

Socio-Cultural Awareness and Culturally Responsive Teaching

ITAC THINK TANK: February 2019

Hosted by Monique Van Willingham (USA)

This is the transcript of one of ITAC Collaborative's monthly Think Tank sessions. Each session focuses on a new theme and is hosted by someone from a different country.

In February of 2019, Monique Van Willingham, Director of Music and Social Change at Longy School of Music at Bard College in New York, USA, provided a brief overview of her current research into concepts of privilege, oppression, and intersectionality. The presentation's ultimate goal was to share an intersectionality framework, curated from many sources by Monique.

Instances in which the text is in [brackets] or (parentheses) indicates when the transcriber was not certain of the speaker's original word choice. Ellipses in parentheses or brackets indicate when the sound was indecipherable for transcription.

Monique

Thank you so much, Madeleine. Hi, everyone. Firstly, thank you so much for having me today to, you know, facilitate this Think Tank. I'm really excited about the topic that we're dealing with today. It's become a big part of my passion. And so, I am actually going to switch directly over to my PowerPoint and just to preface what I'm what today's gonna look like, is that - I'll introduce myself and I'll give a quick introduction and the sort of the lowdown of what we're going to do today. And I think I - just to share with you: I'm at the beginning, I would say, of this exploration around social-cultural awareness, culturally responsive teaching intersectionality. And it's just - it's been a passion of mine for a few years that I've been thinking about - that I've been reading up a lot about. But I'm by no means an expert in any of this. And so I think I see my role in a lot of these. I've made a couple of webinars over the last few months. And often I see my role is activating conversation, making space for dialogue. And really just hearing what everyone has to say about the thoughts that I'm sharing in the hope that we can continue the dialogue.

Monique

Yeah. So I will now share my PowerPoint or share my screen at least and then... .. great! And present. Okay, so Can everyone see the screen?

Madeleine

Yes.

Monique

Right. And, so today there'll be some points in terms of the flow. When I ask maybe - I ask a question and ask [...] people to enter answers in the chat box. That's often to save time. And we'll definitely have a conversation once or twice a day when everyone will get to either share a thought or story or their take on... what's going on. But of course, feel free to jump in and send a chat message if you'd like to share any thoughts or ask any questions.

Monique

Okay, so let's jump in. My name is Monique Van Willingham. Oh, this is the plan for the day: we're going to look at social-cultural awareness, a little bit of privilege. We might do a bit of personal storytelling, but what I really would love to get today is intersectionality and the framework around that. We might not have time to do culturally responsive teaching today, but I'll certainly send the whole Prezi forward. And I'm happy to send the bibliography as well, just as a starting point.

Monique

[...] I just want to share a little bit of my background. So my name is Monique Van Willingham, and I am from Cape Town, South Africa. I was born and raised in Cape Town. And about - this is my family. And about seven years ago, I came to the USA. And where I started was as [...] at the New England Conservatory [...] in Boston. And, there I studied as an El Sistema fellow, which looked at the study using music as a vehicle for social change in Venezuela, firstly, and then looking at how that movement moved across the world.

Monique

After that, I did a Master of Arts in Teaching degree at Longy School of Music of Bard College, and that's the institution that I'm working for now. So, I'm now the Director of Music and Social Change at Longy School of Music. And the place where a lot of these schools that are culturally responsive teaching intersectionality [...] - really started and developed was really in that imaging program - my colleagues and faculty in that space. That was a little where I got to delve deeply into this.

Monique

And then for two and a half years, I was a music director at the El Sistema inspired program with the LA Philharmonic called (YOLA at HOLA). And, of course, there are a lot of these questions - a lot of this was where I did the practice around this: working with kids, working with their families, and also working with communities that I had a lot to learn about. That's when a lot of

the thought process around this came into play. And of course I worked with many teaching artists in that capacity.

Monique

And, then I want to share maybe one more thing about myself is that for many years, as a youth in South Africa, I was part of an orchestra called Miyaji Youth Orchestra. And this was one of the first diverse orchestras in South Africa. There was musicians of various color and ethnicities. And, it was [...] this orchestra somehow had us play - we had a whole classical repertoire [that we went] internationally with, but we also had a whole second concert of jazz music and indigenous music and [our] own compositions. And it was really in this orchestral space that really allowed us to come forward fully ourselves. We had a lot of the conversations around race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and things like that came into conversation as young people. So in this space, I literally saw how music can be used to change the narrative. And so this is why - this is the impetus for my passion around this in terms of teaching.

