We need critique more than ever
Critical librarianship as a tool for thought and action

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1. Context
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2. What we talk about when we talk about ‘the critical’ or ‘critique’
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2. What we talk about when we talk about ‘the critical’ or ‘critique’
3. Developing a critical practice
Context, and being hopeful
Our context

FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS

CANCELLED
Facts matter
“Without a vision for tomorrow, hope is impossible.”

Freire, 1997 p.13
“Our visions for tomorrow are most vital when they emerge from the concrete circumstances of change we are experiencing right now”

hooks, 2003 p.12
Critique and the critical
Critical...

Thinking
Literacy
Information literacy
Pedagogy
Reflection
Theory and practice
Librarianship
“Critical thought and its theory...”

Horkheimer, 1972 p. 210
Librarians are doing this already
But, with significant challenges
Q1 #uklibchat pub lib staff are desperately trying to keep the doors open & management don't tend to promote critical thinking.
Where is the critical librarianship?

critlib.org
#critlib
"Critlib is [...] an outsider perspective that’s become the mainstream of high-level professional discourse. And one to which you must subscribe if you want to be taken seriously, or part of the in-crowd."

Baio, 2017a; 2017b
Being critical, ‘doing’ critique
Critique is a tool for development, resistance, emancipation
“[…] an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal.”

Foucault, 2000 p.236
But...
“[…] critique can become merely an expression of profound cynicism, which then works to sustain dominator culture”

hooks, 2003 p.xiv
Developing critical practice
“Knowledge [...] including every kind of experience is preserved in critical theory and practice.”

Horkheimer, 1972 p. 220
Strategic critical moves transform, rather than reform
1. Critique our LIS practice
2. Raise critical consciousness
3. Develop critical LIS education
4. Critique creeping marketisation

Dick, 1995 pp.229-230
Power and critical questions

Foucault, 2000 pp. 236-248
1. How is power differentiated?
2. What are the objectives of those with power?
3. How is power exercised?
4. What institutions determine the site of power?
5. What technological refinements are brought to bear in exercising power?

Foucault, 2000 pp.236-248
Critique as a leadership skill
Critical reflective practice
“The task of critical reflection is not merely to understand the various facts and their historical development [...] but also to see through the notion of fact itself.”

Horkheimer, 2013 p. 58
“The development of insight and practice through critical attention to practical values, theories, principles, assumptions and the relationship between theory and practice which inform everyday actions.”

Bolton, 2014 p. xxiii
“...critical attention to practical values...”

Bolton, 2014 p. xxiii
‘Domains’ of reflection
Values
Assumptions
Beliefs
Linking reflection to action is a critical practice
“Theory emerges from the concrete, from my efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences, from my efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others […]”

hooks, 1994 p.70
“There is a ‘right relationship’ between critical theory and pragmatics, between the technical and the theoretical. Wise leaders and wise managers will seek this right relationship.”

Elmborg, 2017 p.66
#critlib community
@radicallibs community
especially @walkyouhome, @moananddrone, & @deeronthecurve

With thanks to excellent folk…
These slides
x.preater.com/dbslib17

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