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Critical Librarianship

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Added editor name to back matter

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Upcoming Issue

Fall 2017

*Small Libraries,
Big Ideas*



6

But How Do We *Do* Critical Librarianship?
Kelly McElroy

9

Letting Our Values and History Guide Us:
Inspiration for Libraries From Myles Horton
Annie Downey

14

Working Class in the Library
Bob Schroeder

19

Critically Interrogating Oregon History in the Archives:
Spanish Heritage Learners in the PCUN Records
David Woken

24

Storytime Can Be Social Justice Time
Natasha Forrester Campbell

28

Critical Library Management:
Adminstrating for Equity
Candise Branum & J. Turner Masland



ON THE COVER

Original artwork by Rebecca McCorkindale.
See: <https://hafuboti.com/>

From the Guest Editor



ELSA LOFTIS

Elsa is the Director of Library Services at the Oregon College of Art and Craft and serves as the past president of the Oregon Library Association. She earned her MLIS from the Pratt Institute, and her B.A. from the University of Oregon. She has worked in public libraries, academic libraries, and a museum archive. Among the many things she loves about library work is serving students and collaborating with the amazing people who work in the library world.

Libraries and archives are community spaces that acquire, organize, preserve, and make available resources for our patrons. Library workers connect people to these resources in various ways (technical services, reference, instruction, and more). It is noble and wonderful work, and it begs some interesting questions: is acquisition, organization, preservation, or dissemination a series of passive acts? Are libraries impartial spaces that give the real estate on their shelves to the words and ideas of others without judgment or context?

I would certainly argue that the judgment and context pieces are part of the library's mission. Judgment plays a part in how we strive to provide our patrons with the best possible information we can find for them in terms of scholarly merit or other comparative value (which evolves). We exercise professional judgment when deciding whose voices are represented in our collection when we make purchases and acquisitions. But whose voices aren't represented? Whose voices are endangered or silenced when material in our collections is challenged? Even our subject headings and classification terminology include pejorative language, so how do we organize our materials in a thoughtful and usable way? Providing context for the information on our shelves is part of our shared mission as educators as well. I might not have the ability to take advantage of every possible teachable moment and facilitate conversations each time a patron comes across challenging content in my collection, but I help provide an environment where they can dig deeper and ask questions.

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Above, I've only discussed the *stuff* we have, not even the things we do: how do we welcome the members of our communities? How are our spaces set up and used? What kind of programming and displays are we offering? How do we support critical thinking and depth of inquiry? Libraries are amazing places that give people the opportunity to learn, grow, and enjoy themselves, which is why we love them and work so hard to ensure that all are welcome.

We are at another point in history where our country is looking at how we treat one another, who has power, and who is being marginalized. The social dynamic in this country is constantly being tested, even at the best of times. As I write, it seems that those who subscribe to racist and oppressive beliefs are emboldened and are highly visible, perhaps more so than normal, due to our present political situation. This is causing a great deal of legitimate fear in our communities. Lately, many people in our nation are waking up to the ongoing reality of white supremacy and the attendant miseries it causes. There are aggressive debates about immigration and human rights going on in our communities and in the government. I know that many people who work in libraries think about how world events and social injustice impact the communities we serve, and in connection with these issues, I have been hearing about and reading more and more about critical librarianship.

So, what does critical librarianship mean, exactly, and how is it practiced? To think about this, we look at librarianship through a lens of critical theory and understand that there is a certain amount of activism implied. To embrace critical librarianship means that you believe that libraries should work for social justice (and figure out ways to actually do that work). Critical librarianship also invites library workers to consider how our institutions and our roles have enforced or at least complied with systems of oppression, both in the past and now.

I have noticed a great deal of conversation about these ideas going on both online in social media, in journals, at conferences, and in conversation. It's not always defined as "critical librarianship," but it's in ongoing threads about issues such as whether libraries should let Nazi groups meet in library public meeting rooms, differences between "free speech" and "hate speech," whether scholarly contributions matter as much when it's from a lived experience versus someone with a PhD ("authority is constructed and contextual" [ACRL, 2015] anyone?). These conversations are going on in our libraries and in our profession, and we all deal with them as real people with real beliefs, but also as professionals who are at our core motivated by a call to serve our communities.

I was curious about these ideas and these questions, so I asked you, the Oregon library community, to tell us about how you see critical librarianship and if it plays a role in your work. I was delighted to get responses from incredible, inspiring librarians who were willing to share their stories. Kelly McElroy from Oregon State University—who has been at the forefront of the critical librarianship discussions from the start, monitored the first #critlib chat on Twitter and co-edited *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbooks* (with N. Pagowsky)—contributed an article about how we "do" critical librarianship. Annie Downey, from Reed College and author of *Critical Information Literacy: Foundations, Inspiration, and Ideas*, submitted a piece about Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School, famous for its role in the Civil Rights Movement and community education and how that's shaped her work. Robert Schroeder, Education and Art Librarian at Portland State University, wrote



about relationship building with non-traditional students who tend to be underserved and underrepresented in academe, and how that informed his instruction experiences. David Woken, Coordinator of Library Graduate Instruction and History and Latin American Studies Librarian at the University of Oregon, discussed a unique and groundbreaking program that he coordinates with the Spanish Heritage Learners at the U of O to make use of primary source material to better understand the contributions of the Latinx communities in Oregon history. Youth Librarian at Multnomah County Library, Natasha Forrester Campbell, who currently serves as chair of the Children's Services Division of the Oregon Library Association, described the role that social justice can play in storytime at the public library. Candise Branum, the Director of Library Services at the Oriental College of Medicine and Turner Masland, Access Services Assistant Manager at Portland State University, collaborated on an article that grew out of an OLA conference session about critical library management.

These librarians describe some of the many ways that we can oppose injustice and inequality in our libraries, serve as advocates for our patrons, and make a positive social impact. I am immensely grateful to these writers for sharing their stories and their thoughts. You might see yourself reflected here, in the work you do, or ideas that you have considered. To you, I say, thank you, and keep up the work!

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But How Do We *Do* Critical Librarianship?

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Critical librarianship asks us to look more closely at the sociopolitical world both inside and out of our libraries. Indeed, a lot has happened in the world since I first saw the call for this special issue of *OLA Quarterly*. First, there was the exposure of an internal memo from a Google employee that denied that women were capable tech workers. Last week, there were escalating threats between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un about possible nuclear detonations. I finished writing in the wake of white supremacist demonstrations and violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, and as an unprecedented storm geared up to hit Houston. On Twitter and Facebook, I'm seeing fierce debate about whether to let Nazis use library space ... and how you would even be able to identify Nazis to kick them out.

In short, this is an urgent time to reflect on what critical librarianship is and what its aims are. As the #critlib chats on Twitter have gained interest over the past few years, I have seen the “critical” of critical librarianship interpreted in several overlapping and competing ways. First, critical librarianship is associated, for good reason, with critical theory, or what Kenny Garcia calls a “critical theorist framework that is epistemological, self-reflective, and activist in nature” (2016). Critical theory encompasses the work of many scholars who reflect on and critique social structures. The call for this issue noted that critical librarianship has been criticized for being overly philosophical or theory-heavy. In the case of the #critlib chats, we wanted a place for librarians to talk about how they use critical pedagogy in particular, inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and other scholars, as well as our own experiences as learners and teachers. Our emphasis, however, was on *doing* and how practice informed thinking, and in turn, how this new mode of thinking could influence new forms of practice. This spiraling transformative dialog between theory and practice can be described as *praxis*, and it requires an openness both to learning about new ideas and to try new things.



Second, “critical” can be understood as being critical of, or criticizing. This practice is often described with some amount of anxiety—as if critical librarians are out there waiting to attack their peers for their actions. In a recent interview with Jeffrey Beall, known for his now-defunct list of predatory Open Access publishers, he claims that many activist librarians seek relentlessly to shut down big academic publishers like Elsevier even to the detriment of library users (2017). By using the pejorative term “social justice warrior,” popularized by GamerGate trolls who used it against their foes, to describe these librarians, Beall suggests a sort of culture war within the profession: one side upholding the status quo and the other side trying to tear it down no matter what. This reactionary position fails to examine the flaws in things as they stand. If big academic publishing isn’t inherently bad, why should we believe it is inherently good? Deep critique of how things are and have been is rarely welcomed, but can provide a pathway to explore other alternatives for the future.

