



Introduction

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CRITICAL PEDAGOGY CAN BE a contentious term. It can be misconstrued as simply criticizing for the sake of criticism; it can be associated with focus on talk while lacking action; or it can be viewed as exclusionary through use of jargon and study of theory. For the purpose of these handbooks, we define critical pedagogy as engaging in the theory and practice (or praxis) of inclusive and reflective teaching in order to broaden students' understanding of power structures within the education system and in society. This comes with the ultimate goal of action in some capacity to make the world a more socially just place. Although there are areas within critical pedagogy that still invite debate—some of which authors in these volumes address—we consider both theory and practice valuable, and associate critical praxis with aspects of feminism, critical race theory, queer theory, disability studies, and other approaches that challenge hegemony.

Investigating critical pedagogy might lead to an understanding that the teacher should consider ways in which to redistribute power. This is in essence being able to practice what we preach by modeling how to dismantle oppressive forces within our own classrooms. Redistributing power has its caveats, however. The idea of “empowerment” can be problematic where hegemonic forces still determine who gets to award power and autonomy, educators should remain aware of the power they wield and use it in a way that is authoritative (relating to expertise and facilitating learning) rather than as authoritarianism. This distinction between authority and authoritarianism should be realized as we position ourselves in relation to our students.¹ Critical pedagogy does not diminish the role of the teacher, but rather should enhance it, where learning is viewed as a partnership between teachers and students.

With an understanding of the *what* and the *why*, we also hope this book clarifies the *how*. There is nuance in approaches to critical library pedagogy, which encourages care in how to engage in praxis. Some chapters apply theories directly,

or weave together points of view that lead into application or practice. With so much nuance, not all might agree or have the same philosophy. There are many approaches we can take to engage in critical praxis and we hope these volumes introduce new ideas or generate new thinking in what may already be familiar.

Teaching librarians have long incorporated social justice into their work, but focused interest in critical library pedagogy has grown rapidly in recent years. To provide just one example, while *Critical Library Instruction*² received 28 chapter submissions before it came out in 2010, we received nearly 100 submissions for this project, which expanded from one book to two volumes. Although there is a developing body of literature examining LIS and library practice via critical theories, there is still a lack of easy-to-implement instructional design available. The criticisms of critical pedagogy noted above can be particularly challenging for busy practitioners: dense academic texts can be alienating to beginners and inaccessible to overworked teachers. This collection aims to provide an entry-point to these conversations. These two volumes provide a collection of voices of longtime practitioners and thinkers, as well as librarians who are relatively new to critical pedagogy or to librarianship itself. The authors in this book do not hold any monolithic view of critical pedagogy or social justice, and each contribution contributes to the richness of what it means to do this type of work in libraries. This is evident in the evolving conversations in these volumes alone, where authors cite each other and expand on previous points of view. There are no easy answers or quick fixes to a long history of oppression and discrimination: it does take hard work and commitment to make libraries, education, or society more just; but we hope this book can be a starting point for personal reflection and shared discussion.

There are a variety of pedagogical perspectives represented in these volumes, some of which might be unfamiliar to someone just starting to explore critical pedagogy. Because of that, we want to introduce a few concepts that you will see used throughout these books. The first is the *banking concept of education*, a term coined by Paulo Freire in the classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.³ The banking concept describes education that approaches students as empty containers waiting to be filled with knowledge by the teacher. Although Freire's work was based on his experience teaching literacy to (adult) peasants in Brazil, much of his work resonates for other teaching environments. For teaching librarians, the banking concept may look like a whirlwind database demonstration where students watch you click through the steps to a successful search; it may look like a lecture about why not to plagiarize followed by a multiple choice test to prove you have learned; and so on. Where the primary aim of teaching is the one-way transmission of content from expert to novice, the banking concept may be at play.

Instead, Freire proposed that education focus on transformative dialogue between learners and teachers. Through the process of *conscientization*, learn-

ers essentially come into consciousness about power structures that were previously unseen. In a way, seeing through to these hidden power structures is like seeing “the matrix.” Marx essentially stated that being critical examines underpinnings of ideology. Bourdieu has said it is to search for emancipation from seeing the world in a certain way. And Habermas said it has an “emancipatory dimension.” Conscientization is not necessarily about taking the blue pill or red pill and then suddenly all is realized, but this is an intentional process based on asking tough questions and entering into dialogue.⁴ And with that, these actions should be part of everyday practice. Critical praxis is not meant to be tacked on as wholly separate from library practice; they work in tandem, where it is part of what we’re already doing. Many of us incorporate critical praxis in our teaching whether we intend to or not simply because we urge students to be critical thinkers. We don’t need to think of engaging in critical pedagogy as learning an entirely new way of teaching, but a means to expand what we’re already doing and consider additional perspectives. For example, rather than zipping through a database demonstration, you might find ways to engage students in conversation about the costs, ownership, and production of scholarly information. Conscientization can complement course material, but it requires resisting the banking model approach of dumping content into (or onto) students. This book aims to provide you with ideas and examples of how other librarians do this work for and with their students, and how you can begin or expand your critical pedagogical praxis.

