

Five Critical Lenses of BayCES Coaching and Critical Judgment

A “lens” is a metaphor to communicate the idea of looking at evidence from various perspectives. The meaning of the metaphor is that you can look at the same thing through different lenses and construct very different interpretations of the same reality. Each of us does this everyday—it is how we individually and collectively make sense of the world around us.

We know that we will define solutions based on the way that problems get defined. Similarly, we will define problems according to our interpretations or assessment of what we observe. For this reason, learning and applying these and other lenses is fundamental to coaching for equity.

BayCES coaches use the following “lenses” to intentionally examine what is happening from different perspectives. These lenses or mental models are idea systems that have been developed to interpret experience. Each has a particular set of values, beliefs, and assumptions embedded within it. We make the assumption that no singular mental model or lens is sufficient to understand what we need to know to create a transformed and more equitable system.

The purpose of using these lenses is to improve the predictability of our actions in relation to desired relationships and outcomes. That is, we believe we will increase the likelihood of successfully reaching any given set of objectives if we consider what is happening and what action to take from multiple perspectives—if we examine situations, relationships, institutions, and phenomena through multiple critical lenses.

Every lens brings some things into higher relief while blocking out or obscuring others. This is the benefit of applying each lens as well as the inherent liability in using only one. At the same time, these lenses are interrelated and contain overlapping ideas. The purpose in using them is to think critically, particularly with regard to equity, and take informed action.

- 1- The Lens of Systemic Oppression**
- 2- The Lens of Inquiry**
- 3- The Developmental Learning Lens**
- 4- The Lens of Systemic Thinking**
- 5- The Lens of Change Management**

WHAT IS CRITICAL JUDGMENT?

Critical Judgment is both a habit of mind and heart. We can anticipate that we will never know all we need to know to act with complete certainty that our actions will achieve desired outcomes. Exercising critical judgment is about taking responsible action anyway. It happens in the decisions that coaches make moment-to-moment, day-to-day, week-to-week. When we use this term, we refer also to the notion of a *leap-of-faith* – faith that we have in our will, skill, knowledge and capacity to adjust if we run into difficulty with a line of action. We accept responsibility to act upon the inequitable systems that we wish to change – systemic oppression, internalized oppression, and transferred oppression – even though we do not control these things directly. Some components of critical judgment are:

- Taking responsibility for things you don't directly control;
- The courage to act thoughtfully in your zone of proximal development;
- The preparation in critical lenses to know you can learn and adjust as needed;
- Critical review of practice so both success and failure lead to new wisdom;
- Setting personal learning goals; and
- Engaging in continuous professional development.

The Lens of Systemic Oppression

Assumes that...

- Human beings are born without prejudice
- Injustice is a human creation; therefore, it can be undone
- Systemic oppression exists and negatively affects relationships and the educational process in multiple ways
- Oppression and systematic mistreatment (such as racism, classism, sexism, or homophobia) is more than just the sum of individual prejudices
- Systemic oppression is systematic and has historical antecedents; it is an intentional disempowering of groups of people based on their identity in order to maintain an unequal power structure that subjugates one group over another
- Systemic oppression manifests in economic, social, cultural systems
- Systemic oppression and its effects can be undone through recognition of inequitable patterns and intentional action to interrupt inequity and create more democratic processes and systems supported by multi-cultural, multi-lingual alliances and partnerships
- Discussing and addressing oppression and bias will usually be accompanied by strong emotions

Questions to ask...

- Who is at the table? Who isn't?
- Who has power here? What is power based on here?
- How are power relations affecting the truth that is told and constructed at any given moment?
- Where and how does each person locate himself or herself in a conversation?
- How are oppression, internalized oppression and transferred oppression playing out right here, right now? (In this school, in this group, in this organization, in this district?) What will I do about it?
- How safe is it here for different people to share their truth?
- Does the truth telling connect to shared purposes and commitments for action?
- How can I build the alliances here to move forward?
- How is leadership constructed here? What forms does it take? Who is missing? What can we do to make room for different cultural constructions of leadership?
- How do I understand my practice as an antiracist, anti-bias educator given how I am different or the same as my colleagues? ...the people I am serving?
- How can I build my practice as a leader for equity starting with who I am and what I bring because of who I am?

The Lens of Inquiry

Assumes that...

- People can create their own knowledge and solutions
- Seemingly intractable problems can be addressed
- the way we pose the question determines the nature of the answer
- the way we define the problem dictates how we define the solution
- the questions we ask are as important as the answers we find
- it is easier to engage and enroll people to address inequities when we affirm that we don't yet know everything we need to know to create transformed systems, but we have a responsibility to do so, so we must ask questions together and move forward
- if you own the question, you will take responsibility for the answer
- evidence and data are critical to making informed decisions and judgements
- that multiple forms of data including authentic and qualitative measures produced by multiple constituencies are necessary for effective decisionmaking
- knowledge is socially constructed
- values questions and the process of seeking new information, asks us to keep our minds open to new possibilities

- we never know everything we need to know, but we need to act anyway

Questions to ask...

- Who is defining the problem? Whose question is this?
- What data do we have on this problem? What problems do the data say we should address?
- How am I defining the problem?
- Is this a question I really care about? Who does care about this question?
- From what perspective am I seeing this? What other data or perspectives would help us understand this?
- How is this connected to other things?

A Developmental Learning Approach

Assumes that ...

- Problems of change ARE problems of learning
- Teaching is learning
- People can only be where they are
- Every human being is “on a path” from somewhere to somewhere and it is important to find out both where people have been and where they are going
- It is important to understand the “into”, “through”, and “beyond”
- People enter the work of equity and justice from very different starting points
- If you don't acknowledge progress, you lose people's trust

Questions to ask...

- What is the goal or objective?
- What came before?
- What is the gap between the goal and what is?
- What progress has been made?
- Is there evidence of prior learning?
- Does the will for learning exist?

The Lens of Systems Thinking

Assumes that...

- Change is a given
- The natural system just “is”
- What we observe, whatever is happening in this moment, is exactly what is supposed to happen in the system as it is
- Everything we observe is the result of a complex set of interactions
- We must seek to understand these interactions in order to intervene effectively to change them
- Process and product are part of the same whole
- Conflict and tension are necessary and natural
- That complexity and diversity are good, healthy things
- That all energy moves in cycles

Questions to ask...

- How is the current system designed to produce these results?
- Why did that happen?
- What happens when this happens? What happens when that happens? What are the relationships between things here?
- Where is the energy here? Where are the stuck points?
- If I do this here, what would happen over here?

The Lens of Change Management

Assumes that...

- Beneficial change is possible
- That conditions and strategies can be manipulated to get the system to produce different outcomes
- Assumes that change can be studied, understood, and influenced
- Analysis of conditions for change is necessary to effective implementation
- Certain conditions need to present for successful change to occur: leadership, vision, skills, incentives, resources, a clear action plan
- People need to have the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to change

Questions to ask...

- What are the conditions for change here?
- What are the strengths that can be built on? Where are the weaknesses? Where are the opportunities for leveraging change? What threats to change are present? (SWOT)
- What is the vision people are working toward here?
- What skills are required of people to achieve the vision? What knowledge is necessary?
- Do people have the necessary skill and knowledge necessary to implement change?
- Does the will for change exist here? Where?
- What incentives are in place for people to change? To improve their practice?
- What resources are available to support change?
- What action can I take to make a difference here?