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this work, it is to the benefit of our libraries that we bring this expertise into value assessment projects. For those of us who want value research to be more meaningful, we can help our library to demonstrate value while helping to diversify the types of data collection methods used in this research. In doing so, we can provide a more robust picture to administrators about the value of our libraries to the campus and to the students, faculty, and staff who use them.

Wrap-Up

We see an inherent similarity between critical pedagogy and assessment in that they both support hope for the future and progress towards positive change. Assessment is essential for pedagogical growth and meaningful student learning. In this chapter we provided an overview of how to approach assessment through a critical lens, which includes centering the student experience by opening up dialogue, sharing roles and responsibilities, and negotiating curriculum and assessment. We expand on these assessment strategies in the following chapters by providing examples of how we've incorporated these into our own work. In chapter three, we provide examples of teaching assessment and in chapter four we discuss real world implementations of inclusive student learning assessment techniques.

Chapter 3

ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING

Continual assessment of teaching is essential to professional growth. It requires reflection on practice, including the ways that we design and deliver curricula and how we interact with students. Assessing teaching can be time consuming, daunting, and disheartening. Nevertheless, assessing ourselves leads to reflection, and the benefits gained from reflecting on our practice far outweigh the negatives. As Carolyn Gardner and Rebecca Halpern note: "every time we reflect on an educational interaction, from a tutorial, to a one-shot session, to a semester-long class, we put ourselves in the learner's position, solve problems, and grow as teachers."¹ Stewart asserts that to engage in critical-inclusive pedagogy, educators must first "do the self-work needed and the recognition of being the oppressor, with the responsibility to constantly question and act against systems of oppression."² The assessment methods discussed in this chapter include teaching reflection journals, peer observation, Critical Friends Groups, and face-to-face student feedback. These methods map to all tenets of the Critical-Inclusive Pedagogical Framework (CIPF), as seen in **Figure 2**. Throughout the chapter, we offer our own experiences with these methods and share the voices of others who have engaged with us in this work.

1. Gardner and Halpern, "At Odds with Assessment," 47.

2. Stewart, "Advancing a Critical and Inclusive Praxis," 19.

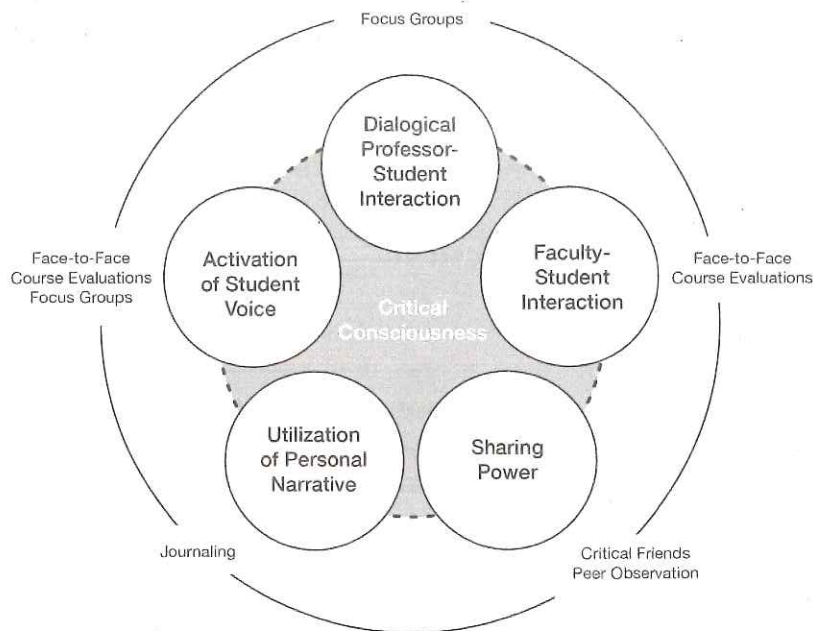


Figure 2: Assessment of Teaching Mapped to the CIPF

Self-Reflection & Peer Observation

Journaling

One of the ways we began our journey into critical assessment was through the practice of reflective writing. The journals we use to reflect on our teaching are informal personal records of every class we teach, logged directly after individual information literacy sessions. They vary from hand-written notebooks to digital journals, but they always demonstrate personal critiques of lesson plans, teaching methods, and observed student reactions to course content. Requiring no real training and only a minimal

commitment of time and effort,³ journaling is now an integral part of our teaching practice. Through critical reflection, we can make important observations that lead to more effective curricula and teaching practices that are responsive to student needs.

