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Original Publication Citation

Research Article

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Culturally Responsive Librarians: Shifting Perspectives Toward Racial Empathy

Abstract: Libraries are charged with being inclusive spaces for all patrons. Library (library and information science [LIS]) preparation programs, by extension, must prepare the next generation of librarians to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. It is imperative that today's librarians are equipped to infuse diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) theory with best practice when establishing policy and procedure for the library environment, staff, and programing. With little research and no established protocol in LIS education, it is unclear how pre-service librarians are trained in DEI to meet the needs of all users. This exploratory study used a participatory action research model to examine how a library educator-researcher might begin to develop a framework centered on cultural competence and implement it with one class of emerging librarians to explore issues impacting racial DEI in library services. Findings suggest that the framework provided a structure by which the LIS students could interrogate their own bias, gain greater empathy toward understanding DEI and racial issues, and begin to shift their beliefs toward creating a culturally responsive library setting.

Keywords: action research, culturally relevant pedagogy, DEI, library education, social justice

The American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* (ALA, 1996) ensures the "right to use a library regardless of origin, age, background, or views." Libraries, as public spaces, serve a diverse population of users and the United States is identified as increasingly diverse. The 2010 United Stated Census Bureau report showed that 22% of the United States population was people of color (USCB, 2018). This percentage increased in the 2020 census with diversity being more pronounced. The United States is now 57.8% White, 18.7% Hispanic, 12.4% Black, and 6% Asian. (USCB, 2022). Librarians must effectively attend to the dynamic needs of all patrons. Therefore, it is imperative that today's librarians are equipped with skills to critically consider the library environment, staff, user services, collections, and programing to best assist all patrons, especially those who may represent underserved or culturally disenfranchised populations.

Ideals of social justice, along with respect for diversity, are foundational to the core values of the library profession (ALA, 2010, 2019). However, with no established model for integrating these ideals into library and information science (LIS) education it is unclear how pre-service librarians, or those not yet in the field, are trained to meet the needs of a racially diverse set of users. In the past several decades, social justice education has been emphasized across disciplines (Goodwin, 1997). Along with this heightened awareness, those of the dominant race have been challenged (DiAngelo, 2018) to critically explore their own identity and to directly address race and difficult conversations of racial disparity. This challenge presents an educational need to address issues of equity, racial diversity, and cultural literacy in library pre- and in-service library training to be equipped to develop the awareness and empathy required to provide user services to the increasingly diverse set of patrons most librarians will serve in their information setting.

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Early attempts at equity and racial education may have lacked depth. Goodwin (1997) chastised the education community for a narrow attempt to build cultural awareness by simply infusing multicultural or racial awareness into an already comprehensive education curriculum with a one-shot course or learning session. Since that time, efforts have been made within LIS programs to thread issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work into coursework and programs more holistically. These efforts are largely in response to meeting accreditation standards where language has been included to ensure attention to diverse learning styles, literature, and pedagogy (AASL, 2019; ALA, 2015). The LIS program explored in this study includes DEI as a central objective underpinning the program while also offering a stand-alone course *Culturally Responsive Librarianship* to further deepen and critically interrogate understanding of diversity, to include racial and ethnic factors, in key areas of librarianship.

1 Statement of Purpose

This exploratory study, framed using an action research (AR) model (Mills, 2017), asked emerging librarians to reflectively interrogate their understanding of racial diversity as it impacts the key areas of library services: collections, programing, facilities, as well as the extent to which policy guiding these areas impacts diverse users using a developed conceptual framework centered on the ideals of cultural competence that derive from the work in education on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). This understanding is situated in the context of how an LIS program prepares new information professionals to critically explore racial issues and reflect on library practices. Emerging librarians focused on race and their own shifts in understanding about how patron racial diversity may shape considerations of library use and policy. These ideas were explored as they engaged with course materials. This study is guided by the following question: *In what ways did use of a developed cultural competency framework in pre-service coursework impact emerging librarians' perspective on how to meet the needs of racially diverse populations?*

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Justice as Theoretical Framework

A popular constructivist and developmental theory that underpins education and library studies appropriate to the education of library professionals is social justice theory. The definition of Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) of social justice includes a vision of a society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Aligned to the tenets of the Library Bill of Rights (ALA, 1996) this definition underpins and frames the work of LIS instruction. The mission of the library supports social justice, a doctrine against social oppression due to racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism in society.

Specifically appropriate to the library tenets of equality and access (ALA, 2019), the social justice lens particularly aligns to a better understanding of how to serve diverse populations. Successful DEI work begins with and progresses beyond acknowledging personal bias to identification of an individual's role in systemic functions and to challenge assumptions about ourselves and others (Drago-Severson, 2016). This often requires individuals to identify and come to terms with unrecognized advantages or privilege. As an approach to exploring DEI within this research, social justice theory guided inquiry as a path to greater understanding.

