

Critical Reflective Practices: Social Inventory

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This activity is designed for students who are seeking to become elementary school teachers and will be teaching in diverse communities, often very different from their own experiences as students. This is an activity to use for developing critical reflective practices engaging in discussions about diversity, inclusion, identity and social justice. This is a self-reflective activity designed to increase the learner's awareness of their own perspectives and to encourage them to seek out and include the perspectives of others into their social world.

Need and Development: This activity is used to engage students in critical self-reflective practices as outlined in the Profiles of Learning for Undergraduate Success in the category of Community Contributor by engaging in meaningful self-examination and reflection and Communicator as they seek to build new relationships as they examine their immediate social worlds (IUPUI, 2022b). This activity is also aligned to the Indiana Commission of Higher Education's State Transfer General Education Core under Social and Behavioral Ways of Knowing and aligns to the IUPUI Cultural Understanding coursework (TransferIN, 2022, IUPUI, 2022a). This activity is designed for students who are seeking to become elementary school teachers and will be teaching in diverse communities, often very different from their own experiences as students. The activity is used to develop critical reflective practices and engage in discussions about diversity, inclusion, identity, and social justice. Self-reflection used in this activity is designed to increase the learner's awareness of their own perspectives and to encourage them to seek out and include the perspectives of others into their lives. Definitions used come from the [IUPUI Faculty Council](#):

Diversity: Perceived human differences in appearance, thinking, and actions, shaped by historical and social systems of advantage and disadvantage. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, intersectional identities formed around ideas and experiences related to race, ethnicity, class, color, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, size, disability, veteran status, national origin, religion, language, and/or marital status.

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Inclusion: An approach designed to ensure that the thoughts, opinions, perspectives, and experiences of all individuals are valued, heard, encouraged, respected, and considered. While "diversity" ensures adequate representation of human difference, "inclusion" solicits and centers diverse contributions.

Implementation: This activity is implemented during the third week of the course. Learners will have already engaged in multiple readings and podcast listening (Biewen & Kumanyika, 2017; Gorski, 2010; Lee, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) which have introduced them to the concepts of anti-racist teaching and becoming aware of their own positionality. After completing this activity (which can also be provided as a take-home assignment), learners will write a reflection on their discoveries and their goals for action. Writing prompts for the reflection include:

How does understanding race as a social construct impact the way you have defined your own identity and that of others? How has your local community defined your race and the race of others?

How might learning about our own socialization impact how we decide to take action towards social justice? How have you been socialized to behave, think, dress, communicate, etc.?

What are the four stages Lee (2009) defines and how might some of our actions intended for justice be considered surface level?

Step-by-step implementation

1. First, (after reading and listening to the included resources) engage the learners in thinking about their own geographical location and how that influences the diversity of their social world. How do their neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, or other social spaces increase or limit their ability to engage with a diverse group of people?
 - a) Here you can pair, group, or provide silent reflection and writing. You may provide a table with each of the identities outlined and include discussion about intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2019).
 - b) Once the learners have examined their geographical space and recognized either the limits or the possibilities for diversity of interactions with others, ask them to begin thinking of all the people in their immediate life that are of a different gender, race, religion, age, socioeconomic status (SES), and ability from them. Have them write down one person for each category that they regularly engage with, essentially someone they would invite to their home.
 - c) Some learners may not have a diverse group of social connections. Others will. Let the learners reflect on their own circles as this is not a shaming experience but rather one for critical self-reflective practice.
2. Now that we have examined our local circles, it is time to review our social media. Who do we follow? Who is in our social media feeds providing us with perspective?
 - a) The learners should now review their social media and begin examining it in the same ways that they examined their personal lives.
 - b) If a learner does not have social media, they may follow blogs, opinion news sites, or other spaces online that encourage and support comments and sharing from personal perspectives.

3. After examining social circles in real life and social connections in virtual life, now it is time to examine the intellectual and entertainment material they bring into their spaces. What books and magazines do you read? What kind of music do you listen to? Who are the authors, writers, producers, lyricists, directors, actors, etc. who are shaping your entertainment and intellectual selves?
 - a) The learners should now begin examining the books they have purchased, magazine subscriptions, musical genre, Netflix feed, podcasts, and other forms of entertainment and intellectual consumption for diversity of perspective.
4. After all this examination, now ask the learners how they might expand their perspective and include more diverse voices in their local, online, entertainment, and intellectual worlds. Have them write down one action step that they can do today to make an effort towards expanding their own perspective.

Reflection

After completion of the above activity, you may ask learners to take home their tables and continue adding to them before writing their reflection. Using the information gathered from the table, pose the following reflection prompts to learners.

Discoveries about your Social World

After you track the diversity you experience in your life, compare and contrast the various aspects of your social life in your family, community, social media, work, school, and other parts of your social identity. Using your inventory, what have you discovered about your social space? How do you think your table reflects your values? What do you notice, now that it is listed in a table? Write at least three paragraphs that state your discoveries.

Reflection for Action

After you've described what the table shows you, write a reflection on these discoveries in no less than three paragraphs. Some questions to consider include: What might you do to expand or develop greater diversity in your social spaces? How does learning about your social inventory impact your ability and desire to become more conscious of expanding your social space? How might increasing the diversity of your interactions with others (whether in-person, through media, or online) help you to develop a better sense of different experiences? How might expanding the diversity of your social spaces increase your commitment to social justice education?