Overview & Implementation

Admittedly, we do not follow a formal journaling format, such as those outlined in the writings of Reale or Moon.⁴ Some of our reflections consist of notes jotted on our printed lesson plans or scribbled on a sticky-note. Regardless of how it's done, it is essential to integrate the practice of journaling into your everyday routine. There are multiple reasons to implement journals into your practice, but if your aim is to use journaling as an assessment tool, then identifying areas for improvement is the primary purpose. When first beginning, you may feel comfortable simply recounting what happened in a specific information literacy session. While this practice may be fun, relaxing, or even cathartic, it doesn't necessarily provide any practical information that you can use to improve your practice. As you can see from the examples in **Figure 3** and **Figure 4**, these journal entries show thoughts and feelings recounted with no actual reflection; here, we did not push ourselves to reflect critically. Why did we feel "preachy" when discussing race, sex, and class in publishing? A deeper reflection would have led to a critical examination of our own identity and privilege. Why was it good that students discussed police brutality in the context of Rodney King? In this particular class it was good because these students are Criminal Justice majors, many of whom will be police officers; it was significant that they wanted to discuss police brutality. However, this journal entry doesn't go beyond recounting the details of the class discussion. There is no

3. We realize "minimal" is subjective. We also admit that we did have to work to find the time in our schedules for reflection when we started. Now we block thirty minutes a day for reflection, usually directly after a class session.

4. Reale, *Becoming a Reflective Librarian and Teacher*; and Jennifer Moon, *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Reflective Practice and Professional Development* (2nd ed, London: Routledge, 2004).

processing about changing practice, changing our approach, or improving the lesson plan.

Day 2

Okay - I felt prachy on the
vaccine, class part.

Figure 3: Journal Excerpt Recounting Personal Feelings

Rodney King topic is fine (especially
since someone mentioned police
brutality). * must remember to
highlight the books on different topics.

Figure 4: Journal Excerpt Recounting Class Discussion

It took time for us to understand how to reflect critically on our practices. We found that the more we read about reflection, the more we improved our own reflective writing. We started to dig deeper and write with an intent to improve our teaching. This involves asking not only what, but also why, and then examining how those decisions influenced others in the classroom. **Figure 5** and **Figure 6** show movement towards greater reflection and questioning of our practice.

LIB 100 = Day 10

Today was a weekday in class, so naturally
it went pretty well. I wonder how to address the
issue of the "chasm" ~~the~~ of understanding that
seems to exist among students. Some students
appear to get it, but others don't seem to
be catching on at all. Is it an attention thing?
Are they not listening to what I'm saying?
Am I not being clear? I should talk to
Lyda. How can I draw examples of what
they are reading to make it clearer to
them.

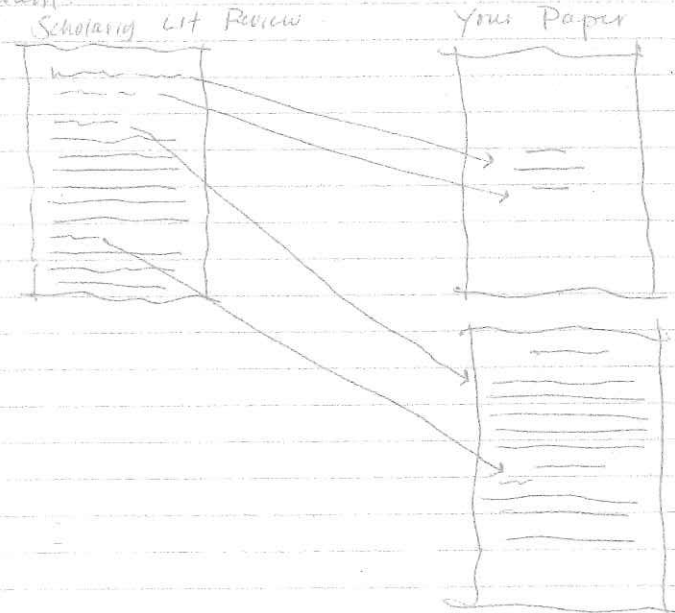


Figure 5: Journal with Critical Reflection

Day 2 - LIB 100

I felt really scattered today. I gave the students the schedule & we had a conversation about the decisions I made based on their feedback. While it was decidedly more of a monologue than dialogue, I think they understood when I was coming from & why I was asking the questions I was. I think that I spent so much of my prep time worried about the schedule discussion that my actual lecture pretty much tanked. It's a boring lecture anyway - I really need to change it for next semester. It is anti-climactic. While I think a discussion on the types of literature is important, maybe it could be conveyed another way.

