

Toward a Critical-Inclusive Assessment Practice for Library Instruction, by Lyda Fontes McCartin and Rachel Dineen

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Lyda Fontes McCartin and Rachel Dineen, *Toward a Critical-Inclusive Assessment Practice for Library Instruction*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2018, 162pp, \$18.00.

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As literature on critical information literacy and pedagogy continues to proliferate, instruction librarians enjoy a range of resources on designing lessons that incorporate critical content, methods, and perspectives. In *Toward a Critical-Inclusive Assessment Practice for Library Instruction*, Lyda Fontes McCartin and Rachel Dineen add to this conversation by reimagining instructional assessment techniques through a critical lens and offering suggestions for their application in the library classroom. Grounding their work in the tenets of critical-inclusive pedagogy, the authors provide academic librarians with a series of actionable assessment strategies, share their personal experiences, and reflect on their guiding theoretical principles. The book speaks specifically to the post-secondary setting, and will be a valuable asset to academic librarians working in university or college libraries who wish to infuse critical approaches into every aspect of their instructional work.

This book was borne out of a working partnership between the two authors, both librarians with information literacy instruction responsibilities at the University of Northern Colorado. As they explain in their preface, the two found each other to be collegial, supportive partners in their mutual pursuit of critical-inclusive instruction. Their personal story underscores the importance of collaboration in experimenting with new teaching techniques and striving towards long-term, iterative improvement. The authors also describe their individual journeys towards critical assessment and the challenges they have faced along the way, a humanizing narrative that readers may find relatable and reassuring. The book's focus on charting both successes and failures emphasizes that positive change can be bumpy, which frames the strategies as realistic and approachable.

The book's scaffolded structure will allow instructors to learn from McCartin and Dineen's instructional expertise. The authors begin by offering an introduction to the principles and influential thinkers of critical pedagogy, setting up a helpful foundation for readers who are new to the discourse. Later, they build upon this



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framework of critical pedagogy by detailing practical assessment strategies and describing examples of implementation, offering tangible learnings to those readers who are already fluent in critical pedagogy theory.

Throughout the volume, McCartin and Dineen draw clear links between theory and practice by incorporating the ideas of other critical educators into their work. In particular, they draw on Dr. Saran Stewart's Critical-Inclusive Pedagogical Framework (CIPF) to align their techniques with an explicitly critical-inclusive foundation. The CIPF's five tenets are intended to serve as an interconnected set of strategies for instructors to pursue holistically. By guiding instructors towards these tenets in concert, the CIPF aims to increase critical consciousness (or *conscientização*) in learners. Critical consciousness is a multifaceted concept originated by Paulo Freire: it is a state defined by awareness, analysis, and resistance of power relations, ideologies, and discourses, and it is achieved through "engaged, dialogue-driven education" (18). While they acknowledge that critical consciousness must be fostered over an extended period of time, McCartin and Dineen focus on the potential to plant "critical seeds" through short-term educational opportunities. The authors visually map their assessment techniques to the tenets of the CIPF by using a diagram of concentric circles, thus rendering visible the intended critical outcomes of their assessment interventions.

Each chapter returns to the key principles that underpin critical pedagogical practice, including centering student experience, valuing student voice, negotiating via dialogue, and sharing responsibilities. In particular, McCartin and Dineen pay special attention to the tension between authority and authoritarianism in the classroom; while recognizing the impossibility of entirely eliminating classroom power dynamics, the authors discuss how critical pedagogues can interrogate their own institutional authority while still leveraging their lived experience and equitably sharing power in the classroom.

The authors also confront the problematic nature of traditional assessment practices, which do not often empower student voice, engage meaningfully with student feedback, or work to decenter instructor authority. The authors assert that these conventional evaluative methods can contribute to student disenfranchisement, as they can act as "a form of unilateral control that can be seen as a form of exploitation or oppression" (38). Alternatively, this book offers a robust approach to assessment that embraces both instructor and student reflection, thus standing in contrast to reductive metrics of achievement. To their credit, the authors grapple earnestly with this friction between assessment and critical approaches. They explain that their project required "a complete makeover of [their] existing assessment practice" (1) and aim to offer new alternatives, rather than adaptations

of traditional methods. Instead of recommending pre- and post-quizzes, objective tests, or standardized instruments that measure performance, McCartin and Dineen focus on self-reflection, peer observation, and face-to-face feedback as ways to gain information about teaching and learning experiences while facilitating critical goals. The authors also encourage instructors to involve students in the creation of assessment tools, like rubrics and learning outcomes, to share power and cultivate dialogue in the classroom. While these qualitative approaches to assessment are not wholly novel, the book's descriptive examples and the authors' value-driven engagement with theory provide readers with an original cross-section of library instructional practice. The authors' honest engagement with the uncomfortable fit between assessment and critical-inclusiveness is refreshing—it bolsters their assertion that both critical pedagogy and assessment “support hope for the future and progress toward positive change” (46) and are not only compatible, but mutually necessary. The authors contend that critical-inclusive teaching must integrate critical assessment strategies, rather than relying on traditional assessment methods to evaluate critical content or refraining from assessment altogether.

In presenting their suggestions for practitioners, the authors are particularly attentive to logistical hurdles that could impede instructors from experimenting with new techniques. In particular, they acknowledge the operational constraints of the one-shot session, a format that comprises a large proportion of the instructional work of many librarians. While recognizing the significant challenges and limitations of this model, the authors also highlight its critical possibilities and suggest adjustments to time-intensive assessment strategies so that they can be used more effectively in the one-shot context. For example, they suggest different approaches for implementing the “Research Self-Assessment” technique in a credit course versus in a one-shot session: while the complete reflection exercise is well-suited for use on the first day of a semester-long course, McCartin and Dineen suggest adapting this technique to the one-shot timeframe by limiting the number of questions posed, using an online polling system to quickly solicit real-time answers, or running a pre-survey. However, while the optional adjustments allow for flexible use of most techniques, the book's overall utility would be strengthened by offering specific strategies intended for the one-shot's limited timeframe. Presenting assessment techniques that leverage the one-shot's unique characteristics, rather than imperfectly mapping other methods to onto its features, would prove a highly useful addition to the critical toolboxes of instruction librarians.

Overall, McCartin and Dineen succeed in providing a useful set of critical assessment strategies for classroom implementation. Their personal examples and detailed appendices animate their theoretical framework, demonstrating how these

techniques could be applied in a real-world information literacy context that will be familiar to many instruction librarians. The authors' suggested assessment strategies certainly align with their stated aims of critical pedagogy—they are reflective, dialogic, and transparent in nature. This straightforward, clear-eyed book will serve as a valuable complement to other writing on critical library pedagogy, helping instructors to understand the impact of their critical teaching by taking a consonant critical approach to assessment.