Teaching and Applying Intersectionality in the LIS Classroom

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Poster learning objectives:

To describe teaching intersectionality for LIS professionals.
To identify intersectional analysis as a lifelong process in LIS, and not a fixed mindset.
To define successful and failed pedagogical approaches to intersectionality in LIS.

Main Goal:

To create a more impactful intersectional Multiculturalism in Libraries course through pedagogical dialogue between instructor and students: This poster seeks to reflect on this course and shift the course through student input.

Method:

An autoethnographic reflection with student feedback

What we're already doing in LSC 525

Merging intersectional critical theory with LIS approaches: Students are provided a foundation of critical works outside of LIS in order to understand the underlying structures around race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability within libraries.

Metacognitive self awareness in LIS students and professionals: Have students self-reflect on their own identity in relationship to the library allows for a metacognitive awareness of their own cultural competencies. Using Project Implicit and intersectional checklist.

The intersectional process: Students adapt the idea of an 'intersectional process' wherein their world view shifts to more mature cultural competencies over time.
Include real world examples from librarians: Through podcast interviews.

What works in this class

Introducing students to critical theory: Typically learning about race and racism is a new concept for many LIS students.

Learning about new intersections around race, gender, sexuality, class, and representation in the library: (Estefania): Reading articles about a race or class other than my own and learning how they are represented/ lack of representation in a library and having to present my findings was a great way to learn about a different community.

Real world implementation: (Kathleen): While enrolled in LIS program, working at a public library (at least) part-time to be able to apply theory, not just during required internship class/credit. Real time experience and working with public is important.

Themes every semester among student dialogue:

How does this apply to all white areas? Students working in racially white areas ask how does this apply to them.
Clinging to a 'fixed' worldview: Some students hold close to the 'colorblind' worldview throughout the semester.
Terms 'multiculturalism and diversity' as cloaks for talking about race: Students regularly wonder if we should change the name from 'Multiculturalism in Libraries'.

Suggestions for improvement?

Include more recent examples of intersectionality in the library: Seeing recent examples of how libraries have approached intersectionality in their libraries. EX: videos of these examples or articles that have shown how successful or unsuccessful they were.
Incorporate Experiential Learning: Perhaps making students attend an activity or event that is aimed towards diverse groups of people. EX: Scottish bagpipe player, African tribal drum dancers, Dia de los Muertos… (We've done these where I work!)
Discuss library work culture more with regards to women of color: Libraries creating a better work culture space that supports workers and patrons. Supporting non-MLIS staff (particularly WOC) or looking closely at how WOC are being supported or treated.

What do you know now that you wish you knew during class?

- **Estefania:** "Now that I am working in a public library, it's incredible to see how involved or not involved the librarian is with the community. Some will go out of their way to outreach and some will not. I feel that we do have power as library workers to influence the higher level library workers to create programs or events that will include the different groups of people who visit their library."
- **Kathleen:** "Wish I knew more about how to assess who is an ally and how to develop a network of allies. What roles management and leadership have in creating intersectionality in their spaces/libraries. Or the responsibilities they have. Also, we may have covered this but how emotionally drainage could lead into early burnout. As a POC how to lead from middle or entry level."
- Include more discussion about paraprofessionals in the library
- **Estefania: More community analysis:** Analyzing which groups of people visit your library or which groups of people live in your community and create programs or activities that accommodate those groups of people. EX: citizenship classes, nutrition classes, bilingual storytime, etc. Also, providing reading materials for these larger communities to make them feel welcome.
- **Kathleen: More conversation around implementing intersectionality in the library:** "Creating staff sessions/development on how to identify and address signs of microaggressions."
- **Discuss more about LLCs** impact on library work, class, race.

How have you implemented this content in your life?

- **Mel**: Implementing the intersectional process in my day to day life to see my own privilege and be aware of how it is put into action in pedagogy and everyday habits
- **Kathleen**: Practicing intentional listening. And including different perspectives when I'm discussing issues that I'm concerned about.
- **Estefania**: Defending the rights of a certain group of people who were being harassed by a security guard in the library where I work.

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives."
-- Audre Lorde