2.1.1 Critical Whiteness Theory

Critical Whiteness Theory is a subset of Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995). One means by which DEI are explored is through racial injustice. Critical Whiteness Theory positions Whiteness as the default lens in American culture and establishes any other identity as "other" (Owen, 2007). This lens challenges and critiques those societal practices that establish Whiteness as the default view (DiAngelo, 2018; McIntosh, 2007; Owen, 2007). Through this theory, the position of privilege for those who are White is challenged and interrogated. In this way, Whiteness is considered the default race by which all other factors are measured (Owen, 2007). In the context of the library, diversity and inclusion discussions frequently assume that "White" materials and patrons are the majority or norm. These are the materials against which all other materials are evaluated for diverse or inclusive content. Thoughtful consideration to "others" who are not White is essential and must be purposeful, not auxiliary (Espinal, Sutherland, & Roh, 2018). These same considerations are essential when determining policy, staffing, and facilities. Exploring Critical Whiteness Theory is essential to this study since both the educator-researcher and the pre-service librarians were White.

2.2 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In a university setting, "teaching for social justice," or using a critical lens to examine one's positionality and views on inequity and privilege is framing curriculum reform (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Education and library candidates use their new understandings to build instructional strategies, grounded in the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy ideals, with the students and patrons they work with in practice. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) specifically explores race and culture when framing new understanding in an educational context (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010). For this purpose, a culturally centered framework is an appropriate path for instruction in a variety of educational settings (Kugler & West-Burns, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995a) to include LIS programs.

Culturally relevant teaching uses cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and the performance styles of diverse students to make learning appropriate and effective; it considers the strengths of a diverse group of students to engage learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995a,b). The goal of culturally relevant teaching is to create a learning environment effective for all students, no matter their ethnic, cultural, economic, or linguistic backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (1995a) reminds us that the benefits of including these practices are a more positive environment and greater engagement of the learner and the instructor, particularly when emphasis is placed on knowledge and consideration of the learners.

2.3 Cultural Competence

Previous studies introducing cultural competence frameworks (Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, & Taylor-Ritzler, 2009; Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989) acknowledge the challenges of first defining cultural competence and then establishing a model that can be applied broadly across professional fields, then accepted by the professional institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population. Cross et al. (1989) established cultural competence as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" and emphasized three required elements in an effective model: (1) self-awareness, (2) culture-specific knowledge, and (3) skills promoting effective socio-cultural interactions by an individual. This definition has since been used as a foundation for cultural competence models or frameworks for various professions to include the health care, counseling, and social work. Balcazar et al. (2009), however, conducted a systematic review of models that have been published and found few

addressed learning about the context of the people they were hoping to serve. Seeleman, Suurmond, and Stronks (2009), a cultural competence framework for teaching and learning in the medical field, proposed a model that specifically explored a new professional's personal prejudices and stereotypical tendencies when considering care in the medical field. This model suggests that students first consider the population they will serve.

This current study recognizes the need for understanding the unique context of individuals being served as Balcazar suggests and the Seeleman model highlights. It blends the suggested approach of both Cross et al. (1989) and Seeleman et al. (2009) in creating a cultural competence model for the library environment that first explores the new professional's personal biases and tendencies beginning with self-awareness, then progresses through building skills in-context for effective socio-cultural interactions.

These ideas are framed within the ideas of educational theory and cultural identity to help further student understanding. Using a framework grounded in these theories helps consider diverse needs and illuminate any potential bias the teacher may hold. Culturally responsive teachers ensure the culture of the classroom is inclusive of all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995a,b; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Use of methods that align students' cultural knowledge to academic skills and concepts and engage students in critical reflection about their own lives and societies further enhances learning (Delpit, 1992).

3 Method

This study used an AR model (Mills, 2017) to frame an exploratory investigation of the beliefs of emerging librarians through course discourse.

3.1 AR

AR seeks to identify an area of focus or concern, collect data, analyze and interpret the data to suggest solutions to the identified problem, and then develop an action plan (Mills, 2017, p. 215). Argyris and Schon (1989) suggest a problem of practice may be discovered through reflective interrogation of what is theorized and what is found in personal actions. Based on this understanding race and the presentation of bias in LIS practice was a problem to be confronted prior to the service profession of librarianship. The AR model provided me an opportunity to address the focus of race and diversity instruction as a problem to explore. Student interaction and engagement using a developed framework provided data and established a plan for future work (Mills, 2017 p. 26). The advantages to using AR in this study include the opportunity to implement a new framework and reflect on the impact and effectiveness of the developed stages of the cultural competence framework for the preparatory course.

Consistent with AR, I examined my own growth and understanding in cultural awareness. As a White scholar, educator, and researcher, I interpreted my own implicit and explicit bias in the creation of the course content and the project and bracketed these as a basis for future understanding (Hayes & Singh, 2012). I developed a cultural pedagogy framework and planned the instructional components of the preparation course. I communicated the course requirements to the pre-service candidates.