How effective is the Day One questionnaire if they don't engage in a discussion about its results? Do a few questions by a few students indicate engagement? Is this radical for students? If so, is it radical in a good refreshing way or do they just find it annoying or irrelevant?

Figure 6: Revisiting Reflective Journal Entry

Teaching reflection journals provide a record of the decisions we make in the classroom. They inform future pedagogical decisions and serve as indicators of effective teaching methods. While disciplining ourselves to get started with teaching reflection

journals was difficult, now we can't imagine teaching without them. We are constantly referring to our journals when planning one-shot lesson plans or reorganizing our credit courses for the next semester. We also share our journals with each other, which provides insight into how each of us is approaching certain topics or dealing with issues in the classroom. Our journals give us the ability to look back after a long semester and know we are making informed decisions about improving teaching and learning. The most significant benefit of the journals is that we can see patterns in our teaching over time. Looking back over multiple semesters of journals allows us to assess persistent issues with our practice.

Tips & Best Practices

After reflecting on our own experience, we have come up with a set of recommendations for librarians hoping to implement teaching reflection journals:

- Set aside a dedicated period for initial reflection. This is crucial. Schedule 15-30 minutes after every class period to journal. We schedule this on our calendar to ensure no one sets a meeting over this time.
- Revisit your journal. Separation from the actual event upon which you are reflecting can be helpful for deeper critical reflection. For example, when reflecting on a challenge, consider a solution in your journal and then revisit that solution later to see if your thinking has changed over time.
- Use your journal to inform curricular decisions. Using journals for assessment means that the journal is your data. Before you sit down to plan that next one-shot, re-read your reflection of the last time you taught the session. This allows you to remember what worked and what did not.
- Share your journal with a trusted peer and engage in a dialogue with them about your thinking.

Peer Observation

Overview & Implementation

Peer observation is another method of assessment that we have passionately adopted as a way to improve our teaching. Departmental, and even institutional, support for peer observation is important to its success. Supportive colleagues and a healthy culture of assessment bolster collaborative assessment practices.⁵ In this section, we discuss three different peer observation initiatives: peer observation done as a committee, cross-institutional peer observation, and cross-departmental peer observation as implemented in our own library. The experiences are built upon the best practices for peer observation in libraries as outlined by Jaena Alabi and William Weare,⁶ as well as the twelve tips for successful peer observation in a college setting discussed by Zarrin Siddiqui, Diana Jonas-Dwyer, and Sandra Carr.⁷ While both articles discuss tips for peer observation, the major takeaways are the importance of confidentiality and effective communication between the observer and the observed. We encourage anyone setting up a peer observation program in their library to begin their conversations with these two pieces.

We began peer observation as an initiative in our library's Curriculum Committee, a group tasked with the oversight and assessment of library credit courses. Our goals were to build collegiality and trust between committee members and to develop

5. The concept of a culture of assessment within academic libraries has been widely explored by authors including Meredith Gorran Farkas and Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe. We suggest the following articles: Meredith G. Farkas, "Building and Sustaining a Culture of Assessment: Best Practices for Change Leadership," *Reference Services Review* 41, no. 1 (2013): 13-31; Meredith G. Farkas and Lisa J. Hinchliffe, "Library Faculty and Instructional Assessment: Creating a Culture of Assessment through the High Performance Programming Model of Organizational Transformation," *Collaborative Librarianship* 5, no. 3 (2013): 177; and Meredith G. Farkas, Lisa J. Hinchliffe, and Amy H. Houk, "Bridges and Barriers: Factors Influencing a Culture of Assessment in Academic Libraries," *College & Research Libraries* 76, no. 2 (2015): 150-169.

