This collection centres the diverse narrative experiences of six early-career US teachers who identify as critically reflective practitioners. The contributors cogently demonstrate how teachers with critically reflective mindsets take active steps to ensure that they are cognizant of how their intersecting social identities impact how they arrive at making different types of decisions (big and small), interact with students from varied backgrounds, and negotiate competing demands and expectations in and out of their classrooms.

The contributors have carefully thought about how learning and teaching are complex processes that involve significant ethical, moral, and social responsibilities. While they do not offer easy answers to the complex challenges that teachers negotiate on a daily basis, their willingness to share their concerns, experiences, and lessons learned offer timely perspectives about the possibilities and promise of using critical reflection as a means to challenge and close persistent academic, equity, and opportunity gaps that disproportionately and persistently impact students from underserved populations.

The editors offer strategies for developing and supporting critically reflective teachers with a focus on transforming PK-12 and teacher education through an equity-centric lens. They contend that aspiring and earlier-career teachers greatly benefit from employing critical reflection in their daily lives to not only survive but to also thrive in an increasingly complex sociopolitical climate. Additional resources and guiding questions are included with specific foci on teacher educators and other major decision-makers in PK-12 education who are directly involved with the education, professional development, and socialization of early-career teachers.
Developing and Supporting Critically Reflective Teachers
Developing and Supporting Critically Reflective Teachers

Diverse Perspectives in the Twenty-First Century

Foreword by H. Richard Milner IV

Edited by

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and

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H. RICHARD MILNER IV

FOREWORD

This is a powerfully important book – filled with real teachers’ accounts of their critical reflective moments and practices, designed to more effectively meet the needs of all students. What is particularly important about the collection of these chapters is the centralization of practicing teachers’ reflective voices, demonstrating a level of value and authority from which any of us can (and should) learn. Indeed, practicing teachers possess a wide array of knowledge and knowing that influence their practices, and we need texts that showcase the visible (and what might be seen as invisible) nature of their work and instructional moves.

Moreover, with its interconnected focus on equity, culture, race and practices, this book addresses, head-on, the very issues that scholarly and practitioner texts should. Students living below the poverty line, those of colour (especially Black and Brown students), those whose first language is not English, and those who have a disability tend to be grossly underserved in public schools across the US. Although some would blame these groups of students for the ineffectiveness of the US educational system, it is clear that young people succeed when mechanisms are in place to support them. This book shows how teachers critically examine themselves, their students, themselves in relation to others, and the sociopolitical context of the communities in which they teach.

Thus, this book advances what we know about self-study, action research, participatory action research, and how teacher educators in teacher education can work in collaboration with teachers to improve their practices and advance our knowledgebase. That is, teachers in this book engage in deep levels of introspection to come to terms with both conscious and unconscious phenomena and personal experiences to transform their practices. The reflective process can shed light on situations that can help educators re-conceptualize their overall practices. Indeed, coming to terms with what we know and how we attempt to share our knowledge requires us to come to terms with our shared knowledge as a foundation from which
we can build. What Frank Hernandez and Rachel Endo have been able to accomplish is noteworthy. They demonstrate what is necessary and possible when university professors – specifically teacher educators of colour – work collaboratively with teachers to build knowledge and to transform practices. This book is a model of practice, knowledge construction, knowledge dissemination, and collaboration that readers inside and outside of schools can learn.

