Cultural Competence in Library Instruction: A Reflective Practice Approach

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abstract: As campuses become more culturally diverse, instruction librarians must work toward developing cultural competence. While the library science literature has discussed cultural competence, no scholars have directly connected it to instruction librarians’ teaching. This article discusses literature, models, and best practices from related disciplines and applies them to a customized workflow grounded in reflective practice, the process of thinking about and reflecting on what you do. The workflow identifies opportunities for intentional preparation, instructional design and delivery, assessment, and reflection. By considering cultural competence at each stage of the teaching process, instruction librarians will be better prepared to connect with and teach students from a variety of backgrounds.

Introduction

As colleges and universities become more global and strive to create inclusive environments for all learners, they must address cultural differences. Each student brings to the classroom his or her personal cultural background, including norms, behaviors, and values. The ability to teach students from a variety of cultures is now critical to the success of any instructional initiative. As campuses continue to change and develop, however, librarianship has remained a predominantly white profession with a mandate to serve all patrons.1

Cultural competence is an essential foundation for instruction in a globalized world. The National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., defines culturally competent organizations as having “the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve.” Cultural competence permeates all levels of
decision-making and practice. It is a “developmental process” that demands reflection, flexibility, and adaptability.²

This article operationalizes cultural competence for academic librarians with instruction responsibilities. It discusses literature, models, and best practices from related disciplines and applies them to a customized workflow grounded in reflective practice that considers the unique circumstances and constraints of one-shot instruction. The workflow identifies opportunities for intentional preparation, instructional design and delivery, assessment, and reflection. By holistically evaluating their instructional practice, instruction librarians will be better prepared to connect with and teach students from different backgrounds.

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Literature Review

The author consulted a variety of disciplines to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of cultural competence. Throughout the literature review, the terms cultural competence, intercultural competence, and cross-cultural competence are used interchangeably to address the core tenets of cultural competence, with deference given to the term the authors used in their scholarship.

Behavioral Sciences

Soon Ang, Linn Van Dyne, and Christine Koh identified personality traits that predict cultural intelligence. The researchers used a well-known personality test, the Personality Characteristics Inventory, and an inventory of the four factors of cultural intelligence to test for correlation.³ The results highlighted the importance of openness, finding that a desire to learn and experience new things is strongly related to all elements of cultural intelligence.⁴

Several researchers discussed the relationship between cultural competence and organizational change. Ethnographic case studies, in which investigators closely observe the activities of members of an organization as they move toward cultural competence, provided critical evidence needed to strengthen these theories. Erica Foldy and Tamara Buckley argued that change processes related to culture and ethnicity can be emotionally fraught, due to “primal feelings including shame, anger, and despair” tied to the history of oppression of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States.⁵ Successful interventions recognize emotions and give employees the opportunity to work “through their fears.”⁶ By embracing tension, organizations enhance their employees’ ability to discuss and process complex issues, develop their cultural knowledge, and gain cultural competence.⁷ Bernardo Ferdman identified what he called “three core paradoxes” that can make inclusion difficult: self-expression and identity, boundaries and norms, and safety and comfort. Managing these paradoxes can deepen an organization’s understanding of what it means to be truly inclusive.⁸
Cross-Cultural Psychology

Much of the research in cross-cultural psychology focuses on traits and strategies that increase the quality of cross-cultural relations. Karen van der Zee and Jan Pieter van Oudenhoven developed a theoretical framework to discuss the correlation of personality and intercultural success. Individuals with high levels of social-perceptual traits, such as cultural empathy, open-mindedness, and social initiative, will more likely find intercultural encounters challenging instead of threatening. Jessie Wilson, Colleen Ward, and Ronald Fischer performed a meta-analysis of literature based on the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale, an instrument designed to measure the subject’s ability to negotiate the social demands of a new cultural environment. They found that both personality and situational variables impact the ability to learn cultural competence skills and predict a person’s sociocultural adaptation abilities.