Of course, there are other meanings to “critical” as well. One in particular is relevant as we consider what critical librarianship is and how to do it: critical meaning decisive, pivotal, or urgent. Think of a critical medical condition, or maybe better still, of a critical hit in the role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*. In this sense, critical librarianship can help us get to the root of librarianship as a whole, and perhaps help us face the crises that libraries, library workers, and library users are dealing with. This particular socio-historical moment seems to ask us, more even than usual, to get on with our praxis. How do we *do* critical librarianship? What does that look like, and why does it matter?

In order to explore these questions, I want to share a bit of my own critical librarianship story. I started working as an on-call page at Multnomah County Library when I was a teenager, and I remember the emphasis made on core shared values, particularly intellectual freedom. During our new employee orientation, we discussed specific challenges and had time to debate them. These shared values—particularly the chance to learn and debate them—made me part of a bigger movement, even as a very part-time worker.

A few years later, as a college student, I got hired through my university library to work at the Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, an independent community archives and library in South Los Angeles. The SCL was founded by Emil Freed, a Jewish leftist who started collecting papers in his basement when his friends began tossing things out of fear of the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1950s Hollywood. The librarians at SCL collected archives and books related to local organizing, worked with academic and independent researchers, hosted community events, and kept a box of toys for the neighborhood kids who occasionally wandered in. We all ate lunch together every day, sharing food and deep conversation, a practice that I now recognize as a form of radical self- and community care.

After graduating from college, I moved to Seattle where I spent a lot of my free time volunteering at the Zine Archive and Publishing Project (ZAPP), a totally DIY community archive, library, and zine-making space. I hadn’t been into zines—little self-published works, often about deeply personal and/or political topics—before I wandered into ZAPP one day and was welcomed with warmth by the open hours volunteers. The community, as much as the materials themselves, hooked me. ZAPP built a collection of stories that wouldn’t otherwise have been compiled, but it also offered the space, materials, and support for people to make their own zines.



I tell these stories for several reasons. From the start, my work in libraries has been in a thoughtful community of practice, with people welcoming me to reflect on our shared values and the necessity to take action. I want to honor the library workers who showed me what libraries could do with their communities.

And although there were absolutely complex ideas and theoretical approaches behind this work, I was a pretty low-level worker or volunteer, contributing in the hourly way that I could. I didn't have to have read Judith Butler in order to catalog queer zines at ZAPP. I didn't have to have a deep understanding of white supremacy or know the full history of segregation in public schools in order to help build a display about the Chicano student walkouts in 1970s Los Angeles. Later, when I learned more about gender theory and ethnic studies, of course it helped my understanding, which then continued to inform my practice. But there were so many places to get started in the thinking *through* the doing. So critical librarianship could look like the Jefferson County Library District Teen Book Club that welcomes young people to read and discuss books exploring social identities, and the work that youth librarian Lorene Forman does to support those young people as they explore what to do in their community. This book club, dedicated to "books, kindness, and inclusion," creates a space for youth to explore stories they hadn't found yet and to build the trust needed for rich discussion. Finally, it gives them the space to think about what their community needs, and what they themselves can do about it.

More than social awareness, critical librarianship seeks social justice. Part of the challenge in getting started is that there is no single way to do it. There is no checklist for praxis, no solution that works for every community. But my experience has taught me that this work happens in community. There are always people to learn from (and with) and work to be done, and there is room for all of us here. 🐘

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Letting Our Values and History Guide Us: Inspiration for Libraries From Myles Horton

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History is always our guide for the future, and always full of capricious surprises.
—BRUCE CHATWIN

In the aftermath of the horrifying racist marches, violence, and murder at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville in August 2017, people across the country have looked to history and shared values to help them clear their heads and find ways to move America forward. In explaining his decision to take down a statue of Robert E. Lee from Duke University's campus, president Vincent E. Price argued that removing the statue was a way to express Duke's institutional values, including a "commitment to justice, not discrimination; to civil protest, not violence; to authentic dialogue, not rhetoric; and to empathy, not hatred" (Price, 2017). The presidents and boards of the American Library Association, Public Library Association, and the Association of College and Research Libraries have published similar anti-hate statements. ACRL's Board asserted that "ACRL is unwavering in its long-standing commitment to free exchange of different viewpoints, but what happened in Charlottesville was not that; instead, it was terrorism masquerading as free expression" (Morales, 2017). As this statement confirms, our shared professional values were developed over time and provide us with a guide on how to respond when all we want to do is react.

I have long been drawn to and comforted by librarianship's dual tenets of consistency and change. Our underlying principles, values, and challenges are reassuringly constant and stable, providing us with a continuous source of guidance as the materials we buy and provide, the technologies we use, and the communities we serve constantly change and evolve. A particularly instructive time in history for education, libraries, and social justice was the 1930s and 1940s as society struggled to figure out how to deal with a myriad of social and economic ills stemming from institutionalized and systemic racism, imperialism, a vast wage gap between rich and poor, fallout from the Great Depression and WWII, unfair



labor practices, and so forth. When the Library Bill of Rights was first published in the ALA Bulletin after adoption by the Council at the 61st Annual Conference in 1939, it included the introductory statement: “Today indications in many parts of the world point to growing intolerance, suppression of free speech, and censorship affecting the rights of minorities and individuals” (ALA Council, 1939). At that same conference, librarians also discussed propaganda, the selection of a non-librarian for the Librarian of Congress, competing user needs, satisfying funders and the public, challenges of marketing, working with legislators and public officials, and the role of libraries in education and democratic societies. In other words, you could time travel back to San Francisco in the summer of 1939 and be able to get right in on the discussions, so in sync are they with the issues we face today.

Ideas on how to educate in order to grow democracy have also stayed remarkably constant over time. The foundations of experiential education were first popularized by John Dewey with the publication of *Democracy and Education* in 1916. Critical educators working in the 1930s and 40s expanded on experiential education as they examined education through the lens of critical theory to develop critical pedagogy. One of these critical educators was Myles Horton, co-founder of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. Highlander was founded in 1932 as a community folk school and training center to provide free adult education to rural Appalachian communities on everything from life skills and reading to community building and grassroots activism. Horton worked with the uneducated and largely illiterate people of Tennessee first in the labor movement and later in the civil rights movement. Highlander activists’ record of success is awe-inspiring as they played an instrumental role in the growth of worker and civil rights throughout the South. To name only a few examples, Rosa Parks attended trainings at Highlander months before she ignited the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Martin Luther King, Jr. first heard Pete Seeger (a Highlander regular) sing “We Shall Overcome” at Highlander’s 25th Anniversary Celebration (Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1998). Horton’s focus on popular, adult community education is not only inspiring but also instructive for libraries as we serve and educate our communities—whether they are public, academic, or school communities—during this time of deep political divides and strife.

Horton was born in 1905 to poor working class parents in West Tennessee. Prior to starting a family, his parents were teachers so they valued education. In 1924, they encouraged him to go to Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee. While at Cumberland, he was active in the Student YMCA, which had projects and programs to deal with racial and economic inequality and other issues of social justice. Horton was troubled that while the YMCA talked about racial inequity as a problem and had developed programs to address it, they remained segregated in all of their meetings. He became convinced that learning is about doing, and that just talking about a problem will not change it (Adams, 1986).

The summer before he graduated from Cumberland, the Presbyterian Church sent Horton to the tiny mountain community of Ozone, Tennessee to organize vacation Bible schools. When Horton was there, most of the people who could find jobs worked in coal mines or the lumber industry. Others had left the area in search of work in textile mills only to return a short time later without finding work and bitter about their inability to feed, clothe, and adequately shelter their families. Horton wanted to help the community but didn’t think the Bible school programs he was tasked with organizing were doing enough, so he changed things up.



Horton asked the parents of the vacation Bible school children to come to the church at night to talk about their problems. He was amazed when they actually showed up that first night and continued to show up in larger and larger numbers each night. Horton did not have lessons prepared for the attendees, instead asking them to talk to each other about their problems and brainstorm solutions. For many of the issues they discussed, they found their own answers, and for others, the community asked Horton to find experts to help them. For example, one night a man who tested wells taught attendees how to test wells for typhoid. Through this process, the citizens of Ozone learned that many of their problems could be solved by talking to their neighbors and Horton learned that “the teacher’s job was to get them talking about those problems, to raise and sharpen questions, and to trust people to come up with the answers” (Horton et al., 1998).

