

The Mindful Reflection Protocol

A Process for Checking Unconscious Bias

The protocol is based on the work of teacher educators, Barbara Dray and Debora Wisneski, *Mindful Reflection as a Process for Developing Culturally Responsive Practices*. They built the protocol around the three cognitive processes involved in our perceptions during communicating with others outlined by Gudykunst and Kim (2003): *description, interpretation, and evaluation*.

Description is an account of what a person observed or experienced that does not attribute social significance to the behavior. It includes what the person heard and saw. People typically gather descriptions by observational data, counting, or anecdotal records.

For example, “Enrique raised his hand 10 times during the story read-aloud” is a description of what occurred in the classroom.

Interpretation is the process of inferring what the behavior meant, thus attributing social significance to the behavior. Educators must remember that behaviors can have multiple interpretations.

For example, at least three separate interpretative statements are possible for the descriptive example “Enrique raised his hand 10 times during story read-aloud”: (a) Enrique was disruptive during story read-aloud; (b) Enrique enjoyed the story; or (c) Enrique wanted attention.

Evaluation is the process of attributing positive or negative social significance to a behavior.

For example, the interpretive statement, “Enrique wants attention” as an evaluative statement could vary from “I don’t like that; Enrique needs to learn better turn-taking skills” to “I like that Enrique takes initiative to participate during read-alouds.”

It is important to recognize that attributions can be negative or positive and may lead to overgeneralizations and prejudice, which classroom teachers should minimize.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (4th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

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According to Dray and Wisneski, the intention of the protocol is to support teachers in a process of deep reflection that interrupts historically deficit views and responses to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Their concern is that when teachers act on automatic pilot or do not take the time to reflect, they may risk misinterpreting culture and language ability as disability.

Their hope is that the process enables teachers to become aware of and recognize their own biases when interpreting behavior in the classroom so that they can be more culturally responsive.

In particular, they believe the process of mindful reflection and communication can help teachers do the following:

- Evaluate their own assumptions, prejudices, and biases about race, culture, and disability and consider how they affect the teacher's interactions with and expectations for their students.
- Objectively describe behaviors without interpretation to consider appropriate and consistent ways of responding.
- Consider the many different ways that children demonstrate engagement and attentiveness, how these ways closely tie with culture, and how culture influences students' many ways of responding and interacting with others in the classroom.
- Interpret behaviors to support rather than inhibit learning.

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Step 1: Ask the teacher to describe the behavior or interaction.

- a. Describe what you and the student said and did like it was a movie
- b. Describe how the student reacted to your actions or comments?
- c. Collect notes on multiple days and at different times of the day if you can.

Step 2: Give the teacher an opportunity to reflect on his feelings and thoughts when working with the student.

- a. How does this student make you feel? What triggers you about this behavior?
- b. What are your assumptions? Why do you find the student problematic?

Step 3: Ask the teacher to explain his interpretation of the student's behavior.

- a. What is your interpretation of the student's behavior?
- b. What leads you to this interpretation?
- c. What are your assumptions?
- d. What are your expectations for the situation? How is the student not meeting your expectations? In what way is the behavior interfering with learning?

Step 4: Ask the teacher to consider alternative explanations of the student's behavior. Guide the teacher through the processes of checking (deconstructing) his assumptions and reframing the behavior based on deep cultural values and neuroscience of connection.

- a. Review the explanations and reflect on why the student may be doing what he or she does. Look for patterns in your behavior and the student's behavior.
- b. List alternative explanations or interpretations of the student's behavior.

Step 5: Help the teacher identify one small change he can make to reframe the behavior and respond differently to it. Make a plan for gentle implementation.

- a. How will you change or respond differently?
- b. Brainstorm ideas on how to change the environment, your actions, and/or expectations for this student.
- c. Experiment with responding differently. Note what happens. Reflect on your feelings as well as the student's response.
- d. Be mindful of your own triggers and find ways to manage when you are (i.e., S.O.D.A.)

Step 6: Continuously revisit this process to reassess your attributions and identify progress with the student.

- a. Notice when you are overgeneralizing or interpreting behavior from a deficit perspective.
- b. Remember that this process is a continuous one, so create opportunities to revisit the steps periodically to continue your growth and understanding of students.

Adapted from Dray and Wisneski, *Mindful Reflection as a Process for Developing Culturally Responsive Practices* (2011)