

Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction

By Maria T. Accardi. (Library Juice Press, 2013). ISBN: 978-1-936117-55-0

Reviewed by Emily Deal

In the introduction to *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction*, Maria T. Accardi describes her book as both a primer on feminist pedagogy for librarians and as a (much needed) corrective that may begin to redress the scant literature on the relationship between feminist pedagogy and the library classroom. Throughout the book, Accardi, who is Coordinator of Instruction at Indiana University Southeast and co-editor of *Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods*, succeeds at striking a balance between elucidating the theoretical underpinnings of feminist library instruction and providing practical guidance for fostering feminist learning spaces in libraries. Three appendices, which include helpful sample teaching contexts, worksheets, and assessment techniques supplement the theory discussed throughout the book, and an extensive bibliography provides direction for further reading. Though it is primarily intended for instruction librarians at colleges and universities, the book may also be of interest to any students and faculty interested in progressive pedagogy in higher education.

The first two chapters introduce feminist theory and situate feminist pedagogy within critical pedagogy, which Accardi describes as “education for social change” (6) that “involves dialogue between teacher and learners, where students contribute to the production of knowledge, and whereby they come to understand the oppressive systems that are innately part of the dominant culture” (32). Here, she references and builds upon the work of theorists such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire (particularly his resistance to the banking method of teaching¹), and describes feminist pedagogy’s primary characteristic as “a concern with gender injustice, sexism, and oppression against women, and how

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this concern affects what happens in a classroom” (35). Feminist pedagogy matters, she argues, “because the higher education system is still tethered to the dominant patriarchal, sexist, racist, and homophobic culture from which it emerged” (24). Moreover, feminist pedagogy is concerned not just with the content of lesson plans, but also with the methods of instruction. Irrespective of subject matter, feminist instructors employ active learning techniques, favor group discussions over lectures, value student voices and individual perspectives, and collaborate with students in the creation of knowledge (25). She writes, “Feminist teaching strategies are anti-hierarchical and student-centered” (42).

In chapter three, Accardi brings feminist pedagogy into the library instruction classroom. She traces the shift from bibliographic instruction to information literacy as part of the larger evolution in higher education from instruction models to learning models (60), but argues that what distinguishes feminist pedagogy from other learner-centered models is the emphasis on turning critical thinkers into critical actors (58). Employing a learning outcomes approach makes sense for feminist library instructors, she writes, because it places students at the center and focuses on student voices and experiences. Using the Gilchrist and Zald model of instructional design², she outlines how a library instruction session can advance feminist teaching principles at each stage of the design process, from conceptualization to assessment (62-63).

The book’s final chapter addresses feminist assessment, and though the term may seem oxymoronic, Accardi underscores that feminist assessment “eschews standardized testing and privileges student involvement in the assessment process” (77). Feminist assessment may involve common assessment tools such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, but she stresses that it should also include feminist pedagogical principles of “seeking the student voice, validating student knowledge, and displaying an ethic of care” (87). She notes the scarcity of scholarly literature on the topic of feminist assessment, but that lacuna may provide an opportunity for new avenues of scholarship that reimagine assessment as learner-centered and diverse.

Throughout the book, Accardi is careful to point out that feminism is concerned not just with ending the oppression of women, but with exposing and ending all forms of marginalization. She leaves room, however, for deeper discussion of criticisms frequently leveled at contemporary liberal feminism—namely, that it often perpetuates, rather than destabilizes racist, classist, heteronormative, and neocolonialist systems of oppression.³ If it’s true, as Accardi quotes bell hooks as writing that “politics of domination are often reproduced in the educational setting” (39), then feminist instructors must remain vigilant about taking an intersectional approach in their teaching, one which takes into account factors such as race, class, and ethnicity in addition to sex and gender.⁴ An intersectional approach seems especially crucial given

that the overwhelming majority of librarians in the United States identify as white.⁵ While such interrogations may be beyond the book’s scope, they are nevertheless imperative to include in discussions of feminist and critical pedagogy in libraries, and may be fertile ground for future scholarship.

NOTES

- 1 Freire describes the banking method of education as “an act of depositing, in which the students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.” See: Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2003), 72.

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1. Outcome:	What do you want the students to be able to do?
2. Information Literacy Curriculum:	What does the student need to know in order to do this well?
3. Pedagogy:	What type of instruction will best enable the learning?
4. Assessment:	How will the student demonstrate the learning?
5. Criteria for Evaluation:	How will I know the student has done this well?

D. Gilchrist and A. Zald, “Instruction and Program Design Through Assessment,” in *Information Literacy Instruction Handbook*, ed. C. N. Cox and E. B. Lindsay (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2008), 168.

- 3 Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York: Routledge, 2003), 25-28.
- 4 See: Michele Tracy Berger and Kathleen Guidroz, ed., *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class & Gender* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
- 5 “Diversity Counts,” American Library Association, accessed May 15, 2014, <http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts>.