

Chapter 5

Co-Creating Spaces for Reflective Practice in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Reflective practice enables educators to engage in self-examination of personal narratives and potential implicit bias that might impact their engagement with the learning communities they serve. Reflective practice informed by critical pedagogies supports educators in fostering learning spaces that affirm diversity, cultivate intellectual and personal growth, and invite community voices. Reflective practice work is grounded in deep trust, reciprocal mentorship, and a shared commitment to culturally sustaining education. As part of the Reflective Practice in Teacher Education project, the authors designed and discussed teaching for critical consciousness resources and reflective practice modules that allowed PreK-12 educators to delve into identity, implicit biases, culture, privilege, and resilience through a variety of methodologies (including dialogue, eloquent listening, journaling, mindfulness, portraiture).

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines how reflective practice, the ability to ‘turn the mirror inward and learn to unearth our internal pictures of the world’ (Senge, 1990: 11), facilitates critical self-exploration among educators that leads to an anti-bias mindset. Reflective practice inspired us to a deeper commitment to creating *brave spaces* (Arao & Clemens, 2013) for teachers and learners to grow together in their understanding of inclusive education and agency so they can collectively “address the deeply ingrained inequities of today’s schools by asking difficult questions related to equity and access” (Nieto, 2002:6). Our unfolding

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work on Reflective Practice aims to co-create intentional learning communities that celebrate the variety of talents represented, elevate the aggregated base of knowledge, and support the intellectual growth and well-being of each and every member. We do so through a seminar titled *Reflective Practice in Teacher Education* which consists of five learning modules designed to guide participants on a journey of self-discovery and provide them with the strategies and tools to create equitable spaces for learners of all ages to grow in their appreciation for diversity across content areas. The theories informing our *Reflective Practice* modules are outlined in the chapter along with detailed descriptions to support readers in the implementation of these modules within their own educational contexts.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our *Reflective Practice in Teacher Education* project rests on the shoulders of Freirian-inspired pedagogical approaches and Dewey-informed experiential learning frameworks. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire advanced teaching and learning endeavors that oppose the “banking system” of education, where students are viewed as receptacles of information being deposited on them by teachers, and teachers have the ultimate decision on what should be taught and how. Freire advocated for a model of education that encourages students to think critically and engage in the type of inquiry that provides opportunities for educators and educatees to partake in mutually respectful learning (Freire, 1979). Freire undermined the assumption that teachers are the leading authority in possessing and disseminating knowledge as he welcomed learners’ diverse expertise in the classroom and elevated their voice as co-creators of learning opportunities and knowledge (Freire, 2000: 70-86). Freire’s reformulation of schooling undermined Western dominant praxis in education that negated knowledge creation as an inquiry-based process, decimated learners’ ability to develop a broad worldview and forced them “to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them” (Freire, 2000: 72).

Freire invites us to view education as liberation, as the practice of freedom (Freire, 1979, hooks, 1994), and think of ourselves as educators who facilitate intellectual exploration, start where students are and respect people’s knowledge (Horton & Freire, 1990: 97-108). Emancipatory models of education that lead to critical consciousness involve problem-posing, analysis and dialogue that occur within egalitarian relationships (Freire, 2000): “through dialogue, the teacher of the students and the students of the teacher cease to exist, and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers” (Freire, 2000: 80). Engaged educators nurture the mind and souls of students, challenge the assembly-line approach to learning (hooks, 1994; Sousanis, 2015) and foster opportunities for students to steward their own learning through dialectic rather than prescriptive and oppressive pedagogies.

Education philosopher and social reformer John Dewey’s *pedagogic creed* (1897) approached education as a form of participation grounded in social consciousness. He believed that true learning is contextually activated by real-life demands and that “through these demands [the learner] is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs” (1987: 77). Experiential learning evokes social responsibility in education and engages students in an unfolding process of *learning by doing* that expands beyond the confining limits of traditional classroom settings -often not conducive to the kind of observation and experimentation that leads to problem-solving, intellectual and moral development (Dewey, 1938). Learning by doing is based on the idea that we learn best when asked to address topics and issues that are relevant to our own experience; when we are invited to new

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