

Chapter 14

Critical Consciousness Checklist

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims at providing pre-service and in-service teachers with a tool to analyze the criticality of their lessons. Teacher training programs are focused heavily on reflection of the effectiveness of an educator's classroom. This reflection generally concerns itself with ensuring that students meet learning targets and master the content. This chapter examines reflection through the lens of critical praxis, including positions of power, funds of knowledge, and meaning making. It provides a recommended checklist of questions aimed at facilitating an analysis of the extent to which lessons and activities successfully allow students to inhabit positions of power, access their funds of knowledge, and make meaning. Implications of critical reflective inquiry will enable teachers to more equitably guide students through their education.

CONCEPT

In this chapter, teachers will undergo the process of analyzing their lessons through a critical lens. Similarly, administrators will also be able to utilize the tools outlined in this chapter to deconstruct their programs to ensure student equity and cultural sustainment. While TESOL teachers have extensive expertise in language acquisition, Simmons (2019) notes that, “there is a gap in knowledge pertaining to the extent of critical consciousness among teachers of ELs” (p. 15). When taking into consideration that ELs, or English Learners, are a significant portion of minority groups in the English speaking world, it becomes clear that teachers of ELs can better cater to the needs of their student base by investing in raising their own critical consciousness.

Raising critical consciousness will be achieved through a checklist of questions targeted at the level of success a lesson or curriculum has had within critically addressing the culture and identity of the students. These questions can be further used as a springboard into discussions among staff, community members, and community leaders. After analyzing and reflecting, teachers and staff will be prompted to improve the critical consciousness of their lessons through continued research and inquiry into answers for the questions put forth.

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Changes that are implemented as a result of a critical consciousness analysis can benefit students in a variety of ways. Simmons (2019) suggests that if teachers are successful in integrating critical consciousness into their pedagogy, students will also internalize critical consciousness and become better learners. Huang (2013) also describes how raising critical awareness within students can lead to stronger written work and stronger analytical reading skills as students are able to take on a variety of personal identities. It is therefore likely that the students with internalized critical consciousness will be more invested in, and score higher, on their classes, and in turn, score higher on standardized tests that require an essay component.

The check-list of questions put forth will cover a range of critically conscious topics including: positions of power, funds of knowledge, empowering students and their identities, and providing for authentic dialogue, or meaning making. All of these topics are key to understanding and implementing critical consciousness, a term that itself has had numerous interpretations over the years. Critical consciousness was detailed by Freire (1970), who discusses a critical pedagogy as one that empowers those who have historically been institutionally disadvantaged. As English speakers have colonized the world, ELs almost always fall into the category or institutionally disadvantaged. It is up to students' teachers to raise both the students and the teacher's own critical consciousness, which according to Diemer et al. (2017) is a combination of reflection and action towards the goal of social justice and sociopolitical participation (as cited in Simmons, 2019). Examples of sociopolitical participation could be attending city council meetings or writing letters to your congressman to enact social and political change. Within the classroom, this often takes on the appearance of providing a safe space for students to voice their concerns about social inequalities, which cover a broad range of topics such as racial injustices of incarcerated peoples, or the wage gap between lower-rung workers and CEOs. Giroux (1983) believed that teachers had a responsibility to guide students in the expansion of their skills as agents of social change. For teachers unaccustomed with guiding their students in this manner, the checklist in this chapter presents an accessible, simple introduction to critical consciousness while also creating opportunities for deeper reflection on critical consciousness.

A fundamental concept that will be key to understanding and implementing subsequent aspects of critical consciousness is *identity*. Norton (2000) defines identity as, "... how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). A critically conscious teacher will take into consideration a student's identity, and how that identity is influenced by social, cultural, and political forces. Instead of seeing learners as being motivated, or unmotivated, teachers can change their perspective to recognize that a student is affected by the perspective of the opportunities available to their identity. With this perspective in mind, teachers can then help students by allowing them to expand their identities. This will, in turn, increase students' investment, or desire to acquire a range of material resources that betters their cultural capital (Norton, 2008). By doing so, a student's identity adapts and transforms. Their identity becomes an asset to their language acquisition process.

Cultural Capital is a key aspect of critical consciousness and stems from students' different types of background knowledge. Bourdieu (1996), describes cultural capital as a social power relation that provides one with value in a given field. Crawford and Gross (2019) note that a critically conscious TESOL teacher is one who helps students to consider how their background and linguistic knowledge influences their class status and access to capital. In today's society, one's background and language are directly connected to their class in society and the opportunities to better themselves in the future. Critical language teachers are able to incorporate an aspect of a lesson that allows students to enhance their

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