Critical Race Theory in Library and Information Science (LIS) Education

SIG Sponsor(s):

Equity and Social Justice (Mónica Colón-Aguirre, University of South Carolina, USA and Nicole Cooke, University of South Carolina, USA)

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ABSTRACT

On its surface the library and information science (LIS) profession is open and supportive of efforts to bring about social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) values into the professional practice. This is evidenced by statements such as the American Library Association's (ALA) Code of Ethics which specifically mention "…to recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases, to confront inequality and oppression..." Although statements like this represent a good start, all too often they remain at an abstract level without the corresponding practical application or strategic management elements which are necessary to enact them in day-to-day professional practice. This enactment is an essential component, if the profession has intentions to bring about social justice applications into practice. Social justice seeks to find ways in which societies can eliminate the systems and barriers that create unearned privilege and marginalization, while upholding human rights (Cooke et al., 2016).

One way to seek social justice in Library and Information Science (LIS) is to incorporate the principles of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT, which originated in critical legal studies, and has been adapted to many social science fields, is a movement which seeks to explore the role of racism and its effects on society. It is an intellectual framework aimed at explaining the real situations that affect the lives of members of minoritized groups and helps bring about revised social and systemic structures which can ameliorate the detrimental effects of racism and racist systems for these groups. CRT is rooted in certain principles which frame explorations of racism in modern day societies.

These principles include notions such as that racism is ordinary and not aberrational, that race is a purely social phenomenon, and that due to differences in their experiences with

oppression, members of marginalized groups are better equipped to communicate their experiences than their white counterparts (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Despite of the soundness of its arguments, CRT has been the target of many attacks which have moved to the political arena with at least 16 states reporting legislation intent on banning the teaching of CRT in public institutions of higher learning. This presentation will focus on the potential role of CRT in enriching the move towards a pedagogy focused on social justice.

This session will present two panels. The first panel will discuss the principles of critical race theory in LIS and present valuable educational resources on the topic (Presenters: Dr. Nicole Cooke, Dr. Mónica Colón-Aguirre, Ms. Cearra Harris). The second panel will discuss specific practices taken on by members of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) recent work to center Blackness and social justice in LIS education in their organization's efforts to occupy space and explore how U.S. librarians are taught, trained, and understood (Presenters: Dr. Ana Ndumu, BCALA Breaking Barriers Project co-PI, Dr. Shaundra Walker, BCALA Breaking Barriers Project co-PI, Shauntee Burns-Simpson, 2020-2022 BCALA President, Nichelle M. Hayes, 2022-2024 BCALA President).

References

Cooke, N. A., Sweeney, M. E., & Noble, S. U. (2016). Social justice as topic and tool: An attempt to transform an LIS curriculum and culture. *The Library Quarterly*, *86*(1), 107-124.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory*. New York University Press.

Short Abstract

On its surface the library and information science (LIS) profession supportive of efforts to bring about social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) values into professional practice. However, the profession lacks practical application elements which are necessary to enact DEI values in day-to-day professional practice. This presentation will focus on the potential role of Critical Race Theory in enriching the move towards a pedagogy focused on social justice.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Critical librarianship; Education programs/schools; Pedagogy.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Critical Race Theory; librarianship; social justice; LIS education.