

Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher

Stephen Brookfield

Written by Sarah Lashley

Critical reflection is the process by which we intentionally and continuously examine the assumptions that underlie our teaching practices. By engaging in critical reflection, we are poised to gain deeper insights about what we do, and how and why we do it. It is a way of ensuring that we gain new knowledge and understanding from our practice.

Simply put, the goal of critical reflection is to see our teaching differently. Seeing our teaching differently requires viewing our teaching through different lenses. Brookfield suggests that there are four useful lenses: student perspectives, colleague perspectives, personal experience, and pedagogical theory.

Of particular note is Brookfield's insistence that student perspectives inform our reflection. A common meta-assumption is that the meanings we ascribe to our actions are the same ones students take from them. When we gather feedback from students, we see the different ways they interpret what we say and do. As such, Brookfield makes a strong case for gathering and sharing feedback with students through the Critical Incident Questionnaire.

Although Brookfield is clear in his call for using student feedback in the critical reflection process, he is also clear that effective student-centered teaching does not mean using the feedback to do what students want. Instead, he calls for instructors to simply inform their teaching decisions with knowledge of students; a relief for all faculty and staff concerned with effective teaching and learning.

Engaging in critical reflection requires more than the ability to see oneself through multiple lenses though. Brookfield also suggests that critical reflection requires courage and a willingness to slow down. He challenges colleagues to work together to stop the premature analysis, judgement, and solution generating that tends to occur in collegial conversations about teaching in favor of supporting one another through the critical analysis process.

Overall, Brookfield provides readers with a guiding rationale and process for critical reflection. Although redundant at times, there are enough useful framings of ideas to warrant a complete read of the book.

Critical Incident Questionnaire

1. At what moment did you feel most engaged with what was happening?
2. At what moment in class this week were you most distanced from what was happening?
3. What action that anyone (teacher or student) took this week did you find most affirming or helpful?
4. What action that anyone took this week did you find most puzzling or confusing?
5. What about the class this week surprised you the most? (This could be about your own reactions to what went on, something that someone did, or anything else that occurs.)