Overall, these six teachers’ stories and practices give me hope – beyond optimism – that critical reflection can lead to culturally responsive practices that influence and shape students’ opportunities to learn in PK-12 classrooms. As Cornel West wrote in the preface of his important edited book with K. S. Sealey (1997):

Hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism adopts the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better…Hope enacts the stance of the participant who actively struggles against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair. Only a new wave of vision, courage, and hope can keep us sane—and preserve the decency and dignity requisite to revitalize our organizational energy for the work to be done. To live is to wrestle with despair yet never to allow despair to have the last word. (p. xii)

Thus, this book and these teachers’ words give me optimism and hope (and perhaps hope more than optimism) about what is and what can be in K-12 and teacher education. Many educators, such as those in this book, fight against structural and systemic forces that can make it difficult for them and for their students to succeed. Yet, they persist, persevere, succeed, and remain both hopeful and optimistic in spite of experiencing difficulties beyond their control. They remain, as do I, critical of current social, historic, economic, and political ills, and also, optimistic and hopeful about the transformational change that can emerge when we refuse to be defeated. Clearly there are positive strides teachers are making in classrooms, and it is essential for us to be exposed to perspectives and insights of possibility rather than those that solely focus and rely on the negative attributes, characteristics, situations, and experiences of teachers, students, parents (and others). I am hopeful that the teachers in this book and others continue to make a difference for students – all students – every day and in every classroom.
FOREWORD

REFERENCE


*H. Richard Milner IV*

*University of Pittsburgh*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Janet Beacom, Angela Kieffer, Kristin Melby, Regina Santiago, and Katy Siegel for their courage and willingness to share their rich insights, knowledge, and perspectives. Current and prospective teachers, as well as school leaders, teacher educators, and the general public, will come to appreciate the value of critical reflection and the work of equity-minded teachers through their narratives.

We are most grateful to H. Richard Milner IV from the University of Pittsburgh for his ongoing support of our work. His willingness to share his expertise with scholars and teachers who aspire to become both critically reflective and culturally responsive has been impactful and inspirational.

We thank Sheila Wright of Cambridge College for her transformational vision for the Induction Series Program when she served as Dean of Hamline University’s School of Education. We also honor the late Subira Kifano, a dear colleague and friend at Hamline University who drastically transformed how we model and teach about critical reflection as teacher educators of colour. Finally, we are grateful to Peter de Liefde and Sense Publishers for their support of this project.

From Frank Hernandez

This book would not have been completed without the commitment and support of Rachel Endo. Thank you, Rachel, for your sound advice and posing challenging questions about critical reflection. I am also grateful to the Simmons School of Education & Human Development at Southern Methodist University for providing me with time and resources to complete this important manuscript. Finally, thank you, Steven, for being my biggest fan and for providing me with sensitive and constructive feedback.

From Rachel Endo

I thank Frank Hernandez for bringing forth his amazing vision to engage in collaborative research with our former students. I am always grateful for all that Bette Bauer, Karla Bergen, Sr. Judy Eby, Mary Ellerbe, Violet Harris, Kevin Kumashiro, Gary Marshall, Jody Neathery-Castro, Fayneese Miller,
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kent Ono, Yoon Pak, Mike Reynolds, and the late Peter Suzuki have done for me over the years. Bill Lindquist generously agreed to step in during my sabbatical to allow me to finish out this project. Finally, I thank my family and parents for their ongoing love, patience, and support.
INTRODUCTION

Given the changing demographics and political landscape of US PK-12 education especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is a great moral imperative to develop and support critically reflective teachers who will be able to survive and thrive in a contested sociopolitical climate. Arguably one of the most urgent issues confronting US PK-12 education is the widespread public perception that those who are involved with the education of children and youth are not responding to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. As of 2014, over one-half of the K-12 student population is comprised of students who are American Indian or of colour (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). The US Census Bureau has also made the following projections regarding the population growth of the following major ethnic and racial groups between 2010 and 2050: Blacks will have a 46-percent growth rate, Latinas/Latinos of at least 87 percent, and Asian Americans over 213 percent compared to only approximately 1 percent among Whites (“The United States of Education,” 2012). Figures for Alaska Natives and American Indians were not calculated in the above projections, although the US Census estimates that both groups are expected to grow by more than half of their current populations by the year 2060 (“U.S. Census Bureau Projections,” 2012).