Additional planning was done on my part to provide instruction, instructional materials, and guide pre-service candidate learning through both synchronous and asynchronous instruction. This instruction grounded candidate understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). This could at once be considered planning and action in the AR model. Later, I reflected on the course design, effectiveness in meeting the framework, and overall learning of the pre-service candidates. Throughout the stages of the framework, the candidates reflected on the impact the course content was having on their beliefs and understandings about race.

3.2 Participants

Data were collected from one class of emerging library professionals enrolled in a course titled *Culturally Responsive Librarianship*. Eighteen participants were enrolled in the course, offered as an elective for the LIS program. Students in the LIS program complete 30 credits of coursework to obtain a Masters of Library Studies degree. There is no singular required course that focuses on DEI initiatives or instruction, though the faculty of the program and the college in which the program is housed all value the ideas of social justice as evidenced through published mission statements and a commitment within strategic planning. This elective is one of several that address ethical and social concerns found in library settings.

The course description states:

> This course provides thought-provoking background and practical suggestions for engaging with diverse populations. Participants explore their own assumptions about race, class, and culture and learn strategies for creating environments and an open dialog that are culturally inviting to all.

The learning goals or outcomes include the following: a candidate who successfully completes this course will be able to: (A) explore their own assumptions about race, class, and culture and apply these to the relationship of the environment, collection, program, and services of the library; (B) identify strategies for creating library environments and selecting resources that are culturally inviting to all; (C) foster a library culture that facilitates respectful, productive, and inclusive interactions; and (D) read and respond to contemporary literature with culturally diverse theme.

Students enrolled in the course were at various points in their program of study, with some enrolled in their first semester and others taking the course as one of their final courses prior to graduation. All participants were enrolled at the graduate level and planned to pursue a career in a library information setting. Further participant demographic data showed that all students were White females and lived in a variety of geographic settings within one mid-Atlantic state representing rural, suburban, and urban environments.

3.3 A Cultural Competence Framework Applied to Library Practice

I developed a course and engaged participants in stages of a framework designed to examine issues of DEI grounded in theories of social justice, critical Whiteness theory, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and user services aligned to these ideals.

As the researcher, I developed a framework to guide the curriculum and work of the pre-service library participants. This was used and clearly articulated through the course materials. Derived from my own reading and understanding of the literature (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), observations, and research on social justice education and cultural competence pedagogy (Adams et al., 2007; Drago-Severson, 2016), the following stages were used to define a simplified culturally responsive framework used in the LIS course: (a) develop a sociocultural awareness, (b) develop an interpersonal awareness, (c) accept responsibility for change, and (d) lend a voice and plan for action.

This cultural competence framework was applied to the course structure. As the educator researcher, a person identifying as White, I developed the framework based on my own stages of growth, as well as my intent for growth within the students.

As a career educator rooted in pedagogy and instruction, scaffolded learning was a key consideration to presentation of material for this learning. Information was presented in smaller learning modules and discussed together to maximize understanding and build cognitive and emotional development. Furthermore, as someone building on my own understanding of social justice and critical race theory, I understood the need to slowly build understanding in these complex issues. For these reasons, I chose to develop a framework that could be deployed in stages with emerging LIS students.

The framework included several stages introduced throughout the course. These were introduced progressively, though the pre-service candidates engaged with the stages in an iterative cycle, able to revisit and reflect on their journey as was individually appropriate. The stages of the framework are described as follows:

> *Stage One – Develop a Sociocultural Awareness:* includes self-reflection to identify any implicit or explicit bias.
>
> *Stage Two – Develop an Interpersonal Awareness*: includes building an understanding of and empathy for others. This stage requires engaging in difficult conversations about personal bias as well as confronting treatment of others in society.
>
> *Stage Three – Accept Responsibility for Change:* includes not only ownership of the need to improve, but development of a personal plan for improvement with identified action steps and measures of accountability and progress.
>
> *Stage Four – Lend a Voice or Actions:* includes establishing a vision and goals to act as a change agent within society; to be a voice within the library community for equity and inclusion.