Monique

So, moving into what is culture? I wonder if we could do a quick check in the chat box? And if you could just actually enter into the chat box? On seeing this question. So I'll stop the share. And just in on to the question, if you're willing, what is culture to you, maybe just a sentence or two or word, we'll take like a minute or so to just type in.

Madeleine

Thank you.

Monique

Okay, I see one - I see human expression Anyone else? What is culture? Culture is a shared approach to life. Mm-hmm. Other thoughts? Great! Culture: traditions, habits. Culture is worldview. Identity... origin... familiar set of systems and beliefs [...] and when embraced by particular people group. Yeah, thank you for that.

Monique

Anything else? Okay. So, just in the interest of time, I think we'll move forward with this. And so, in thinking about culture, I often think about it in three ways which would be well - before... we could be one of the definitions, and this definition comes from Delgado-Gadait and Trubea, 1991: (Culture) is a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews and beliefs that give order and meaning to our lives and the lives of others. So, I've often seen sort of that definition of it's like a system of values and often shared values, beliefs, standards. Sometimes it leads to - sometimes that is linked to space and place and geography. Sometimes it's linked to culture [...].

Monique

And, then another definition that's also going to influence some of our discussion today might be culture as a way of doing things that can [overriding] way of seeing things and a way of being.

And, I just wanted to share this, that often, you know, our culture with [it's] cultural values and background or our way of doing things together determines how we think, believe, and behave. And, this in turn determines and affects how we teach and learn.

Monique

So, when we step into the classroom as teaching artists or step into spaces and places as leaders or facilitators, we don't just come with our political selves, we come with all of our background and worldviews, our ways of doing things - we slip into every space with all of who we are, whether we showcase that or not. And since today's topic is social, cultural awareness, I just want to do - [to share] that the social-cultural awareness is related to the different groups of people in society and the habits, beliefs, cultural and social thoughts. So today, we are actually looking at - you know, there's a definition of culture as a way of - a combined way of doing things or a shared set of values and beliefs. But if we add it to the notion of social identifiers, and how each - different groups of people have different social aspects (...) that identify them, which have sometimes sort of privileged some and not others - we sort of are going to look at all of this as a framework altogether today.

Monique

And so in terms of culture and education, I think there's no escaping the fact that education is a social-cultural process. And just in thinking about this, if I think about teachers, I think, as teachers, we step into spaces... where as teaching artists, we step into spaces with a personal cultural background, with any prejudice that we might have, because we all have some type of prejudice, it's quite natural biases, and then preconceptions. So, we actually all slip into spaces with a mixed bag of these things. And then we have our students also step into the spaces with a mixed bag of these things. And, in a sense, we construct an environment of meaning to give them. And that's the other definition of culture as a way of doing things and overriding the understanding and culture that we set up.

Monique

And I think what I'm what I'm hoping to discuss in this conversation is, you know, what is - what does that look like? And knowing that, when we construct an environment of being together, it can either be intentional, or we might not use intention. So a lot of this is how do we use this type of knowledge and exploration in a way that has intention? Okay, so I'm going to play this video. It's a video just talking about [... the privilege walk]. And yeah, so we'll play the video and then we'll actually get a chance to speak and discuss. Okay, so here, goes!

[\(Buzzfeed's Privilege Walk video is shared on screen.\)](#)

Group discussion about the video was omitted from the transcript and the learning module recording.

Monique

So, that's a good segue for us to actually move on. So, I'm going to go back to sharing my screen. Thanks for your participation. I love that! It's wonderful. I'll begin to move forward.

Monique

So, what is privilege? And yes, there's this unearned privilege. But, here's just a quick definition. And I do want to share that I know that all of you are teaching artists and leaders and experts in your own right. So, I don't share definitions - by no means do I think that you don't know this or haven't engaged with it. I think I love sharing definitions to ensure that we're accessing the conversation from a similar place. In front of this conversation, I've found it helpful for some conversations.

Monique

So, I'm just going to read this: privilege is the invisible advantage and resultant unearned benefits afforded to dominant groups of people because of a variety of socio-demographic traits. Privilege provides economic and social boosts to dominant groups while supporting structural barriers to other groups imposed by prejudice." This is from Encyclopedia of Social Work and it just speaks about how the invisible advantages and privileges that some social groups have. And often it's sometimes in the interest of its social group to keep that structural barrier going.

