



Equity Dispatch

Becoming an Equity-Oriented Educator Through Critical Self-Reflection



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“Reflective thinking leads educators to act deliberately and intentionally rather than randomly and reactively.”

-Hibajene M. Shandomo, 2010, p. 103



Did You Know

Critical Self-Reflection Strategies Lead to Increased Opportunities for All Students

In order for educators to engage in critical self-reflection, they must move beyond

a superficial understanding of self and others and reflect upon their positionality (e.g. the intersecting and multiple identities of an educator, such as race and gender). In so doing, educators must also critically reflect upon their professional development, conversations with colleagues, lesson plans and preparation, and their interactions with students (Great Lakes Equity Center, 2015).

Often educators encourage students to self-reflect on their own learning without participating in the practice themselves. When educators do engage in reflective strategies it is often for skill development or application of theory without critically examining their identities, and their implications in the classroom (Patil, 2013).

This approach to self-reflection is problematic for two reasons. First, without critically reflecting on how one's identities and cultural histories mediates how one understands theories and practices, educators do not have the opportunity to question their own power and privilege, the impact of their prior learning, or to examine their own implicit and hidden attitudes and assumptions in order to change the dominant narrative (Bay & Macfarlane, 2011). Next, self-reflection without critical reflection allows educators to presuppose teaching to be an objective craft rather than understanding that teachers bring their cultural histories, biases, and privilege into the classroom. In this case, educators are assumed to be devoid of beliefs and behaviors which could adversely affect student outcomes (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Although self-reflecting upon theories and practices is important, if educators do so without a level of criticality they may never fully be aware of how and why they choose to utilize certain practices, procedures and materials, and the implications of these choices on student learning. When educators begin to critically self-reflect on their own personal biases it can have a profound impact on the instruction they provide. For example, some educators may engage in teaching consisting of predictable patterns of instruction followed by seat work. Educators may do this because they received this type of instruction during their academic careers and thus, they tend to utilize the same methodology in their teaching practices (Yerrick, 1997). Because students respond differently to teaching methods and materials this type of regimental instruction may not be conducive to promoting equitable outcomes and may become barriers to student learning (Morley, 2008).

Self-reflection without critical examination can lead to positioning the student as receiver of information rather than as a thought partner, co-constructor of knowledge, and a resource which educators may leverage to better inform their practice. When critical self-reflection is present, educators value student feedback, consider the strengths and lived experiences students bring to the learning environment, and consider which groups of students their methodologies advantage or disadvantage.



Why It Matters

Educator Critical Self-Reflection Helps All Students Develop a Counter-Narrative

Critical self-reflection can help produce a more equitable and just society because it allows educators to examine practices on a metacognitive level and alter practices which may unwittingly perpetuate power inequities. As educators reflect and experience paradigm shifts through critical self-reflection, students benefit from their expanded way of viewing self and others. As a result of critical self-reflection, educators may modify curricula to critique and redress issues of privilege and bias (e.g. sexism, ageism, ableism, racism, and heteronormative stereotypes) in their own curricula selection, development, preparation, and delivery. In this way, educators assist students in creating a counter-narrative to oppose the often deficit-orientation to difference that the dominant narrative perpetuates (Morley, 2008).

Critical self-reflection promotes autonomy in thinking. As the critically self-reflective educator challenges inequities based on a greater understanding of self, they begin to create a non-judgmental culture and climate in the classroom in which students are critically acknowledged as reciprocal partners in teaching and learning (Bay & Macfarlane, 2011). Critical self-reflection involves more than examining a set of skills or tools educators use; it means educators, through introspection with peers and students, begin to think and act independently of dominant ideologies. As educators engage in critical self-reflection they move towards a non-hierarchical, equitable power relation between students and educator, and recognize the importance of collaborative learning (Morley, 2008). Engaging in critical self-reflection enables educators to make connections between knowing and learning.



For Equity Now

Equity-Oriented Journaling is a Powerful Strategy for Critical Self-Reflection

Engaging in [journaling](#), with or without prompts, can ensure educators consistently reflect on their instructional practices (Radd & Kramer, 2013). The following prompts (Great Lakes Equity Center, 2015) can aid educators in critical self-reflection. Educators can use reflective prompts before and after teaching lessons. As educators' journal and reflect on these important questions they gain a greater understanding of how theories, beliefs, and attitudes impact practice.

General Critical Reflection Questions

1. What are my multiple cultural identities and how do they inform and/or effect my practice?
2. How do I create a physically, intellectually, socio-emotionally, and culturally safe and inclusive learning community?
3. How will I acquire accurate information about the cultural histories and community practices of my students? (Paris & Alim, 2014)

Critical Reflection Questions for Before and After Lesson Delivery

Before: In what ways do I demonstrate in this lesson an affirming attitude for all students?

After: In what ways did I demonstrate in this lesson an affirming attitude for all students?

Before: In what ways do I understand my own cultural identity, and its implications in my practice?

After: In what ways did I demonstrate an understanding of my own cultural identity, and its implications in my practice?

Before: How do I develop constructive ways of centering my students' lived experiences and sustaining their community practices? (Paris & Alim, 2014)

After: How effectively did I center the lived experiences and sustained my students' community practices (Paris & Alim, 2014)?

Before: How do I demonstrate appreciation of the multiple and diverse perspectives in my classroom?

After: How effectively did I demonstrate my appreciation of the **multiple and diverse perspectives** in my classroom?

Before: How do I demonstrate my commitment to getting to know my students authentically?

After: How well did I demonstrate my commitment to getting to know my students authentically?

Meet the Authors

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