Having decided that his future was in adult education, Horton went back to Cumberland to finish college and then went on to earn graduate degrees from Union Theological Seminary at Columbia and Chicago University. In addition to reading and attending classes to develop his ideas, Horton also visited different schools and organizations. He spent hours with Jane Addams, the legendary co-founder of Chicago’s Hull House, trying to get a feel for what Hull House had been like in the beginning, what its struggles had been, and how the founders achieved the momentum and community support it needed to thrive. He also spent time in Denmark studying Danish folk high schools, which have offered free and low-cost continuing education experiences since 1844 for the farming population on Nordic history, folklore, music, literature and language, and geography, and to discuss current political and social issues (Corl, 1981).

Based on his research, experience, and experimentation, Horton established Highlander to be problem-centered and student-centered. An advocate of co-created curriculum, he argued that “since I chose to work with poor, oppressed people, I had to take into consideration that they’d never been allowed to value their own experience; that they’d been told it was dirt and that only teachers and experts knew what was good for them” (Horton et al., 1998, p. 57). For example, basic economics was taught at Highlander, including sessions on surplus value. After one class,

“an unemployed nurse from Gruetli, Tennessee,(...) who’d brought a basket of onions, bacon, and canned fruit to Highlander to pay her tuition, told [Horton] ‘When I was working at the hosiery mill in Chattanooga, we were told that we would have to take a wage cut or the mill would go out of business. Of course, we took the cut. About ten weeks later, I read in the paper that the daughter of the mill owner was sailing for Europe to spend the winter. I suppose it was the surplus value we had produced that paid her way’” (Adams, 1986, p. 35).

Horton saw vocational education, which was what was normally offered to blue collar workers, as wholly different from education for citizenship. To learn for citizenship, students have to have a say in what they need to know and they have to be empowered by the learning process. To meet the goals of helping workers develop into strong citizens, Highlander used a three-prong approach to education with a residence program, a community program, and an extension program. The community program consisted of classes that were offered



based on what community members asked for. Classes never just originated from the staff at Highlander; they came from requests or ideas born in the community. Residence students were invited based on the promise they demonstrated as local leaders or organizers. The extension program was taught by residence students along with staff in the field as they worked on strikes or organizing in communities that needed their help.

When I first discovered Horton, I was struggling with how to teach information literacy at a comprehensive state school. While the students had far more formal education than most of the Highlander students, they often seemed illiterate in terms of understanding information in the way they needed to for success in our current and changing world. When we consider literacy, we often think that being able to read and write are the basics everyone needs, but Horton believed in other equally important basics that were relevant to the people he worked with. For example, being able to stage a protest and demand more from bosses were basic skills (literacies, if you will) that the people he worked with felt they needed. There were also more mundane skills that they taught each other, but importantly, the community identified the skills they needed to learn. Information literacy is a basic literacy that is fundamental to people living and working today and will only continue to grow in importance. Once you consider the flow of information a basic literacy, the urgency to develop information literacy programming and classes that empower people and instill critical reflection grows in intensity.

After the Charlottesville crisis, leaders across the country visibly struggled to find their feet as they worked to reconcile American ideals of free speech and free expression with the growing violence, unrest, and uncertainty in communities across the country. Libraries can be a powerful force during this time of turmoil. By providing communities with tools to develop their own educational ideas, problem solve, learn essential literacies, and challenge the status quo, we will move closer to meeting our professional ideal of libraries that embrace the “free exchange of different viewpoints” (Morales, 2017) and “advocate for the rights of socially excluded, marginalized, and underrepresented people, ... act[ing] in solidarity with all groups or individuals resisting attempts to abridge the rights of free expression and free access to ideas” (ALA Council, 2017). The lessons Horton learned and taught about empowering the disempowered through problem-based, student-centered, and co-developed curricula can serve as a powerful guide for librarians looking for ideas and practices to help them teach for a more democratic, equitable, and just society. 



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Working Class in the Library

by **Bob Schroeder**
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BOB SCHROEDER

Bob works at PSU library and instructs, and learns from, a lot of students, who like himself might be considered non-traditional or first-generation college students. These students inspire his research, and the more he researches, the more he seems able to encourage these students to see themselves as academics—to find their own voices, ask their own questions, and build a future aligned with their own visions of what might be.

Portland State University is an urban, access university. This means that students don't face nearly as many academic barriers, such as entrance exams, in order to attend PSU as opposed to other colleges. Nevertheless, students do encounter many hidden barriers that affect their chances of getting into, staying at, and graduating from PSU—barriers associated with race, gender, citizenship, abilities, and the topic of this article—socioeconomic status. We need to acknowledge that all of these characteristics intersect and play out differently, so it's hard to look at just one of these characteristics at a time. "Working class" isn't the same experience for students who identify as black or queer or immigrant or differently abled. By pulling on the thread of socioeconomic status, we can begin to unravel how many of these other characteristics weave together to form the warp and weft of students' experiences in college. We have to start somewhere, and starting where you are is just as good as anywhere else—but while keeping in mind that we have no way of knowing where our journey might take us. For example, I am from a working class background, but I started off from a much more privileged place because of my race—white—and my gender—male—than many other working class students. But urban access universities that have lower barriers to admission, like PSU and the ones I attended back in Michigan, do seem to be a magnet for working class students. When working with all students in the



library, but with working class students in particular, it is incumbent on us to understand, and perhaps even use in our own practice, critical theories and critical methods.

At PSU we also have various programs that support non-traditional students who come from groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Programs that I liaise with, such as Summer Bridge and McNair Scholars, are similar to programs that probably exist on your campuses to support these students. I've written about my involvement in these programs in an earlier issue of *OLA Quarterly*, so I won't detail that involvement here (Schroeder, 2014). Being involved with the students in these programs has been one of the most enriching and satisfying relationships I've had in academe—one that has helped me unravel my own journey through the education system over the last (almost) 60 years. It's those relationships and what they've taught me that I wish to concentrate on in this article. As I am an Instruction and Reference Librarian, those relationships have been forged in classrooms, in student consultations, and at the reference desk. I want to focus on the internal and reflective work that librarians can do that will help us create meaningful relationships with working class students—habits of mind and habits of practice that help instill agency in working class students.

A quote from an Aboriginal activist group in Queensland Australia from the 1970s really gets to the core of what I'm trying to say about relating and working with working class students:

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us
work together.”

Critical pedagogues such as bell hooks and Paolo Freire discuss and model this kind of relationship in their teaching. They offer to us that education is more than students just gaining the tools for success in a profession. Though of course we must realize that helping students to reach economic stability and success as they see it in their own terms is essential. We must validate those motives but also realize that those motives exist in constant conflict and dance with other, more liberatory and transformative goals of education.

One thing this mutual relationship means to me is that we try not to start our projects with working class students with a “deficit” mindset. Certainly, many of these students may not have had many of the economic and academic privileges and advantages of other students, but they also have many different skills and advantages going for them—they did make it into college after all! We need to trust the wisdom in all of the students in the classroom and enter into dialog with these students from the very beginning, rather than helicoptering in and colonizing them with only what we think might be useful. While we are certainly a resource in the classroom, we represent only one voice—and we need to constantly reflect and bring meta-cognition to bear on our actions and reactions in the classroom. We need to constantly ask ourselves—is what we are doing meeting the articulated needs of these students, or are we acting in our own best interests and merely replicating the power structures that exist in the academy and in the world?

How can these ideas really work in a classroom? I'll offer up a few examples. When you meet with students to teach them about the library and academic research, do you come in with a tightly scripted lesson? Or do you also create a space for students to teach you what



they need to know? I'm not saying that, as librarians, we don't all have expertise from what we've learned, and at some level we need to trust our own knowledge and position. Rather, I'm suggesting that in order to keep current and really know the questions that exist in the room, we need to invite students into dialog. If we only dialog about the ideas that I want, then dialog itself will not ameliorate the situation. It's only to the extent that student voices and questions surface that paternalism will be weakened and power will be shared—not perfectly, but more equitably. Emily Ford, a colleague of mine who read an early draft of this article, pointed out a contradiction in what I was suggesting here. Is my plan for my classes just another paternalistic way of helicoptering in and colonizing these students? Am I really acknowledging the unequal power dynamic between teacher and students in a classroom? I agree that I do have to be aware of my place of privilege and power in a classroom—this is undeniable. But what I'm attempting here is opening up my classroom to as large an extent as possible in order to share some of this power with students: getting students to see themselves more as active agents in the creation of the class. I'm not going to offer up a full course of challenging the system in 50 minutes, but I hope to be able to at least show glimmers of what might be.

