms and schools more generally (Kinloch, 2017, p. 25). Ilett's literature review of librarian attitudes towards students whose parents did not go to university found that students' apparent unfamiliarity with the library was sometimes seen as antagonistic, and students were thusly labelled as disruptive. This led to students internalizing feelings of not being welcome, or not belonging, to the library (Ilett, 2019, p. 181). As a librarian who wants my students to continue their information literacy journeys after formal education, making sure they— and subsequently their peers who learn from them—feel that the library is a space and a resource that they do belong to, is paramount.

I do not want the next generation of teachers to feel they should erase their own cultural practices whilst studying, or using library resources, and therefore try to employ a culturally sustaining pedagogy in order to do this.

What it is

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, as defined by Paris (2012), stems from Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP). CRP requires an educator to "begin with the learners" (Cooke, 2018, p. 120), and to understand that not all teaching environments are homogenous (i.e. made up of one culture or one lived experience). Instead, CRP sees cultural heritage as something that will affect students and their learning, and deploys a variety of teaching strategies accordingly. CRP also incorporates embracing other cultures into curriculums and provides a range of information and resources that support multiculturalism (Hramiak & Huang, 2015, p. 3).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy goes further, in that it supports cultural pluralism and cultural equality. Rather than viewing literacies external to the institution as deficiencies it instead purposefully seeks to maintain the community practices of students. It is not responsive to culture, but rather supports students in "sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities whilst simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95)

Rather than critiquing the white gaze that sees anything other than these values as deficient, too much of the work in HE libraries is based on the notion of, "how can we (white, middle class, academic) get them (non-white, non-middle class students without cultural traditions of Western academia) to be more like us". A culturally sustaining pedagogy would

allow students space within their learning to celebrate and perpetuate their literate and cultural pluralism. A culturally sustaining pedagogy acknowledges and challenges the norm of whiteness dominating what constitutes being academically able, and what counts as educational achievement (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 11).

Through centring the experiences of students who are people of colour, BAME, or from cultures aside from the dominant one, such as working class or the first in the family to attend HE, a culturally sustaining pedagogy would aim to have these identities seen as relevant within the classroom (Cole, 2017, p. 740). Within information literacy sessions, librarians can demonstrate that the knowledge and understanding gained from students' own communities and cultures can be a good basis to expand learning (Ilett, 2019, p. 181). As Preece states,"The linguistic and cultural diversity of BME students' needs to be approached as a resource rather than a problem" (Preece, 2009, p. 49).

Critical Incidents in using a more Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Reflection can enable self-awareness of previous assumptions and initiate change within ways of thinking and doing (Yu, 2018, p. 765). Librarians in the UK, like teacher-trainees, are encouraged by professional bodies to be reflective practitioners through the emphasis on reflection in Continuing Professional Development activities such as Chartership, and in academic spheres, attaining Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. I have found reflection an important part of developing my teaching practice, and of all the models I have come across, I find using critical incidents the best way of framing this reflection and recognising the effects of my experiences in the classroom on how I teach in the future.

I see a critical incident as an incident that occurs in the classroom that makes me reflect on my actions as a teacher. Griffin found that reflecting on critical incidents increased trainee teachers' disposition towards "growth and enquiry" (Griffin, 2003, p. 207), and this is also what I have found through my own practice.

Here are three examples of teaching techniques that I have used, and the critical incidents that inspired them.

Using example topics suggested by students

When I teach information literacy, I tend to try to use examples that will be relevant to students' lives. I do not use "perfect" examples in demonstrating searches, as I want to teach students not in which order to click pages on a website, but rather to understand the larger concept of searching for information as "strategic exploration" (ACRL, 2015).

When using sources for examples to use in group exercises, I am intentional about using sources that are written by a representative mix of people, including BAME authors, and organisations that represent under-represented groups. This is often harder than I would like, owing to the fact that the dominant narrative within Western education and early years being one written by white people. This being the case, I take this opportunity to ask questions of my students such as, 'what voices are missing from these sources,' and 'what do writers mean by "us", "we" and "they"' (Oh, 2018).