Stage One carried the expectation for students to engage in an ongoing examination of their own cultural background and identity while seeking additional knowledge, skills, and values to enhance practice. Meeting this ideal enhanced the librarian's consciousness on issues of race, particularly with patrons who are culturally different from themselves (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Here, students began with exercises that give name and significance to their own identity. I believe it is not possible to know or understand the experience of others without first understanding yourself. Students then explored explicit and implicit bias through a series of exercises and discussions. This was accomplished through personal bias inventories and assessments, such as the Project Implicit (2011) and Stinson (2012). Built on the notion of critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), students must move beyond their individual beliefs and developed a broader sociopolitical consciousness, thus enabling themselves to explore and critique racial norms, values, and the institutional systems that produce and perpetuate social inequities. The framework therefore began with self-examination, meant to inspect personal beliefs toward non-dominant cultures and confront negative attitudes; a strongly supported initial step of cultural competence (Kugler & West-Burns, 2015; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Stage Two, building an awareness and empathy for others, manifested in the LIS course through course readings. Here my students were asked to progress beyond their own self-exploration to understand the lived experiences of others, specifically in an effort to build empathy and awareness of racial groups to which they did not identify. Reading and reflection were interactive expectations, as well as literature discussion and reflection. Use of course readings and two selected course texts, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City* by Mathew Desmond and *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine, structured group conversations followed by personal written reflection. *Evicted* is a non-fiction account of eight families within a cross-section of an American city, showcasing the economic reality of life for those struggling to make rent and the public institutions that individuals of all classes, race, and status operate within. *Citizen* is a compilation of poems, stories, and images that show everyday instances of overt and implicit racial slights happening in America to everyday citizens as well as national celebrities. They are both National Book Award winners and were selected because of the cross section of society they depict as well as the rich character stories developed and situated within the public structures and systems.

Both texts are character driven and allow for development of an understanding of others who may be like and also somewhat "other" than the students themselves. Dillard (1996) promotes reflection as a venue to discuss race in higher education, which allowed for students to explore their own awareness and (dis) comfort with race. Critical conversations about race occurred within the literature discussions. These courageous conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006), centered around common readings, were intended to establish a safe space for participants. Literature discussion prompts were developed with the intent to propel students beyond Skerrett's three categories of racial discussions in the literature. Moving beyond apprehensive, ill informed, or strategic language use (Skerrett, 2011, p. 314), the intent was for participants to engage more deeply with racial realities. Race talk was perceived as uncomfortable, but use of literature

frequently makes empathy a bit more accessible while probing participants beyond polite conversational exchanges (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Leonardo & Porter, 2010).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) posit a cultural competency curriculum by which emerging professionals develop a commitment toward change. Therefore, *Stage Three* suggests librarians as service industry professionals have the moral expectation to meet the needs of all (ALA, 2019). Once the emerging librarians identified their own bias and built a greater empathy for those who are racially different they were able to identify plans for personal change. This began with an understanding that differences should be acknowledged.

Banks' (1988) educational equity theory is established in education as a means to explore emerging and practicing teacher behaviors in multicultural education. His assertion, supported by other researchers in the field (Bennett, 1990; Sleeter & Grant, 1988), lies in the belief that progress toward a "color blind" institution could only occur when policies, curricula, and staff dispositions were examined. Claims of being color blind implies race does not matter, or that characteristics of the dominant race are used to overlay all considerations (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017). Lee (2011) found enacting these ideals to be particularly challenging for educators striving to "teach for social justice" as many perceive to view differences as problematic (p. 3). Through personal growth and understanding, progression from a color blind mindset can begin at this stage to better begin to address inequities that exist due to race. In accepting the responsibility for working toward change in the library and library policy, the emerging librarians acted as agents of change. By first acknowledging difference among diverse racial groups and dispelling a "color blind" mentality they were then asked to make personal commitments of change against institutional barriers. In this stage, the candidates discussed the unique qualities of diverse patrons, employing the use of personas and case studies to situate patrons and policy within the library.

Stage Four identifies how library services might be enhanced for all individuals. Drawing on Dewey's (1933) foundational piece on reflective action, students were asked to consider their newfound understandings as applied to a library setting. Dewey maintains reflection is most beneficial when a problem is presented, and one must think through solutions. Reflection is required to set the path for dedicated actions that have a purpose. Active progress is key to moving DEI initiatives forward. Building on what the participants identified as growth in their personal bias and understanding, in this stage they engage in the realization of those gains into effective strategies that may be established for the information space. Here, candidates project plans for action in their library profession. Applying the theory from coursework, they reflect on personal growth, areas for refinement, and make a plan for future policies to implement.

The social justice theory lens influences how adult learners explore and understand racial diversity in the library space. A culturally competent stance is integral to developing reflective practice for all library candidates. Interaction with each of the four stages of the framework gave library candidates the opportunity to gain critical reflection skills and an awareness of their critical consciousness.

3.4 Data and Analysis

Three data sources were collected and analyzed for each participant. Data therefore included an initial reflection on personal bias and scored assessment inventories, a reflection on race situated within a literature discussion using the texts *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City* by Desmond (2016) and *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Rankine (2014), and a final reflection on personal growth. Each participant engaged with the same course materials and course readings. Within assignments, DEI were discussed broadly and included a scope wider than race. However, analysis and findings for this study focus specifically on those discussions of race in participant responses. The common texts were selected to represent broad socio-cultural issues represented in society. The texts were also highly character-driven, with characters that represent a cross-section of society that may be found in the demographics of a public library.