Meta-knowledge of culture guides communicative behaviors. Angela Leung, Sau-lai Lee, and Chi-yue Chiu found that, when interacting with members of the same culture, participants framed their descriptions based on what they assumed their peers knew. When communicating with noncultural peers, participants provided more detailed, lengthier descriptions and reframed them based on assumptions of lack of prior knowledge.

Winston Sieck, Jennifer Smith, and Louise Rasmussen examined metacognitive strategies for solving cross-cultural scenarios by thinking aloud with participants who had varying levels of expertise. Novices and laypeople would more likely find a solution without delving past a surface-level interpretation of the described behavior. Experts would more likely challenge assumptions, consider alternative interpretations, mention culture in their explanations, and suspend judgment while interpreting the scenario.

Communications

Lily Arasaratnam and Smita Banerjee proposed that an intrinsic desire to seek out new experiences motivates some people to interact with individuals from different cultures. Ethnocentrism, the belief that one’s own group is superior, was negatively correlated with a desire for new experiences and with intercultural communication skills.

Gina Barker conducted a series of interviews with Americans living in Sweden and Swedes living in the United States to delve into how “acculturating individuals” obtain and apply intercultural communication competence. Several differences in cross-cultural communication, such as a willingness to communicate in public, argumentativeness, and tendencies toward self-disclosure, impacted individuals’ ability to apply long-held communication behaviors in their new environs. In addition, whether people had learned and adopted in-depth knowledge of “cultural features” and practices influenced their success at intercultural communication.
Hee Sun Park, Timothy Levine, Rene Weber, Hye Eun Lee, Lucia Terra, Isabel Botero, Elena Bessarabova, Xiaowen Guan, Sachio Shearman, and Marc Stewart Wilson found a statistically significant connection between cultural variations and directness of communication. Most variation in communication style takes place on an individual level. However, challenges in collecting data from multiple countries potentially impacted the study's reliability.

Higher Education

Faculty and Teaching

Daniele Flannery argued in favor of modifying adult learning theory to incorporate emancipatory pedagogy, which seeks to reflect on and reform existing power structures and injustices. By embracing learners’ cultures and social context, respecting cultural and personal differences without encouraging competition, making room for oft-ignored voices, and understanding that teaching is a political activity that can contribute to justice for the oppressed, instructors can create learning environments that empower diverse learners. Establishing an inclusive learning environment based on “respect, understanding, and empathy” and facilitating a reciprocal learning relationship between student and teacher can lead to the construction of truth and knowledge that contains multiple perspectives.

Alicia Chávez critiqued the current body of research on teaching across cultures in higher education, stating that researchers focused too much on cross-cultural interrelation between students and faculty. The research lacks substantive, empirical analysis of teaching and learning across cultures; elementary and secondary education researchers lead this field of study.

Data from Indiana University’s Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, designed to measure faculty expectations of student engagement in educational practices linked with high levels of learning and development, indicated that most faculty tried to be mindful of inclusivity. Considerations included students, pedagogy, developing inclusive classroom environments, assessment, and modifications of the course content based on student learning needs. Less than 50 percent of faculty stated that they engaged in self-examination or adopted inclusive attitudes toward the course goals, content, and theoretical perspectives. However, most faculty supported creating inclusive learning environments and empowering students through class participation. Alain De Beuckelaer, Filip Lievens, and Joost Bücker examined the relationship between cross-cultural competencies and student perceptions of teaching quality. Cross-culturally competent faculty received higher marks when interacting with diverse students. In addition, cross-culturally competent faculty had high levels of cultural empathy and open-mindedness. Students who shared the same culture as a faculty member could recognize when a lack of cultural competence hindered an instructor’s ability to interact with culturally diverse students.