Along with changing national demographics, PK-12 classrooms are also becoming more diverse, yet, approximately three-fourths of all US classroom teachers are White American (Boser, 2011). In a place like Minnesota, which, though historically racially homogeneous, is home to a growing immigrant and refugee population, 96 percent of the K-12 teacher workforce is White American (“Lack of Racial Diversity,” 2015). Similarly, US teacher educators who are employed at colleges and universities are also primarily White American (Milner, 2010). Using Minnesota as an example, of the 31 teacher-preparation programs across the state, only two universities include at least one-quarter of faculty who are American Indian or of colour.
(Hamilton, Spies, Godinez, & Mariani, 2015). As faculty members employed in university settings, teacher educators exert a substantial amount of control in key decision-making processes that impact how future teachers are educated and socialized. Teacher educators not only shape the content and structure of licensure programs, but also transmit certain beliefs and values to pre-service teachers that will impact their practices when they are in the classroom.

The overrepresentation of White Americans in PK-12 and teacher education has directly and indirectly shaped the uneven educational prospects of ethnically and racially diverse populations. Specifically, several educational disparities between groups of students in the PK-12 system have been attributed to the lack of non-White teachers and to the persistence of implicit bias within the relatively homogeneous teacher workforce (Cross, 2005). Examples include the disproportionate representation of American Indian students and students of colour in remedial and special education, higher dropout rates among diverse students, and other patterns indicating that diverse learners are not receiving equitable opportunities to realize their full academic potential (e.g., Blanchett, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Furthermore, most US teachers have not received adequate preparation in their licensure programs to critically reflect on these very issues regarding how ethnic and racial identities impact educational opportunities and outcomes (Howard, 2003). The under-preparation issue is linked to the governance and structure of teacher-education programs, where teacher educators, the majority of whom are White (Cross, 2005), often struggle to help a similarly homogeneous pre-service teaching force understand the root causes and consequences of the systemic oppression that has impacted racialized populations in American education for centuries. Thus, while the lack of ethnic and racial diversity among the current teacher workforce is a matter of concern, a larger issue at hand is how schools and teacher-preparation programs will hopefully partner together to intentionally develop and support a relatively homogeneous group of professionals to meet the demands of working in increasingly diverse schools in twenty-first-century America.

Certainly, the types of structural changes needed to diversify and transform the PK-12 teaching workforce and the ranks of teacher educators at the university level in order to close various equity and opportunity gaps will require a significant overhaul of two complex enterprises that are slow to change. A starting point for discovering opportunities and possibilities for change is to analyze the lived experiences of early-career teachers who have developed a critical consciousness as equity-minded teachers through both
their personal experiences and professional development during their pre-service preparation through their induction years.

DEVELOPING CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE TEACHERS

Developing critically reflective teachers who embrace their social responsibility to become equity-minded practitioners is one of the most challenging, timely, and urgent issues that teacher educators, whom are also predominantly White, must begin to model and teach in their own practice. To start, university faculty who are teacher educators might begin to distinguish how critical reflection and reflection are two qualitatively distinct processes. For one, most US teacher-preparation programs require that their teacher candidates engage in ongoing reflection throughout their coursework and field experiences leading up to the student-teaching experience. The goal here is that teacher candidates will continuously use reflection to make appropriate instructional improvements for future lessons while also gaining self-awareness about how to continuously improve their practice. Requirements such as writing a philosophy of teaching statement (Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2007) and reflection-based papers such as observation reports from field-based experiences are common products that teacher candidates are expected to produce to demonstrate their competency in reflective practice. Through the above activities, pre-service teachers are generally asked to describe how they aspire to teach, as well as justify the instructional methods that they plan to use in their classrooms.