Based on the goals of the research question, a constructivist grounded theory approach was used for data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). This method of grounded theory analysis emphasizes "diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views, and actions" (Creswell, 2007, p. 65) and

allowed for examination of individual responses. Statements were used as units of analysis and data were coded to identify emergent categories (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). Themes that captured the stages of the developed CRP framework served as the initial set of structural codes: identity, bias, empathy, acknowledgement, colorblindness, acceptance, and action. The researcher detailed emerging patterns (Charmaz, 2006) within identified categories and reviewed a subset of the data with a co-researcher to ensure validity and reliability of the codes. Participant reflections were then aligned to the developed four stages of the pedagogy framework. Discussion of findings below is organized by the AR model, to demonstrate the impact this framework had with this group of candidates and to suggest a plan going forward. Participant quotations help to illustrate these findings. Statements are unaltered, though participant names are changed to maintain anonymity.

4 Findings

The results of this exploratory study are presented through the framework stages. The data were examined from all participants to identify patterns of thought on depicting perceptions of race and identity in relation to library practice and the developed framework.

4.1 Framing the Problem

The educator-researcher began the study by identifying a need for exploration of DEI instruction and a framework. This was done with an AR focus (Mills, 2017) in which the stages were used to guide thematic understanding of participant progress. A developed cultural competence framework informed the coursework. Stage One introduced students to their own areas of growth.

4.1.1 Stage One: Identifying Areas for Personal Growth

Stage one: Perspective themes	
Identification of cultural awareness	Disagreement of personal bias
Disbelief and discomfort with beliefs	Rationalization of bias
Disassociating feelings	Acceptance of personal responsibility

As an introductory activity of the course, students were asked to assess and identify their own explicit and implicit bias. This was done through the completion of the assigned bias inventories and their own reflection on meaning from the generated results. Students then reflected on their findings. This early assignment was challenging as students built their own understanding of cultural awareness and reflected on their personal beliefs. At the onset of the course, participants began with their own identity. Though they identified with many roles and positions within society, they remained safe within their identity classification and did not disrupt the language of civility (DiAngelo, 2018) or enter conversations about race. Participants identified by gender, profession, sexual orientation, and family role, but no one stated their race in opening identity exercises.

As the course continued deeper issues of bias were probed. Many participants expressed disbelief or discomfort with their findings. They even avoided mention of words that identified race, when possible, as if trying to perhaps make the outcome sound less damaging. Carol and Jess demonstrate this, "What I was not expecting was that I might have bias against people of deeper hued skin. It was disconcerting to find that

out about myself" (Carol) and "The most uncomfortable moment for me was when I found I favored European Americans as opposed to African Americans. I was very upset about this" (Jess). Hope struggled with language and words used to refer to race in general, "I am White. Just typing that makes me uncomfortable. It makes me anxious to use adjectives to describe individuals. I don't know how to properly acknowledge someone's 'otherness' without treading too far -so I just avoid it all costs."

Other participants went so far as to disagree with the result of a bias inventory as it pertained to race, though they did not disagree with the validity of the assessments as a whole, offering up a rationale for why the test may have assigned the bias. This can be evidenced in the following statement:

> I disagree with the strongly preferring lighter skinned people to darker skinned people. I do not disagree with the sexual orientation assessment. I do know that prefer the company of lighter skinned people is partially due to not having darker skinned people around to socialize with in my life. (Kelly)

Perhaps because it was an early assignment and used as an exercise in self-exploration, some students equated having a racial bias to not being a *good person*, such as. "I think of myself as a good person, yet, I was faced with the fact that I am consciously and unconsciously making choices and decisions that may, in fact, be hurtful to others" (Holly).

Other participants did not deny personal bias, but instead simply put forward a rationale for any disclosed racial bias. These accepted racial biases then explored a clear line within their past or within established relationships and community that could be the potential cause for such a set of beliefs. Sharon exemplifies this here:

> It is suggested I have a slight automatic preference for White people over Black people. I grew up in what was a small town in California. It was not a very diverse community. We did have a couple of families of farmworkers from Mexico that would send their children to school during the months they worked in town. We did not have any African-American students at our school until I was in sixth grade. I believe that part of my bias may be due to my lack of understanding of the culture of people of color.

A small number of students in the course were more accepting of the challenge of this reflective assessment to confront their implicit bias. They seemed to understand that identifying racial bias was an important step to working with diverse populations and that there was potential harm in not doing this initial, self-reflective work. These participants were ready to embrace the identification of racial bias, though it did not prevent discomfort within their reflection. This participant group further viewed the identification of their bias as an opportunity for personal growth. Jenni expresses this sentiment,

> I am a bit uncomfortable. I am perhaps a little bit more biased than I had thought coming into this experience. I see this as a good thing though. I have learned that I have a strong automatic preference to European Americans over African Americans I want to truly address this because I do not want to possess this preference.

This is further echoed by Mary, who suggests a path forward, "With the readings and the realizations that I have made about myself I realize that the first thing to change needs to be me."

