

Multidimensional Cultural Safety: Working with Campus Micro-Communities

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Diversity and inclusion efforts in libraries are aimed at identifying and addressing service barriers that might be overcome by skilled practitioners and a particular suite of institutional policies (e.g., Caidi & Allard, 2005). However, some critical LIS scholars have noted that these skill-based and policy-related discourses generally avoid critiquing the forces of structural racism, discrimination and colonialism in society that are at the root of many of these barriers (Homma 2005; Hudson 2017). This depoliticized and deracialized discourse – framed as cultural competence -- focuses instead on the power dynamics between the practitioner and client within a context of cultural neutrality (Overall 2009). Yet, as Patrick Wolfe (2016), observes, we need to understand that processes of racialization are historically- situated and place-specific. This requires a more complex and holistic understanding of how these oppressions manifest and affect individuals and groups differently, depending on the historical and contemporary human geographies and institutions involved (Wolfe 2016).

To address the shortcomings in conventional approaches to cultural competence, this presentation proposes applying to the academic library context a framework adapted from other professions: Multidimensional Cultural Competence (MDCC) from clinical psychology (Sue, 2001) and cultural safety (CS) from Indigenous nursing (Hart-Wasekeesikaw 2009). The former views cultural competence in terms of diversity factors, components and multiple levels of foci (from the individual to societal), while the second is premised in postcolonial understandings and respect for Indigenous knowledges. The proposed synthesis, Multidimensional Cultural Safety (MDCS) focuses on the need for institutional critiques as well as a recognition of the impacts on students of racialization and power structures (Dudley, forthcoming).

In this session, practice-based examples demonstrate how this framework has been developed in and applied to a particular academic library context. Since 2012, University of Winnipeg librarian Michael Dudley has been offering regular reference outreach and orientations to the University's recognized "micro-communities", including Indigenous students, International students, students experiencing a disability and English language learners, each of which is supported by staff, dedicated spaces and specific programming. By working with micro-communities in a theoretically-informed and culturally safe manner, community outreach efforts are able to operate at multiple dimensions and in their efforts to address – to the extent possible – structural factors which may present barriers to successful library use.