



CHECKING MY SYSTEMS FOR EQUITY

By Enid Lee

"I check my systems for equity every time I enter my classroom."
Grade 2 teacher reflecting on her practice in an equity workshop.

What does this teacher actually do in order to check her systems for equity?

She frequently checks the assumptions she is making of students and their families on the basis of their culture, language, race, and class; and how those assumptions are shaped by her own language, race and class among other aspects of her identity at stages of preparing, instructing, and reflecting on her teaching.

Those assumptions are apparent in the following areas:

During the preparation stage, she asks herself...

⌘ Activities & Resources for Instruction ⌘

- A. Which students in terms of gender, culture, race, immigration status, and socioeconomic background can relate to these activities and this material?
- B. How can I connect these activities to the experiences, prior knowledge, and goals of all the students?
- C. What examples/illustrations and historical information can I use to connect the key concepts to students' lives?

⌘ Nature of the Learning Tasks ⌘

- A. What do I want students to learn from these tasks?
- B. Have I included a range of tasks to engage the realities of experiences in the room?
- C. Will the purpose of the task be clear to all students?

D. Will the task be challenging to all students?

E. Is there a pattern in terms of gender, culture, language background, race, seating arrangements, status in the classroom among those who are typically on-task and those who are not?

As she teaches she asks herself...

≈ Student Talk ≈

A. Which students are talking while I am teaching?

B. Is there a pattern among those who are talking and among those who appear to be listening? (Proximity to me, their relationship to the topic I am teaching about, race, language background)?

C. How do I incorporate student talk into my teaching?

D. What are the agreements we have in place for listening to and learning from everyone in the room who is part of our learning community?

E. How can I use student behavior to understand what is taking place and to redirect the students' attention to the subject at hand?

≈ Student Participation ≈

A. Which individual students are not participating?

B. Which groups of students are not participating?

C. What is the nature of the participation I am expecting?

D. What strategies have I put in place to encourage whole class discussion or to create opportunities for many voices to be heard during the class?

E. Is there opportunity for students who speak classroom English as a second language or a second dialect to practice their answers in pairs before speaking in a big group?

- F. Are "mistakes" and partially correct answers opportunities for learning in this climate?
- G. Am I allowing appropriate wait time for different students depending on their needs and strengths?
- H. How much am I talking in comparison to the amount of time students are talking?
- I. What opportunities and support have I created for students to lead the discussion and ask some of the questions?

As she responds to her students she asks herself...

Teacher Attention

- A. Where do I seem to direct my questions?
- B. Do I seem to get the answers from the same students most of the time?
- C. What is my proximity to those students who seem to be engaged and those who do not?
- D. Do I move around the room and make contact with different group of students in terms of their seating arrangements, their familiarity with the language of instruction, racial backgrounds?
- E. Do I address my questions or attention to the students who are not raising their hands?
- F. Do I ask questions that allow students to think creatively and critically and not have one correct answer?

Teacher Tone

- A. What words and tone of voice do I use to express my expectations of the class?
- B. Do I begin by threatening, highlighting the negative consequences that will ensue if the students don't comply with my expectations?
- C. Do I stress the positive intrinsic outcomes that will be experienced through their participation?

- D. Do I express high expectations of all students in terms of my knowledge of them as individuals who are capable of demonstrating their best effort?
- E. Do I redirect students to the task at hand by finding out what has taken them away from it?
- F. Do I redirect their attention by reminding them of an instance when they did good work and made a sincere effort?

Teacher Directions

- A. Which individual students and which groups are following my directions?
- B. Which ones are not?
- C. Is there a pattern with either group?
- D. What strategies have I used to ensure that my directions are heard, understood and that the logic of my directions is clear?
- E. Do I attract the attention of the students before I begin giving the directions?
- F. Do I give directions in both spoken and written form?
- G. Do I give a chance for questions and clarifications after the directions have been given?
- H. Do I sometimes build in an opportunity for a student to review the directions with the class so that I can see if they are understood and whether they reflect my intentions?
- I. Do we have agreements in the class, which encourage students to help each other in the spirit of a learning community to work on the activities at hand?
- J. What are the students doing when they are not following directions?
- K. How can I use this information to change the situation?

Once she has taught the lesson she reflects...

When I reflect on what I have learned from answering these questions with my class, how can I fine-tune my systems for greater equity tomorrow?