Stephen Quaye and Sean Harper argued that faculty members should respond to student requests for diverse learning experiences by embracing culturally inclusive pedagogy. They suggested that faculty review one another’s syllabi and provide feed-
back on the diversity of their course content. Engaging in reflective practice can result in self-awareness regarding the connection between personal attitudes, prior knowledge, and teaching behavior. Potential strategies for incorporating intercultural competence into professional development include curricular and instructional reviews, professional development focusing on intercultural competence in both the personal and instructional realms, and evaluating intercultural skills during performance appraisals.

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### Students and Learning

Patricia Gurin, Eric Dey, Sylvia Hurtado, and Gerald Gurin found a consistent, positive relationship between diversity experiences and student learning outcomes. In their national study, informal interactions between diverse students had a significant positive impact on intellectual engagement and self-assessed academic skills. Matthew Mayhew, Gregory Wolniak, and Ernest Pascarella determined that students who had positive diversity experiences with their peers in class had an increased need for cognition. Negative diversity experiences with peers in the classroom had a major negative impact on need for cognition. The results indicated that teaching practices promoting lifelong learning had positive impacts on all students in the sample, not just specific subgroups. Robert Sidelinger found that proactivity and a sense of control over one’s learning were strong predictors of in-class and out-of-class student involvement.

Higher education research has a dearth of studies that define diversity beyond race and ethnicity; April Yee’s research examines socioeconomic differences. First-generation students were more independent when it came to their studies and less likely to reach out to faculty or student academic support services for assistance. Middle-class students used a dual-pronged approach that employed independent study strategies and seeking out help. Through interactive engagement, middle-class students obtain valuable cultural capital that increases their likelihood of academic success. First-generation students who are self-reliant risk being viewed as “disengaged, passive, and apathetic by faculty.” Structured opportunities for interpersonal contact, embedded services, and proactive academic support services might help to reach less proactive students.

### Social Work Education

In 2015, the National Association of Social Workers, the largest professional organization of social workers in the United States, published an update to their professional standards for cultural competence. The *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* emphasize that culture is a broader concept than race and ethnicity. The standards identify communication skills, cultural humility, and an awareness of intersectionality—the ways that different social identities, such as race, gender, or class, overlap and interconnect, resulting in biases and power imbalances that impact the experiences of marginalized groups—as essential to understanding complex cultural differences.
Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García coined the term cultural humility in 1998. A practitioner who embraces cultural humility observes other cultures with an openness to learn; asks questions rather than makes assumptions; and strives to understand rather than to inform. Tervalon and Murray-García defined a problem with the term competence. Competence, a narrow term that focuses on gaining and demonstrating a set of skills, can be construed as lacking components of lifelong learning and reflective practice. A practitioner with cultural humility will engage in reflective practice and lifelong learning, recognize and account for power imbalances in relationships with patients, and cultivate “mutually respectful” relationships in one-on-one and community settings.34

Ann Marie Garran and Lisa Werkmeister Rozas encouraged social workers to reflect on power, privilege, and intersectionality. After social workers become aware of their culture and their place in the “larger socio-political hierarchy,” the next step is to consider their power, station in society, and the “myriad threads of power and privilege which do or do not inhabit [their] identities.”35 When social workers fail to consider these elements in critical moments with clients, they deprive themselves of the opportunity to enhance their knowledge, consider their role in the social order, and examine how society influences their practice.36

Elementary and Secondary Education

The research in elementary and secondary education is practitioner-focused and thoroughly considers all the potential inputs and outputs of instruction, as well as the instructor’s ability to harness cultural competence to increase equity and inclusion. Gloria Ladson-Billings defined culturally relevant pedagogy as having a three-pronged approach. Culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on academic achievement, supports students’ cultural identities, and encourages students to develop “critical perspectives that challenge inequities.”37 In a series of classroom observations, the best teachers challenged students to perform well academically, treated their classrooms as communal learning spaces, and employed flexible teaching methods. Teaching in a culturally relevant fashion depends upon teachers’ conception of self, how relationships are structured in the classroom, and the flexible and evolving nature of knowledge.38

