1st Teaching Philosophy – Written Spring 2022 – Learning Design for Librarians – University of Arizona

Learning and adding content knowledge to schemas can be violent in educational systems undergirded by supremacist ideologies and histories of oppression. Students enter these implicitly through their lived experiences and identity markers when entering a classroom. It is not sufficient to make available independent, creative projects to generate co-constructed knowledge around set learning objectives. It is necessary as teachers to also provide students emotional supports through meaningful relationships with teachers and peers such that the process of shared discovery and story-construction mitigates a parallel pain while honoring and integrating different perspectives. Accessibility and inclusion in my teaching is paramount, but this is construed as a theoretical inclusion that generates practical inclusion by consequence—one that understands the ways in which we as teacher and student are positioned and transforming ourselves around flawed educational systems, adjusting continuously what we know and with whom, to hold agency over any enacted helplessness. I hope my students transform themselves consistently to change their perspectives and physical and cognitive position, as will I, maintaining a mobility and memory in learning that is our only constant.

Reflections on a Teaching Philosophy

My initial teaching philosophy contained a spirit of exchange in how students and teachers co-created knowledge in the classroom. I wrote about the importance of considering students' backgrounds. I thought this was freedom: freedom to engage—to contribute what "[students] lived and behaved" to classroom discussion (hooks, 1994, 3). However, as Fink (2013) questioned language itself and explored a new taxonomy of learning to find and create the "concepts and terms…that could accurately describe the kind of impact we wanted to have on students' lives," his openness to what knowledge even *was* made me see my mistake (32). In trying to avoid bell hooks (1994)'s caution that "Knowledge was suddenly about information only," when she moved to white schools (3), I initially drafted my teaching philosophy to include what I saw to be the ancillary factors around that information—student background.

However, this approach has two problems. One, it places a terminology (knowledge) at the forefront; that automatically breeds constraint in meaning. And two, it inadvertently marginalizes in language those contextual factors around *information* if the latter is held central.

I see in my initial teaching philosophy the echoes of categorization, distilling components of knowledge to measure it, scars of my own quantitative research life, or with the grace that Parson & Ozaki (2020) give, echoes of behaviorists' construction of knowledge as a collection of observable, measurable behaviors; but with every categorization, there is loss. As Fink (2013)'s chapter epigraph cites, "If learning is regarded as a search for meaning and coherence in one's life...[of] personal significance to the learner, rather than how much is learned," therein lie valuable insights into classroom power dynamics and mechanisms. Mellon (1986)'s grounded theory framework seemed to strike a balance through qualitative research—searching for meaning through asking others about emotions and feelings around libraries while still generating themes of concern like fear and anxiety that could guide a librarian in improving a lesson, a teaching tool, or outcome. Grounded theory seemed the necessary, generating opposite to learning analytics' "enact[ion]" on students (Hathcock, 2018). It seemed a way to encourage "librarian as facilitator" in a participatory audience that co-constructs learning and discovery through "surprising and story-driven ways" (Donovan, 2009). Seale (2016) influenced me, too, in how she writes that "Despite its apparent naturalness, "common sense" is not non-ideological," which implied that beginning in ideology to reach understanding is the natural course. However, the "naturalness" of that premise worried me in how it suggested passive acceptance. As Cooke (2020) writes, even with ideological understandings like "intellectual humility," there is a needed disjuncture of knowing better and doing better. She cites Gonzales-Lopez (2011) to say, learning and improving in

teaching is a "process of stretching out, hurting, and healing" and have come out the other side as a stronger researcher and educator" (92). This reflects the pain of growth and reciprocity between ideology and action that grounded theory as a practice seemed to meet—and Enlightenment theories seemed to miss, as outlined in Seale (2016)—if embedded in a teaching philosophy.

As such, in redacting my teaching philosophy, I initially considered that this grounded theory approach would generate the knowledge I hoped to construct and discover in the classroom. However, in hearing about a theory for the first time, I misconstrued it in my practice. In designing a sample lesson out of a burgeoning teaching philosophy, I relied on discussion boards and held Mellon (1986)'s verbs close, "to *discover* themes, topics, or situations…to *construct* hypotheses or to develop ideas about how individuals define themselves." In part, maybe this instructional move came from a very different "vocational awe" than what Ettarh (2018) describes—a chance to explore discussion-based learning for someone primarily coming into librarianship from infant teaching with children with speech disabilities, an age and case where discussion is not possible. However, mostly, it came from Seale (2016)'s citing of Spivak (2004), how "education should be "an uncoercive rearrangement of desires,'" amongst learners in whom teachers "cultivate the responsibility to the other" (Seale, 2016, 87) by "also adding something discontinuous" (Spivak, 2004, 532). Rearrangement and discontinuity combatted the violence of education as it reminded me of chemistry—how mixtures can be purposed to their previous parts in a way solutions cannot. Rearranging created an intermediary step in learning and honored the sometimes-messy process of learning that exists in Leung & McKnight's (2020)'s chosen epigraph: "to transform yourself, you must transform the world." More on this as I thought of it after reading Leung & McKnight (2020)'s discussion, but initially, I considered geometry and how an injective transformation finds its reflection across an axis, how the coordinates of a transformation can be easily traced back to their original place and their new location. Geometric transformations hold the possibility of forward motion and too, the chance to return, a duality that students might hold through negotiating the violence of learning, in a path from previous self to future one, through reflective practice. Transformation, thought of in this way, too, feels objective and measurable, as would be the behaviorist's approach (Parson & Ozaki, 2020)

I thought these would fulfill and emerge from discussions having provided readings around a topic. The grounded theory definition recalled Bloom's Taxonomy and Gilchrist (2009)'s awareness that "[a]ssessment is a thoughtful and intentional process." I thought *it*—discussion and conversation-based activity--stood alone, emerging from that transformational back-and-forth across the axis that was a natural part of those "discontinuities" (Discontinuities also happened to hold a geometry in meaning as these were the points where transformations gave to allow entry of other functions into a graph).

