

## What Is Critically Reflective Teaching?

Every good teacher wants to change the world for the better. At a minimum we want to leave students more curious, smarter, more knowledgeable, and more skillful than before we taught them. I would also want my best teaching to help students act toward each other, and to their environment, with compassion, understanding, and fairness. When teaching works as I want it to, it creates the conditions for learning to happen. Students increase their knowledge, deepen their understanding, build new skills, broaden their perspectives, and enhance their self-confidence. They see the world in new ways and are more likely to feel ready to shape some part of it in whatever direction they desire.

Teaching can also work in the opposite way by confirming students' belief that education is a pointless and boring waste of time in which nothing of interest, relevance, or value happens. Here teaching confirms people's adherence to the status quo by strengthening whatever mechanisms of social control are in place and deepening students' apathy and conformism. So for good or ill the world is never the same after teaching.

Of course this neatly bifurcated way of presenting teaching as inherently liberating or conforming is actually far more complex in reality. I may design an exercise that I believe engages students and promotes participation, but they may experience it as a manipulative exercise of power. For example, in my first-ever

course I taught in the United States I announced at the first class that students had control over deciding what should be the course curriculum. I assumed this announcement would produce an intoxicating and welcome sense of freedom, but I was told only that they'd paid a lot of money to learn from me, the expert. As unconfident novices in a new subject area they said I was setting them up for failure by not providing sufficient guidance for their learning.

One of the hardest lessons to learn as a teacher is that **the sincerity of your actions has little or no correlation with students' perceptions of your effectiveness**. The cultural, psychological, cognitive, and political complexities of learning mean that **teaching is never innocent**. By that I mean that you can never be sure of the effect you're having on students or the meanings people take from your words and actions. Things are always more complicated than they at first appear.

For example, in my own practice I place a strong emphasis on narrative disclosure. I like to provide examples from my life that illustrate points I'm making. I do this because students across the years have told me that this captures their attention and helps them understand a new concept. But there is another side to using personal examples and that's being seen as self-obsessed. Sometimes students' evaluations of a particular class have called me *arrogant*, a term that bothers me greatly because I hate self-importance so much. When I describe a situation or incident in my own experience that I think clarifies a complicated idea or shows how a new piece of information might be applied, I assume I'm being helpful. Yet some interpret this as an unhealthy fascination with the minutiae of my own life, as borderline self-indulgence. Investigating and clarifying these kinds of complexities is what critically reflective teaching is all about.

## Critically Reflective Teaching

**Our actions as teachers are based on assumptions we have about how best to help students learn. These assumptions come from a**

**number of sources:** our own experiences as learners and the way we interpret these, advice from trusted sources (usually colleagues), what generally accepted research and theory say should be happening, and how we see students responding. Sometimes these assumptions are justified and accurate, sometimes they need reframing to fit particular situations, and sometimes they're just plain wrong.

**Critical reflection is, quite simply, the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions.** We all work from a set of orienting, stock assumptions that we trust to guide us through new situations. **Some of these are explicit** and at the forefront of our consciousness. For example, I hold two strong explicit assumptions. The first is that whenever possible teachers should initially model for students whatever it is they wish those students to do. The second is that the best teaching happens in teams. That's because team teaching enables teachers to bring different knowledge and perspectives to bear on topics and to model intellectual inquiry by asking questions, seeking to understand differences, and disagreeing respectfully.

**Other assumptions are much more implicit.** Implicit assumptions soak into consciousness from the professional and cultural air around you. Consequently they're often harder to identify. For example, for many years I assumed that discussion was the best teaching method to use with adults. This implicit assumption came from three sources. First, my personal experience of schooling was characterized by lectures, dictation, and top-down approaches, something I found really boring. When I became a teacher I was determined not to replicate that approach and so moved instinctively to using discussion. Second, the theory I was reading in my professional preparation drew from English and American traditions that explored education for social justice and community development. This theory, particularly that of Freire (Freire and Bergman, 2000), emphasized the importance of dialogic processes, and this deepened the commitment to discussion that arose from my bad memories of school.

Third, pretty much every one of my colleagues at the adult education center where I worked advocated discussion as the most appropriate teaching method for working with adults. Over time the assumption that discussion-based approaches were inherently superior and the most “adult” just became part of who I was. It ceased to be something I thought consciously about and just embedded itself into my habitual practice. Planning a new course? Use discussion! Setting up a staff development effort? Start with small groups!

