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Book Review: Brookfield, S. (2017). Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, Second Edition. Jossey-Bass. ISBN 978-1-119-04970-8, hardcover, 286 pages.

Edith van der Boom

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Abstract

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Keywords

teaching, reflective practice

Book Review: *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*

Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass. ISBN 978-1-119-04970-8, hardcover, 286 pages.

Edith van der Boom, Institute for Christian Studies

As a teacher, I think a lot about pedagogy—what I will teach and how I will teach it. During the past couple of years, I have thought more about whether my teaching practices are supporting the learning communities of grace that I desire my classes to be. I wonder what my unconscious biases are and how I can teach in a way that truly celebrates each learner in my classroom. What are my assumptions about race and racism, human sexuality, and indigenous perspectives? Critical reflection, according to Friere (1970/2018), is more than thinking about one's practice, it includes action. I wanted to learn more about what actions I could take so I invested some time in reading Brookfield's second edition of *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*.

Throughout the book Brookfield shared his own personal stories as a college instructor and how he applied critical reflection to his own practice. Despite the fact that this text is written for an audience of college instructors, I believe that all educators can apply the suggestions of critical reflection within their own contexts. The most impactful part of this book for me was Brookfield's constant application of critical reflection to teaching race and racism. Whereas he committed a whole chapter to this topic, I found that he continued to touch on this topic throughout the book.

Although the main concepts of this book were presented in the early chapters, I found the chapters that followed helpful in showing me how to apply critical reflection by uncovering assumptions having to do with power and

hegemony.

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Throughout the book Brookfield revisited the topics of culture, race, and inclusion within the context of the classroom. I found this helpful as I work through my own concerns about teaching through an ideology of white supremacy. While

Edith van der Boom is Assistant Professor of Philosophy of Education and Practice of Pedagogy at the Institute for Christian Studies.

reading this book I have applied a number of his suggested practices and I am excited to try more as I grow in my own practice of becoming a critically reflective teacher.

Critical reflection is often used as a process for problem solving. The idea of not trying to fix something that isn't broken may seem to make sense but that is not the stance we want to take as teachers. As lifelong learners, critical reflection sets us up for a stance of ongoing inquiry and informed actions. Uncovering one's assumptions is part of being a good teacher as it helps us make informed decisions, develop a rationale for practice, and survive the emotional ups and downs of teaching.

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This book contains four lenses which are important to consider when critically reflecting on one's practice: students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experiences, and theory and research. Students' learning experiences are diverse as they each interpret our words and actions from their own context. Seeing ourselves through our students' eyes is one of the best ways to uncover the power dynamics in our classrooms and recognize hegemony. I was reminded that teachers need to take the time to ask students to describe problems as they experience them in the classroom. Critical reflection is best practised

collaboratively by colleagues who often share many of the same or similar classroom experiences. They can help us reflect back to how we have perceived things and challenge the assumptions we hold and power dynamics that exist in our classroom. I became much more aware of the need to be conscious of microaggressions that are committed in groups of mixed-race, gender, or class classrooms. Personal experiences can have the most influential role in how we teach and yet we tend to pay the least attention to this lens of critical reflection. Our tendency is to repeat learning experiences that we personally felt to be enriching and work to avoid learning experiences that we found boring or unhelpful. Theory may be the most difficult lens for teachers to use as many classroom teachers have limited time to read and research educational theories. As teachers we all have access to each of these lenses and yet we all don't use them equally due to external constraints, of which time is the most common.

I appreciated reading this book as it inspired me to begin applying critically reflective techniques to my own practice. Critically reflective teaching occurs when we identify and carefully consider the assumptions that shape our practice. This text suggests that reflection becomes critical when it focuses on a teacher's understanding of power and hegemony. By power it advises teachers to question the assumptions they have about the power dynamics of their classrooms and how they are using their power as a teacher. The concept of hegemony is defined as "the process whereby ideas, structures, and actions that benefit a small minority in power are viewed by the majority of people as wholly natural, preordained, and working for their own good" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 16). I was convinced that I need to examine how my current practice may be supporting a class culture that is actually causing harm.

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References

Freire, P. (1970/2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic.

As part of critically reflective teaching, I appreciated that a number of common-sense assumptions were considered about what good teaching looks like. It was interesting to think about alternative interpretations for these assumptions that many of us make in our classrooms. For example, the author suggested that many teachers assume that it is common sense that students learn best through discussion. As an alternative interpretation he proposed that for students who feel they look and sound different from their classmates, discussions are actually alienating. Throughout the reading I was reminded that the attempt to see things differently is central to all reflection. Assuming that our carefully planned classroom protocols will be experienced by each student in the same way is problematic. I found it helpful to read specific examples of how teachers can give power back to students.