Geneva Gay asserted that because students and teachers bring their culture into the classroom, culture serves not only as a starting point but also as a “major determinant of how the problems of underachievement are solved.” When students must repress their cultural norms and embrace prescribed behaviors, they face the task of performing well under constraints in strange learning environments. A culturally competent teacher should be familiar with different cultures, strengthen culturally weak elements of the curriculum, create an inclusive and caring environment that prescribes high learning expectations for all, and employ a flexible communication style.39
A variety of approaches have been put forth to prepare teachers to apply cultural competence to their work. Susan Lenski, Thomas Crumpler, Corsandra Stallworth, and Kathleen Crawford discussed an ethnography project that facilitated interaction between preservice teachers and their communities. By enhancing their understanding of their community through ethnographic methods, preservice teachers could move “beyond awareness” and toward the ability to instruct students from diverse backgrounds. Tyrone Howard proposed several behaviors for reflective practice. He argued that, for instruction to be truly relevant, teachers must recognize their ability to impact their students in “either positive or negative ways.” By reflecting, teachers can determine if they address cultural and social issues in the classroom and avoid using reductive assumptions to shape their work. Carol Weinstein, Mary Curran, and Saundra Tomlinson-Clarke applied reflective practice to classroom management.

Kristan Morrison, Holly Robbins, and Dana Rose supported these strategies. They amalgamated classroom-based research to identify best practices in culturally relevant pedagogy. They identified as strategies for success clear communication of expectations; making oneself accessible to students outside a classroom setting; working from students’ demonstrated strengths as a starting point; and scaffolding, which provides successive levels of temporary support to move students toward greater independence.

Assessment

Assessing intercultural competence requires a multifaceted strategy. Intercultural programs at postsecondary institutions have used a variety of methods to assess student performance, including journals, observations, in-class assignments, interviews, focus groups, and portfolios. Well-designed reflection prompts can encourage students to move beyond describing events into intentional thinking regarding their future. Assessing performance in intercultural situations provides key evidence regarding behavior and communication skills.

Defining intercultural competence in a specific, local context is necessary for determining the assessment objectives. By prioritizing goals and aligning outcomes, one can specify which elements of cultural competence should be emphasized in the assessment. Sources of indirect and direct evidence of learning and performance can drive a thematic analysis that identifies areas for improvement.

Library and Information Science

The ACRL diversity standards emphasize key areas for individual and organizational expertise, including self-awareness; cross-cultural knowledge; development of services, programs, and collections; and organizational and workforce diversity. In 2014, librarians from the University of Washington-Bothell and Cascadia College—both in Bothell, Washington—discussed their efforts to implement the ACRL standards at their joint library. They developed and executed a plan that emphasized social justice and consensus-building. With the new standards in place, librarians may move toward a more integrated approach.

Lori Mestre investigated academic librarians’ prior experiences with diversity training and if that training prepared them to be culturally competent. By conducting a survey and follow-up interviews, Mestre determined that all library and information science graduates should have “some baseline knowledge of cultural competency.” Most respondents stated that their lack of training made it difficult for them to employ cultural competence at work. An “integration approach” to the curriculum would provide a foundation that would enable future librarians to practice cultural competence in all areas of their work.

The research on international students provides clear evidence of the complexity of intercultural interaction. Yusuke Ishimura and Joan Bartlett conducted a survey of academic librarians to determine their self-reported comfort level with teaching international students. Respondents stated that a “lack of knowledge of students’ culture” caused roadblocks. The authors concluded that training opportunities for instruction librarians should cover teaching methods and instructional design as well as “cultural sensitivity training . . . and familiarization with students’ background and characteristics.” Jian Wang and Donald Frank examined best practices for cross-cultural communication with international students. International students must rapidly adjust to new social norms and academic environments. To help ease the transition, academic librarians can customize their communication style for this audience.

