

Confronting Bias

As educators it is critical for us to be reflective practitioners. That is, we must observe how we teach and assess how we can improve and grow in order to better facilitate our students' learning. This ability or willingness to grow is what educators call continuous learning and we quite often pride ourselves on being life-long learners. I recognize the fact that I have much to learn and I will always consider myself a learner, however, recently I discovered that many of us, myself included, can be resistant to change. This ability to grow, this openness to change is what I believe truly sets apart the exceptional educator because they can adapt their teachings to meet the needs of their class, their school, and their community environment in addition to the needs of their individual students.

I work in an environment that has an extremely supportive staff and we know that we can count on each other both professionally and personally. Most of the educators do what they do because they care about students and want to see them lead independent and successful lives. Many of us understand that some of our students face challenges in their lives, some of which we never come close to experiencing. A lot of our students come from racialized backgrounds and because of histories of oppression, there are a fair number of families who struggle financially. Most, if not all of the educators work hard to ensure that our students are treated equally, regardless of their home situations.

Recently during a staff in-service, it was brought to my attention that many educators are or have become complacent in our various roles. Listening to a teacher who works extremely hard to confront issues of inequity and injustice, I became aware that many of us do not do enough to check our own bias. This teacher asked us to think about and identify bias that we all possess. Many of the other educators denied being discriminatory in any way and another teacher even stated that she could not possibly be racist because when she looks at her students she does not see colour, she is colour-blind.

It was then that the first teacher confronted everyone in the room by stating that they were not being honest with themselves. Initially this teacher said that being colour blind is not acknowledging difference and that to say that is to deny children of their culture and heritage which is a large part of what makes us who we are in our world. Furthermore, this teacher said he found it difficult to believe that there were no discriminatory views in the room as it is natural for us to carry bias based on our previous life experiences as well as with what we are all presented through various media. Many of the other educators then became extremely defensive and either continued to deny any biased beliefs or racist thoughts.

Because of this confrontation I began to see how oppressive thoughts continue to exist and are reproduced in our schools. Many of us talk about caring for all people and treating others with respect, but behind closed doors there are some educators who criticize students' families and their home situations. There are even others who work in challenging communities that may be outside of our own realities, however, we leave them at the end of the day. If we do not share our lives with the families we teach we may not have any personal stake in that

community. Our students' everyday experiences may be far from our own so we must do all we can to treat all students equally.

I have come to realize that I need to continually question myself and my environment in order to confront the bias that I consciously and unconsciously bring to my students. I must question my own ways of thinking more deeply to uncover bias learned through my own schooling experiences. I myself have been shaped by these lessons so I must begin to disrupt any form of discrimination. By confronting the bias around me I can begin to unearth the truth for my students.