I also initiate conversations that could be seen as difficult, including on the subject of race. When talking about keywords and having students think about vocabulary and how the use of words can change depending on context and user, I may include the example "how do you describe your ethnicity or race, and how would other people describe you? How would the government?" Simply posing this question has led to obvious moments in which students have been able to understand a concept through relating it to their own experiences.

CRITICAL INCIDENT - This example arose from one class in which, during a discussion about synonyms and their use in searches, a student offered her own experience as a self-described mixed-race person being described by older relatives in terms that are now seen as slurs. I felt a jolt of fear, as I was afraid of the discussion including a sensitive topic (part of my own white fragility, as described by diAngelo, is the discomfort and fear surrounding confronting my own prejudice (diAngelo, 2018, p. 20)). However, I saw how much more engaged students were with the subject when the example was something they had experienced in everyday life, rather than the usual examples I use, such as synonyms of "children", "education" etc. I use storytelling a lot in my teaching, as this demonstrates for students that I value my own personal experience, and that I am willing to explore my own privileges and hopefully change the assumptions that have shaped my practice thus far. Cooke calls this "radical honesty" and I would agree with her assessment that part of caring for students requires authenticity in the classroom (Cooke, 2018, p. 126).

Authenticity in the classroom includes allowing my students to be authentic themselves. Although it is challenging, I am growing to understand that what could be seen as "disrespectful" behaviour to my white academic eyes, could be what Kinloch describes as "a nuanced form of resistance" (Kinloch, 2017, p. 38), and a sign that I need to change my practices. This change of practice could include not calling on students to answer questions in debates who clearly do not want to participate; it may be that they are trying to maintain the hierarchy within the classroom of me as the lecturer and them as having no legitimate authority to speak. hooks argues that this hierarchy is so ingrained within some students that they will even comply with the "liberatory practice" of a teacher out of this same perception that the teacher is the dictator in the classroom (hooks, 1994, p. 147). Feminist pedagogy asks us to challenge the student's assumptions of teacher-student relationships (Carillo, 2007, p. 39), but it may be that, in making my class activities constantly interactive without being mindful that I need to create a safe space for students to transgress first, any activities completed are done so because students are being complicit with me as a teacher using my power, rather than having truly interactive and constructive learning experience. It takes time to build up trust in a classroom (Keer, 2016, p. 70), and the nature of one-shot information literacy teaching means that, unless the teacher is truly authentic in their address and allows for student authenticity without censure, a truly critical pedagogy is impossible.

Understanding the reasons behind your students' research topics

Students may choose independent research topics that are related to themselves personally, or are of a particular interest stemming from a personal experience. They may also research topics that they believe their tutors will approve of or that have lots of easy-to-find literature. A Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy would encourage students to find topics that affect them directly (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 153), and part of my role as a librarian is to find out what these include, and to help students in discovering voices that contribute to discussions surrounding them. This means making time for close reference interview work with students and often using sources far outside of the library's collections.

CRITICAL INCIDENT - An undergraduate student came to me for a one-to-one appointment for help looking at the topic of colourism within community education settings, something that had affected this student deeply but for which she was sure she would not find any research. She was willing to change her topic to something else, but I

encouraged her to stick to the topic that resonated with her own experiences, and did a series of wider searches, including on social media. I was eventually able to connect with a PhD candidate who I found on Twitter, who was also looking at colourism in education. The student was able to contact the PhD candidate, who was delighted to be asked for help by an undergraduate and willingly shared some references with her. This experience demonstrated why research as exploration should not be limited to the immediate sources a student's tutors have highlighted, or even to library resources and search engines. Because of this, a student was able to conduct a research project steeped in her own cultural experiences.

Part of my practice is to encourage students to critique the norms of their subject in terms of how these norms may marginalise communities. For example, if a student is looking at healthy eating initiatives in the early years I might encourage them to include sources discussing food poverty and differences in cultural attitudes to food. Paris talks about how a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy gives students the space to critique their own practices and discover ways they themselves reproduce harmful discourses (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 11). By encouraging students to critically examine their own responses to the theories and practices they are learning in a vocational context, I am encouraging them to further evaluate their own practices through research and other information literacy competencies.