I definitely come to class “prepared” with ideas I think might be useful to discuss, but I also start many of my lessons with questions. I ask the students to talk with their neighbors or in groups about what they want to know more about today: anything about using the library or its resources, about the research process in general, or any other thing about the university that *they* want to know more about. I give them four or five minutes, then I ask the group to tell me their questions, and I write them up on the board, letting the students know that this will be our lesson plan for the day—this is what we'll learn more about. I think this process begins to set the tone that I am valuing their input, and I'm modeling the idea that learning, for both the students and me, is a mutual and constructed thing. And truthfully, many of their questions are exactly what I had planned on talking about, though I find that they raise many new ones each term—and this is great! I'm learning with them at the same time; as Freire says, we are both teacher-students and student-teachers (Freire, 2000, p. 80). I make sure to validate students' questions and comment when they have ones I've never thought about, thanking them for teaching me more about their research needs. This method is especially helpful when working with traditionally underrepresented groups such as working class students, and it begins to validate for them, in a public space, the notion that *their* questions are valid academic questions—that they should feel empowered to ask them, and they should expect to get answers.

I've also done similar modifications to the traditional “library tour.” If you're like me, you mostly cringe when asked to provide one for new students. Maybe it's just me, but the students I've taken on tours look like they want to be anywhere else but trapped in the library with someone who can talk incessantly about the glories of microfiche and the map room! So I created a “student lead library tour.” I prompt groups of students to go out to a different floor of the library and take photos of anything they think might be helpful with their research, or things they find strange or weird and email me the photos (working in groups insures that at least a couple of students in each group have a cell phone). When the students return to the classroom, I pull up their photos and have them talk about what they found interesting or strange, and I chime in, too. This method validates their points of view and



interests and sets us up for another creative and dialogic learning space. By inviting them to find “strange” or weird” things I show them that finding things strange or weird in a university is normal—none of the systems of academe are natural or necessarily easy to understand.

Having, at least in part, a “critical” lens can be important when creating learning experiences for working class students. By critical lens, I mean some understanding of class, gender, race, or diverse abilities that comes from perspectives like Marxism, Queer Theory, Feminist Theory, or Critical Race Theory. I’m not saying one must accept a critical stance *personally*, but I think we need to understand them as valid ways of knowing, just like other ways of knowing in academe, in order to serve all of our students. This can be important for a variety of reasons. One is that these theories support asking critical questions in the classroom, such as questions about power. Questions like, “Why do we privilege peer-reviewed articles in school? Who benefits from paywalls, and who doesn’t? Who gets to make up subject heading to describe *other* people? Why doesn’t academic writing sound like how I talk? Why do textbooks cost so much?” These are valid questions and ones that will resonate with most working class students. If we don’t support really hard questions in the classroom, then what are we modeling for our students? Do we show them that there are questions, perhaps ones close to them, which they shouldn’t ask in the university? Are we really saying our teaching is about social replication of inequalities, rather than the possibility of transformation? The way we choose to approach issues of class in our classrooms or at the reference desk class ripples out into the university and society at large.

I have an example of my critical lens supporting a minority and working class student. I was consulting with a student, showing her databases to use for her research. I can’t remember exactly how we got on the subject, but as we were talking she mentioned how she was noticing a change in her thinking and how she related to her family and friends since she’d been in college. She was struggling with the idea of how “becoming academic” meant, for her, becoming “something else”—accepting values and ways of knowing and being that were from a different class and from a white perspective. She was very uncomfortable with being in this liminal space and was even mulling over the idea of moving to a different state in order to not feel like she was being pulled by these opposing cultural forces while in school. Understanding a bit about class and race in academe, I was able to talk with her and help her find some research on this very subject that she was deciding to research as well. She was able to surface some issues from her own life and enter into an already extant scholarly conversation on a topic of personal relevance.

I’m not saying that just because you are a working class student we should track you into a certain critical mode of research. Many working class students will have assignments and research that align more with traditional modes of inquiry. But sometimes students are researching a question that arises from their lived-experiences as working class or a question that resonates with a critical theory. I think we would be doing students a disservice to not know about and not show them one of the more interpretive ways of researching used by Marxist, queer, feminist, or critical theorists. As librarians who do reference and instruction work, we need to be cognizant of how much the university is really a “multiversity”—a multiverse of different ways of being and doing. Many disciplines that reply on feminist or queer or post-colonial theories utilize more than just plain vanilla, qualitative or quantitative, methodologies; methods such as participatory action research or autoethnography



or Indigenous research. Knowing about these different theories and methods allows us to connect to many of our teaching faculty colleagues and their students who are already looking through critical lenses. Most importantly, for working class students, whenever their questions revolve around issues of class, we will be in a position to support and validate them and their diverse and wonderful and needed research that is also truly academic. With this deliberate and conscious support, we are helping to reinforce students' agency and the possibilities of transformative education. 

This article is based on my part of an ACRL University Library Section panel discussion in the Webinar, "Library Services for Students from Disadvantaged Socio-Economic Backgrounds," August 1, 2017. Recording available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amSXjtERutg&feature=youtu.be>

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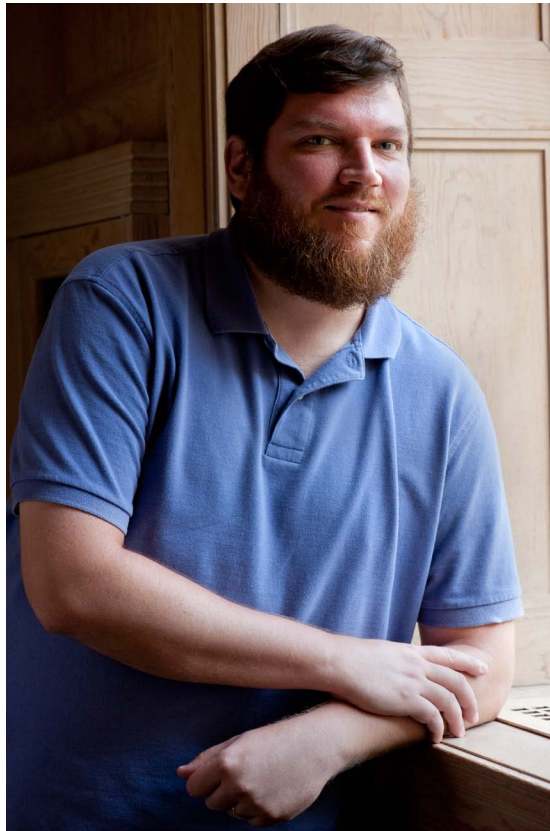
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Critically Interrogating Oregon History in the Archives: Spanish Heritage Learners in the PCUN Records

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Critical librarianship has emerged over the past decade or so as one of the main thrusts of the library profession's longstanding commitment to social justice. Growing from the application of insights from critical theory to libraries as an institution, the critical librarianship movement explores how hierarchies of power, particularly those around race, gender, sexuality, and class, shape our work, and how we can challenge our profession's complicity in those hierarchies. Critical librarianship's insights have been applied perhaps most thoroughly in the areas of cataloging and classification and, especially, information literacy instruction (Garcia, 2015). Critical information literacy instruction has spread rapidly through the library profession, and its influence is noticeable in the Association of College and Research Libraries' "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education" (2016), with its emphasis on critical examination of the construction of texts and their role within systems of power. Drawing on the critical pedagogy tradition of the Brazilian organizer and adult literacy educator Paolo Freire and the U.S.-based critical educational theorist Henry Giroux, critical information literacy instruction focuses on teaching as a dialectical process wherein the instructor is a facilitator in dialogue with their students, working with them in a process of critical interrogation of texts where all participants learn from one another's experience (Gage, 2004). Instructor and student work together to unpack the ways that their texts, be



they a primary source, a published scholarly study, or a searchable database, are shaped by and embedded in systems of power. This process facilitates critical thinking, but also, when done effectively, leads to an understanding of how institutions and structures of power function. From there, we can begin to challenge those structures of power through engagement in collective democratic struggle, confronting labor exploitation, disenfranchisement, denial of social services, and other injustices by participating in social movements that advocate for the students' communities.