Monique

So, we're actually going to skip the storytelling, we did a little bit of it now. And, just as a preface to intersectionality, because I really want us to have the discussion about intersectionality - I want to hear your thoughts.

Monique

But, just to share as an intro, so oppression, looking at [...] - whether we are looking at indigeneity, nation, language - all of those separate things - realizing that oppression and structures of power happen at multiple levels. And this becomes important for this conversation as we walk through it.

Monique

It's reinforced by societal norms, institutional biases, interpersonal interactions, and individual beliefs. So if you look at the bottom, there's the individual belief and that, for example, would be you... me... what do I feel about? What are my feelings, my beliefs, my values, my culture, my background?

Monique

Then, the next one would be interpersonal. And this is where we begin to speak about, you know, engage actions, behaviors language. So, when we start engaging with each other, we now have two individuals or a group of individuals with their backgrounds, now engaging about a topic.

Monique

And, then institutional might be legal systems, education systems, public policy, things like hiring practices, media images. So, institutional is the next level.

Monique

And societal or cultural often pans out as collective ideas about what is right. And it's often the dominant [group] set in space. And we'll talk about what dominant can't constitute, but often it's the dominant group that sort of shares these overriding collective ideas of what is right in [...]. And what everyone else should maybe, you know, ascribe to.

Monique

So, I'd like to see the intersectionality framework. There's many ways you can use it -many different... lots of ways of naming it, but today - I'd love this is from actually found this on the USC - University of Southern California website in the therapy section. [...] I'm happy to share that link as well. I love the way they did this.

Monique

So yeah, in their framework, I've looked at the agent being the members of a dominant social group and privileged by birth to acquisition knowingly or unknowingly, who sometimes often exploit and reap unearned advantages over members of the target group. And then a target group could be described as members of social identity groups who are often discriminated against, marginalized, disenfranchised, oppressed, exploited, and by an oppressor's system [... of] institutions without identity apart from the target.

Monique

So another word for agent on the top might be sort of that is dominant. Another way you could look at it could be the majority. In some spaces, the majority is the dominant group. And, they are the agents. In other spaces, for example, in my context back home in South Africa during apartheid, we, through colonization and, you know, we had a minority actually be the agent. So, we had those who are Caucasian or white were in the minority, they were about 12% - of a 70% black nation - was actually had the power.

Monique

And then those who are the target underneath are often those who are discriminated against oppressed, exploited. And [so I encourage you to think] about your own country or your own space or place and think about who are the agents in your space? And what is the cultural makeup of your agents and think about history. Think about what that means for overriding. [...]

Monique

One more thing before I share the framework is that - why I really love this framework? I've been through so many conversations around race [...]. And these conversations are always really hard to have, especially when it's colleague to colleague. I think, you know, when you are sort of leading a group of students through something, that's one thing. But in order to go through this

process ourselves, which you've got to do in order to lead the process with others, it can be super hard to have the conversation. It just gets super tense, awkward, and there's a lot of guilt in the room. There's a lot of anger. There's just a lot of emotion in the room.

Monique

And I find that this framework, for me, really hits home. Like for the most part, not for everyone, but for most individuals? In some space in this framework, we're both the target and an agent of oppression, and that's important to know because that means that me, as Monique, there are spaces where I need to be an ally. There are spaces that I don't understand fully - that I need to learn about I need to ask questions about and not just- I need to not [...] others in those spaces. But there are other spaces where I need my voice to be heard. I need to speak up for myself. In those spaces, I need to advocate for those who are in a similar group. And so the framework, to me, seems like a good way to engage with that.

Monique

So, what is intersectionality? It's basically the intersection of social identifiers. And these are some of the identifiers on the screen. Indigeneity, class, sexual orientation, sexuality, racism, religion, gender, age, ability, and wage, nation - immigration status. And these were the few that we are looking at today.

Monique

I'm actually going to skip this for now. This is just a definition. [I'm going to] skip the exercise. But let's just take a minute or so and everyone, if you can just maybe, well... we could maybe do it quickly? If you wouldn't mind just reading through the definition, and then going to the chatbox, and maybe typing in one or two words that one phrase that stands out for you. And Madeleine, I'm going to leave the screen up and if you wouldn't mind actually reading what comes up with the chat box have three minutes. So as you read type and we'll actually just take three minutes to collaboratively. Okay?