6. Alabi and Weare, "Peer Review of Teaching."

7. Zarrin Secma Siddiqui, Diana Jonas-Dwyer, and Sandra E. Carr, "Twelve Tips for Peer Observation of Teaching," *Medical Teacher* 29, no. 4 (2007): 297-300.

a way to assess teaching outside of course evaluations. We began by exploring the literature on peer observation of teaching in both the higher education and library literatures. From this literature review, we determined our process and developed guidelines (see **Appendix A**). We followed the model of pre-meeting, observation, and post-meeting.⁸ Additionally, we included a required face-to-face student feedback session for each credit course as we discuss later in this chapter. We made sure to stress in our documents that peer observation is used to improve teaching and learning and is non-evaluative. Any documentation from the peer observation, such as observer-written comments, was confidential and was excluded from annual faculty evaluations.

Peer observation with the committee took place between spring and fall of 2016. At the end of fall 2016, after going through two peer observation sessions with two different partners, we decided to seek the perspective of librarians outside of the committee. Ultimately, we sought the perspectives of librarians outside of our institution so that we could get feedback on our teaching from people who were not involved in our day-to-day practice. After finding our partner institution, we held a retreat so we could meet each other and discuss the peer observation project. This retreat was a way to build camaraderie among the librarians, and to make sure that everyone involved had a voice in the development of the process. We used the original Curriculum Committee documents as a jumping-off point and updated them at the retreat so that they met the needs of all participating librarians. We also developed an idea checklist that outlined possible areas of teaching that could be observed, such as delivery, pace, or student participation (see **Appendix B**). After these initial discussions, we selected partners and got acquainted with them over lunch, learning about liaison areas and teaching obligations. These collaborative peer observations took place over one academic year. Despite the amount of coordination involved in this inter-institutional project,

8. Martin and Double, "Developing Higher Education Teaching Skills through Peer Observation and Collaborative Reflection," 161-170.

the overall take-away was positive. Observing and being observed by peers outside of our library forced us to examine issues about our practice that had not been seen in peer observation within our committee. We are now involved in cross-departmental peer observation in our own library as part of the work of all liaison librarians, following the same process outlined in **Appendix A**. This indicates a significant shift toward a culture of assessment in our organization.

Although being observed in the classroom prompted moments of vulnerability and apprehension, the experiences have had lasting benefits for our teaching practice. We gained a greater awareness of how we physically move around our classrooms, learned how to incorporate collaborative tools more effectively into our teaching, and adopted new approaches for engaging students in class discussions. Working with peers, especially those outside of your own organization, can help you see your teaching in new ways. To see how in-depth this feedback can be, we provide an example of peer observation notes in **Appendix C**.

Because peer observation is a collaboration, we invited our colleagues to share some of their experiences:

A major theme that developed from the peer observations and subsequent discussions with my partner was the relationship between our teaching persona and our identity and personality outside the classroom. We noted how challenging it can be to project both confidence and approachability. It was a great opportunity to discuss our feelings about our teaching practices and identities as educators in a safe, non-judgmental space.

I like observing others teach because it reminds me that there isn't one right way to teach and that a variety of methods are effective depending on what you are hoping students will learn. I also feel like I gain a lot from being able to sit in the back of the room and observe what students are doing throughout the class. I'm somehow always surprised to see that students are paying attention. Sure, you get the occasional student who is doing something else, but the overwhelming majority are listening, following along, and doing their best to learn something.

The biggest challenges were around scheduling: one department taught nearly all credit-bearing classes in eight weeks, while the other department taught one-shots that were scattered about in the semester. This, combined with the geographical and weather issues that winter in the Rocky Mountains presents, led to some observations not getting scheduled. It was also tough to make one's colleagues do things like respond to emails from their partners if they did not report to you. Lastly, some pairs were able to establish trust quickly, but others just didn't gel. As the article we chose as our common reading pointed out, establishing trust for peer review of teaching is important, and it is easier to do when you work with people every day.

Observing someone from another library teach—as opposed to attending a presentation/panel at a conference—is a fairly rare experience, and I took away a lot of energizing ideas and approaches from my observation partner. I also appreciated the insights that my partner offered me to improve both my lesson plan as well as my delivery. They differed in some respects from the feedback that I had already received from members of my own department, and I appreciated this different perspective/viewpoint.