4.2 Implementing the Stages: Participant Growth in Action

Stage two: Perspective themes	
Building Empathy	*Acknowledging Societal/Systemic Barriers*

With identification of the initial groundwork set, and action prepared, the researcher-educator and participants began the active stage of the AR model. This involved using the developed framework to progress beyond discomfort to gain empathy and form new beliefs and attitudes that will be applied to library practice.

4.2.1 Stage Two: Shifting Toward Racial Empathy

Engaging with course materials and readings provided participants with the perspective of what it may be like as the non-dominant race. The course materials presented information on race and racial tensions in a manner that was new or heightened the understanding of racial minorities for some participants, "After the readings in this class, especially *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine, my understanding of what it is like to not be a part of the dominant White culture in America was developed" (Holly). The participants began to have a deeper personal understanding about the impact of race and society through the character's experiences, "I never realized how micro-aggressions really affect people but can now better understand how people feel" (Amy). As Kelly noted, some of the content provided a much-needed perspective, "The book was bone chilling in some places. It opened my eyes to what African Americans go through daily. I do not have to deal with any of this and I do not know how I would cope with these feelings daily."

All of the participants were White and enrolled in graduate school. For these reasons, they were not currently of the population presented in the course readings. In group discussions, there was clear unease with racial tensions and a general sense of being uncomfortable with the content, as well as the conversation. While the topics of both course texts proved difficult, situating race within a socioscientific discussion of poverty in the book *Evicted* proved easier to discuss than the nearly exclusive discussions of race and racial relationships within society that were the central theme in *Citizen: An American Lyric*. This was shared several times: "Discussing diversity was an incredibly uncomfortable thing for me" (Hope).

Discussing books like Evicted and Citizen can be difficult because they are books on topics that many people are uncomfortable talking about. I admit that I struggled more with Citizen than with Evicted. Evicted followed both victims and perpetuators of different races and ethnicities without heavily focusing on the effect of racial bias on their situations (Beth).

Citizen was more emotional and focused specifically on White bias, discrimination, and aggression against Blacks. It was much rawer and condemning. My group was very open and candid while discussing Evicted, but the whole atmosphere shifted when we switched to Citizen. I think we were all moved by the book's honesty and transparency, but the material was painful to address (Marti).

The use of language: *You* verses *We*, to include the use of second person narrative to establish and highlight instances of racial bias within the book *Citizen* further heightened unease in the literature discussions as the participants began to feel the weight of some of the societal issues being discussed, "Black Americans are given little choice other than being the 'you' to White America. This idea paired with the fact that I am part of White America was particularly difficult for me to come to terms with" (Holly). These discussions begin to demonstrate a shift in thinking and building of empathy toward others:

> I carry implicit biases that I intellectually do not support and am trying to acknowledge so that I can move past them in both internal and external ways. Through her poetry and deliberate second person point of view, I was forced to see and experience situations and current events in ways I hadn't before; I was called out for my behaviors and biases. I had never before felt so keenly how it is to be viewed as "other." (Holly)

Systemic oppression of racial groups was discussed as participants observed this through the characters in the literature. Several participants connected with the concept of White privilege as exemplified through the readings, even if they had originally been averse to the idea that they had any sort of racial bias, such as Kelly, "I found myself feeling far more sympathetic towards the African American characters and judgmental towards the Caucasian characters, even though the characters from both races were considered poor" (Kelly) and Hope, "Many live in a world where poverty is imposed on them. This then causes the dominoes to fall – students who don't show up for school, part time employees who just disappear, the need for reimaged public housing and more."

The participants identified perseverance against societal barriers associated with African Americans they did not perceive in the White characters, which was an interesting finding:

> Also, in Scott's case [Scott is White], he had a choice to ask for help. Doreen, Arleen and Vanetta [all Black characters] did not have the option of turning to a family member to help them out financially or otherwise. The differences of the root

causes of the reasons of poverty for these families was difficult to manage for me. For the majority of the African American families, generational poverty with no real path to exit was eye opening. (Carol)

A newfound understanding and awareness for people they may encounter in similar situations manifest for some participants such as Lori:

> Some of our students bounced around from school to school because their families were moving from apartment to apartment. If I'm being honest, I don't think I ever really stopped to think about the situations that caused each of those families to have to move. From now on, I will be thinking differently, and I will continue to grow my own empathy by reading more about others' experiences. (Lori)

The participants identified personal ignorance but presented an openness to learning more as they went through the course materials and engaged in open conversations and reflections.

4.2.2 Stage Three: Building Cultural Awareness

Stage three: Perspective themes	
DEI in context	Diversity means including all

Having confronted their personal bias and worked to understand some of the lived experiences of those from another race, participants were able to establish a greater awareness and understanding of ideas that were once elusive to them. Participants were better able to define and personally connect to the ideas of DEI. Sue simply stated, "This class has opened my eyes to the fact that our unconscious plays a big part in how we treat others" (Sue).

