



Chapter 14

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Effective teachers reflect on their teaching.

How Do I Become a Learner-ready Teacher?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE

Sumaira had three more classes to complete before finishing her teacher preparation program and applying for her teaching credentials. She was enjoying student teaching and was looking forward to getting her own classroom. Sumaira, however, was anxious about getting a job and beginning her first year of teaching. She was worried that she wouldn't be able to apply all that she was learning in her program, and she didn't know how to begin.

Sumaira had heard about becoming a learner-ready teacher and was familiar with the concept. She knew that she needed to continue learning, but there was so much to do and to think about that she was feeling overwhelmed. Sumaira decided to talk with one of her instructors about how to organize her thoughts and prioritize her actions as she prepared to enter the teaching profession.

Perhaps you're like Sumaira right now: you're somewhat confident in your ability to teach, but you're also anxious. You recognize how much you have learned about how to teach reading and writing to PreK–3 students, but you also know that you have just scratched the surface in learning about teaching. In fact, you may have thought you knew how to teach reading and writing before you entered your program, but you now realize how complicated it is to teach children to read and write.

In this chapter, we go back to the concept of becoming a learner-ready teacher that we presented in Chapter 1, and we suggest ways to categorize and prioritize some of the aspects of teaching that you'll need to remember going forward. To do this we present seven ideas about areas in your teaching life that you will want to consider. These are areas in which you can expand your learning and thinking.

1. Be Reflective about Your Teaching

You have probably written reflection papers for some of your classes, and you might be expected to write a reflection about lessons you teach in your placement. We bet that your instructors have told you that it's important to be a reflective practitioner. But, what does it mean to be a reflective practitioner, and how can you become one?

We've encouraged you to engage in reflection at various points throughout this book, but let's look more closely at what it means to reflect. Reflection is a cognitive, or thought, process where you think about your experiences and engage in self-evaluation and self-examination to look carefully at your teaching practice. The purpose of reflection is to improve your practice, and there are two main ways to go about engaging in reflection on your teaching (Schön, 1983). You can **reflect in action** and you can **reflect on action**. You may be wondering, what's the difference? Well, reflection *in* action means that you are reflecting as you are engaged in teaching. In other words, as you are teaching, you are thinking about how the lesson is going, how students are responding, what you can do better, and you may possibly even be making in-the-moment adjustments to improve your teaching. Reflection *on* action happens after the fact. This is probably the type of reflection that you've been asked to do by your instructors, mentor teacher, or university supervisor. In this type of reflection, you look back at your teaching and ask yourself questions such as: Did I accomplish what I set out to do? Did the students participate in the lesson and learn what I intended? What did I do well? What could I do better in the future?

To get a better sense of how reflection in action and reflection on action work, let's look at how Sumaira has used reflection during her placement. Sumaira's literacy methods instructor required her to teach several literacy lessons in her placement, and she was expected to write a reflection for each lesson to address what went well, what could be improved (and how), and what she planned to do next as a follow-up to the lesson. Because she reflected after the lesson was completed, this is an example of reflection on action. One day, Sumaira and her mentor teacher, Mrs. Chang, were talking, and she told Sumaira that she reflected on her teaching not only after a lesson was over, but while she was teaching it. Sumaira wondered if she could think about anything else while teaching because, as a teacher candidate, she felt like she had to be so focused on what she planned to do in the lesson. It's true that this might seem difficult to reflect while you are teaching, but Sumaira realized that as she got more practice teaching, she was able to begin to reflect on her teaching while she was in the act of teaching. As her mentor teacher, Mrs. Chang told her, "If you want to be an effective teacher, you have to reflect almost constantly so you can use your reflections to grow and improve as a teacher."

Skilled teachers engage in reflection regularly so they can continue to improve their teaching. They are always seeking ways to improve student engagement and student learning outcomes. They set high goals for themselves as teachers, but they also understand that they will grow and evolve as

Margin Note 14.1: 5 Quick Steps of Reflective Practice

<http://www.teachhub.com/5-quick-steps-reflective-practice>



Margin Note 14.2: Making Teacher Reflection Meaningful

<https://www.educationworld.com/making-teacher-reflection-meaningful>



teachers across their careers. They embrace mistakes and the occasional failed lesson as ways to think deeply and honestly about their practice to identify ways they can improve their teaching (Marzano, 2012). Does this sound like you? If so, you are well on your way to being a reflective teacher. If you don't think you are there yet, look at Margin Note 14.1 to find a five-step process you can use to engage in reflective practice. Give it a try and see if it helps you think about your teaching more deeply and provides you with useful insights for improving your teaching. In Margin Note 14.2 you'll find several ways you can engage in daily and weekly reflections. Choose one of the reflection ideas and apply it to your teaching. Was this approach to reflection helpful? Did it allow you to understand something about your teaching? Did it offer you a chance to identify a way to improve an aspect of your teaching?