These reflections highlight the value of peer observation as well as the challenge of trying to connect both personally and professionally with others. We believe it is important to start any peer observation process with librarians or disciplinary faculty from your own organization before collaborating with a different institution.

Tips & Best Practices

After reflecting on our experience, we have a set of recommendations for librarians hoping to implement peer observation:

- Read the literature broadly before starting so you make the right decisions for your team.

- Consider doing peer observation as a team initiative. This makes it part of the team/committee goals and helps to create a culture of assessment in your library.
- Seek partners from different institutions. Going outside your library is beneficial because you gain perspective outside the culture of your own instruction program. Consider distance if you are planning to work with peers outside your library. Our peers were two hours away, which meant a lot of driving for everyone involved.
- Ensure that everyone has a voice in creating the peer observation process and guidelines.
- Do not include peer observation reports as part of an evaluation process.
- Reflect on your observation experiences.

Critical Friends Group

Overview & Implementation

The Critical Friends Group (CFG) model is a collaborative method of assessment that combines peer observation and dialogue with self-reflection and self-assessment. We've found the CFG to be an effective way for liaison librarians to collaborate with disciplinary faculty on improving curricula and teaching. We see participating in a CFG as compatible with a critical practice, because it pushes us to share power with our peers. We share power by opening ourselves up to critique. We put ourselves into the role of learner, with the understanding that there is still much we don't know about teaching and that there is always room for improvement. Being a critical friend requires that we trust in each other and mutually commit to improvement. Not only do you have to be willing to accept critical feedback from peers, you must be willing to make changes based on that feedback.

Our experience implementing a CFG to improve one of our credit courses resulted in significant curriculum changes and more participatory teaching methods. We first implemented a CFG when

students in one of our credit courses, *LIB 160: Criminal Justice Library Research*, were having trouble writing research questions, a skill needed in upper division Criminology & Criminal Justice research methods courses. In an effort to improve our lesson plan and to ensure that students were able to transfer their skills from *LIB 160* into upper division Criminology courses, we reached out to a faculty member in Criminology for feedback. To start the CFG, we sent the faculty member the lesson plans for the two-day lesson on research questions and asked that she observe two class sessions in order to provide feedback on the lesson plans, content, and teaching. After the first class, we discussed updates to the lesson plan and vocabulary that was important for students in later Criminology courses, such as a conversation on dependent and independent variables. After the second class, the three of us discussed organization of the two-day lesson plan and made significant changes to the order in which the two lesson plans appear in the scheme of the course, as well as ways to improve the in-class activities. Using this feedback, we updated the lesson plan. You can see the full range of changes in the journal excerpt in **Figure 7**.

A couple of weeks following the observation sessions, we met with the faculty member again to go over the lesson plan changes. This morphed into a larger conversation about the placement of *LIB 160* within the Criminology major. Our discussion prompted a proposal to make the library course a co-requisite with a writing-intensive Criminology course, *CRJ 380: Justice Research & Statistics*.⁹ This change was approved by the Criminology faculty in fall 2017 and will be in effect starting in fall 2018. This curriculum change would not have happened without the honest and constructive dialogue of the CFG. The group will restructure in fall 2018 to include all *LIB 160* and *CRJ 380* instructors.

Engaging in reflective writing after a post-observation discussion can help you process the comments of your peer.

⁹ Up to fall 2018 *LIB 160* was a required course in the Criminology major that students could take at any time.

The journal entry in **Figure 7** is an example of critical reflection following a peer observation session. When we went back to this journal entry days later, we were able to reflect on our own practice more critically based on peer feedback.

Day 10 - LIB 100

Today was a bit rough. We did peer review of draft research questions. I'm always super pleased with the results of these peer reviews but the process certainly needs improvement. Based on today's experiences of Lyda & Sarah's feedback, here's my proposed solution:

Day One	Day Two
<input type="checkbox"/> opinion v. judgment	<input type="checkbox"/> scenario to question
<input type="checkbox"/> effective RQ criteria	example & discussion
<input type="checkbox"/> intro to independent & dependent variables	<input type="checkbox"/> write scenarios - partner & discuss
<input type="checkbox"/> research question re-write (2-3 examples as a group)	<input type="checkbox"/> draft research question
<input type="checkbox"/> scenario to question - just sentence	<input type="checkbox"/> self-assess draft RQ

ok so I've been thinking about it & instead of being disappointed in my students not listening or being prepared, I simply need to adapt. So, for instance, today Monday morning, I should have given everyone 5 minutes or so to get on the same page. I can't expect them to ask for help - I just need to be more empathetic.