The literature on self-awareness is scarce. Patricia Overall stated that librarians need to develop their skills within cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental domains to successfully implement cultural competence. By embarking on a path of self-reflection, cultural appreciation, and cultural acceptance, and by examining the environment where interactions take place, librarians can make themselves relevant to a broader population. Sustaining a culturally competent organization depends upon librarians’ ability to learn, reflect, and evaluate.

**Cultural Competence Models**

Most models emphasize appropriate behavior and communication as the final desired outcomes. Of the six models discussed by Lily Arasaratnam-Smith (formerly Lily Arasaratnam), only Alvino Fantini’s Intercultural Competencies Dimension Model emphasizes reflection. The four dimensions of the model—knowledge, positive attitudes, skills, and awareness—are interconnected such that “the first three dimensions promote enhanced awareness—fostered through introspection and reflection—while enhanced awareness, in turn, stimulates development of the other three dimensions.”

Prue Holmes and Gillian O’Neill developed the PEER (prepare, engage, evaluate, and reflect) model as a possible explanation for how individuals develop cultural...
awareness. They designed an assignment grounded in phenomenology (the study of the different ways that people experience or think about something), ethnography, and self-reflection that required students to interview a “Cultural Other.” Students wrote accounts of their meetings and reflected on their interactions and engagement with their interview partner, as well as describing their feelings about their personal level of intercultural competence.

The assignment had four phases that directly correlate to the PEER model. Before meeting with their “Cultural Other,” students recorded biases and assumptions that they held about their interview subject’s culture. In addition, students noted “any social and communicative phenomena which might not immediately seem to connect with their prior knowledge and which might be unexpected.” Next, students engaged with their “Cultural Other” over time during planned social outings. Students then used ethnographic methods to record and interpret each encounter. Critical reflection on their experiences and challenges helped students examine their “taken-for-granted ways of thinking, behaving, and communicating.”

Reflective Practice for Cultural Competence in Instruction

Background

The circumstances of the typical instruction librarian differ greatly from those of classroom teachers and faculty. Librarians who teach one-shot sessions usually have little to no interaction with the class prior to the session and have only a limited time for their lesson. Despite these limitations, a librarian must establish a connection with students so they feel comfortable seeking assistance.

The PEER model’s emphasis on experiential learning and reflection make it an appropriate starting point for developing cultural awareness and competence in an instructional setting. By adapting the model’s practices to the unique situation of the instruction librarian, the profession can establish a methodological baseline for incorporating cultural competence into the classroom.

The purpose of the workflow is to indicate opportunities for cultural considerations during each stage, along with potential strategies. Incorporating these considerations will be a highly local process because what works at one institution may be inappropriate at another. Flexibility, experimentation, and creativity are key to determining what works best for students.

Step 1: Preparation

Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson-Clarke note the importance of biases and attitudes, stating that each person is a “cultural being [who has his or her] own beliefs, biases, and assumptions about human behavior.” Instructors who fail to examine their biases increase the likelihood of misunderstanding student behaviors and motivations, which could result in inappropriate treatment in the classroom.
Everyone has a culture. Instruction librarians should consider the cultural factors that have defined their life and shaped their worldview.

By adapting the assignment developed by Holmes and O’Neill, instruction librarians can consider their biases and assumptions within a classroom context. Acknowledging how these views may impact one’s teaching provides a foundation for developing cultural awareness and for limiting behaviors that alienate students or hinder their academic success. A multifaceted approach should consider a variety of identity factors, such as race, ethnicity, country or region of origin, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. A deep examination will help determine how “one’s own worldview can shape students’ conceptions of self.”

In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge that the classroom is not a homogeneous environment. Instead, tangible differences between different cultures can come to the fore. By increasing cultural awareness and learning more about students’ backgrounds and cultural norms, instructors can better prepare themselves to acknowledge and account for differences.

Gay suggests that, when building a cultural knowledge base, instructors should focus on elements that have clear implications for teaching, such as cultural values and traditions, attitudes regarding learning, and communication and relational patterns.