What I did not realize was that there is some need for structure, even in the quest for discovery. In my teaching, I created a new, colloquial discontinuity entirely—confusion around the assignment! I was so worried about Glassman (2018)'s "underneath" as she spoke about the library patron as human being positioned under the weight of a system, so worried about "enacting" violence through structure—an active word that has emerged in many of our readings (i.e., Hathcock, 2018) through itself or its synonym—that I misunderstood necessary guidance in my teaching—learning outcomes and activity creation with goals and guidelines—as too restrictive.

Further, my teaching philosophy also took for granted that the availability of engagement—accessible spaces, and my own identity in the space as a minority group would reduce barriers and equal participation and engagement. This is not fully true. It is true that because of my own identity markers, I cannot well contribute to the "awe" of librarianship and its "missionary-mindedness" of "white women" who have the "innate characteristics" of "true womanhood" to be librarians (Ettarh, 2018). I cannot claim these, and I would occupy a similar place of "threat" to white authority that bell hooks (2014) describes.

However, when I assumed that my teaching philosophy would not have to carefully consider the distinction between achieving "obedience" in the classroom versus an eagerness to question and learn, assuming the latter was given, I was mistaken. As a library professional, my own existence as practitioner questions Ettarch, (2018)'s historical, white, environmental norm. Yet, engagement is not given if environment is present.

Loyer (2018) fully changed my thinking here in the sharpness of "research as violence," and the affective aspect of information literacy. Beyond what is simplified as cognitive dissonance, there is pain in the process of building a schema. In one example, Loyer (2018) cites Erica Violet Lee's experiences to describe the pressure a minority student might feel in pursuit of a project, "not just as a personal failure but a failed responsibility to break stereotypes and represent all Native people everywhere in a positive way" (146). I did little in my teaching philosophy draft to support the affective weight with which students might come to the institution, the same affective weight with which bell hooks was forced to fit into an integrated school that asked the wrong questions. My new teaching philosophy is an effort to understand how a librarian needs to also do well to regulate the emotions of students around the process of integrating a violent education as personally relevant and not continuously.

Cooke (2020) cites James Baldwin (1979), to say, 'which is equally applicable to libraries: A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled. A child cannot be taught by anyone whose demand, essential, is that the child repudiate his experience." This understanding that a teaching philosophy can explicitly include the love of the public, honoring humanity for their first place as human beings (Glassman, 2018) allowed me a permission to include what I thought was more a premise of teaching more explicitly in my new teaching philosophy because Baldwin (1979)'s citation made me realize that it may not be a premise and may instead have come as *my* premise for the violence I have personally faced to reach this point in librarianship. In a teaching philosophy, I need to state it.

Above all, the biggest change in my teaching philosophy was to realize for the first time that this is not my teaching philosophy but ours—if a class on co-construction of knowledge taught anything, it was my first exposure to a community of practitioners that held the same cares. I do not come from a family of librarians, librarianship or even teachers, and I have always felt alone. As my initial teaching philosophy may evidence and certainly my introduction post that outlined a "good teaching" experience, I was raised by my own teachers—who all looked different from me but who cared about me more than my own family—amplifying a disjuncture I carried throughout my life and in the classroom around my identity and coming from violence. While Cooke (2020) writes that it is important for librarians of color to "create our own cannon" she uses "our," in a way that I did not feel comfortable falling into before this class. Although this profession might include the discomfort of making a place, there is an "our," a generated family in a profession, and Cooke (2020) has had the chance to interact with like-minded scholars and thinker.

A course-wide focus on "our" folded into my teaching philosophy. I want my students to know that they are never alone in these processes of learning and knowing, even if in their identities, they might feel alone in what brought them to the class. I include this because my parents, too, knew the immigration "alone," which I see as soon folding somehow into what librarianship means as we tend to a migrating world. Returning to how Leung & McKnight's (2020)'s meant transformation, "It is difficult for us to forget who we are and what we look like, especially when entering a classroom of new students, working with certain faculty members, or just attending a meeting of our library colleagues. If we forget, there is always someone to remind us through microaggressions or micro-violence. If we forget, the world reminds us. We do not have the privilege to forget." This drive to forget is magnified by identity markers like immigration that trade "memory for mobility" and "collective amnesia" (Karthik Amarnath, SAADA Archive, 2022). And, librarians as information literacy professionals and teachers have a chance to combat it by critical librarianship and constructing a cannon and too, teaching philosophies

that hold tenets like *transformation, reflective practice* and constant change as their only static. A course announcement mentioned simply that teaching philosophies are always revised, and I hope that my new teaching philosophy hold those graphical holes or geometric discontinuities—less for the student as my confusing teaching experience tried, but more, as theoretical spaces for revision for the teacher.

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