What does it mean to be a critically reflective teacher?

Beverley Burkett
Program chair, MATESOL
Overview of session

• What is critical reflection?
• Why is it important?
• Becoming critically reflective – four lenses
  1. Autobiographical – our stories
  2. Through our students’ eyes
  3. The critical friends group
     • Following a protocol
  4. The literature
“Critically reflective teaching happens when we identify and scrutinize the assumptions that undergird how we work.”

Brookfield. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*  p. xii
The Critical Reflection Process

Adapted from: Brookfield. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* Pg 30
Why is critical reflection important?

It helps us to:

• take informed actions
• develop a rationale for practice
• avoid self-laceration
• ground ourselves emotionally
• enliven our classroom
• increase democratic trust

Brookfield. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*
And this can ....

• contribute to achievement of teaching & learning goals
• result in motivated critically reflective students!
So, how do we do it?

• Begin with ourselves – analyze our experiences as learners and as teachers, reflect on them, tell our stories

• Take 5 minutes to write about something that you have been wrestling with in your practice; a question you have to which you don’t currently have the answer
What do you do to see your teaching through your students’ eyes?
Through students’ eyes – e.g. Critical incident questionnaire

Instructions to answer these questions:
1. At what moment in the class this week did you feel most engaged .....?
2. At what moment in the class this week did you feel most distanced .....?
3. What action that anyone (T or S) took in class this week did you find most affirming & helpful?
Critical incident questionnaire (contd)

4. What action that anyone (T or S) took in class this week did you find most puzzling or confusing?

5. What about the class this week surprised you the most? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you.)

From: Brookfield. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher.* 1995
How can we involve our peers in collaborative discussions?
One way of engaging our peers:
Critical Friends Group

1. Facilitator overview (3 minutes)
2. Presenter overview (5 minutes)
3. Clarifying & probing questions (5 minutes)
4. Group discussion (12 minutes)
5. Presenter response (5 minutes)
6. Debriefing (5 minutes)

The role of theory/literature

• It lets us ‘name’ our practice
• It breaks the circle of familiarity
• It can be a substitute for absent colleagues
• It prevents groupthink and improves conversations with colleagues
• It locates our practice in a social context

From: Brookfield. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher.* 1995
If I don’t get that (*illumination through reading*), do you know what can happen? We as popular educators begin to walk in a circle, without the possibility of going beyond

Paulo Freire. 1990. Horton & Freire. *We make the road by walking*
Thank you

bburkett@marlboro.edu