I still argue strongly for the relevance of this approach (Brookfield and Preskill, 2016). But since I started deliberately and regularly examining my assumptions I’ve realized that sometimes it doesn’t make sense to begin a new course or professional development with a discussion. When students are complete novices, being asked to discuss new content is intimidating and often counterproductive. It’s also unfair. How can people discuss something they know nothing about? **When there’s a history of institutional mistrust on the part of students, or when they’ve been burned by participating in discussions in the past, holding a discussion as the first thing you do is probably going to backfire.**

Assumptions become tweaked over time, deepened in complexity. **You realize that for a particular assumption to work, certain conditions need to be in place.** For example, in my habitual, knee-jerk turn to discussion I’ve come to realize that discussions set up to explore contentious issues usually benefit if certain ground rules are stated early. In addition, **I need to use protocols to secure everyone’s participation** and to give silent processing as much prominence as verbal exchange. I also know that discussion leaders need to be open to critique and willing to reconsider their own assumptions. So my implicit assumption that discussion should be used in all situations has been refined and contextually finessed through conscious examination.

To recap, critically reflective teaching happens when we build into our practice the habit of constantly trying to identify, and

check, the assumptions that inform our actions as teachers. The chief reason for doing this is to help us take more informed actions so that when we do something that's intended to help students learn it actually has that effect.

## Types of Assumptions

Assumptions are the taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and our place within it that guide our actions. In many ways we *are* our assumptions. They give meaning and purpose to who we are and what we do. Becoming aware of our assumptions is one of the most puzzling intellectual challenges we face. It's also something we instinctively resist for fear of what we might discover. Who wants to clarify and question assumptions they've lived by for a substantial period of time, only to find out that they don't make sense?

Of course assumptions are not all of the same kind. Some are broad in scope, some specific to a particular situation. Some are explicit, some implicit. I find it useful to distinguish among three broad categories of assumptions—paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal.

### Paradigmatic Assumptions

These are the structuring assumptions we use to order the world into fundamental categories. Usually we don't even recognize them as assumptions, even after they've been pointed out to us. Instead we insist that they're objectively valid renderings of reality, the facts as we know them to be true. Some paradigmatic assumptions I've held at different stages of my life as a teacher are the following:

- Adults are naturally self-directed learners.
- Critical thinking is the intellectual function most characteristic of adult life.
- Good classrooms are inherently democratic.
- Education always has a political dimension.

Paradigmatic assumptions are examined critically only after a great deal of resistance, and it takes a considerable amount of contrary evidence and disconfirming experiences to change them. But when they are challenged the consequences for our lives are explosive.

### **Prescriptive Assumptions**

These are assumptions about what we *think* ought to be happening in a particular situation. They're the assumptions that are surfaced as we examine how we think teachers should behave, what good educational processes should look like, and what obligations students and teachers should owe to each other. Note the word *should*. A prescriptive assumption is usually stated with that word smack in the middle. Organizational mission statements and professional codes of practice are good sources for revealing prescriptive assumptions.

Some prescriptive assumptions I've held or hold are the following:

- All education should promote critical thinking.
- Classrooms should be analogs of democracy.
- Teachers should clarify expectations, objectives, and criteria of assessment as early as possible in an educational episode.

Prescriptive assumptions are often grounded in, and extensions of, our paradigmatic assumptions. For example, if you believe that adults are self-directed learners then you'll probably assume that good teachers encourage students to take control over designing, conducting, and evaluating their own learning. And, of course, you shape your teaching to accomplish this, which leads us to the third kind of assumptions—causal.

## Causal Assumptions

These are assumptions about how different parts of the world work and about the conditions under which these can be changed. They are usually stated in predictive terms. Examples of causal assumptions I've held or hold are the following:

- Using learning contracts increases students' self-directedness.
- Making mistakes in front of students creates a trustful environment for learning in which students feel free to make errors with less fear of censure or embarrassment.
- Rearranging rows of chairs into circles creates a welcome environment for learning that students appreciate.
- Teaching in teams opens students to a greater breadth of perspectives than is possible in solo teaching.

Causal assumptions are the easiest to uncover. But discovering and investigating these is only the start of the reflective process. We must then try to find a way to work back to the more deeply embedded prescriptive and paradigmatic assumptions we hold.