Michael Thomas, Marlon Mitchell, and Roberto Joseph modified the ADDIE (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation) model of instructional design with several cultural considerations. They argue that getting acquainted with students is a continual process that does not stop after the initial analysis stage. For instructional products to be truly effective, a teacher must “consider the various cultures for whom she would design and how her own culture interacts with those of the users.” After the audience has been thoroughly considered, a teacher can begin the process of designing instruction that is truly relevant.

Academic librarians are well positioned to learn more about cultures by attending cultural events and lectures on campus. By examining the course catalog for courses with a cultural focus and reviewing relevant syllabi, instruction librarians can see what topics and core texts are emphasized in the curricula. Most importantly, instruction librarians should seek out opportunities to meet and get to know students. By holding office hours in student spaces, advertising through communication channels that students read, and letting them know that librarians are available to help with their research needs, the instruction librarian can build a reputation as a helpful resource.

Practical knowledge about the various cultural groups present on campus is essential because it can inform practice and make education stimulating to all students. This knowledge base can be developed through a variety of means. Usually, the office of institutional research provides key demographic data on its website. Campus diversity offices often provide profiles regarding diversity on campus, including demographic
information on countries of origin and other identity-related factors. The Open Doors Report on International Exchange, published by the Institute of International Education, a nonprofit educational and cultural exchange organization in the United States, provides detailed data about international students and study abroad. Cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and granular data about campus demographics provide a foundation for a deep dive into cultural competence.

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Step 2: Instructional Design

Taking time to evaluate “tried and true” instructional design methods is necessary because instructors frequently gravitate toward what they find comfortable. Instead, they should consider how their methods may impact students’ experiences. Culture influences learning because students approach learning from varied backgrounds. To respond effectively, instruction librarians should design multimodal experiences that encourage interest and engagement. In addition, instruction librarians should seek opportunities for building upon students’ prior knowledge by scaffolding new material and concepts.

Instructional materials, such as lesson plans, handouts, and guides, can demonstrate entry points and barriers to learning. Instructors seeking to improve their cultural competence should focus on evaluating instructional materials for “existing obstacles” to student learning. A thorough examination that pinpoints inclusive and noninclusive elements will identify potential adjustments that will increase the potential for learning. Reducing barriers to entry and points of confusion, along with modifying the definition of engagement, will create a more accessible learning environment.

A lesson that offers multiple points of entry, opportunities for student autonomy, and the chance for students to make the material relevant to their personal circumstances will generate greater engagement and knowledge transfer. Relevant instruction allows students to apply their personal experience and make cognitive connections, tying the new information to their individual background.

The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), a nonprofit research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for everyone, developed the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a set of principles for curriculum development based on research in the learning sciences. UDL guidelines propose that instructors “provide multiple means of engagement.” Engagement stems from offering students autonomy regarding how they will participate and from making learning relevant and authentic to their lives. Autonomy facilitates engagement and a sense of personal control. Personal control leads to relevant, individual impacts on suc-
cess, as opposed to external control, which produces limited, prescribed impacts. When teachers relinquish control and allow students to direct their learning and focus on their personal goals, students take ownership of their learning and become accountable for their mastery of the material.

Moreover, offering choice allows students to engage without compromising their cultural identity. Students will less likely run into a roadblock when they have a variety of options to prove their understanding. Instruction librarians should try presenting content in different formats, such as discussions, lectures, reading and writing, visual aids, and hands-on or active learning, to see which methods gain the best response.

Past assessment results also form a critical piece of the puzzle because they can illustrate if learning occurred. Instruction librarians can examine results to determine if they should establish additional scaffolds between concepts, revise the information presented, or alter the methods used. Using past feedback from students can also help establish gaps and patterns that can be corrected in future implementations. Corrections should take students’ culture and prior knowledge into account.