Evaluating information

In my teaching, I encourage students to challenge notions of authority through examining what voices and experiences are most visible within academia compared to outside of it. This can be a hard sell, as many of the students intrinsically (or rather, through years and years of training) place "authoritative" voices above others, or recognise different types of authority depending on the community they find themselves in at the time (Sanders & Sanders, 2017, p. 579). Within an HE context, authoritative voices are majority white, middle- or upper- class, and also working in academia. It has also been noted that students in one-shot sessions actively resist talking about their own socio-political contexts (Keer, 2016, p. 70).

I have experienced students commenting that there are few current practitioner voices on their reading lists or in policy papers relating to early years, but then not being willing to challenge this as something that should be changed, simply resigning themselves to "the way things are". Rendón examines this phenomenon, explaining:

> "The dominant belief system is powerful, entranced, validated and constantly rewarded by the social structure that created it. When we begin to see that some of the agreements in the belief system are flawed we find it difficult to challenge them" (Rendón, 2009, p. 25).

Ascribing authority results in oppression in some form or another (Badke, 2015, p. 193), and Kinloch speaks of how students' previous educational experiences may have led them to believe they themselves and people like them are not acceptable in an educational context (Kinloch, 2017, p. 25). And so the question is, how can I propose the notion that the idea of "experts" coming only from the sections of society with power is problematic without belittling the students' established beliefs that their own lived experiences should be dismissed in writing about their vocations in favour of those very "experts" from within academia?

I have done this through demonstrating that what students believe makes someone an "expert" can depend on the context of what they are doing. For example, students may trust a YouTube makeup artist based on recommendations by friends, viewing figures, and community comments, as well as the results from trying out tips on their own. Students then apply how they judge experts in fields that are related to their own knowledge outside of academia to how they evaluate academic authors. For example, do you look up what others say about the author, or their ideas? Do you analyse whether the author's ideas or theories play out in your own practice?

CRITICAL INCIDENT - I ask students to critically evaluate what voices they listen to in different contexts and why. As students will all have different understandings of what is meant by expertise and authority, it can be hard to generalise within examples. I therefore use different mediums as examples of how authority can be socially constructed. An example for this is the difference between print news and online news. Newspapers are often cited as "good" sources to use by students as they are easy to access and contain content they can often read and understand.

I had a group of students who were predominantly readers of online news, with little experience of other forms of news media. As I wanted to widen the discussion to other forms of media, and knew from my own experience that older members of my own family tend to read paper-based news, I questioned students about their inter-generational experiences. One student offered that their grandparents only read physical papers. Other students agreed that they also have older relatives who did not access the same content as them. I then demonstrated the difference in output between print and online news, and

the students began to challenge why this was, why they and their grandparents were often reading completely different stories, and what a difference this made to their outlook on what was happening in the wider world. This led to a longer discussion about filter bubbles and how the authority we place in different voices depends on our cultural contexts. By centring on the students' experiences within their own cultures and families, what Kinloch refers to as "narratives of belonging" (Kinloch, 2017, p. 38), I was able to lead students to think about the wider implications of different people receiving very different information from different formats of what was supposed to be the same source, such as Google, YouTube, or even a newspaper.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the context of HE in the UK, and the need for a more critical pedagogy in working with students in the information literacy classroom, in order to challenge the white, middle class academic hegemonies that assume all students have the same background and sociocultural literacies.

The chapter has then included some examples of critical incidents from my teaching practice that show how I use a Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy within information literacy as part of my praxis, the goal of which is to encourage resistance to oppressions, rather than resilience, to continue to grow within them. My hope is that these examples will be read as reflections that could be useful to spark conversations and further readings in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, as further scholarship that explores Culturally Sustaining Information Literacy would be valuable to the #critlib community.

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