* use example (maybe from this semester to show next semester) student's transition between scenario to question

Figure 7: Critical Reflection Following Peer Observation

Our experience with the CFG model was rewarding. Not only did we improve our lesson plan on writing research questions, we made significant curriculum changes in both the library and Criminology programs. Inviting a non-librarian into our classroom pushed us out of our comfort zone, as neither of us had ever been observed by a non-library faculty member. Having a disciplinary faculty member ask questions about pedagogical choices pushed us to reflect more critically on our approach to teaching information literacy. This also reinforced the teaching role of librarians on our campus. Most importantly, the CFG let us develop a stronger collegial relationship between library and disciplinary faculty. The Criminology faculty member also found the CFG model helpful, as can be seen in her reflection on the process:

Watching another instructor teach material (on how to develop a research question), which serves as the foundation for material I teach in a Research Methods course gave me a much better understanding of students' background and preparation for the content and assignments in my own course. It made me realize that I need to find other opportunities to learn about the content in the other courses that students take before my course, either by asking students about their level of preparation or by talking to or observing other faculty. In addition, I also learned new approaches to content delivery. For instance, the instructor asked students to revise a poorly developed research question in pairs and then write their revised research questions on the white board for the class to consider and discuss. I found this technique to provide a nice way to engage students and cover many examples of research questions in one course meeting.

Tips & Best Practices

After reflecting on our experience, we have a set of recommendations for librarians hoping to implement a Critical Friends Group:

- Start with a specific goal. Consider the teaching question you want your CFG to focus on as they observe your teaching.

- Meet first to discuss the lesson plan. We believe meeting before the classes to discuss the lesson plan is helpful for providing context for the group.
- Meet immediately after any observation to discuss the class session.
- Take time to reflect on the observation and to formulate constructive feedback for the next discussion.
- Have multiple meetings following the observation. This provides time to reflect on initial reactions and can result in more productive dialogue within your group.

Face-to-Face Feedback¹⁰

We find asking students for feedback to be an essential task for centering student voice in the classroom. We gather direct feedback from our students as often as possible. We've implemented face-to-face feedback for credit courses through verbal course evaluations and in one-shot instruction through focus groups. Both of these methods allow us to use student voice to make curricular changes and improve our teaching. Developing a dialogue with our students about their classroom experience has made face-to-face feedback one of the most meaningful ways we assess our teaching.

Face-to-Face Course Evaluations

Overview & Implementation

Face-to-face course evaluations are a form of course evaluation that takes place face-to-face instead of through an anonymous evaluation form. It is a discussion with the entire class instead of individual students. We find that this method is not only useful for getting in-depth answers from students related to our classroom

10. Michael Oravitz, Kristin Bovaird-Abbo, and Karen Hessler, "Just Ask: Enriching Evaluation through Face-to-Face Student Feedback," (Presentation at the Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, University of Northern Colorado, 2015), <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/tla/24/>.

teaching, but is a valuable exercise in centering student voice in the assessment of teaching. We avoid "how's my driving"¹¹ type questions that focus on things about the instructor (such as preparation, communication skills, or interpersonal relationships), since these things may be difficult to discuss in person. Instead, we focus on questions that are about classroom teaching. Examples of these questions are:

- What about this class did you find most beneficial as a student/researcher?
- Is there any part of this class you felt was extraneous or irrelevant?
- If you could change anything about this class for future students, what would it be?

Face-to-face course evaluation allows us to ask meaningful questions and provides us with an opportunity to follow-up in the moment. Instead of a Likert Scale question that asks a student to rate interest in the course, face-to-face feedback asks about topics students found most and least engaging. We can then probe deeper with students about updating course content. This helps improve teaching by letting us retain what did work and discard what didn't work in the classroom. The best part of face-to-face feedback is the conversation students have with each other. When discussing helpful assignments, for example, students discover that while one person found an assignment unhelpful for learning, another student found it very helpful. This provides a teaching moment for the students as they gain a new perspective. For a complete example of face-to-face course evaluation data, see **Appendix D**.