Step 3: Teaching and Self-Documentation

Morrison, Robbins, and Rose’s synthesis of classroom-based research on culturally relevant pedagogy identified several high-impact teaching strategies. Instructors who establish high academic and behavioral expectations for all students, invest in students’ success, and cultivate nurturing environments intentionally build inclusive and equitable classroom settings.

At this stage, instruction librarians should design one or two teaching goals related to cultural competence to revisit during the assessment and evaluation stages. Knowing one’s instructional intent regarding cultural competence before entering the classroom will help create a foundation for critical reflection.

The beginning of the session is a critical opportunity to make the instruction librarian’s role clear. Affirming that the instructor’s purpose is to help students reach the instructional goals and that high expectations apply to all students helps to establish shared goals and rapport. Teachers who do this well encourage students in a consistent fashion and make clear that all students are capable of learning the material.

By cultivating a community of learners using a variety of participation models, such as peer teaching, instructors can diminish the presence of traditional, competitive Westernized academic norms. Cultivating a community of learners encourages students to offer social support and feel invested in others’ academic performance. Adding time for self-directed learning gives students an opportunity to fully focus on their individual interests related to the subject matter.

Effective communication is essential to culturally competent teaching. Scaffolding examples and concepts can help learners make critical connections between prior knowledge and new information.
communicating clearly, elaborating on and restating ideas, engaging in active listening, and modeling key concepts.

Instruction sessions provide an opportunity to document actual teaching behaviors. After each class, instruction librarians should take time to log their activities and behaviors. This record keeping is necessary because intent and actions can differ. The goal of this exercise is to consider what happened during the class in an objective fashion. Any teaching situation requires adjustments on the fly and flexibility to keep learning on track. Anything from technological failures to inaccurate assumptions about students’ prior knowledge could result in an unplanned detour. Knowing exactly what teaching methods the instructor employed, how he or she communicated concepts, and how students reacted to the material are key to understanding what happened during a one-shot session. For a more complete audit, a librarian could ask a colleague to observe and log a session, providing a valuable outside perspective.

When documenting sessions, it is important to recognize repeated norms as patterns. For example, if some students defer to the librarian’s expertise instead of offering their own opinions, this might be a cultural learning norm. By acknowledging cultures instead of viewing them as roadblocks to engagement, one can begin to find ways to suit instruction to diverse students.82 Respect for learning and social norms from different cultures is critical to the development of an inclusive teaching environment.

Step 4: Assessment and Evaluation

When assessing students, culturally competent instructors distinguish between mastery of the material and individual differences. Instruction librarians must determine if a student has truly failed to understand the lesson or if cultural differences might obscure the student’s level of understanding. The ability to determine if a behavior is due to an unfamiliar norm or to a barrier to comprehension is a critical addition to a teacher’s portfolio of evaluation techniques.83

No matter what kind of assessment the instructor conducts, students must understand how they will be evaluated and how that information will be used to shape their education.84 Distributing rubrics that provide clear descriptions of the performance expectations for each part of the work or identifying the characteristics of successful work can help clear up any gaps between the librarian’s expectations and the student’s understanding of the task at hand.

With regard to self-assessment, the instruction librarian should pick one or two elements of culturally competent teaching to assess at a time. Attempting to gain enough evidence to alter one’s entire teaching strategy at once would be overwhelming.85 Being selective and gradually assessing one’s performance over time allows for focused evaluation and continual improvement.

A structured review of all the instructional inputs creates a picture comprised of prior knowledge, intent, design, and behavior. Determining what went well and where the lesson or learning did not gel can help instructors situate their teaching within their institution’s cultural context. Teacher librarians can use the evidence from session logs to reshape teaching artifacts, instructional methods, communication strategies, learning outcomes, and assessment. A strong understanding of the student body, the cultural
norms on campus, and current learning gaps can provide critical information for design changes that increase engagement and student choice, learning and discovery, and communication.86

Step 5: Reflection

Reflection is a critical step in carrying out a cultural competent vision. By following assessment with reflection, librarians can begin to understand how culturally competent teaching methods impact learning in their classrooms.