You may want to reflect on specific aspects of your teaching where you have been trying to improve your practice and your students' learning. For example, you might decide to reflect on how you are addressing equity in your teaching by using questions like these developed by Milner, Cunningham, Delale-O'Connor, and Kestenberg (2019, p. 66).

- Which students were successfully engaged in learning during the lesson? How do I know?
- Which students were not engaged in learning during the lesson? How do I know?
- What might have blocked these students' engagement in the lesson?
- How could I modify the lesson to engage more students?
- What different instructional strategies might have worked better?
- Should I alter the content or do other things to promote student learning?

Because teaching is a complex process that requires you to use what you know about content, teaching strategies, assessment, and your students, there is always room for growth. As John Dewey (1933), the originator of the concept of reflective practice argued, simply getting more experience teaching will not make you a better teacher. You have to reflect on those experiences, and then you can grow and improve as a teacher.

2. Prioritize Your To-do List

As a student in a teacher preparation program, you probably have learned how to prioritize tasks that need to be done. Think about all of the times you've had competing tasks. Perhaps your mentor teacher wanted you to teach a lesson on syllables the same day that you had a big paper due for a class. What do you do? Which one do you spend most of your time on?

All of us make decisions based on a risk-reward calculation to some extent. For example, let's say that the paper you had due would make the difference for you in getting an A in the class or not. How much do you want the A? On the other hand, let's say that your mentor teacher is going to be on the hiring committee for a new first-grade teaching position, and you really want to be completely prepared for every lesson you teach. Also, your last lesson didn't go so well. You thought you were prepared, but the students didn't respond as well as you expected, and you want every student to be engaged and learning in your next lesson. You only have so much time, so which project gets most of your attention or do you decide not to sleep much that weekend?

We have a couple of comments for those of you who tend to be perfectionists and expect everything to go smoothly when you are teaching. First, students are unpredictable, and teaching is not an exact science. You will make mistakes so reflect on them and move forward. Spending more time to plan your every teaching move may not make much of a difference in the way students respond to you. As you reflect on your lessons, you will also need to prioritize what to do differently. You can't do everything all at once, so you need to make decisions based on the time you have and organize your work so that your decisions will have the most impact on student learning (Heyck-Merlin, 2012). This skill will be important throughout your teaching career.

When you're a teacher, you'll have the same situation with an overwhelming number of things to do and a lack of time to do them. Therefore, you need to prioritize your work. You can't do everything. Of course, your biggest priority will be to do what your students need. However, you will also have tasks to do for your school and the administration that are time sensitive. For example, you may have 4 hours allocated to do schoolwork over the weekend. You really want to develop a new unit using children's books on migration issues, but you also need to finish grades for the students' report cards. Because report cards have a firm deadline, you will need to prioritize that task and save the unit planning for later. There will also be times when you just can't get to some of those big projects until you have a set amount of time. Your daily work, such as planning, instructing, and assessing, will take up most of your time, especially during your first year of teaching. Of course, if you tend toward procrastination or are not very organized, you'll have to work harder to manage your time. This will be a trial and error process until you find a way to manage your time and prioritize your tasks that will work for you in your teaching situation.

Margin Notes 14.3 and 14.4 give you ideas about ways to prioritize teaching tasks so you can manage the many things you need and want to do. Consider which of these ideas might be helpful to you and make a note to apply them when you find yourself with a long to-do list and not enough time. As you get more experience teaching, you'll be able to develop and refine your own ways to prioritize teaching tasks and get things done.

Margin Note 14.3: Time Management Tips for Teachers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odOq3fOglrU>



Margin Note 14.4: 7 Ways to Prioritize Teaching Tasks When Everything Seems Urgent

<https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/truth-for-teachers-podcast/7-ways-prioritize-teaching-tasks-everything-seems-urgent/>



3. Learn More about Your Cultural Identity

In your teacher preparation program, you've most likely been examining your own culture as you learned how to become a culturally responsive teacher. As you consider your own cultural background, remember that you are not identified by one thing, and neither are your students. You may be white, from an impoverished background, from a family who speaks a dialect of English, and the child of the mayor of a small rural town. You have a variety of privileged and oppressed identities. The idea that you are many things is explained by a framework called **intersectionality** that describes social identities as interacting on multiple levels with a variety of privileged and oppressed identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) developed this framework with the idea that various social identities combine to place each individual at a particular social location informed by group membership such as gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, ability, religion, nation, and gender identity when introducing the concept of intersectionality. What this means for you is that you should try to think about the ways that you are privileged and ways that you may be oppressed. Understanding the ways your own cultural identity is layered will help you understand your students better.