Here at the University of Oregon (UO) I have applied insights from critical information literacy pedagogy, as well as the literature of History pedagogy and archival instruction, to work we perform with the Spanish Heritage Language Program (SHL) in the UO Department of Romance Languages. SHL is a program of courses for students who already have significant experience with Spanish, generally native speakers, but who have not had formal instruction in the language. Put simply, it is akin to the English instruction that universities have for native English speakers, only aimed at native Spanish speakers. The SHL program at the UO, however, builds in critical perspectives on the racism, gender relations, and class exploitation that U.S. Latinx communities have faced, and the ways that culture and language reinforce those systems of exploitation and power. The program embraces the language of U.S. Spanish speakers, including code switching and "Spanglish" usage that are frequently discouraged in more prescriptive language instruction programs. It encourages students to recognize their own language and culture as legitimate and, by critically examining the sociolinguistic roles of different registers (from the formally academic or professional to informal slang), to better understand, negotiate, and challenge cultural hierarchies of power. The texts used in the classes are drawn from as wide a range of U.S. and Latin American Spanish practice as possible, from high literature to popular culture (I guest lectured in one class about U.S. Latinx rock 'n' roll and punk rock, for example) to historical primary source materials. It is to this last subject that I will turn my focus.

The Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) at the UO Libraries houses several collections of primary sources on the history of Oregon's Latinx community. The largest and most extensive of these is the PCUN Records, the archives of the *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United, PCUN), a farmworker union based in Woodburn, Oregon. PCUN is the largest Latinx social movement organization in the state. The PCUN records document nearly 50 years of Latinx social movement organizing in the Willamette Valley, stretching from the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s–1970s up to this decade. The founders of PCUN had led the Willamette Valley Immigration Project, an immigrant legal aid organization active from 1977 to 1985, before expanding their work into labor and community organizing by founding PCUN in 1985. PCUN has been a strong advocate for Oregon's Latinx community throughout their existence and has helped to found many other social organizations, including Causa, Oregon's immigrant rights organization; the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation, which builds affordable housing for farmworkers; the CAPACES Leadership Institute, a youth leadership training and mentorship program; and KPCN-LP "Radio Movimiento," a low power FM radio station broadcasting from PCUN's union hall in Woodburn. PCUN has also been a consistent ally of other progressive organizations, teaming up with environmental organizations to challenge pesticides, aligning with fellow



Primary Source Questions Used in the PCUN Records Sessions

1. Look at the physical nature of your source. What can you learn from the form of the source? (Was it written on fancy paper in elegant handwriting, or on scrap-paper, scribbled in pencil?) What does this tell you?
2. Think about the purpose of the source. What was the author's message or argument? What was he/she trying to get across? Is the message explicit, or are there implicit messages as well?
3. How does the author try to get the message across? What words does he/she use to communicate their point?
4. What do you know about the author? Race, sex, class, occupation, religion, age, region, political beliefs? Does any of this matter? How?
5. Look at the above clues to determine: who constituted the intended audience? Was this source meant for one person's eyes, or for the public? How does that affect the source?
6. What can a careful reading of the text (even if it is an object) tell you? How does the language work? What are the important metaphors or symbols? What can the author's choice of words tell you? What about the silences—what does the author choose NOT to talk about?

labor unions, and working alongside Basic Rights Oregon to challenge anti-immigrant and homophobic legislation and ballot measures in Oregon during the 1990s (it is worth noting that that PCUN began working to uphold LGBTQ rights long before most of their fellow unions were willing to do so). As a collection containing many Spanish-language documents showing the history of democratic, community-based struggles by members of Oregon's Latinx community to challenge systems of racial hierarchy and class exploitation to which they have been subjected, the PCUN Records are an ideal base from which to draw texts for the type of critical pedagogical project that animates UO's SHL program.

Students come to the class with some preparation for the material, generally having read a short encyclopedia entry on PCUN (Woken, 2014) and excerpts from Lynn Stephen's short history of PCUN (Stephen, 2012) or Mario Sifuentez's history of farm labor in Oregon since WWII (Sifuentez, 2016). They then come to SCUA's classroom, where a selection of primary source documents in Spanish from the PCUN records as well as some photos, pins, flags, and other graphic materials and ephemera, are available to peruse. The students receive a brief introduction to SCUA and to archives in general before they are given a list of questions they will use to discuss the sources they see before them (see sidebar). They then work in groups of two or three to examine one of the selected texts, with the course instructor and myself there to answer questions. Discussion occurs in a fluid mix of English and Spanish. Students explore why the creators of their document chose certain language, taking into consideration the creator, audience, and other influences that would shape a document.

One fruitful piece from the collection that we use for every SHL class is a comic book written as an orientation for new union members, called *Somos la unión!* Some students immediately assume that the work is for children of farm-

workers. However, as they examine it they realize the material in it, which includes detailed discussions of how to respond to pesticide poisoning, discussions of how union contracts work, and the occasional swearing, is hardly appropriate for children, and so they begin to think about why PCUN might have chosen to use a comic rather than a purely text document. Since many farmworkers are not well educated and all of them work long, exhausting hours at physically taxing labor, a comic is an excellent choice, being easy to read in the little downtime farmworkers have and easy to share with their fellow workers. Another fundamental lesson for many of the students is the fact that, despite their marginalization in mainstream media and curriculum, the Latinx communities of Oregon have played a cru-



cial role in shaping the state we live in today and challenging the injustices they have faced throughout the state's history. Both for SHL students native to Oregon and those who came to UO from out of state and face the brutal culture shock that many people of color experience upon moving to Eugene, it can be powerful simply to have the life and history of Latinx people in Oregon centered in their education.

At the same time, as mentioned above, we approach the discussion as a dialectical process where we learn from our students. Many of the students are from Woodburn and have experience with PCUN, and so help to approach the lived experience of being part of the movement with their own memories of visiting the union hall and living the vibrant social and cultural life of the movement. Some students recognize friends and family in the photos from the archive and help us to fill in information that is not always obvious from the texts themselves. Many farmworkers in Oregon are not native Spanish speakers but rather communicate in Mixteco, Zapoteco, Triqui, or any number of other languages spoken in the indigenous communities of southern Mexico. Students have helped us to identify the languages used in some of the documents, as in the case of one student who helped to identify a Mixteco document when she recognized the phonetically spelled words her grandmother spoke when she was a child. In addition, the students' close reading of sources, informed by the details in the secondary sources they read before the class (Sifuentez (2016), based heavily in oral history, is particularly fruitful), have helped to further flesh out elements of documents that we otherwise may have missed. We instructors learn from our students' life experiences and so gain a richer understanding of the history we are preserving. At its best, the division between the (expert) instructor and the (amateur) student begins to break down as we learn through a mutual process to understand and appreciate the farmworker experience here in Oregon and to challenge received histories of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalist exploitation in favor of a bottom-up understanding of Oregon's history.

This is not to say that any of this process is easy. The ideal dialectical exchange between instructor and student does not always occur, putting us in constant dialectical engagement with our own practice. The SHL instructors and I are constantly adjusting our discussion plans as we go, tweaking our approaches to foster student leadership in the learning process. It can be a frustrating process, but the results are worth the struggle. Students have told us that they leave feeling that they have been presented with history relevant to their experience for the first time in the university, or even in all of their education. Students of color frequently feel alienated and isolated by an academy that remains steeped in whiteness, downplaying, misrepresenting, or erasing those students' experience even in the midst of declarations to uphold values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Critical pedagogical methods, which encourage students to interrogate the relations of power and exploitation within which knowledge is embedded, provide a means for marginalized communities to challenge the oppressive systems they face. As interest in critical pedagogy continues to grow within the library profession, we must continually challenge ourselves to ensure that the liberatory potential of these methods is not neutralized and that the foundation of challenging entrenched relations of power and exploitation does not become yet another empty statement of intent in our universities that remain in many ways based in institutions of white supremacy. The challenge critical pedagogy poses to us is to act in such a way that our students in turn challenge privilege and power, including that of the faculty at the university, so



that they can face the world as protagonists in their own struggle and, hopefully, change it in a just and equitable way. 

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Storytime Can Be Social Justice Time

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Natasha is a Youth Librarian at the Multnomah County Library's Hollywood location and serves as the Chair of OLA's Children's Services Division. In her professional life, she does programming and reader's advisory for kids ages birth–18 and the adults who raise and teach them. This includes storytimes for babies through preschoolers and moderating two family graphic novel book groups: one for grades 2–3 and one for grades 4–5, plus their favorite adults. She's a member of the Amelia Bloomer Project committee for ALA's Feminist Task Force, and when not actively librarianship she plays board games, walks her dogs, searches for the perfect taco, and hoards comic books like a dragon hoards gold.

