



20 (Self-)Critical Things I Will Do to Be a Better Multicultural Educator

By Paul C. Gorski (gorski@earthlink.net) for **EdChange** the *Multicultural Pavilion*
<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural>
<http://www.mhhe.com/multicultural>

1. I will learn to pronounce every student's full given name correctly. No student should need to shorten or change their names to make it easier for me or their classmates to pronounce. I will practice and learn every name, regardless of how difficult it feels or how time-consuming it becomes. That is the first step in being inclusive.
2. I will sacrifice the safety of my comfort zone by building a process for continually assessing, understanding, and challenging my biases and prejudices and how they impact my expectations for, and relationships with, all students, parents, and colleagues.
3. I will center student voices, interests, and experiences in and out of my classroom. Even while I talk passionately about being inclusive and student-centered in the classroom, I rarely include or center students in conversations about school reform. I must face this contradiction and rededicate to sharing power with my students.
4. I will engage in a self-reflective process to explore how my identity development impacts the way I see and experience different people.
5. I will invite critique from colleagues and accept it openly. I usually do well accepting feedback until someone decides to offer me feedback. Though it's easy to become defensive in the face of critique, I will thank the person for their time and courage (it's not easy to critique a colleague). The worst possible scenario is for people to stop providing me feedback, positive and negative.
6. I will never stop being a student. If I do not grow, learn, and change at the same rate the world around me is changing, then I necessarily lose touch with the lives and contexts of my students. I must continue to educate myself—to learn from the experiences of my students and their parents, to study current events and their relationship to what I am teaching, and to be challenged by a diversity of perspectives.
7. I will understand the relationship between INTENT and IMPACT. Often, and particularly when I'm in a situation in which I experience some level of privilege, I have the luxury of referring and responding only to what I intended, no matter what impact I've had on somebody. I must take responsibility for and learn from my impact because most individual-level oppression is unintentional. But unintentional oppression hurts just as much as intentional oppression.
8. I will reject the myth of color-blindness. As painful as it may be to admit, I know that I react differently when I'm in a room full of people who share many dimensions of my identity than when I'm in a room full of people who are very different from me. I have to be open and honest about that, because those shifts inevitably inform the experiences of people in my classes or workshops. In addition, color-blindness denies people validation of their whole person.
9. I will recognize my own social identity group memberships and how they may affect my students' experiences and learning processes. People do not always experience me the way I intend them to, even if I am an active advocate for all my students. A student's initial reaction to me may be based on a lifetime of experiences, so I must try not to take such reactions personally.

10. I will build coalitions with teachers who are different from me (in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, first language, disability, and other identities). These can be valuable relationships of trust and honest critique. At the same time, I must not rely on other people to identify my weaknesses. In particular, in the areas of my identity that I experience privilege, I must not rely on people from historically underprivileged groups to teach me how to improve myself (which is, in and of itself, a practice of privilege).
11. I will improve my skills as a facilitator, so when issues of diversity and equity do arise in the classroom, I can take advantage of the resulting educational opportunities. Too often, I allow these moments to slip away, either because I am uncomfortable with the topic or because I feel unprepared to effectively facilitate my students through it. (I often try to make myself feel better by suggesting that the students "aren't ready" to talk about racism or sexism, or whatever the topic might be, when really, it's more honest to say perhaps that I am not read.) I will hone these skills so that I do not cheat my students out of important conversations and learning opportunities.
12. I will invite critique from my students, and when I do, I will dedicate to listening actively and modeling a willingness to be changed by their presence to the same extent they are necessarily changed by mine.
13. I will think critically about how my preferred learning styles impact my teaching style. I am usually thoughtful about diversifying my teaching style to address the needs of students with a variety of learning styles. Still, I tend to fall back on my most comfortable teaching style most often. I will fight this temptation and work harder to engage all of my students.
14. I will affirm and model appreciation for *all* forms of intelligence and the wide variety of ways students illustrate understanding and mastery of skills and knowledge.
15. I will reflect on my own experiences as a student and how that informs my teaching. Research indicates that my teaching is most closely informed by my own experiences as a student (even more so than my pre-service training). The practice of drawing on these experiences, positive and negative, provides important insights regarding my teaching practice.
16. I will encourage my students to think critically and ask critical questions about all information they receive including that which they receive from me.
17. I will challenge myself to take personal responsibility before looking for fault elsewhere. For example, if I have one student who is falling behind or being disruptive, I will consider what I am doing or not doing that may be contributing to their disengagement before problematizing their behavior or effort.
18. I will acknowledge my role as a social activist. My work changes lives, conferring upon me both tremendous power and tremendous responsibility. Even though I may not identify myself as a social activist, I know that the depth of my impact on society is profound, if only by the sheer number of lives I touch. I must acknowledge and draw on that power and responsibility as a frame for guiding my efforts toward equity and social justice in my work.
19. I will fight for equity for *all* underrepresented or disenfranchised students. Equity is not a game of choice—if I am to advocate education equity, I do not have the luxury of choosing who does or does not have access to it. For example, I cannot effectively fight for racial equity while I fail to confront gender inequity. And I can never be a real advocate for gender equity if I choose to duck the responsibility for ensuring equity for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. When I find myself justifying my inattention to any group of disenfranchised students due to the worldview or value system into which I was socialized, I know that it is time to reevaluate that worldview or value system.
20. I will **celebrate** myself as an educator and total person. I can, and should, also celebrate every moment I spend in self-critique, however difficult and painful, because it will make me a better educator. And that is something to celebrate!