These volumes include three types of chapters. Volume One provides short essays reflecting on personal practice, describing projects, and exploring major ideas. We hope that these chapters provide inspiration as you begin or renew your exploration of critical pedagogy. The bibliography of each chapter also provides a network of other sources to explore. Volume One closes with a selection of workbook activities to improve on your own practice and understanding of critical pedagogy. Inspired by Kate Bornstein’s gender and sexuality classic *My Gender Workbook*,⁵ these chapters guide you through structured reflections and self-guided learning via writing, drawing, reading, and conversational prompts. These chapters cover topics such as building personal skills and identity, cultivating local community, and documenting your journey as a critical practitioner. These activities do not need to be completed in order, and many of them can be repeated again over time to deepen your reflection and self-knowledge. Many of these activities could be adapted for use in groups, in a workplace or informal group. We encourage you to share your reflections with others, whether with colleagues in your institution or through broader networks online.

Volume Two consists of lesson plans. These chapters include everything from small activities to multi-session projects. However, the bulk of them focus on the ubiquitous and often frustrating one-shot. It is important to note

that these lessons are not provided as recipes, or steps to follow in a straightforward sequence. Critical pedagogy requires collaborating with learners and adapting to their needs, as well as continual reflection, but we hope that these lessons provide elements you can pull and tweak to fit your own environment. These chapters also provide 30 different views on creating and delivering critically-designed information literacy instruction. Many of these lesson plans reflect material commonly requested by faculty, including introductions to databases, evaluating information sources, or the research cycle. The approaches used by lesson plan authors also demonstrate how to meet faculty demand while also negotiating a more critical approach. Each of these chapters concludes with at least one final question, where authors have presented some additional thoughts for you as the reader to reflect on. We hope this provides a valuable opportunity to engage critically throughout instruction, whether you are new to critical pedagogy or have been practicing it for a while.

Through these three formats in the sixty chapters we've included, we hope you find multiple points of contact for your own practice and study. These are not endpoints—these two volumes do not have everything you need.

Finally, a few notes on editorial decisions you may notice throughout the books. We have asked authors to use gender-neutral language whenever appropriate, so you may see “they” used as a singular pronoun instead of “he” or “she.” Several chapters use Canadian spellings rather than standard American spellings, as requiring linguistic assimilation can reinforce cultural imperialism. We thank ACRL Press for their willingness to be flexible with applying these two conventions. Academic language represents particular histories of cultural practice and domination, and intentional choices can move towards equity.

Along similar lines, we invited authors to participate in the *Citation Practices Challenge*, which asked academics to be purposefully inclusive in who they cited, to “stop erasing Indigenous, Black, brown, trans*, disabled POC, QT*POC, feminist, activist, and disability/crip contributions from our intellectual genealogies.”⁶ We invite you, as the reader, to look closely at who is cited and included, and whose voices are missing in this collection. Although we have sixty chapters between the two volumes, it is hardly a comprehensive collection of the critical pedagogy and social justice work happening in library classrooms. We have little from the perspectives of disability studies or anti-colonialism, for example, and all of our authors currently live in the United States and Canada.

In some ways, these gaps reflect the cyclical nature of critical pedagogy and praxis: there is always more work to be done. Just as this is not the first text to explore critical pedagogy within librarianship, we are certain it will not be the last.

Notes

1. Joshua F. Beatty, "Reading Freire for First World Librarians" (paper presentation, Annual conference of the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians, Ottawa, ON, June 2, 2015).
2. Maria Accardi, Emily Drabinski, and Alana Kumbier, eds. *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods*, (Sacramento: Library Juice Press, 2010).
3. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000).
4. Nicole Pagowsky, "Transforming our Image through a Compass of Critical Librarianship" (keynote presentation, Wisconsin Association of Academic Librarians annual conference, Manitowoc, WI, April 22-24, 2015), <http://nicolepagowsky.info/documents/PagowskyWAAL2015Transcript.pdf>.
5. Kate Bornstein, *My Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).
6. "Citation Practices Challenge." *Google Docs*. Accessed March 31, 2016. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1beYUXa7IETsrsmwr52g4Qn3rEbYh0xFBU7Sde2CwHRg/viewform?usp=embed_facebook.

