

LIS Pedagogy Chat is a discussion series for library and information science instructors. Our goal is to provide an informal space to ask questions and share ideas about online pedagogy, and to build a community of practice. Each session focuses on a different topic and features a short presentation on best practices followed by a facilitated discussion and a collaborative document of ideas to share. Slides and notes from each session are available in a shared folder. For more information, see <https://www.lispedagogychat.org/>

Dismantling Deficit Thinking

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Moderator: Chelsea Heinbach (UNLV), Rosan Mitola (UNLV), and Erin Rinto (U of Cincinnati)

Link to [Slides](#)

Topic 1 Deficit Thinking

- Definition: belief there is a narrow, prescribed, correct way of doing things (the norm) and those outside the norm are operating at a deficit and need to be “fixed”
- Historically rooted in oppression of marginalized groups
- Has negative impact on students: ignores cultural strengths, lived experiences, validates negative perceptions of students
- Leads to banking model of education (Freire), lecturing students and expecting them to absorb what we are telling them
- Manifestations in higher ed: construct of at-risk students (avoids addressing systemic issues, puts onus on students), generational stereotypes, achievement gaps, dismissal community knowledge (privileges classroom and academic information over other learning spaces and ways of sharing knowledge), commitment to neutrality (doesn't recognize unequal systems are at play), embodiment of dominant cultural values (e.g., ableism, whiteness)

(note: resources in slides in our archive)

Topic 2 Dismantling Deficit Thinking

- How can we adopt strengths-based approaches
- Book identifies potential pedagogies, draws on them to create five principles
- Principles (with mindsets and practices) available at:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/167Usbl7pbw_XEFtXMhFuykf_r6Tdo5mLSXy-Pho_D8/edit
- Instructors must shift mindset (internal work) in addition to adopting classroom/work practices (external work)
- Example Principle: Center social interaction and community knowledge
 - Knowledge is not created in a vacuum, it is created in communities
 - We should create opportunities for students to create knowledge together - problem-based learning, projects that emphasize community pride, bring expertise from students' communities into the classroom
- Example Principle: Work against systems of educational oppression
 - We should demystify higher education (unwritten rules)
 - Interrupt deficit language when you see/hear it
 - Problematize some norms as you teach them (e.g., academic authority as absolute)
 - Legitimize students' current knowledge, language

Topic 3 Discussion

1. Based on your own experiences with students, what strengths and challenges do students bring with them to college?
- Time management
 - Skilled at finding textbooks, readings, etc., both using the library and otherwise

- Being finders and evaluators of information
- Challenges: building confidence with self-directed learning, they may feel there is a “right answer” they are supposed to find, hidden curriculum
- May find their communities of origin as a source of strength, may also be separating from or struggling with their relationship with that community (shouldn’t stereotype)
- Challenge: students who come with knowledge/skills, but penalized by instructors for minor stuff (e.g., citation errors)

2. Where have you noticed barriers to students expressing or using their strengths in higher education and libraries?

- Faculty setting up scholarly knowledge as the only legit knowledge
- Students don’t think their interests are “academic enough” (and faculty don’t encourage them to see how to integrate interests into assignments)
- Don’t see that their lived experience has value,
- Faculty ideas of the final product and HOW students can demonstrate knowledge.
- Rigid rules around sources, “creative prompts with rigid rules.”
- In disciplines that emphasize standards (e.g., engineering), when they are in areas without standards, shifting to a more relaxed approach can be difficult
- Students have so much experience with punitive approaches to education, they expect that there are right/wrong ways to do things and they will be punished if they don’t do it “right” - can hinder creativity or drawing on strengths
- Need transparent assignment design (see TILT <https://tilthighered.com/tiltexamplesandresources>)
- “One thing that is a challenge is that constructivist ways of teaching are also rooted in cultural values and hegemony. In some cultures, the learner is passive. It is a difficult line to walk!”

3. Have you experienced a deficit or strengths-based approach to teaching when you were a student? In what ways did that experience impact you?

- A well scaffolded discussion
- A professor who required creativity
- Deficit - faculty who did not allow students to retake a test that everyone failed after instructor had been gone for a week and sub taught them different strategies

4. Do you incorporate reflective practice on your own positionality in your classroom? Do you have your students reflect on their positionality and how they navigate power/privilege/marginalization in their educational experiences?

5. Which manifestations of deficit thinking do you have any agency to address?

- How we frame content in our own teaching
- The language we use in the classroom
- Talking to faculty about assignment design, create opportunities for faculty to get help with designing research assignments
- Engaging in critical self reflection
- Addressing deficit thinking as we teach grad students in LIS - teaching future librarians to do better!
- Better mentoring for new librarians
- In hiring committees - rooting out problematic hiring practices,
- Applying these ideas to other areas of work - our committee work, tenure policies, etc.

6. What is one strengths-based approach you feel inspired to incorporate into your own practice?

