

NCORE: National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education
 Seattle, Washington
 May 31 - June 3, 2001
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Self-Awareness and Social Justice Pedagogy

Self-awareness is an important aspect of social justice pedagogy. Knowing ourselves as teachers and as members of different social groups, becoming aware of the forces that have shaped our consciousness, and unlearning/changing biased attitudes and behaviors is a life-long learning process. The Johari Window (Luft, 1984) is a model that can help us become more conscious and effective as social justice educators.

We can think of this model in two ways: as a window through which we look inward to see ourselves more clearly, and as a window through which others observe us. Through looking inward and disclosing to others what we perceive in ourselves, and through inviting feedback from them about what they notice in us, we gain in self-awareness. The Johari Window illustrates this process of Self-Disclosure and Feedback.

Johari Window

	Things I Know About myself	Things I Don't Know About Myself
Things Others Know About Me	Open Area	Blind Area
Things Others Don't Know About Me	Hidden Area	Unknown Area

Open Area: This area includes aspects that are known both to ourselves and to others. In terms of social justice pedagogy, this may include what we disclose to others about our own experiences with oppression and discrimination as target or agent, struggles with overcoming oppressive socialization (internalized oppression or domination), and other aspects of our identity. These are the issues that are open for discussion in our classrooms/interactions with others. We can think about this as our comfort zone.

The Open Area reflects growing awareness, expanding as we explore the isms, learn more about ourselves in relation to them and develop more comfort in dealing with issues as they arise. This quadrant is expanded through self-disclosure and feedback. As we are able to share our struggles with others, and invite their feedback we open up to the possibility of more learning, expanding our comfort zone to meet and extend our learning edge.

Questions to ask:

- How open am I about my own process with learning about social justice and my own socialization?
- What kinds of things about myself do I share easily with others?
- How do I use myself and my experiences to teach?
- What is open for discussion in my classroom/interactions with others?

Hidden Area: This area includes things of which we are conscious but which we choose not to disclose to others. This may include fears, biases, preferences, annoyances that we may hide from others, often for good reason. For example, we may choose not to disclose aspects of our experience if we believe they are inappropriate to the situation or will not serve a learning purpose. Or we may avoid discussing issues with which we are still struggling and do not yet feel safe to raise. However, thinking consciously about what we choose to disclose or not to disclose also raises our awareness and can be an important learning edge.

Questions to ask:

- What do I shy away from disclosing about myself? Why?
- What are my motivations for not disclosing certain things?
- What do I hide that I might want to disclose?
- What do I hide that I think could interfere with good teaching/learning? Is my rationale clear and conscious?

Blind Area: This area includes things that are not conscious to us but which others can observe about us. This may include reactions we have to certain people or topics that others may note but of which we are not aware. For example, we may unconsciously avoid certain people, favor others, flinch when certain topics are raised, in ways that are noticed by others but which we ourselves do not see. This can include those areas that are hidden from us by normative socialization, cultural blindness, and assumptions of privilege. This is also an important Learning edge.

Questions to ask:

- What am I likely not to perceive due to my own social positioning?
- What have I learned that was previously in my blind area?
- How open am I to feedback and how do I respond when others give me feedback?
- What important insight/learning have I gained from inviting feedback in the past?

Unknown Area: This area includes things of which neither we nor others are conscious. This includes the vast, unexplored part of ourselves that remains out of our awareness and cannot be observed by others. Through self-exploration, education, psychotherapy, life experience we gain access to this area for learning and growth. This could include uncovering reasons for triggers, gaining a deeper understanding of our own socialization and personal psychology, uncovering unexplored potentialities, figuring out motivations, fears and expectations related to social justice issues. This is a never-ending, life long journey and ongoing learning edge.

Questions to ask:

- What was previously unknown to me (and to others) which I now know about myself?
- How did I become aware of this?
- What other puzzles intrigue me and call me to further exploration?

According to the Johari Window Model, the Open Area expands as we share ourselves with others (reducing the Hidden Area), invite feedback (reducing the Blind Area) and discover aspects of ourselves that were previously unnamed or mysterious (reducing the Unknown Area).

References:

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Luft, J. (1984). Group process: An introduction to group dynamics (3rd edition). Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.