Participants progressed from simply understanding terminology and concepts to an appreciation of these ideas in context, "I felt that I understood equity but perhaps, I really just understood the definition of equity. It is an intricate web of ideas and motivations. It's not easy to discuss, argue, admit insecurities or to view equity from someone who really has never known inequalities. This course allowed me to understand it internally" (Sue). For some, this meant exploring topics that were elusive or outside a participant's scope of experience.

> Breaking through this I believe the hardest part of discussing the issues of the readings with my group was the fact that I lacked knowledge of many of the situations. As an educated woman who has worked in the school systems for over 15 years, I was oblivious to the racial profiling that occurs in the housing industry. I admitted in our meeting that it never occurred to me that a family was moving due to eviction and this made me feel small, especially as a teammate made the comment that she is used to this with her students. The course gives us a perspective outside of our own. Taking a walk in someone else's shoes can change your whole perspective. (Julie)

This is further explained by Beth:

> I fell short on realizing the full range of what a diverse and inclusive library should look like. In thinking about diversity, I pictured people who are from lower income back- grounds, inner city, and most likely to be African American or single mothers. While this is certainly one type of people who lack representation in our libraries, it is also a fantastic example of stereotyping. This doesn't represent an entire group of people.

Participants progressed in their understanding of culture and identity in a way that prepared them to understand diversity and difference as something to acknowledge. For many, this presented as a shift from "color blind thinking" to a more inclusive means of interaction. Participants began to recognize cultural and racial diversity instead of blanketly applying a one-size-fits-all approach to their concept of library services, "I didn't think about my cultural blindness being a negative thing, but I have recently discovered that when no resources, attention, time, or teaching are devoted to understanding cultural

differences everyone is denied important aspects of their identity" (Tammi). The shift from cultural cele-
brations to inclusive thinking was also key to understanding impactful diversity and equity:

> Previously, I would have thought that a collection that included various cultures, food, fashion, famous people, festivals,
> and flags, would be a strong and inclusive collection. I understand now how limiting the literature to this depiction would
> strengthen stereotypes and make underrepresented populations feel more isolated. A diverse collection should depict an
> accurate portrayal of modern life to not only benefit underrepresented populations but lead to a more empathetic and
> culturally competent community as a whole, one that recognizes differences as a healthy part of our world. (Sue)

4.3 A Plan Forward – Reflecting on Progress and Continuing the Work

Stage four: Perspective themes
Acknowledged growth
Sustaining efforts
Global changes-community and policy

The final step in the AR model is to reflect on the process and make plans to carry work forward. At the
conclusion of the course and after implementing the culturally responsive framework, the pre-service
librarians were able to demonstrate insightful progress in their own personal growth. Plans for sustaining
their work were expressed.

4.3.1 Stage Four: Envisioning a Culturally Responsive Library

The use of the framework fostered an opportunity for participants to experience a cultural awakening.
Participants document a cultural awareness for developing a culturally responsive library, "I have devel-
oped a sense of responsibility to make sure all patrons are provided with diverse collections, resources, and
programming that challenges their thinking, that promotes a counternarrative, and that keeps issues facing
marginalized groups current" (Holly).

They acknowledged their personal growth and accepted the challenge of applying this toward library
practices to improve DEI initiatives, "I also recognize that my own personal growth has been substantial,
and I confidently feel that I will have a positive impact on my future library community" (Beth).

Participants understood that DEI work must go beyond personal action. They planned initiatives to go
beyond their individual goals to include policy decisions and systemic changes within an information
setting, "I need to not only help students of color by creating library policies that foster inclusion, but
also by creating opportunities for others to learn about the contributions of marginalized groups and the
importance of inclusion for everyone" (Sharon).

This also transferred to a commitment to build understanding in others:

> Further, a library that is truly culturally competent builds positive learning partnerships with the community it serves.
> ensuring access and connection for all possible users. must be willing to reflect on their own cultural lenses, acknowledge
> and work on existing prejudices and biases in themselves, and be willing to act when presented with inappropriate words
> or behaviors that are prejudiced or discriminatory. (Holly)

Through their personal commitment to more inclusive libraries, the participants responded to the call to
spread their new knowledge and awareness to others:

> The course has not only broadened my thinking but has given me the confidence, as well as substantive information upon
> which I can draw to make my point. Furthermore, I am profoundly aware of the need for more people to advocate for what

is just and equitable. Instead of diversity being this esoteric concept that I was unable to specifically define, I can now give it description, along with meaningful examples. I understand the value and importance of celebrating diversity and curating a collection that is inclusive to all. (Hope)

4.4 Limitations

This study is not without limitations. All results of the bias inventory assessments were self-reported. While many students chose to self-assess on racial bias, not all completed this bias inventory and some of those who did found themselves in a conflict of agreement with the results. Not every student in the course who assessed racial bias developed an action plan for improvement around this area. In an effort to capture authentic student bias, race was not a required area for students to explore. This study focused only on the DEI perspectives of race and racial perceptions. Participants also discussed a variety of other under-represented or underserved populations in their reflections and these discussions are beyond the scope of this study. Finally, this study focused on the perspectives of one set of students in one course. Future studies may look at a broader sample or may alter the data samples used to explore student perceptions. Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant and needed contribution to the discussion of LIS preparation.