Inquiry to Action

At the end of the semester, students are invited to share how they implemented their “Reflection for Action” plans. These actions steps range from including a diversity of groups and individuals in their social media feeds and identifying how their takes on popular culture and news might differ from their own, reading a text with an author and protagonist who differs in more than one identity from themselves, volunteering at an organization that supports or serves populations that differ from the student, identifying policies or practices at their job or school that are inequitable or exclusionary and maintain segregated spaces, or other forms of action. Action will vary based on the starting point of the individual in their own awareness of their positionality, privilege, and willingness to experience “discomfort.” Many students are ready to move into grander action towards social justice, while others are unable to recognize their own power or oppression during this early stage of the course. Students are invited to present their actions to their peers. This may be completed as a video submission, an in-person whole group share, a partner share

online, or an in-person group share. Consider the relationships built in the class and how vulnerable students are able to be given the classroom community.

Value: Aligning with the Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation and the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, this activity highlights two key areas for teacher preparation: understanding diverse perspectives and approaches and critical reflective practices (CAEP, 2022, CCSSO, 2013). As future teachers, each of these learners must become aware of their own positionality and the influences of their social worlds on their own ideas. They must also actively seek to create inclusive environments by actively seeking contributions from our pluralistic society.

Student Response: Learners enjoy this activity as they often think of themselves as “open” or cultivating a “diverse” social world. However, upon examination, many learners find that their diverse perspectives come from very wealthy celebrities in their social media feeds or from their work environments that have limited opportunities to engage in conversation outside of work duties. They also realize areas of diversity that are often ignored (i.e., age, ability) and how these diverse perspectives can enhance their worldview and shape their understanding of their social worlds. Learners are quick to add new people to their social media as their “action step”, so try to push them to think of an action step that is also connected to their socially available world (i.e., watching a film with their family, choosing a book for their child to read together, inviting a co-worker for lunch, etc.). Encourage choosing to read an author, engage in a musical genre, or choose a film that represents a point of view that is distinct from their own perspective.

Vulnerability

This activity can be implemented as a private experience focused on self-awareness with submissions directly to the professor or as in-class and group activities and discussions. Each instructor will know their student community and build this activity in a way that is inviting and allows the student to be vulnerable in a low-stakes environment. Assigning points for this activity should focus on the completion and ability to reflect. Identifying that the assignment is not intended to make individuals feel “guilty” for their experiences, but to make them aware of how these experiences and actions shape their worldview and their own ability to appreciate and seek out diversity and inclusionary practices.

Excerpts from student Reflections:

- *I like to think of myself as a pretty open-minded person when it comes to society and how it affects myself and those around me. After seeing the things I put in my inventory it just made me want to push myself a little harder and to find an even deeper understanding in the cultures and ways of life of those I am surrounded by every day.*
- *I feel that the table I created is a rather poor representation of my values and beliefs. The reasoning behind the assumption is that one of my foundational beliefs is that everyone should be included and respected regardless of perceived differences, yet I have made very little effort in my personal life to branch out and take the necessary action to enact this belief. Going forward, I am going to have to reevaluate my dedication to this ideal, and change myself in order to truly live up to the ethical standards I have set for myself.*
- *My social life inventory table is not as diverse as I would like it to be, however I hope my responses do not portray my values as closed-off or un-inclusive.*

- *I think it is so important to allow yourself to learn in different situations because you can prepare for more knowledge. I think another thing it would help me to see how different cultures respond to different things.*
- *This is an eye opener and helps me see all the areas that I can improve on and develop more diversity. As far as expanding goes as I go on in life, I will do my best to remember this social inventory and build on it through my experiences and as I meet new people. This acts as a good overview and provides a lot of insight on all aspects of my life.*
- *As I reflect through this week, I have realized things I did not see before. I have been living and continue to live a homogenous life. I find myself feeling more comfortable living a life surrounded by people that I know accept me and will not judge me by my looks or background. I also find myself having more Hispanic friends than any other ethnicity.*
- *I mostly hang around non-religious people because I am not religious. When I'm around very religious people, I do feel uncomfortable. I've never really been sure why, but I believe it is that I don't want to offend them by telling them I don't believe in their beliefs. I know that most people do not get offended by such statements so I feel like I should stop letting the off chance of offending someone by explaining that I'm non-religious not get in the way of getting to know someone.*
- *Maybe I should pay more attention to being inclusive to people with disabilities. Just because I haven't noticed many people who appear to have disabilities does not mean that there may not be some in the same social spaces that I occupy. I always take care to treat disabled people with the same respect as I would treat anyone else whenever I have the opportunity to interact with them.*
- *The best thing I can do to encourage diversity is actively speak out about stigma[s] surrounding higher education and oppressed groups.*

Limitations: Learners may be resistant to these ideas or not find value in developing a more diverse community for the purposes of expanding their own perspectives and ideas. Some learners will identify their world as “diverse” because they know of people, but are not actively engaging with these people, books, films, etc. This activity can be revealing and vulnerable if completed as a shared group activity. This activity has been implemented as both a personal take-home assignment and as a classroom collaborative assignment. Knowing your audience is key in choosing to implement this as a self-reflective practice or as a collaborative learning practice.

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