We've discussed the importance of understanding cultural aspects of your students throughout this book. Often, though, we may have seemed to talk about one of the cultural identities of your students, such as their ethnic identity or home language. As you move into your career as a teacher, we'd like you to look at your students in a more nuanced way. Your students' identities are multilayered. Let's think of some examples. You may have a student from Guatemala, Marita, who came to

the United States with her family as a political refugee. Your experiences with students from Guatemala have been students who are steeped in poverty and immigrated to the United States to find work. Marita's family, however, was wealthy and her father had a high-ranking position in the government in Guatemala, and she was used to having maids and servants and has a good command of English. As you work with Marita, you need to be aware that her identity as a newcomer will be multilayered and that her cultural experiences might be different from what you expected.

It's important to look for those layers as you get to know your students and their families. One way to do that is to remember that we are all many things. Margin Note 14.5 shows Crenshaw describing intersectionality and Margin Note 14.6 explains intersectionality. As you learn about intersectionality, think about the ways your life is both privileged and oppressed and then talk with your colleagues about how to incorporate this framework as a teacher.

As you grow and mature as both a person and a teacher, you will gain additional insights into your own identities, and you can use these insights to understand your students' identities better too. You may be noticing that the ideas we present in this chapter are all things that will characterize your teaching life throughout your career. To be an effective teacher, you always need to be learning, growing, and evolving.

Margin Note 14.5:
Crenshaw Discusses
Intersectionality

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQ9FHC>



Margin Note 14.6:
Intersectionality 101

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6dnj2lyYjE>



4. Become More Culturally Competent

We hope you feel like you have learned how to become a culturally competent teacher and prepare culturally responsive lessons. As you begin your teaching career, one of your goals should be to continue to learn to become more **culturally competent**. You may think that you have conquered your biases, but it's very likely that you have some unconscious or implicit biases. Now is the time to embrace a mindset that is becoming more aware of ways that you could be looking at your students through your biases (Gullo, Capatosto, & Staats, 2019).

Let's give you an example. Let's say Mark came into your second-grade classroom on the first day of school 15 minutes late. He was grimy and disheveled with several days' worth of dirt under his fingernails. His clothes looked too big for him and had worn spots. Your community has a large

homeless population, so after one look at Mark, you decide he could be living in the homeless camp and probably would need to have reading intervention like other students you've known in the past.

Just reading the description of Mark, did you make some assumptions about him? We all tend to jump to conclusions based on our experiences, impressions, and biases. As a teacher, however, your biases can lead to lowered expectations and reduced student achievement so it's imperative that you examine your biases on your journey to become more culturally competent (Gullo, Capatosto, & Staats, 2019). Look at the video in Margin Note 14.7 and discuss ways you might have seen implicit bias in your schooling experience.

Margin Note 14.7: Implicit
Bias in Education

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBZPHE1oPJ0>



MICROAGGRESSIONS. As you work on your own ability to be aware of implicit or unconscious bias, you might also start becoming aware of **microaggressions**. Microaggression is a term used for unintentional insults and hurts communicated toward a person of a culturally marginalized group. For example, let's say you have a student from your classroom, Ai-Ying, who is of Asian descent and was born in the United States. Another student asks Ai-Ying where she is from. That is a microaggression, an unintentional dig at her. If Ai-Ying hears that same question throughout her life, she may feel like she is an outsider in her own country. Microaggressions are common, and we're not saying that people are intentionally trying to make others feel bad. Instead, we need to think of how microaggressions could be received by our students and the hurt they may cause. Margin Notes 14.8 and 14.9 describe microaggressions in more detail. Discuss with your colleagues the times you have heard or experienced microaggressions and how you can use those insights to be a more culturally competent teacher.

EXAMINE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS. What should you do if you encounter bias in your own thinking or microaggressions in your classroom or even in the teachers' lounge? First, remember that becoming more culturally competent is a lifelong process. As you find a bias against a group, acknowledge that this bias is your preliminary instinct but does not need to be your mindset. Then make sure that you do not treat any student unequally because of an implicit bias (Benson & Fiarman, 2019). For example, perhaps your initial reaction to a new student from Somalia is that the student will lag in academics and be socially uncomfortable because of their religion. You can challenge your initial impression and not make any educational decision until you have more information about what that student needs.