A great philosopher* once said, “I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.” Libraries have long held this belief, with records dating back to the 1800s showing a history of U.S. public libraries offering materials, services, and programs that support language acquisition and literacy specifically aimed at children (History and Traditions). Providing age-appropriate storytimes aligned with research-supported early literacy strategies is a cornerstone of that belief.

But storytimes are not just about getting young children ready for the educational aspects of school. Storytimes are an amazing opportunity to give children world knowledge outside their own experiences and to model for adults how to be aware of and inclusive in their children's early learning. As author Grace Lin states in her [TED Talk](#), “as much as kids need books to be mirrors, kids also need books to be windows; kids who always see themselves in books need to be able to see things from other viewpoints. How can we expect kids to get along with others in this world, to empathize, and to share if they never see outside themselves?” Many parents say that part of the appeal of storytimes is the opportunity to interact with other children and families. Storytimes are when many children meet families from different races, cultures, and countries of origin, either in person or through the pages of the books read to them.

Many libraries throughout the state offer storytimes in Spanish, Russian, and other languages. My library system offers storytimes in five languages as well as culturally-responsive and adaptive programs such as Black Storytime and Sensory Storytime for children on the autism spectrum and/or with sensory processing disorders. While these are good-faith efforts, I believe we can do more. Families attending any library storytime should feel seen, heard, and included even if it's not a special storytime aimed at their specific situation. We owe it to our patrons and the kids we serve to think critically about what we offer and to always do better.

I'm not sure when I started consciously thinking about how to make sure inclusivity and the opportunity to see mirrors and windows were parts of my



storytimes. Was it the day I had planned to do a 10 Little Monkeys finger play and realized that wouldn't be as easily accomplished by the child in storytime that day who had six fingers total? Was it the day it hit me that every book I read that storytime featured a two-parent household with one stay-at-home mom and one leaves-for-work dad, even though that isn't the experience of many kids in my community? Was it the day I acknowledged that *We Were Tired of Living in a House*, while a book I love, was kind of tone deaf to read in a community experiencing huge increases in homelessness? I can't pinpoint a time or a place, but all those experiences started to add up.

Lucky for me, the library world is a generous and always evolving community, and other people had those thoughts long before I did and had ideas about how to address those concerns. If your interest is piqued and you're looking for a starting place, I highly recommend the Storytime Underground's (SU) excellent [Storytime for Social Justice Toolkit](#) (Storytime Underground, 2017). If you aren't familiar with the term "social justice," the commonly accepted definition of the term means the fair and equitable distribution of privilege and opportunities, which is basically at the core of each and every library's mission. The toolkit has tons of book suggestions for preschool and school-aged storytimes, as well as extension activities and discussion points. What storytime provider doesn't love a new flannel board or song to share?

One of the other resources on the SU page is a [list of questions](#) (Storytime Underground, 2017) to ask yourself about inclusivity, and all of us library folks love a good question, right? For some of us, it's never occurred to us to consider questions like these. For some of us, these questions might be uncomfortable to think about and hard to answer. For some of us, we've thought about them but not really delved in deep to find answers. The important part is that we take an opportunity to think about them now, asking questions such as:

- What is your favorite storytime book featuring a main character of color?
- What was the last story you read aloud about Native people that was NOT a "myth, legend, or folktale?"
- What do you do when you don't have diverse books that fit your theme?
- What are ways of modeling or encouraging compassion, kindness, and empathy in storytime? How do we make it easy to continue this practice at home?
- How would you speak with an adult who took issue with reading a book that included a gay couple in storytime?

Remember how I mentioned some might be uncomfortable to think about? Each time I look through them, I find one that stretches my comfort zone or makes me ponder a situation that I haven't dealt with yet but would like to prepare for in case it happens. My favorite question to come back to over and over again is this: What mistakes have you learned from?

There are a lot of other riches available online as well. The ALA has great booklists to help you include [LGBTQ materials](#) in your storytimes. Canada's Burnaby Public Library offers [songs in 15 languages](#) (Embracing Diversity) as well as suggestions and tips for using them in culturally-aware and inclusive ways. Head Start has a [guide to selecting culturally responsive children's books](#). This [Tennessee State Library and Archives program](#) offers ways to include children with visual impairments. The [Bryce Don't Play blog](#) addresses ableism in the library with many suggestions that apply to storytimes.



At this point I can hear a few people grumbling that they don't have the time, energy, or money to overhaul their storytime practices, and the fabulous news is that I'm not advocating for major changes! I'm advocating for all of us to ask ourselves and other storytime providers some questions and to take action based on our personal answers. I'm asking all of us to acknowledge that the way we've always done things isn't always the best way, the most welcoming way, or the most inclusive way. I'm asking us to do the work to make sure we're doing right by our communities, even the ones we don't think we see inside our walls.

With the help of the resources above and many others, I'm making changes to my own storytimes. I am not an expert in storytime inclusivity. I don't think anyone can BE an expert in storytime inclusivity. But what I am and what we all can be is a storytime provider willing to make some changes, make some mistakes, think about some practices, listen to other people tell their stories, and make more changes ... wash, rinse, repeat. I've reached out to other storytime providers from around the country in person and online, and I've started to gather some tips, some of which I'll share below. These are not "the way" to do inclusivity in storytimes, they are just ways that I'm trying and adapting, and I encourage you to try what works for you and come up with new ideas (and then share them with the rest of us!).

Here are some basic changes I've made:

- Make nametags (stickers) for everyone in the room, including grownups, and when two people have the same first initial, point that out as a simple connection. "Oh, look, Jasper and Josefina both have the same first letter in their names! Jasper's J sounds like 'juh' and Josefina's sounds like 'huh' but they both look the same. How cool!"
- Be mindful about the books you choose, and look for more than just ethnic diversity, considering family make-up (one-parent? Multiple generations in one house?) or home diversity (House? Apartment?) or gender make-up (Do only boys do action? Do only girls take care of dolls/pets/other people?).
- Try out your ink colors ahead of time on different skin tones if you give kids hand stamps at the end of your storytimes. A recent online thread indicated dark red, dark black, dark blue, and metallic colors can work well on a variety of skin tones, while other storytimes chose to do stickers to avoid the issue.
- Even if your book doesn't have a lot of racial diversity, extension activities such as flannel boards or puppet play around the book can. A co-worker recommends getting a multi-ethnic puppet pack comparable to [this](#).
- Give kids options when doing fingerplays and movement activities. Let them tap the floor (or their leg or their wheelchair) instead of clapping their hands, or have them raise their hands instead of stomping their feet, as appropriate.
- Avoid using phrases like, "Everyone has 10 fingers and 10 toes," even if everyone who happens to be in that room at that time does. Instead use more open questions such as, "How many fingers do you have? Help your grown up count your own and theirs."

The library community and especially library staff who work with young children have long embraced the idea that we help teach children and give them the skills to lead the way. Those skills don't just include letter knowledge or phonological awareness, but also sharing, recognizing and respecting differences, and learning self-control. To quote the Storytime Underground Social Justice toolkit, "We have the ability to teach our kids



compassion, empathy, and critical thinking skills. We introduce them to diversity and culture they may not come across otherwise. Our children will be leaders *someday*, and we can help them become thoughtful, kind, and open minded human beings. Storytime matters. Libraries matter. We matter.” 