Certainly, engaging in reflection is necessary to help teacher candidates understand the value of intentionally planning engaging and rigorous instruction for their students, and when necessary, making adaptations to serve the needs of specific populations such as English-language learners and students with disabilities. For some White teachers, reflection becomes critical in moments of crisis such as learning on the first day of school that they have an ethnically and linguistically diverse group of students who seem disengaged or distracted, and thus, may reflect about and plan for how they might better “manage” their noisy students’ seemingly off-task behaviours. Reflective practice certainly helps teachers become aware of the dozens of classroom interactions that occur on a daily basis. Yet simply engaging in the act of reflection is not sufficient for teachers to become effective in their practice. We concur with Harris, Bruster, Peterson, and Shutt (2010) that critical reflection, which “is composed of personal discourse of reasons for decisions about events, taking into consideration the broader contexts of
historical, social, and political considerations” (p. 35), is an essential skill that all teachers must acquire as a means to making meaningful, positive, and substantial differences in the lives of the families and students they serve.

This book’s primary purpose is to centre the narrative experiences of six early-career US female teachers who self-identify as critically reflective practitioners. The teachers all went through the same graduate program to earn their initial teacher licenses plus their Master of Arts in Teaching degrees at a midsize urban liberal arts university located in Minnesota. Each teacher speaks for herself. Each teacher shares her challenges, hopes, and personal commitment to K-12 education. At the time, when they were enrolled in the program, the teachers had one to five years of classroom experience. Thus, this book offers critical insights about the development and support of critically reflective beginning teachers who have always had high aspirations to make a significant difference in the lives of their students. They each view equal access to a high-quality education as a basic civil right that all students deserve, especially children from historically underserved backgrounds.

CREATING A DISTINCT EXPERIENCE FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

We will briefly discuss the institutional context where we participated in the design of an innovative Induction Series Master of Arts in Teaching program that was specifically designed to support beginning teachers who had fewer than five years of teaching experience. The university is located in the Twin Cities, which is the most ethnically and linguistically diverse community in the state. The School of Education’s conceptual framework includes the following four pillars: (1) promote equity in schools and society, (2) build communities of teachers and learners, (3) construct knowledge, and (4) practice thoughtful inquiry and reflection. Preparing teachers to work in multicultural and urban settings is a central part of the school’s mission.

After gathering feedback from community partners as well as alumni and current students through focus groups and survey data, we learned that the external perception of the School of Education was that its mission and values did not always align with its practices. For example, several alumni and current students, the majority of whom are White Americans, shared that while they learned several helpful strategies in their licensure courses to act the part of reflective teachers, they did not believe that they had a clear grasp of the type of critical self-awareness that was needed to understand how their own identities and implicit biases shaped the various interactions that occurred in their ethnically and racially diverse
DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE TEACHERS

classrooms. As teacher educators of colour who also identify as critical multicultural educators (Frank is a Latino male and Rachel is an Asian American female), we were similarly interested in preparing in-service teachers to develop a type of deep-level reflection that acknowledged but also moved beyond individual-level beliefs and practices.

In 2010, a team of administrators (including the two authors), faculty, and outside groups led an effort to start an innovative alternative to the School of Education’s traditional Master of Arts in Teaching Program that focused on supporting new teachers through the induction years. The design team included an ethnically and racially diverse team of classroom teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators. The Induction Series program launched in 2011 with concentration areas in Culturally Responsive Practice, English as a Second Language, Environmental Education, and Literacy. Teachers took three content-specific courses, which depended on their selected specialty area, and three additional courses that were dedicated to the topic of critical reflection for beginning teachers. In their learning communities, the teachers courageously shared their concerns, fears, questions, and reservations without fear of judgment. Cohorts read seminal works by scholars who analyze the intersections among and between critical reflection, critical theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and urban teacher education (e.g., Apple, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1996, 2001; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2003; Milner, 2010).

Throughout their programs of study, the teachers extensively discussed and wrote about their own journeys to the teaching profession. However, they were required to make connections to their own lived experiences and social identities, a process that was traumatic for many White teacher candidates who had never directly confronted issues of racism or talked about their own segregated and traumatic childhoods (Cross, 2005). The theme of racial equity was integrated throughout the coursework. Using Pollock’s (2006) everyday anti-racism case-study framework (p. xiii), program instructors invited the teachers to share their real-life conflicts, dilemmas, incidents, or problems during class sessions using guiding questions that centrally focused on issues such as how disproportionality, implicit bias among teachers, and the hidden curriculum manifest in the schools while also arriving at action-oriented solutions based on factors that are within teacher’s control such as creating affirming learning environments and making explicit efforts to connect with communities, families, parents, as well as students.