REPLACE JUDGMENT WITH CURIOSITY. A more uncomfortable area of becoming culturally competent is when a student, teacher, or parent expresses some kind of bias, microaggression, or racial slur. What should you do? We often hear our colleagues who are experts in multicultural education say, "replace judgment with curiosity." It's a way of reorienting our thinking when we encounter someone who is different from us or who does things differently. Rather than jumping to a conclusion that anyone or anything different is deficient, they recommend that we take a stance of curiosity to learn more and to understand things from that person's perspective. This approach also allows us to build our knowledge base of different groups, cultures, worldviews, and perspectives.

TAKE A STAND. Young children are learning about themselves and others, and they may not always think about the impact of what they say on others. What should you do if a child says something that is a microaggression or worse? First, it's important to create an identity-safe classroom where everyone feels safe, valued, and supported. In that type of classroom setting, you can talk about things that people may say or do that hurt people's feelings or makes them feel unvalued or excluded. In the article, "Teaching First-graders about Microaggressions: The Small Moments Add Up" (2019), Bret Turner, a first-grade teacher, describes how he creates an identity-safe classroom and how he engages his young students. He uses children's literature like those books recommended in Figure 14.1 to introduce the concept of macroaggressions so he can engage his own students in such discussions should the need arise. He also helps children see the difference between a single unkind comment and repeated comments that build up to make a student feel excluded, unwelcome, and unvalued. Although it may be uncomfortable for you to raise such topics in your classroom, as a learner-ready

Margin Note 14.8:
Microaggressions in
Everyday Life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0JsAS4>



Margin Note 14.9:
Microaggressions in the
Classroom

https://www.siue.edu/facultycenter/services_resources/teaching/Microaggressions.shtml



Figure 14.1. Books to Help Children Build an Awareness of Macroaggressions

Choi, Y. (2003). *The name jar*. New York, NY: Dell Dragonfly Books.

Ewart, M. (2008). *10,000 dresses*. New York, NY: Triangle Square Publishers.

Genhart, M. (2015). *Ouch moments: When words are used in hurtful ways*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

Miller, S. (2018). *Don't touch my hair!* New York, NY: Little Brown Books for Young Readers.

Margin Note 14.10: Becoming Upended: Teaching and Learning about Race and Racism with Young Children and Their Families

[https://www.naeyc.org/
resources/pubs/yc/may2018/
teaching-learning-race-and-
racism](https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2018/teaching-learning-race-and-racism)



teacher, you must be committed to making your classroom a safe, supportive learning space for all children, and addressing microaggressions is part of creating that type of classroom with your students.

See Margin Note 14.10 to read about how you can help teach young children and their families about race and racism. As you read the article, consider what questions you have. What makes you uncomfortable? Why? How can you build your confidence with addressing race and racism in your teaching? Share your insights with your colleagues or your mentor teacher. In Margin Note 14.11, you can view a short video of young children talking about race. As you view the video, ask yourself how you can use the insights you gain to help you be more well-prepared to address race and racism in your teaching and classroom.

You may be thinking that the approach we are advocating is to not be a racist, but there is a new, bolder approach that we want you to consider. It's being antiracist. Kendi (2019) describes being an antiracist as working against racism to change structures and systems to help eliminate racism. As a teacher, how can you do that? Well, you can start in your own classroom using ideas such as those offered in the article in Margin Note 14.12. As with any instructional approach or activity, it's important to consider context. On a topic that may be considered controversial such as racism, always be sure to talk to your mentor teacher and building administrator to come up with a plan you can all agree on together.

Margin Note 14.11: Kids Talk about Segregation

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=Sff2N8rez_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sff2N8rez_8)



Margin Note 14.12: How to Be an Antiracist Educator

[http://www.ascd.org/
publications/
newsletters/education-
update/oct19/vol61/
num10/How-to-Be-an-
Antiracist-Educator.
aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/oct19/vol61/num10/How-to-Be-an-Antiracist-Educator.aspx)



Engaging Families: Learning about Student Identities

Talking to family members is a great way to learn more about your students and their identities. Be sure to approach such conversations with an open mind and adopt the stance of replacing judgment with curiosity. You may find that open-ended questions such as the following are helpful:

- Tell me something about your child that will help me teach them better.
- What is a fear you have for your child?
- What is a dream you have for your child?
- What do you want me to understand about your child that other teachers may not have known or understood?

Before contacting any families, be sure you have your mentor teacher's approval and support.