

Improving Our Teaching Through Critical Reflection

After teaching class or after reading your students' discussion posts in your online classroom, do you take time to reflect on how things went, how things are going, and how you and your students are experiencing your class?

Brookfield (1995) described a number of strategies to improve teaching through critical reflection. Here's one I like a lot. It's called "Keeping a Teaching Log." Brookfield maintained that "keeping a log of your private reactions to and interpretations of, the events you think are important in your life as a teacher is one way of helping you realize several things about yourself" (p. 72).

Brookfield suggested that we maintain the log on a regular basis, spending about 15 to 20 minutes a week. Eventually, patterns, common themes, recurring problems, and success strategies might emerge that could inform your practice. Here's questions to which you might want to respond (pp. 73-74):

- 1. When did I feel most connected?** What was the moment (or moments) this week when I felt most connected, engaged, or affirmed as a teacher—the moment(s) I said to myself, "This is what being a teacher is really all about"?
- 2. When did I feel disengaged?** What was moment (or moments) this week when I felt most discouraged, disengaged, or bored as a teacher—the moment(s) I said to myself, "I'm just going through the motions here"?
- 3. What situation caused stress?** What was the situation that caused me the greatest anxiety or distress – the kind of situation that I kept replaying in my mind as I was dropping off to sleep, or that caused me to say to myself, "I don't want to go through this again for a while"?
- 4. What took me most by surprise?** What was the event that most took me by surprise – an event where I saw or did something that shook me up, caught me off guard, knocked me off my stride, gave me a jolt, or made me unexpectedly happy?
- 5. What would I have done differently?** Of everything I did this week in my teaching, what would I do differently if I had the chance to do it again?
- 6. What do I feel most proud of?** What do I feel proudest of in my teaching activities this week? Why?

Resources

Brookfield, S. (1995). Becoming a critically reflective teacher. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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