Group discussion about the definition was omitted from the transcript and the learning module recording.

Monique

So, here's the framework, I found that - taking this from a couple of spaces. Definitely I, of course, didn't create it myself. And, I think, sometimes seeing the whole framework can be overwhelming for people. That being said, I think engaging with the whole framework is useful.

Monique

So, what we're going to do is I'm going to speak through the framework, and then I'm going to show you how the framework pertains to me. And what that means. And then we're going to have a discussion around any thoughts. And maybe we'll end with a short [...] on what this means for teaching artists.

Monique

So, if we look at the intersectionality framework, on the left hand side, we have all the social categories. On the top axis we have target, which is the excluded group. Remember, this may be in minority, [...] but the group - it doesn't have sort of the power in the space, often excluded. And on the right hand side top axis there's the agent, which is the dominant group. Remember dominant is power, plus they use of often so it's power. Plus privilege, maybe the majority of it may be political. So, that's just context. Remember, this whole framework through which I'm shading it today's to the US context.

Monique

So, if you look on the left, we have race/racial/racism, the excluded group going across would be people of color. The dominant group - the agent group in the United States would be white, Caucasian people. In terms of class, excluded would be underserved communities, Agent [...] class. Gender, the target group be women, transgendered people. In the agent dominant group, the use would be male. Sexual orientation, the target or excluded group has been LGBTQI+ people and the agent and dominant group have been those who are heterosexual [...]. In terms of ability, you have people who are with disabilities who are differently-abled as the excluded group and dominant group would be people without disabilities - are more able bodied. In terms of religion in the United States, due to history and colonization and power, as part of a target to be non Christian. And then the dominant group would be Christian and so forth.

Monique

Maybe one other thing that I might pull out here would be that looking at youth, for example, there's excluded groups. It would often be children and young adults in terms of their voice being heard [...] and the dominant people, adults. Maybe further down, you might look at immigrant status: excluded groups in the United States have been immigrants, and then those in the dominant group, US born indigeneity, which might be very interesting to many countries. Represented would be those who are indigenous often exclude a group in the United States, those would be Native Americans. And then those with a colonial background, or the dominant group in this category would be anyone who's not indigenous. And then there's this [...], of course, around language in United States.

Monique

Let me actually - whoops, let me go to what this looks like for myself. And [...] I often share this just to think through - so I feel like, at this point, I see the world through this lens. And looking at this lens makes me realize that which spaces I need to be an ally in which spaces I need to lift the voice of others, and also it's reminded me and it's made me do some learning around the things, in a sense, that I get to end with [...] and experience because of my privilege in various areas.

Monique

So I'll just quickly go through this, I'm a person of color. So in that space, I need my voice to be heard. Class, I definitely grew up in an in an underserved community. But now I'm, you know,

middle/owning class. So, I am a woman. So, in that space, I would need my voice to be heard. I am heterosexual. So, in that space, I'm in that dominant group. And it means that in that space, I need to [...] - realizing that I've got things to learn. Asking questions is good, not making assumptions, doing the learning and also not speaking on behalf of others. And assuming that my way of seeing something is everyone else's way of seeing something. [...] Able bodied, I have a Christian background. I'm an older adult. [So], in all of those spaces, I really need to ensure that I'm making space for others and making space for others' voices to be heard in those spaces in terms of these conversations. It's really about listening and learning. Yeah.

Monique

So I see this comment. So let's actually move into - taking a moment to just - (...) We have about, let's see, 30 minutes left, and taking a moment to [situate] yourself with the table. Let's have a discussion. And let me just show you this quickly. We're not going to get time to necessarily do this exercise. But, this is something sort of about as we examine ourselves, the next step is examining our world and seeing like, I am, you know, where do I sort of lay within this? My coworkers... so the people around us: the students I teach, teachers I'm with, the doctor that I go to. Basically the people who we engage with! The people in my neighborhood, people who regularly visit my home, my neighbors. Where do they fall within this? And what does it really mean? For [...], what does that mean?

Monique

Great. So I'm going to stop shooting and let's have a discussion around this slide, maybe situating ourselves in the table, any questions that you have? What does this mean for us? And all the aspects that you're curious about or surprise you. And we're not going to write down our thoughts. We just gonna go ahead and have a conversation. Okay, so I'm gonna stop shooting.

Group discussion about intersectionality in the participants' lives and experiences was omitted from the transcript and the learning module recording.

The discussion concluded the session.