5 Implications

This exploratory study examines how the use of a cultural competency framework impacts emerging librarians' perspectives on meeting racially diverse populations. The stages of the cultural competence framework were created to guide the development of the LIS course. The discussed findings suggest the framework, aligned to the principles of social justice, situated within coursework applying culturally relevant pedagogy information raised pre-service librarians' awareness level toward issues of racial DEI. The coded findings document a shift toward empathy and a better understanding of those who are dissimilar to the participants. As participants progressed through the stages of the developed framework together, they grew in their ability to engage in courageous conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006) to push forward ideals of racial diversity and equity in a library setting. "Having these difficult or courageous conversations will help me to be less afraid to talk about racial issues with my peers and my patrons. It will help me to have these conversations in the most appropriate way" (Kim).

Engagement with the course materials allowed students to bridge knowledge of race and racial tensions and engage in difficult conversations that would otherwise be elusive as demonstrated by Holly, "Rankine's work spoke to me about what it is like to not be a part of the dominant White culture in America, to live in a Black body in today's society and carry, without choice, that weight." Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argue that most people do not come into contact with many people of radically different race or social station. We tend to read materials written by and interact with people of our own culture. Individuals can, however, develop empathy for people who have other cultural experiences (2012, p. 33–34). Therefore, findings demonstrating a greater awareness and empathetic stance toward people of different races when approached through the course texts support this assumption. As demonstrated by Amy, who in initial reflections confronting her racial bias stated, "I don't want to be viewed negatively so I just avoid any of these discussions" showed considerable growth in empathy in a later discussion stating,

> I find myself, already, asking more questions about my own assumptions, practices, and choices with an increased passion for asking these same questions of others. At the same time, I am driven to know more so that I can do better in my defense of those whose voices have been and are being marginalized.

Race is a deeply embedded social construct (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 8). To effectively increase a participant's awareness of how race plays a role in systemic interactions throughout many peoples' everyday

lives, the course texts and readings proved valuable. This was sustained as participants shift their anticipated actions to plan to better meet the needs of a racially diverse set of patrons in their future information settings:

> I'm a little daunted and a whole lot inspired by the scope of the work that can be and is being done to not only ensure all patrons receive the information they need to grow, learn, think, and create in ways that are important and relevant to them but also in the deliberate efforts to ensure that every patron feels noticed, known, and respected by library staff and through the resources available at the library. (Holly)

Though derived from an educational framework, the pedagogy framework is beneficial preparing for the library setting that is a service profession. The use of a cultural framework in a LIS preparation program to train pre-service librarians to engage with those they will assist prepared participants to move past their initial reluctance to identify and own bias to a realization that racial awareness brings voice.

A library preparation program that does not critically interrogate race, power, diversity, class, and privilege in the context of meeting the needs of all patrons its graduates will serve runs the risk of disenfranchisement of those patrons. Participants left this course with an energy to refocus their perspective, "I am excited to begin helping myself and my community become more culturally aware" (Cat).

6 Conclusion

This study suggests that a course dedicated to diversity and equity, particularly when framed using a culturally responsive pedagogy framework that includes personal reflection, may have a positive impact on student awareness of their own cultural backgrounds as well as student beliefs and perceptions of others. Change in discourse over the course demonstrated a shift in language from defensive to more empathic and open to diverse opinions and beliefs specifically explored through the principles of cultural teaching. The framework served to assist pre-service librarians identify racial diversity for the purpose of determining anticipated needs of a diverse library population. Findings support this model may be beneficial in for LIS programs where training that considers a diverse set of library users and provides structured strategies for developing critical consciousness.

In conclusion, this exploratory AR study indicates that although DEI are tenets built on the core values of librarianship, these ideals must be explicitly taught in LIS coursework. Having a framework upon which to build this instruction is critical. Many emerging librarians want to believe that they hold DEI values. The optimal opportunity for shifts in understanding occurs as students engage with course materials. Infusing discussions of race and social justice within a course using a culturally responsive pedagogy framework participants begin to examine their own beliefs about race and shift their understanding toward personal growth.

Future directions for this work would be to identify where LIS programs can require DEI education to ensure a more socially trained set of LIS professionals. Implementation of a framework as described in this study, with larger populations of students across institutions, can provoke awareness and training among emerging LIS students and professionals.

Data availability statement: In the interest of protecting the confidentiality of the participants of this study, full data sources are not shared.

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