## How Do We Examine Assumptions?

The best way to unearth and scrutinize our teaching assumptions is to use four specific lenses available to us: students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experiences, and theory and research. Viewing what we do through these different lenses helps us uncover when and how certain assumptions work and when distorted or incomplete assumptions need further investigation. This can't be a one-time scrutiny; it must be consistent and regular—daily, weekly, monthly. That's the discipline of critical reflection.

## **Students' Eyes**

Seeing ourselves through students' eyes makes us more aware of the effects of our words and actions on students. This helps us clarify our assumptions and decide when they make sense and when they need to be changed or discarded. A common meta-assumption is that the meanings we ascribe to our actions are the same ones students take from them. But when we collect data from students we see the different ways they interpret what we say and do.

## **Colleagues' Perceptions**

Inviting colleagues to watch what we do or engaging in critical conversations with them helps us to notice aspects of our practice that are usually hidden from us. As they describe their readings of, and responses to, situations that we face, we often see our practice in new ways. Colleagues can suggest perspectives we might have missed and responses to situations in which we feel clueless.

## **Personal Experience**

Our own experiences as learners provide important clues to the kinds of classroom dynamics that hinder or further the ability to learn. This is why I feel the best use of professional development money is to fund teachers to take a course release so they can enroll as learners in courses in which they are truly novices. Becoming a student enables you to study your experiences and transfer the insights about what does, or doesn't, work to your own teaching.

## **Theory and Research**

Theoretical and research literature can provide unexpected and illuminating interpretations of familiar as well as newly complex situations. For example, reading Michel Foucault's (1980) analysis of power shed an unexpected but very illuminating light on my work as a teacher. Practices that I thought were transparent and empowering (for example, using learning contracts or rearranging classroom furniture by putting chairs into circles) were experienced



by some as invasive and aggressive or as trying to wish away my power in a wholly unconvincing way.

## So What Makes Reflection Critical?

Most reflection remains within the technical realm. We reflect about the timing of coffee breaks; how to use blackboards, flip charts, or screens; whether to ban hand-held devices from class; or the advisability of sticking rigidly to deadlines for the submission of students' assignments. We can't get through the day without making numerous technical decisions concerning timing and process. These technical decisions become critical when we start to see them in their social or political context, influenced by the structures and workings of power that exist outside the classroom.

What is it, then, that makes reflection critical? Is it just a deeper and more intense form of reflection? Not necessarily. Informed by the critical theory tradition, reflection becomes critical when it's focused on teachers understanding power and hegemony. As such, critical reflection has two distinct purposes:

### **Illuminating Power**

Critical reflection happens when teachers uncover how educational processes and interactions are framed by wider structures of power and dominant ideology. It involves teachers questioning the assumptions they hold about the way power dynamics operate in classrooms, programs, and schools and about the justifiable exercise of teacher power.

### **Uncovering Hegemony**

Critical reflection happens when teachers try to uncover assumptions and practices that seem to make their teaching lives easier but that actually end up working against their own best long-term interests—in other words, assumptions and practices that are hegemonic. It involves examining how to push back against this exploitation by changing structures and alerting others to its presence.

## Critical Reflection as the Illumination of Power

Structures and forces present in the wider society always intrude into the classroom. Classrooms are not limpid, tranquil, reflective eddies cut off from the river of social, cultural, and political life. They are contested arenas—whirlpools containing the contradictory crosscurrents of the struggles for material advantage and ideological legitimacy that exist in the world outside.

One of my flawed assumptions as a beginning adjunct technical college teacher was that what happened in my classrooms was largely of my own making. I assumed that what I did and the way that I did it were largely under my own control. Certainly I knew there were examinations I had to prepare students for and that these would test students' knowledge and understanding of the content outlined in the syllabus. But I viewed my classroom as my own domain. I believed I could make pretty much all the decisions about the timing and flow of how we covered the required content and that the teaching methods and approaches were chosen by me.

