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**Book Review**

## **Review of *Information Literacy and Critical Thinking: Using Perspective Transformation to Break Information Bubbles***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Review of *Information Literacy and Critical Thinking: Using Perspective Transformation to Break Information Bubbles* by Amanda Nichols Hess. ALA Editions, 2025. ISBN: 979-8892553247

### **KEYWORDS**

Critical pedagogy, transformative learning theory, information literacy

### **SUGGESTED CITATION**

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## Introduction

Teaching librarians exist in a strange and ever-evolving state, straddling responsibilities and roles in credit-bearing instruction, one-shot classroom visits, research assistance (for both students and faculty), outreach, and advocacy, to name a few. In spite of the professional expertise developed from such extensive instructional activities, librarians are often pigeonholed to database walkthroughs and source evaluation checklists. How do librarians move beyond technical skills instruction and foster deep critical engagement? Amanda Nichols Hess presents a possible solution: operationalizing critical pedagogy with perspective transformation, as outlined in *Information Literacy and Critical Thinking: Using Perspective Transformation to Break Information Bubbles*.

Hess argues that perspective transformation is a valuable tool for library professionals engaging in critical librarianship broadly, and critical pedagogy more specifically. Furthermore, she asserts that understanding how perspective transformation works can better enable teaching librarians to foster critical information literacy in their students' learning environments. In understanding how critical theory and its applications are tied to transformative learning theory, teaching librarians can meaningfully consider and reconcile the disconnect between their theory and practice in critical pedagogy.

## About the Author

Part of what lends the book its credibility and approachability is Hess herself, whose scholarly and professional record makes her well suited to tackle this topic. Between her credentials – a PhD in Educational Leadership, an education specialist certificate in instructional technology, and an MS in Information Science – and her current role as coordinator of instruction and research help at Oakland University, Hess situates herself at the nexus of pedagogy, librarianship, and transformative learning theory. Her publication history, which ranges from books on modular online learning to edited volumes on instructional identities, reflects a sustained commitment to understanding how librarians teach, learn, and evolve within academic environments.

This new book builds on her research trajectory. Her scholarship on transformative learning, teacher identity, and online instruction is well cited, and the echoes of her nationally recognized 2018 dissertation are clearly audible throughout *Information Literacy and Critical Thinking*. Hess writes not only as a researcher but as a practitioner who has lived through the phases of perspective transformation herself, offering examples from her own professional life that feel grounded rather than performative.

## Summary of Contents

Chapter 1, “Framing Critical Librarianship and Perspective Transformation,” does a fine job of explaining critical theory, as well as a few related applications: critical pedagogy, critical librarianship, and critical information literacy. This chapter also introduces readers to Jack

Mezirow's learning theory of perspective transformation. Hess outlines ten phases, as established by Mezirow, for individuals experiencing perspective transformation. The rest of the book is organized using these ten phases, though Hess notes that the phases are "neither linear nor straightforward" despite being "sequenced."

Chapter 2 is about "disorienting dilemmas," which serve as the catalyst for perspective transformation. In these situations, an individual's presumptions and beliefs are challenged and disrupted in some way, but they are also faced with the necessity of taking action: in Hess's words, "Are we going to choose to acknowledge and grapple with this disorientation?"

In Chapters 3-8, Hess discusses the subsequent phases in perspective transformation: self-examination and alienation in Chapter 3, connecting with other's discontent in Chapter 4, exploring alternative attitudes and behaviors in Chapter 5, acquiring skills and trying new roles in Chapter 6, developing competence, confidence, and relationships based on new ways of thinking in Chapter 7, and fully integrating changed perspective into actions in Chapter 8.

In each chapter proceeding the first, Hess presents a concise summary of existing scholarship, connecting this existing literature to applications in critical librarianship and critical pedagogy. Hess also provides a few examples of her experiences with perspective transformation in her professional life, at immediate and gradual points, as well as at individual and systemic levels. Including these varied reflective anecdotes allow teaching librarians at all experience levels to find something relatable to connect to as they are reading. After these examples are discussed, Hess discusses how teaching librarians might facilitate critical library instruction by creating learning environments conducive to transformative learning. Finally, each of these chapters conclude with "Opportunities for Reflection and Action," prompting the reader to connect the concepts discussed in the chapter to their own individual experiences.

This combination of theoretical overview, practical application, and reflective exercise creates a rhythm that is both instructive and engaging. Particularly effective are Hess's examples from her own career, which helped ground Mezirow's theory in the everyday realities of library instruction. They also model the vulnerability and self-interrogation she asks her readers to undertake—an important reminder that critical pedagogy demands personal reckoning, not just professional rhetoric.

### **Strengths**

One of the book's most compelling strengths is its clear investment in combining scholarly rigor with lived experience. Hess's examples of her own perspective transformations—whether at the individual or systemic level—make abstract concepts tangible. Readers who have felt the dissonance between their critical pedagogical ideals and the constraints of their institutional environments will find her stories validating and illuminating. They also demonstrate her central claim: that transformation is relational, iterative, and sustained through dialogue and connection.

Another strength lies in Hess's stylistic balance. While she grounds her ideas in complex critical theory, she keeps her writing mostly conversational, easing the reader through dense theoretical terrain. This interplay of formality and plain speaking makes the book approachable for early-career librarians or those new to critical theory who may feel intimidated by its complexities.

Hess's inclusion of conceptual visualizations—though hit-or-miss depending on one's preferred learning style—also reveals her pedagogical generosity. Even if the diagrams do not always deepen understanding, their presence signals her desire to reach readers in multiple modalities, reflecting her broader commitment to inclusive teaching.

Finally, the reflective prompts at the end of each chapter are particularly valuable. Rather than prescribing a rigid method, Hess invites readers to examine their own assumptions and teaching identities, emphasizing that perspective transformation is not a solitary intellectual endeavor, but a process nurtured through community, conversation, and shared vulnerability.

### **Limitations**

Despite its many strengths, the book is not without limitations. The most notable challenge lies in the book's structural commitment to following Mezirow's ten phases of perspective transformation. While the guidance offered in the 'taking transformation forward' sections is valuable, the structural commitment to following Mezirow's phases forces the instructional design content to be encountered piecemeal, which lessens the book's effectiveness as a standalone pedagogical resource. Readers interested in how to facilitate transformative learning for students may have preferred a dedicated chapter or section explicitly focused on instructional design for critical information literacy. However, this criticism is simply one of structural choices in the book, not of its overall content.

### **Conclusion**

This book is recommended for librarians interested in critical theory, especially those experiencing perspective transformation in their own careers. Hess provides a comprehensive roadmap for perspective transformation in librarianship, supplying relatable examples of such transformations in her own life. This book would best suit beginner-to-intermediate professionals, or at least those who are relatively new to critical pedagogy and critical librarianship. For those more familiar with the aforementioned concepts, the book may still be valuable in its detailed exploration of the phases involved in perspective transformation, especially toward the end of each chapter where opportunities for transformative learning are discussed.