Some of the guiding prompts that were discussed throughout each course and the program included the following topics:
1. How is reflection qualitatively different from critical reflection? What are areas of overlap? Try to identify what characteristics distinguish reflective versus critically reflective teachers.

2. What does it mean to be a critically reflective teacher in twenty-first century America when one-half of all children in the public schools are American Indian or of colour?

3. What are my perceived strengths as a teacher? Where do I need to improve?

4. How do I gather multiple perspectives on how I really am doing as a teacher?

5. How do I generally react when colleagues, families, and students criticize my practices and teaching? Why do I react the ways that I do? Who would I turn to as I decide how to interpret other people’s feedback and potentially use it to improve my own practice?

6. What decisions do I make as a teacher that could potentially alienate, disengage, inspire, and motivate my students? Think broadly about everything from the curricular, instructional, interpersonal, management, and other type of decisions that a teacher makes on a day-to-day basis.

7. What types of questions about my own practice and my colleagues’ practices develop as a result of us engaging in authentic, courageous, and ongoing critical reflection?

8. How does critical reflection influence how I collect data and interpret information about colleagues, communities, families/guardians/parents, other stakeholders in education, and students?

9. How does critical reflection impact how I analyze and interpret students in terms of their ability levels, behaviours, and likelihood for academic failure and success?

10. How do the answers to the questions above transform my own learning and teaching practices?

All teachers in the program were required to complete a final synthesis project where they connected key concepts of critical reflection to their specific contexts and practices. A series of carefully scaffolded and sequenced prompts guided the teachers to craft reflective narrative statements that analyzed the relationship between their own and their students’ biographies. For example, the teachers co-constructed and then responded to specific prompts such as the following:

- Your background and social identities: Who are you as an individual and social being? How were you educated and socialized? How do your
social identities such as dis/abilities, economic status, gender, language, nationality, race, religion, and/or sexual orientation shape your views about the relationship between learning and teaching? What types of social disadvantages versus privileges do you hold? How might your belief systems, experiences, and worldview limit, marginalize, or silence certain students? Empower, inspire, or motivate others?

- Your professional experiences: Map out your unique journey into education, including how you got to where you are today. Reflect on key moments in your life that inspired you to enter the teaching profession. Did school “work” for you, or did you experience certain challenges that inspired you to go into education? Also, think about signature life events and lessons that transformed how you view learning and teaching as well as student-teacher relationships.

- Based on what you have learned so far and what you know: What does being a critically reflective teacher mean to you? What does it mean to teach for equity and social justice? What are the benefits to you, your students, and the profession for engaging in critically reflective practice? What questions remain?

Throughout this cohort-based graduate program, the teachers participated in a series of peer-review sessions with their colleagues as they developed and refined their final synthesis projects on the implications that critically reflective teaching has had for their growth as equity-minded teachers. Creating a collaborative learning environment was essential to assist the teachers in articulating their experiences while also gathering essential feedback from their peers as they developed intermediate and long-term professional goals (Hagevik, Aydeniz, & Rowell, 2012). At the end of their program, the teachers presented their final projects using poster presentations that included optional supplements such as sharing personal artifacts or video narratives. The forum was open to the entire campus community and the public, which enabled the teachers to share their insights with a broad and diverse audience that included other colleagues.

FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

The six teachers who contributed to this volume synthesized core elements of critical reflection with in-depth analyses of how their own lived experiences have shaped their understanding of teaching as a complex and dynamic profession with significant ethical, moral, and social responsibilities. The
teachers framed their works using the method of narrative self-inquiry, which shares elements with both autoethnographic methods and narrative inquiry where scholars construct, recall, and reconstruct critical moments from their life experiences that inform a heightened understanding of both other and self (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Denzin, 2013). Narrative self-inquiry allowed the teachers to engage in self-definition on their own terms, and also, to construct powerful self-directed narratives (Diamond, 1993). As Diamond (1993) reminds us, the power of narrative self-inquiry is that “authoring provides a powerful paradigm for promoting and studying teacher thinking” (p. 511). As authors of their own experiences, the teachers offer crucial first-person insights about how they have developed their identity as critically reflective practitioners. Beyond minor editing, we retained each teacher’s original ideas and thoughts in order to demonstrate the diversity and range of her experiences, as well as to honor her own perspectives, unique teaching philosophy, and worldview.

Certainly, this project includes some gaps and limitations that are common in qualitative inquiry (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2003). Foremost, there are only six narratives represented in this volume, the teachers all self-identify as women, most are White females, and there is only one teacher of colour represented. Yet the contributions of this purposeful and small sample offer valuable examples of how beginning teachers who consciously engage in critical reflection on a daily basis differently and similarly understand their place in the field as public servants. Second, this collection focuses on the insights of one cohort of beginning teachers with one to five years of classroom experience. However, the perspectives of these beginning teachers who are also critically reflective and equity-minded practitioners have particular significance for efforts to transform the field as well as teacher education. More detailed implications for practice and theory are offered in Chapter 8.

Recruitment procedures depended on our roles as faculty members in the Induction Series Program. Three years after the first cohort graduated in 2011, we invited a select number of teachers to contribute to this volume. In hopes of modeling critical reflection and an equity-based pedagogy, we took an approach that disrupts traditional notions of research subjects and student-teacher relationships. That is, rather than conducting a traditional study that would have likely resulted in a secondhand interpretation of teachers’ experiences as anonymous subjects, we were interested in honoring their direct insights and knowledge by centring this project around their first-person narratives.
Finally, as teacher educators of colour, we recognize that we are not considered the “norm” in the field of teacher education, which, as in PK-12 education, is historically, and still is, predominantly White (Milner, 2010). We acknowledge that we are situated in a specific sociopolitical context as racialized bodies in the White-dominated field of teacher education. Relatedly, we understand that, because of who we are (or who we are not), we bring a different set of interpretive frameworks to our scholarly efforts and teaching. More specifically, our pedagogies and scholarly frameworks are focused on issues of equity and racial justice (Howard, 2003). However, as scholars and teacher educators of colour, we recognize the various contradictions in our work, including the need to both decenter and recentre how our field interprets and understands common discourses around effective teaching and equity. Like many pre-service teachers, we did not receive formal training in our teacher-preparation programs regarding how to become critically reflective teachers. Reflecting back to our early careers, we recognize that our identities as teachers of colour directly influenced our understanding of critically reflective practice. That is, the very presence of our racialized bodies in predominantly White spaces forced us to early on become aware of issues of culture and race in the classroom. Now, as teacher educators at predominantly White schools of education as well as leaders of colour, we have developed a refined understanding of the essential purpose of critical reflection in the preparation and support of classroom teachers.

CRITICAL REFLECTION AS SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PRACTICE

Critical reflection entails a major paradigm shift for many US in-service and pre-service teachers, who generally attend teacher-preparation programs that emphasize teacher-centred reflection, or the intense focus on one’s immediate context and practices, as the primary or sole means of assessing one’s effectiveness (Wong & Wong, 2001). For example, teacher-centred reflection often arises from a conflict or dilemma where a teacher attempts to gather immediate information to solve a problem (Danielson, 2009). Many teacher-preparation programs focus on reflection because of the ways by which state departments of education tend to narrowly define various concepts related to effective teaching. For example, Minnesota’s Standards of Effective Practice for Teachers include ten specific standards. Standard 9 on Reflection and Professional Development is prefaced by this statement: “A teacher must be a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of choices and actions on others, including students, parents, and
other professionals in the learning community” (n.p.). Standard 9 includes 11 subparts; however, the majority of them privilege teacher-centred reflection, which does not demand that teachers engage in critically reflective practice.