In fact, as I moved through my first few years of adjunct work it became increasingly evident that structures and forces completely out of my control substantially shaped my supposedly independent classroom universe. First, the syllabus reigned supreme in my kingdom. Classroom discussions would start to ignite as students brought in personal experiences but I'd constantly have to cut these short in order to get back to the "official" business of covering the designated content. Sometimes when students seemed the most engaged I had to act as the enforcer of dullness, dragging them back to the study of disembodied content. I couldn't contact examiners or syllabus designers to ask them to change the tests to reflect the new areas we were exploring in class. Because exam questions and curriculum were predetermined they existed in a universe to which I had no access. The timing of examinations was set years in advance so there was no opportunity to let discussions run on. If I did that we wouldn't have the time to cover the next chunk of

curriculum properly. And that could, after all, be a chunk that was stressed in this year's examination questions.

I also became aware of wider social norms of what constituted appropriate behavior. In my first weeks of teaching I tried to get as much classroom discussion going as possible. Sometimes my students became volatile, shouting and moving around the room. I encouraged them to change groups and to get up out of their seats if they needed a break. Full-time colleagues passing by my adjunct classroom must have thought chaos or anarchy had broken out! My class was loud, looked disorganized, and definitely did not fit the norm of students sitting quietly in orderly rows while the teacher talked.

I don't want to suggest that any of my exercises or activities actually worked. I'm sure students took advantage of my inexperience and saw me as a soft touch, someone they could take liberties with. And I'm convinced there was a high degree of chaotic disorganization evident. Not surprisingly I received not-so-subtle indications from colleagues that the noise my students created was interfering with what was going on in adjoining classrooms and that I needed to have better control of what was happening in mine.

Now there was no stated policy on student behavior, no set of college guidelines on what a "proper" classroom should look like. But clearly something was in the air—a number of paradigmatic and prescriptive assumptions—that was pressuring me to make sure my classroom appeared and sounded a certain way. This "something" was dominant ideology.

### Dominant Ideology

Dominant ideology is a central idea in critical theory (Brookfield, 2004), which is the chief intellectual tradition informing my own understanding of critical reflection. It refers to the set of beliefs and assumptions that are accepted as normal and commonsense ways of explaining the world. Some dominant ideologies in the

United States are those of capitalism, positivism, democracy, militarism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, and each of them contains a core premise:

### **Capitalism**

assumes that the free manufacture and exchange of goods and services secures freedom of speech and protects individual liberty. Under capitalism entrepreneurial creativity is unleashed in ways that nurture the human spirit.

### **Positivism**

assumes that the world and its constituent elements can be measured, assessed, and graded in quantifiable ways. The most reliable knowledge is produced through the application of the scientific method, so education should focus first and foremost on the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) disciplines. Students educated in these disciplines will help the US economy remain the most dominant.

### **Democracy**

assumes that the most reliable and morally appropriate way to make decisions is through a majority vote. A majority of people thinking the same way about something represents the uncommon wisdom of the common people.

### **Militarism**

assumes that, as the world's foremost superpower, the United States must maintain the strongest arsenal of weapons and personnel on the planet. Only by maintaining its superiority in armaments will the country's security be assured. Funding military, paramilitary, and other security agencies is the best way to keep America safe because the exercise of force is something that enemy states understand and respond to.

## White Supremacy

assumes that because of their superior intellect and capacity to think logically and rationally, white people should naturally assume positions of power and authority. People of color are governed by emotions rather than logic and do not have the impulse control that effective leaders require. Furthermore, because whites consistently perform better in tests and examinations, their greater intelligence means we're safer if they're in control.

## Patriarchy

assumes that men's superior intellect and capacity to think logically and rationally means they should naturally occupy positions of authority. Women are governed by emotions rather than logic and do not have the impulse control that effective leaders require. Feeling sways them when it comes to decision making so they can't be trusted to think rationally about the common good. Consequently men should be entrusted with decision-making power.

Ideologies such as capitalism, majority-vote democracy, and militarism are very public, praised in the media, and commonly accepted as morally desirable. Some ideologies, such as white supremacy and patriarchy, are less overtly expressed because they contradict tenets of other ideologies, such as democracy. They are expressed in jokes and whispers privately among groups of "friends," that is, people who can be trusted to think in the same way.

Critical theory views all these ideologies as mechanisms of control, designed to keep a fundamental unequal system safe from challenge. If the majority of people could see that they live in a world designed to keep a small minority in a position of overwhelming material superiority, then revolution would break out. But if you can keep people thinking that this is the natural, commonsense way the world works, then you secure their consent to this state of affairs. When dominant ideology works most effectively people

react to stock market crashes, widespread layoffs, budget cuts, and hospital and public service closures in the same way they react to weather changes. Hurricanes, ice storms, and heat waves are out of our control and to be shrugged off as best we can. Similarly, dominant ideology causes us to interpret economic and social disasters as equally unpredictable and beyond our sphere of influence.