We began face-to-face course evaluation in fall 2016 as an initiative of our library Curriculum Committee. It takes place in the last week of the course, usually in the final twenty to thirty minutes of the class. To prepare, each instructor develops questions that are

11. Oravitz, Bovaird-Abbo, and Hessler, "Just Ask."

specific to their course. If an instructor has implemented a new assignment or activity, or organized the course in a new way, they will usually ask for feedback about these changes in their questions. Many of the questions are broad and seek feedback about course organization, timing of assignments, clarity of instructions, and use of class time.

In our process, the course instructor does not facilitate the face-to-face course evaluation; we select partners for this process. We made this decision thinking that students might be more honest if they were not speaking to the person who taught the class. The facilitator takes notes during the discussion and then types them up and sends the feedback to the instructor after final grades are submitted. The pair then meet to discuss the face-to-face feedback and talk through possible curriculum changes. While the results are confidential and do not appear in any evaluation materials, faculty are encouraged to discuss feedback with the Curriculum Committee Chair if they are concerned or have questions about how to use the feedback to make improvements.

For us, face-to-face course evaluation is the most valuable way to evaluate a course. Students take this face-to-face feedback session very seriously, offering honest and constructive criticism. The dialogue developed between the students and the facilitator is so much richer than the anonymous snippets students leave in written course evaluations. While the feedback from students is still confidential, the facilitator can contextualize the comments and ask students for more clarification. For example, if a student mentions something about inconsistent grading practices, the facilitator can ask that student to elaborate on what they meant by inconsistent and ask the rest of the students if they share the same concern. Students often build off of each other's comments and continue the conversation among themselves with few interjections from the facilitator. This type of direct and specific feedback is invaluable in curriculum development. Additionally, the facilitator has the autonomy to reword questions if something is confusing for students or if the original question is not eliciting a response.

Another benefit is the conversation that happens after the session between the instructor and the facilitator. Ideally, the facilitator will be a teaching librarian who is familiar with the goals and values of the instruction program. After hearing what the students have to say, the instructor and facilitator can discuss the feedback and use it to make positive change to content and pedagogical approach.

Face-to-face course evaluations have helped us to make real change in our practices. Other Curriculum Committee members share their appreciation for the process below:

I appreciated hearing student voices in the face-to-face feedback a colleague collected for me. They brought up issues that were not covered in the official course evaluations. I also valued the chance to ask specific questions that were not included on the formal evaluations.

Face-to-face feedback has been more useful for suggesting concrete changes to my courses than standard course evaluations ever were. I've gotten fewer of "the girl was condescending" comments, which makes getting the results back less emotionally taxing.

Tips & Best Practices

After reflecting on our experience, we have a set of recommendations for librarians hoping to implement face-to-face course evaluation:

- Be aware that not all students feel comfortable sharing their opinions in front of a group, particularly if they feel like their opinion may be unpopular among their classmates. Leave time after the session to allow anyone a chance to speak one-on-one with the facilitator. Additionally, there should always be an opportunity for anonymous course evaluations.
- Assign feedback partners at the start of a semester. If you are doing peer observation, use the same partner.

- Set aside enough class time for feedback. We recommend at least twenty minutes.
- Consider a pre- and post-meeting between instructor and facilitator in order to clarify questions and student comments.
- Face-to-face feedback can work in one-shot instruction; your partner can speak to a sample of students you taught and/or speak with instructors. Consider a time after an assignment's due-date if the one-shot is directly related to a course assignment.

Focus Groups

Overview & Implementation

Focus groups are structured group interviews that involve a facilitator and volunteer participants. Unlike the face-to-face course evaluation, focus groups combine students from multiple sections of courses or students from across campus.¹² Discussed in the literature as a feminist approach to assessment, focus groups can be an enlightening way to improve teaching.¹³ This approach to assessment takes significant planning, training, organization, and people. Despite the logistics involved, the potential exists to gather meaningful assessment data with focus groups.