When analyzing the key differences between reflection versus critical reflection, some essential themes arise. Reflective teachers are skilled at analyzing micro-level classroom contexts such as assessing how well a particular lesson went and making adjustments based on their interpretations of student comprehension and engagement (Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2007). However, critically reflective teachers have an elevated sense of social responsibility to address and tackle inequities in and out of their classrooms to ultimately situate their individual actions and beliefs within larger sociopolitical contexts (Howard, 2003; Ward & McCotter, 2004). Teachers with critically reflective mindsets take active steps to ensure that they are aware of how their own biases shaped by their social identities impact how they arrive at certain instructional decisions, interact with various students, and manage their classroom communities. For example, critically reflective teachers consider questions such as, “Who do my students think I am?” and, “Who do I think my students are?” These questions challenge the common assumptions that teachers often make about their students, and instead, address how student are thinking about their teachers as social beings with many identities. A critically reflective teacher is ultimately attentive to issues of power and privilege in the classroom; is willing to acknowledge and learn from past mistakes; and reflects on how her or his own implicit and unconscious biases shape the context of the learning environment (Hagevik, Aydeniz, & Rowell, 2012).

Overall, critical reflection helps teachers, especially those early in their careers, to carefully rethink other-self dynamics with the purpose of promoting community building, democratic classrooms, and a learning environment that embraces ambiguity, conflict, and open discourse (Harris, Bruster, Peterson, & Shutt, 2010). To attain such an ambitious goal requires finding innovative ways to include teachers in the process of defining their own experiences and needs. As Tripp (1993) reminds us, “so little is known about the system as experienced by practitioners” (p. xiii), as well as the ways in which teachers are situated within a complex social enterprise. Synthesizing themes from the literature, we have identified some of the key conceptual and dispositional differences between reflection (Brindley & Parker, 2006; Danielson, 2009; Synder, 2012; Ward & McCotter, 2004) and critical reflection (Harris, Bruster, Peterson, & Shutt, 2010; Howard, 2003; Tripp, 1993) at both the macro and micro levels. To clarify, the list is not exhaustive; it only begins to identify some of the more common dispositions,
### Table 1. Characteristics of reflective and critically reflective teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reflective teachers</th>
<th>Critically reflective teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Identity and Practice</strong></td>
<td>How do my experiences inform my teaching practices?</td>
<td>How do my students’ experiences inform my teaching practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What has worked best for me as a student and as a teacher that I can implement in my classroom?</td>
<td>How can I reach students whose learning preferences and lived experiences are different from my own?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How can I can exert my authority and knowledge in the classroom to minimize disruptions?</td>
<td>How do I build and maintain a dynamic learning environment where all students are affirmed?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How can I make sure that my students see me as fair?</td>
<td>How do I intentionally promote an equitable classroom environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How can I help my students see that I have their best interests in mind?</td>
<td>How do I empower students to identify their cultural assets and talents to maximize their learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Materials</strong></td>
<td>Did the materials I select keep students engaged in the lesson?</td>
<td>Why did I choose these specific materials? How did I solicit students’ input in the selection process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What materials did I use that worked well in the lesson?</td>
<td>How did I incorporate my students’ cultural assets and interests when selecting these materials?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What materials did I use that did not work so well in the lesson?</td>
<td>How did I elicit my students’ feedback to make adjustments to my instruction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any resources or techniques that I would like to see used instead?</td>
<td>How were my students co-constructing knowledge in my classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Engagement and Learning</strong></td>
<td>Were all of my students, especially those who tend to be disruptive, on task?</td>
<td>Did I provide all students with differentiated opportunities to succeed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reflective teachers</th>
<th>Critically reflective teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Engagement and Learning</strong></td>
<td>What parts of the lesson did the students seem most engaged with?</td>
<td>Did the learning that took place allow all of my students to capitalize on their strengths?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What parts of the lesson did students seem least engaged with?</td>
<td>How do I encourage and inspire all of my students to maximize their potential?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Were my instructions clear to students? If some students did not understand what I was saying, what should I do to help them listen better next time?</td>
<td>How do I create varied learning opportunities for my students? If some students struggled in my class, what are some ways that I may have contributed to potential challenges or misunderstandings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was the lesson taught at a reasonable pace from start to finish? Did I cover all of the content and learning objectives?</td>
<td>How did I consciously differentiate my instruction to accommodate all of my students’ learning needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Which students actively participated in today’s lesson? Who did not participate at all or at the rate I was hoping for?</td>
<td>What did I do to ensure that all students had opportunities to participate in the lesson?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Decisions</strong></td>
<td>How effective was the overall lesson?</td>
<td>Did I deliver a culturally responsive and engaging lesson that resonated with students’ lives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How can I do it better next time?</td>
<td>How do I ensure that all of my students’ needs are being met next class? Throughout the rest of the year?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did I meet all of my day’s objectives?</td>
<td>Were all of my students able to engage with the materials I presented? If not, what do I need to do differently?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
expectations, and practices that effective classroom teachers explore during their professional journeys. The list includes specific examples that allow comparisons of how reflection and critical reflection might translate into the common decisions and routines that teachers engage in on a daily basis.