**If you did not recognize the opening lyrics to The Greatest Love of All, there is a good chance you are not an aficionado of ‘80s pop hits. And while Whitney Houston might not be recognized as a great philosopher, I think we can all agree she had a great set of pipes (as did George Benson, the original singer).*

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Resources

Multicultural puppets <http://tinyurl.com/yb5y46um>



Critical Library Management: Administrating for Equity

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Introduction

Starting with the August 2016 NFL pre-season, Colin Kaepernick sat during the singing of the National Anthem. It was a simple act that carried great significance. He was refusing to pledge allegiance to a country that actively oppresses people of color. The protest continued into the regular football season, and it drew national attention. When first asked about the protest, he said:



I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder. (Wyche, 2016)

He soon moved to a bended knee, rather than sitting, to continue his protest while showing respect for members of the military who defend the country. Inspired by his action, other professional athletes followed his example. Some athletes also kneeled and some raised their fists. In one example, an entire team linked arms during the anthem. On September 4, 2016, professional soccer player Megan Rapinoe also took a knee during the anthem, later describing her decision as being:

... very intentional. It was a little nod to Kaepernick and everything that he's standing for right now. I think it's actually pretty disgusting the way he was treated and the way that a lot of the media has covered it and made it about something that it absolutely isn't. We need to have a more thoughtful, two-sided conversation about racial issues in this country. Being a gay American, I know what it means to look at the flag and not have it protect all of your liberties. It was something small that I could do and something that I plan to keep doing in the future and hopefully spark some meaningful conversation around it. It's important to have white people stand in support of people of color on this. We don't need to be the leading voice, of course, but standing in support of them is something that's really powerful. (Halloran, 2016)

Within a month of the protest starting, Kaepernick was on the cover of *Time* magazine. His defiance of the national anthem was immediately controversial and perceived as divisive. While Kaepernick's jersey quickly became the top selling jersey on the NFL's website, he was also voted the most disliked player in the league by NFL fans. On one side, Kaepernick is lauded as a hero fighting for social justice. On the other side, the protests are seen as un-American and disrespectful of police and military forces. Peter King, a Republican Congressman from Iowa, compared Kaepernick to the jihadist militant group ISIS. When confronted with uncomfortable conversations about oppression and privilege, it seems that his critics would rather look away and place blame on the protestor rather than what he is protesting.

The act at the heart of the protest was simple: Kaepernick placed his knee to the ground. But it was a tremendously brave act. He had millions of eyes on him, as NFL games remain one of the most popular televised events. He risked his job. Today he remains unsigned and there is speculation that he is being punished for his political beliefs. He saw injustice, and he took a stand. And library managers need to follow his example.

At its base, a library is a community organization. That community could be a neighborhood, a grade school, or a college campus. In order to best serve our communities, we must understand their needs, and both the positive and the negative influences on the community. The same macro-level issues that Kaepernick was protesting on a national level affect our libraries on the micro-level. We live in a country where minority communities face a multitude of overt and systemic forms of oppression: higher rates of incarceration, police harassment, job discrimination, and the environmental degradation of communities of color and individuals living in poverty; lack of state-enforced protection against job and housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identities. Injustice is at



the forefront of our current events as we see Black Lives Matter continue the fight for civil rights, the community of Flint, Michigan, go without clean drinking water, and Standing Rock fight for autonomy and protection against an unjust pipeline. When patrons walk into our libraries, this is the world they walk in from. Oppression in our communities is oppression against our library patrons. As library staff, we need to critically examine our professional practice. Does our work uphold systems of oppression? Do we offer respite? Do we offer a path towards liberation? Far too often, American libraries reinforce the legacy of oppression in America. We can find examples of this in our history (less than a generation ago, many libraries were segregated, with separate collections and buildings for white and black patrons) as well as how we organize library material (such as using outdated, problematic subject headings).

Every day, librarians have a choice: they can uphold the status quo, or they can choose to occupy a place of discomfort and fight against the status quo. Colin Kaepernick chose to fight. His action was bold and it cost him his job. But he has contributed to a long standing conversation about oppression in America and he has brought that conversation back into mainstream media. Librarians have often held up the status quo, oftentimes unknowingly but also because we have been afraid to take a bold step and resist oppression. Kaepernick could have stood by his teammates, with his hand over his heart, and simply played ball. But he chose to resist. Library managers, like Kaepernick, have a high level of visibility. And we have the opportunity to set policy and influence organizational culture. By moving toward a more just management practice we will move toward more just libraries and hopefully will contribute to the creation of more just communities. This article will define critical theory and use it as a framework for how we can continue to push against the status quo and to move libraries in the direction of liberation and equality.

Critical Theory in the Library

Critical theory is a framework for understanding social structures and social phenomena by examining struggles between domination and liberation. It is a critical way of looking at the world through the lens of power: who has the power, who doesn't have power, and what are the consequences of this dynamic. Rather than being a singular theory, critical theory is composed of many theory structures. One of the early examples of critical theory is class theory, developed in the first half of the 20th century. Class theory examined who owned the means of production, who had to sell their labor power to obtain resources, and how did these power imbalances affect the development of society. Growing from class theory, post-colonial theory examined the human consequences of external control and economic exploitation of native people and their lands. Critical race theory is a theoretical framework in the social sciences and humanities that is focused on the application of critical theory, a critical examination of society and culture, to the intersection of race and power. Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of gender inequality; it examines women's and men's social roles, experience, interests, division of labor, and feminist politics. Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women's studies, debunking the long established and rigid roles of the different sexes, genders, and sexualities, promoting the notion that gender and sexualities exist on a spectrum, that gender identity and sexuality bear no inherent relation to each other and that value judgements based on orientations and identities are regressive and dangerous. Looking back at the different examples of critical theory frameworks, it appears that each one grows out of the theories that came before it.



Each of these examples has at its core the concepts and practice of questioning the dominant power structure.

The incorporation of critical theory and the practice of questioning dominant power structures into librarianship is growing, from conversations on social media to recently published articles and even entire conferences. We can see different ways that librarians and library staff incorporate critical theory into their daily practice. Perhaps the most ubiquitous incorporation of critical theory into library practice is through library instruction. There is a growing movement among teaching librarians who use a critical theory lens to influence both what they teach and how they teach. By using critical theory to influence their teaching methods, they have the ability to reach more students and help those students think critically about the world they live in. Teaching librarians will take critical theory into consideration when designing lesson plans, ensuring that they are not contributing to an invisible barrier that is traditionally built by oppression. Another example of how library practitioners implement critical theory is through the organization and access of our information. In one recent example, librarians successfully petitioned the Library of Congress to change the subject heading of “Illegal alien” to “Noncitizen” (Peet, 2016). This act sends an important message that the library profession recognizes the fact that people cannot be illegal and hopefully makes the library a more welcoming place. A third example of critical theory applied to the library setting is the growing movement recognizing the importance of getting diverse books into children’s collections. Oftentimes a child’s first time interacting with a person who is different from them is through their reading material. Books allow all readers to see the world through another person’s perspective, leading to an increased level of empathy. Diverse books are also safe ways to help children understand the various levels of inequality that exist in our society.

One area of librarianship where the practical application of critical theory is greatly needed is library management. The conversation about power structures has not been deeply incorporated into library management practice, in part because traditional management upholds traditional hierarchies. The earliest forms of management in Western industrial societies chiefly entailed controlling workers and driving profits. While there have been great improvements in working conditions over the past two centuries, more modern forms of management still uphold hegemonic cultural norms. If you do a Google image search for the word “management,” the search results will overwhelmingly be comprised of white men in business suits (N.B. when doing a Google image search of librarian, while the results are almost entirely female, they photo are all of white people which reflects the overwhelming whiteness of our profession). Managers in the library are in a key role to affect the overall tone and direction of the organizations they serve. Managerial tasks include recruitment and hiring, conducting performance reviews, writing and implementing policies and leading strategic planning processes. By applying critical theory frameworks to these tasks, managers will help their organizations move away from traditional and structural forms of oppression.

Critical Library Administration in Practice

We have so many thoughts and hopes and fears about what it means to be a library manager in the United States in 2017, but mostly we have questions. Will we continue to have funding? Will national policies affect how we view hate speech and is there even such thing as a “safe space?” How will the Trump Administration’s policies affect the educational system? How do we best support communities who have been ravaged by systemic poverty, ha-



tred, violence, and natural disasters while continuing to maintain our own mental health? As managers burdened with all of these uncertainties, one piece of the puzzle that we can actively control is the creation of policies and frameworks that support our staff and patrons in doing social justice work. If we are serious about creating systemic change, managers must recognize our position of power in library organizations and make a commitment to making sure people have the tools and support required in working towards equity. Management is both about human interactions and systems of power (Branum, 2017), and we must be intentional in creating systems to ensure this work is prioritized and funded, and that our staff is supported.

DIVERSITY PROJECTS AND POLICIES

At its core, “diversity” focuses on modifying, not dismantling, the white dominant paradigm; in particular, diversity allows dominant groups the privilege of not having to think about how they inherently own a space, while the differing experiences of “other” groups become a point of focus. Additionally, diversity itself does not solve the problems of institutional racism. As librarians working in an overwhelmingly white profession, confronting racism is not just about ensuring that our workplaces are racially and ethnically diverse. We are called on to begin the process of examining that Whiteness and dismantling the structures that are explicitly or implicitly preventing people from historically marginalized groups from having support structures and power, from having their voices heard and respected, and from having the opportunity to lead (Brook, Ellenwood, & Lazzaro, 2015; Galvan, 2015).