In fall 2017, we embarked on a focus group project that aimed to improve the content and delivery of the curriculum for our first-year English composition program. We teach approximately fifty one-shot sessions per semester for this program and were ready to freshen up the lesson plan. This project involved the Information Literacy and Undergraduate Support (ILUS) department (five faculty members and one staff member) and took nearly an entire

¹² There is a dearth of literature about using focus groups for information literacy assessment. For a discussion of this literature, see Erlinger, "Outcomes Assessment," 449.

¹³ Musil, *Students at the Center*.

semester to prepare.¹⁴ To design our focus groups, we looked outside the library literature to the work of Richard Krueger and Mary Anne Casey.¹⁵ Their book helped us design two specific focus groups, one for first-year English students and one for instructors of first-year English (see **Appendix E**).

Conducting focus groups is a lot of work. We had trouble getting student and instructor volunteers despite multiple reminders, various opportunities to attend a focus group, and the offer of free food. We put many hours into designing, coordinating, and facilitating focus groups for a small number of participants. Despite this, we did receive valuable feedback from the students and instructors we interviewed. As with face-to-face course evaluations, one of the greatest benefits of focus groups is the conversations that participants have with each other and the facilitator. With a simple question or a short prompt, focus group participants are generally eager to share their experiences and opinions with the group. Focus groups also offer the opportunity to garner more in-depth feedback from participants. For instance, participants can be asked to write about an experience. Their narrative might encourage the writer to divulge more specific details or suggestions than a verbal comment may have provided.

Tips & Best Practices

After reflecting on our experience, we have a set of recommendations for librarians hoping to implement focus groups:

- Check with your Institutional Review Board (IRB) before you embark on any significant focus group projects, as you are working with human research subjects.
- Partner with one or more faculty or teaching assistants to get participants rather than a blanket call for participation.

¹⁴ While this was a department effort, Assistant Professor Brianne Markowski led this initiative.

¹⁵ Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 2000).

- Design your focus group to include various types of questions. Not everyone will feel comfortable answering certain types of questions. By incorporating a variety of questions, you will have a better chance of getting everyone in your group to participate. For example, one question may ask participants to reflect on an experience and then share it with the group, while another may be a simple yes or no. Both questions can provide valuable data.
- Have a script prepared and do a practice run-through of your focus group with your colleagues to help address any awkward or unclear questions.
- Have a dedicated note-taker in each focus group. This should be someone familiar with the research, but not a formal facilitator. This frees the facilitator to lead the discussion and ask follow-up questions of the participants.
- Offer incentives as a way to get volunteers. Make sure whatever you offer is appropriate for the time and effort you are asking from your volunteers.

Wrap-Up

In this chapter we discussed methods for assessing teaching that map to the CIPF. We get feedback from peers inside and outside of our library in order to gain different perspectives on pedagogical approaches and to engage in a more critical examination of our teaching. We also strive to engage students in conversation about our teaching since they are the ones most impacted by our practice. The materials we provide in the appendices for this chapter may help to jump start your own assessment work. We hope that the excerpts from our personal journals encourage you to get started with your own teaching journal, even if you start with simply recording what happened. We also hope that sharing face-to-face feedback and peer observation notes will help alleviate some of the fear associated with asking others to critique your practice. In the next chapter we discuss approaches to assessing student learning that are mapped to the CIPF.

Chapter 4

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

When we set out to write this book, we thought we could discuss typical classroom assessment techniques re-envisioned through a critical lens. After reading the work of critical pedagogues, especially those involved with assessment practice, we realized that such a discussion is not really possible. Critical assessment is bigger than that; as Keesing-Styles notes, it “involves an entirely new orientation—one that embraces a number of principles that may not be familiar in the generic assessment literature.”¹ Critical assessment embraces tenets of feminist pedagogy such as being democratic and student centered, being collaborative, valuing voice, and caring about the whole student.² The focus is on changing our assessment practice through student self- and peer-assessment, student reflection, and student participation in classroom assessment.

As we’ve noted, assessment practice is one of the most political processes in higher education and traditional models can be seen as a form of exploitation or oppression. Thus, critical assessment requires us to share power with our students. This requires us to

1. Keesing-Styles, “The Relationship Between Critical Pedagogy and Assessment in Teacher Education,” 10.

2. Foley, “Using Feminist Pedagogy to Create Meaningful Assessment for Learning in One-Shot Library Sessions,” <https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1049&context=southeasternlac>