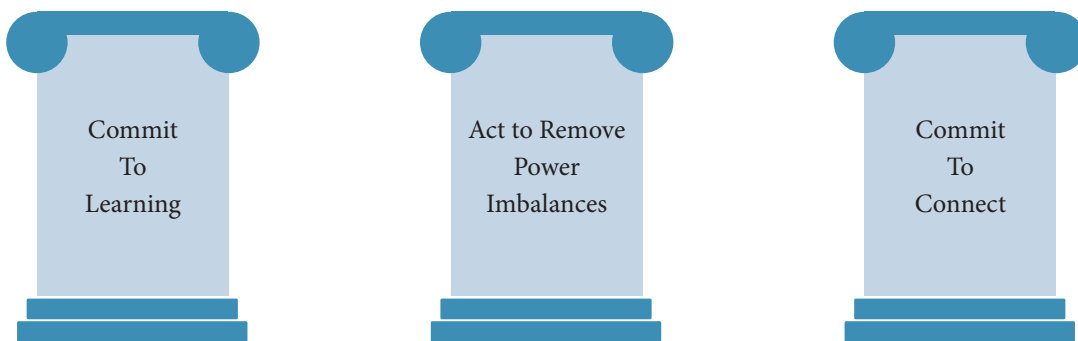# Cultural Humility in Action

Cultural humility is a relatively new concept to libraries borrowed from the health sciences disciplines; at its root, cultural humility requires one to acknowledge inequality and take action (Cooke, 2017, Tervalon & Garcia, 1998). Cultural humility operates in two dimensions, with our colleagues and our patrons. It is helpful to think of cultural humility as a concept with three pillars:

- Pillar #1: A commitment to being a lifelong learner who deliberately and bravely establishes a practice of rigorous self-reflection and critique.

- Pillar #2: A willingness to acknowledge and dismantle power differentials or imbalances based on authority or position.

- Pillar #3: A commitment to connecting to the community you support.

Commit To Learning	Act to Remove Power Imbalances	Commit To Connect

Three reasons to incorporate cultural humility

Now, you might be asking, what are some reasons why I might add cultural humility to my practice as a library worker? Here are three reasons:

- To improve communication with your colleagues and patrons.
  By taking the time to examine your own identity and worldview, you vastly improve how you communicate with others. If you are curious about learning more and want to start examining yourself check out an article I wrote on the topic called "Critical self-reflection: Moving inward to provide outward service and Developing reflective practice in LIS education" (Goodman, 2016; Sen & Ford, 2009; University of Toronto, 2016). For now, take action by asking yourself critical questions about who you are to improve your ability to communicate well with patrons and colleagues.

- To remove structural barriers for your colleagues and patrons.
  As a library employee, question your position of power relative to patrons, with whom you are interacting. Ask yourself, how do I use my power with my patrons? If you are in a leadership or supervisory role in a library, question the power differentials between you and those whom you supervise. Power imbalances will exist in libraries, but a practice of asking questions and taking action will help us to remove structural barriers in our libraries.

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- To create a better library for your colleagues and patrons.
  Venture beyond the library to local community organizations to conduct on the ground fact gathering. Ask questions, like, how can I better serve patrons by forming authentic, strategic partnerships? What do I need to learn about the community where I work? As for colleagues, talk with them about their communities and be careful with your assumptions, biases, and prejudices. The other side of asking questions is practicing good listening skills. For more tips on how to practice active listening see the University of California, Greater Good project listed in the references (University of California Berkeley, Greater Good in Action, n.d.).

Cultural humility is a tool we can use in our libraries to help us better support our patrons and to improve communication with our colleagues. Remember to be patient with yourself; cultural humility is not an end-point but rather a continual process of questioning, learning, and acting. To learn more about this concept see the list of articles and resources below.

References

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University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. (2016). *The power flower: Reflection on our social identities.* Retrieved from https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/edactivism/Activist_Resources/The_Power_Flower.html

Resources to learn more about cultural humility

Cooke, N. (2017). *Information services to diverse populations: Developing culturally competent library professionals.* Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Limited.

Jones, S.D., & Murphy, B. (2019). *Diversity and inclusion in libraries: A call to action and strategies for success.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

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