Critically reflective teachers are on high alert for the presence of dominant ideology in educational processes and decisions. They see its influence as particularly evident in battles over curriculum where white supremacy and patriarchy come into play. Changes to tuition levels, differential funding for schools and departments, or the widespread adoption of rubrics in student assessment are analyzed in terms of the workings of capitalism and positivism.

### Unearthing Power Dynamics

Critical reflection as the examination of power is not just concerned with how educational processes function as systems of social control or the way common institutional practices reflect elements of dominant ideology. Uncovering how power dynamics operate in the microcosm of classroom and staff room interactions is just as important.

Many teachers who work in a critically reflective way identify themselves as progressives interested in democratizing classrooms and empowering students. I'm one of these self-identified "progressives." Most of my approaches and activities are dictated by my desire to increase student participation and create an inclusive environment. In my own mind my actions are transparent and innocent. I assume that the sincerity with which I invest them is clear and that it produces the desired positive effects in students. I also assume that my actions designed to democratize the classroom, engage students, and convey authenticity are experienced in the way I intend. But because I built the critically reflective habit into my practice, the lenses of students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, my own experiences, and theory have called these assumptions into question.

As an illustration let me briefly examine some assumptions regarding teacher power. As someone committed to working democratically I believe in my “at-one-ness” with students. Believing my students to be moral equals I like to think I’m really no different from them. I want them to treat me as an equal, a friend not an authority figure. The fact that there’s an institutionally mandated imbalance of power between us, and that I usually know a lot more about the content, is in my mind a temporary imbalance. I view us as co-learners and co-teachers.

This belief exerts a strong influence on me. But by using the four reflective lenses of students, colleagues, experience, and theory I know that my assumption that declaring my at-one-ness with students causes them to see me as one of them is way too naive. In fact the strongly hierarchical culture of higher education, with its structures of authority and its clear demarcation of roles and boundaries, means that I can’t simply wish my influence away. No matter how much I might want it to be otherwise and no matter how informal, friendly, and sincere I might be in my declarations of at-one-ness, I am viewed as fundamentally different.

Culturally learned habits of reliance on, or hostility toward, authority figures (especially those from the dominant culture) can’t be broken easily. This is particularly evident when the teacher’s identity is clearly different from students; for example, a man teaching a mostly female class, an upper-class teacher working with working-class students, a person of color teaching white students, or vice versa. In these instances declarations of at-one-ness will come across at worst as lies and at best as inauthentic attempts to curry favor.

Critically aware teachers reject the naive assumption that by saying you’re the students’ friend and equal you thereby magically become so. Instead, they research how students perceive their actions and try to understand the meaning and symbolic significance students assign to them. They come to understand that authentic collaborations will happen only if teachers spend considerable time earning students’ trust by acting democratically, fairly, and respectfully toward them.

## Critical Reflection as Uncovering Hegemony

Hegemony (hedge-a-moh-knee) and hegemonic (hedge-a-monic) are hard words to get your tongue around let alone to understand. But they are crucial to understanding the critical part of critical reflection. As developed by a founder of the Italian communist party (Gramsci, 1971), the term *hegemony* describes 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. In contrast to earlier notions of ideology that stressed its imposition from above as a mechanism of control, hegemony stresses learning from below. Gramsci maintained that people proactively learn their own oppression by internalizing the commonsense ideas swirling in the air around them in families, friendships, communities, culture, and social institutions.

Not only are the practices of hegemony actively learned but also people take pride in enacting them. They get pleasure from having perfect attendance records at school, being the first to show up for work and the last to leave, earning extra credit or merit pay for taking on more work, amassing the symbols of a successful life (car, house, consumer goods), and so on. But these ideas and practices that seem so obvious and commonsense are constructed and transmitted by powerful minority interests to protect the status quo that serves these interests so well.

The subtle cruelty of hegemony is that over time it becomes deeply embedded, part of the cultural air we breathe. We can't peel back the layers of oppression and point the finger at an identifiable group of people whom we accuse as the instigators of a conscious conspiracy to keep people silent and disenfranchised. Instead, the ideas and practices of hegemony—the stock opinions, conventional wisdoms, or commonsense ways of seeing and ordering the world that people take for granted—become part and parcel of everyday life. If there's a conspiracy here, it's the conspiracy of the normal.