Howard emphasizes that instructors must “be explicit about what to reflect about.”87 Prompts for reflection should be tied to assessment goals and embrace the complexity of cultural competence. Equity, cultural differences, instructional design, teaching methods, and evaluation of student performance all deserve critical, non-reductionist reflection.88 Instruction librarians, by considering what they intended to do, what they did, and where things did or did not go well, can examine how their worldview, design choices, methods, and behaviors impact student learning.

Reflection can focus on practical and cultural considerations. For example, do any changes encourage inclusive learning environments? Does offering students choices lead to greater mastery of, interest in, and engagement with the material? Do changes to communication strategies and teaching methods result in enhanced understanding? Do the assessment results demonstrate knowledge transfer? Most importantly, do the changes encourage all students to learn at a high level while respecting their cultural identities?89

Once the takeaways are clear, instructors can use them to reorient their worldview, reshape instruction, and develop modifications for the next cycle. Each takeaway can become an action item for the next session. For example, if the instruction librarian struggled to communicate with the students, he or she could emphasize creating opportunities for initial explanations and additional clarification during the next session.

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Accepting a lack of knowledge, encouraging mutual respect, and developing a lifelong learning orientation are essential to the continual development of cultural competence. Therefore, one must stand ready to recognize one’s ignorance and seek out appropriate resources and assistance.91 Accepting a lack of
knowledge, encouraging mutual respect, and developing a lifelong learning orientation are essential to the continual development of cultural competence.

In summary, incorporating cultural competence is an iterative process. Each attempt to improve one’s abilities will lead to opportunities for improvement elsewhere. By acknowledging areas of progress and targets for improvement, instruction librarians can clearly define their strengths and weaknesses.

**Future Directions and Conclusion**

Culturally competent instruction recognizes that all participants bring different cultural backgrounds to the classroom that should be embraced. Cultural competence requires a teacher to holistically evaluate all elements of instruction, reflect on them, and revise them if necessary. Adding cultural competence to one’s instructional workflow not only increases inclusivity, learning potential, and engagement but also establishes a relationship of mutual respect between the instructor and the student.

Communities of practice, groups of people who share a profession and together learn to do it better, provide an ideal place for discussing cultural competence in a local context. In addition, communities of practice can set goals and develop feasible, relevant assessment practices. Because this work is potentially emotionally fraught, input from colleagues who have experienced the same issues can be helpful. More importantly, members of these groups can hold one another accountable.

Future directions for research in this area include evaluating librarians’ comfort levels and experience with core tenants of cultural competence and evaluating the utility of the workflow discussed in this article. A study that evaluates both instructional design and delivery through assessment of instructional artifacts and video recordings of class sessions would help bridge the gap between intent and action. In addition, a meta-analysis of reflective self-assessments would produce a list of core considerations and essential questions for culturally competent reflective practice.

Cultural competence urges instruction librarians to venture out of their comfort zones and into a constantly evolving unknown. Intentional, continuous development of cultural competence is necessary for any instruction librarian who desires to connect with students in a relevant, empathetic manner.

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**Notes**

4. Ibid., 118.
6. Ibid., 267, 272.
7. Ibid., 279, 284.
13. Ibid., 1018–19.
18. Ibid., 185.
20. Ibid., 158.
23. Ibid., 583.


30. Ibid., 353.


36. Ibid., 107–8.


38. Ibid., 478–80.


49. Ibid., 484–86.

51. Ibid., 319.
53. Ibid., 211–12.
55. Ibid., 199–200.
59. Ibid., 710–11.
65. Ibid., 43.
69. Ibid., 19.
76. Rogers, Graham, and Mayes, “Cultural Competence and Instructional Design,” 212.
78. Ibid., 436.
80. Ibid., 480.
81. Rogers, Graham, and Mayes, “Cultural Competence and Instructional Design,” 212.
84. Ibid., Part 2, 41.
88. Ibid., 200–201.