As Table 1 shows, the ways in which reflective and critically reflective teachers conceptualize their professional and social responsibilities are distinct from each other. Specifically, reflective teachers often think about their individual intentions, often defaulting to the assumption that they always are “well intended,” even when the outcomes are inequitable and unfavorable to their students. In contrast, critically reflective teachers look more broadly at the impact of their beliefs and practices. They interrogate their own assumptions, expectations, and intentions, and make intentional efforts to continuously improve (Dinkleman, 1999). To summarize, teachers who are critically reflective must think carefully about the intermediate and long-term consequences that all of their actions and interactions will have not only for their students, but their colleagues, families, parents, school leaders, and the surrounding community (Canada-Phillips, 2014; Harrington, Quinn-Leering, & Hodson, 1996).

The following chapters in this book are first-person narratives of the diverse experiences, insights, and perspectives of six critically reflective practitioners. The teachers will explore various topics about what critical reflection has meant for their personal lives as well as their practice as equity-minded teachers. Their collective and individual perspectives will offer timely insights about the realities and rewards of teaching in times in which

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reflective teachers</th>
<th>Critically reflective teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Instructional Decisions</em></td>
<td>How did I deal with any problems that came up during instruction?</td>
<td>What potential role did I play in any classroom conflicts or problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was I perceptive and sensitive to each of my students’ needs?</td>
<td>Was I conscious of, and responsive to, blatant and subtly oppressive practices or power imbalances in my classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How was my overall attitude and delivery throughout class?</td>
<td>How were my students able to connect their learning to what I was doing, saying, and teaching?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. (Continued)
teachers in the US are navigating ambiguous and competing demands and expectations. As Howard (2008) reminds us, the type of critical reflection that will be required to tackle some of the most urgent issues in public education will require that new teachers understand the “moral, political, and ethical contexts of teaching” (p. 95).

A BRIEF NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Language has the extraordinary power to define, exclude, or include groups of people based on arbitrary and subjective categories of analysis. Mindful of the power of language, we avoid using terms commonly used in the literature and research to define early-career teachers, such as amateur, inexperienced, or novice (e.g., Brindley & Parker, 2006; Synder, 2012; Ward & McCotter, 2004). These terms have somewhat negative connotations in that they imply that new teachers are lacking in certain competencies and skill sets rather than focusing on what they do know. Instead, we intentionally use terms such as beginning, early career, and new to describe teachers who have been in the field for fewer than five years.

REFERENCES


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