A crucial purpose of critical reflection is to uncover and challenge hegemonic assumptions. These are assumptions that we think are in our own best interests but that actually work against us in the long term. With teachers, hegemonic assumptions about what makes them good or what represents best practice serve the interests of groups that have little concern for teachers' mental or physical health. The dark irony of hegemony is that teachers take pride in acting on the very assumptions that work to enslave them. In working diligently to implement these assumptions, teachers become willing prisoners who lock their own cell doors behind them.

As an example, think of the way so many teachers construct their work as fulfilling a vocation. Teaching as vocation implies that we are selfless servants of our calling, our students, and our institutions. Teachers who take this idea as the organizing principle for their professional lives may start to think of any day in which they don't come home exhausted as a day wasted. Or, if not a day wasted, then at least a day when they haven't been all that they can be (to adapt a slogan that first appeared in commercials for army recruitment).

When service to a vocational calling becomes the metaphor you choose to construct your teaching career, then you open the door to hegemony. This is because institutional notions of what it means to be in vocational service subtly co-opt what fulfilling one's vocation looks like. Without you realizing what's happening, your notion of service becomes fused with institutional priorities such as increasing student test scores, securing grants, recruiting more students, spending more time building community relationships, giving prestigious conference presentations, or engaging in scholarly publishing.

This diligent devotion to institutional ends comes to be seen as the mark of a good teacher. A sense of calling becomes distorted to mean that faculty members should deal with larger and larger numbers of students; regularly teach overload courses; serve on

search, alumni, and library committees; generate external funding by winning grant monies; and make regular forays into scholarly publishing. What started out as a desire to be in service to students' learning becomes converted into a slavish adherence to promoting institutional priorities.

So what seems on the surface to be a politically neutral idea on which all could agree—that teaching is a vocation calling for dedication and hard work—becomes distorted into the idea that teachers should squeeze the work of two or three jobs into the space where one can sit comfortably. *Vocation* thus becomes a hegemonic concept—an idea that seems neutral, consensual, and obvious and that teachers gladly embrace, but one that ends up working against their own best interests. The concept of vocation ends up serving the interests of those who want to run colleges efficiently and profitably while spending the least amount of money and employing the smallest number of staff members that they can get away with.

The ingenious cunning of hegemony is that it is embraced, not resisted. Teachers actively look to serve on committees, take on summer school, travel to professional conferences, and increase their advisee roster all to show what good institutional citizens they are. They interpret requests to do more as a welcome sign of their indispensability to the institution. Extra sections, extra committees, extra publishing commitments are accepted with a sense of pleasure. The fact that they're exhausted is taken as a sign of devotion, of superlative commitment, of going the extra mile. The more tired they get, the prouder they feel about their vocational performance.

Of course sooner or later the center cannot hold and they get ill, collapse in exhaustion, or just go on automatic pilot. I know this from personal experience. In the last fifteen years I've had three work-related collapses. One in my office on campus, one at an airport getting ready to board a plane to give a speech, and one driving back from a meeting (I did manage to pull over before passing out!). Each time I was taken to the emergency room for a battery of tests, only to find out that I was physically fine.

If hegemony were a concept of medical pathology my doctors would have been correct to diagnose me as suffering from it. I don't know what prescription they would have written for me: a week of political detoxification maybe? Now bear in mind these three collapses all happened as I was teaching about hegemony, writing books on critical theory examining the idea, and warning people about it. In fact they all occurred well after the first edition of this book, with its attendant analysis of hegemony, was published! So don't think that just knowing about hegemony intellectually means you're always able to recognize when you're caught in its grip.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I've tried to set out the fundamentals of critical reflection. To recap, it's a process of intentional and continual scrutiny of the assumptions that inform your teaching practice. These assumptions are scrutinized by viewing them through the four lenses available to any teacher: students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experience, and theory. What makes this reflection critical is its focus on power and hegemony. Informed by the critical theory tradition, critically reflective teachers try to understand the power dynamics of their classrooms and what counts as a justifiable exercise of teacher power. They also attempt to uncover and challenge hegemonic assumptions—those they embrace as being in their best interests that actually cause them harm.