Although our profession is built upon white values (Brook, Ellenwood, & Lazzaro, 2015; Galvan, 2015; Honma, 2005), librarians have done an excellent job in promoting multicultural communities through displays and programming. From bilingual storytime to learning about a community’s cultural heritage and oral traditions (LaTronica, 2014), this is something libraries have thrived at; although simple displays and programming are really the low-hanging fruit, there remains real value in seeing oneself reflected in the library community. Mathuews (2016, p. 10) notes that diversity is important, as it focuses on representation and visibility, but “... social justice takes this line of thinking beyond simple representation to a more complex view of systems. Social justice seeks to ensure that all people participate in and benefit equally from a system.” Additionally, diversity projects are often viewed as a sidebar to our “real” work. The real fact is that inequity affects not only us as individuals, but also our patrons and communities, and our missions and policies should address this.

For library managers and administrators, this will require you to not only look back at your current policies and make (sometimes substantial) changes, but also to create new frameworks. Good intentions do not create change—we do. We create change through policy, metrics and assessment. We investigate how our policies or space might be upholding white, heteronormative cultural values, and then we create action plans to address those issues. Using formalized policies and assessment will also create a system of accountability; by tracking and assessing our progress, we can see what we’ve done, what is working, and what is not. Systemic models for change such as Jackson and Holvino’s Multicultural organizational development model (Holvino, 2008) or other organizational frameworks for social justice are generally implemented institution-wide, but libraries can also create department-specific plans and use the strategic planning process to investigate and address specific needs.



Mission statements frame our values as an organization, and explicitly stating a commitment to equity will frame social justice work as a central tenet of what we do. Depending on the size and level of bureaucracy at your institution, this may be a complicated process. The rewards can be high, though: the process of reviewing and changing mission statements not only helps us formalize our values, but can be empowering for all parties engaged in this work. It sets the tone and creates expectations around the work we do and what we expect of one another.

Action Plan for Critical Library Policies:

Creating policy can be a painstaking process when you are being reactionary or otherwise forced to make changes. But the process can be really empowering (and dare I say fun?) when we create policy on our own terms that supports our library's values.

- Review your mission statement. If it doesn't directly address equity and social justice, and if it doesn't use explicitly anti-racist language, then work on changing it.
- Complete a climate assessment study. This will help identify what issues are most important to your stakeholders, and pinpoint areas where you are deficient. For an example, see [Portland Community College's campus climate assessment results](#).
- Assessing services. Though we don't frame it as such, UX is social justice work in action. We must ensure that our services can be utilized by those that are differently abled, but also investigate how our policies or space might be upholding normative values that can make people feel like they don't belong.
- Formalize social justice work by building it into strategic plans and creating diversity plans. Rather than devaluing diversity initiatives as side-projects, they become integrated into our everyday work. See *ARL's SPEC Kit 319: Diversity Plans and Programs* (Maxey-Harris & Anaya, 2010) for concrete examples of formalized diversity initiatives that have been utilized at a number of institutions; the University of Montana also documented their process in creating a campus-wide diversity initiative (Edwards, 2015).

VOCALIZING SUPPORT

The shootings of black Americans by law enforcement officers is a national epidemic. It is affecting our society in ways that we cannot even comprehend right now, re-traumatizing people of color every time a new injustice is perpetuated. The number of ICE arrests of undocumented noncriminals has doubled under the Trump Administration (Sacchetti, 2017), which also continues to push for a partial travel ban that specifically targets predominantly Muslim countries. Most recently, Trump announced a ban on transgender people serving in the U.S. military and has decided to let Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) expire, leaving the fates of nearly 800,000 children of undocumented immigrants to Congress. People of color and members of the LGBTQ community have legitimate concerns for their physical safety, and rather than working to ameliorate those fears, national policies are exacerbating them.

After the election of Donald Trump and the rise of racialized incidents on college campuses, Kim Bohyun wrote:

Sometimes, saying isn't much. But right now, saying it aloud can mean everything. If you support those who belong to minority groups but don't say it out loud, how would they know it? Because right now, nothing is obvious other than there is a lot of hate and violence towards minorities (Bohyun, 2016).

As library managers, this means that we have to be deliberate and explicit when it comes to making our support of targeted groups known. It requires not only the condemnation of white supremacy, sexism, and homophobia, but also vocalizing our commitment to creating and maintaining safer spaces. Many academic library directors have made public state-

ments; the public statement posted by 86 members of the University of Oregon's staff and faculty is an excellent example:

In this time of increasing polarization of worldviews and escalating acts of aggression against members of marginalized groups, we the undersigned staff, faculty, and administrators in the UO Libraries wish to express our solidarity with students, faculty, and staff who advocate for the protection of human rights. We stand with those who oppose bigotry, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, ableism, and sexual predation and assault. We affirm that social injustices and oppression of people are wrong, and are a danger to the open, respectful environments we need to carry out our university and library missions (Open Letter to the UO Community, 2016).

In vocalizing our support for equitable systems, one critical point that we can't ignore is that the very nature of systemic racism makes this work easier for white people, while there are very real risks for people of color. Colin Kaepernick's bending of the knee was a simple physical motion, but the act itself was extremely loaded; as a black man in America, this was an act of bravery and defiance, one that many would argue lost him his career. People of color are often seen as rabble-rousers if they question administration, their concerns dismissed as being overly sensitive and their behaviors viewed as aggressive. In a profession like librarianship, which we know to be overwhelmingly white, people of color often have limited space to speak up and push boundaries for fear of reprisal, while white librarians are given the benefit of the doubt about their motives.

Intentionally or not, libraries uphold power imbalances that exist in American society; sometimes this is blatant discrimination such as historically segregated libraries in the south, but most often this plays out as microaggressions. Kaepernick, an individual black man, was punished for kneeling. But when hundreds of NFL players, coaches and owners linked arms or kneeled together on September 24th, it was a powerful demonstration of solidarity. Those who chose to kneel were not punished for stepping out of line because the league stood together. There is something librarians can learn from these athletes—one person speaking out is an act of rebelliousness, but a community standing in support of that person is an insurrection.

LISTENING, OWNING UP TO OUR MISTAKES, & LEARNING

In our efforts to assert ourselves as leaders, one skill that is sometimes neglected is the skill of shushing ourselves. In outlining seven truths about doing critical race work, April Hathcock (2016) states that not only are white librarians guaranteed to screw up, but that this means you will (deservedly) be the target of "anger/hurt/frustration/wrath of the people of color you've offended." We librarians are a fearful bunch—fearful of losing jobs, losing support, and for white librarians in particular, fearful of being called out for being racist if we mess up. When we experience criticism (especially if we feel our actions were coming from a good place), it hurts, and our initial instincts are often to defend ourselves. This is not productive; rather, we must listen to those we wronged, understand our mistakes, and work to make it right. Hathcock notes that this work is intersectional, and can be applied to other ally work; whether we are supporting and advocating for LGBTQ folk, rural communities, or for those who are differently abled, we are bound to make mistakes. The work of taking



critique is difficult, but by listening, learning, and making changes, we will also experience joy and fulfillment in our journey to become better humans and allies.

In Conclusion, Libraries Resist

We are living through a political period when it is essential that critical theory and social justice frameworks are incorporated into library management practice. Donald Trump's presidency is proving to be overtly racist and oppressive. His chaotic administration is inspiring neo-Nazis and white supremacists to march openly in the street, calling for the creation of a nation based on the exclusion of non-white communities, and the "Make America Great Again" platform has obvious roots in racism, patriarchy, misogyny, and xenophobia. Libraries need to be a haven for our most vulnerable library patrons: folks from Muslim communities; immigrants and refugees; transgender, genderqueer, and queer individuals; and our homeless community members. These library patrons will not only experience overt discrimination via official policy from the Trump administration, but could also be the victims of violence by hate groups who are emboldened by the administration.

Library managers wield influence and small changes can have great consequences. While Kaepernick's act of bending the knee was deceptively simple, many of the critical library management procedures we recommended in this article are relatively simple. They may lead to uncomfortable conversations, but growth and change often come from discomfort. Let us use our privilege as library managers to ensure the promotion of justice, equity, and liberation. 🐘

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OLA Quarterly Publication Schedule 2017

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