

## Critical Consciousness

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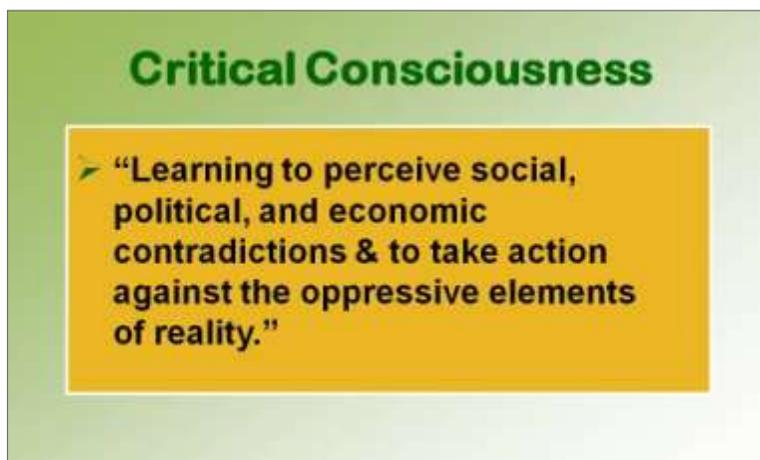
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### Definition of Critical Consciousness

The following definition of critical consciousness is from *Education for Critical Consciousness* by Paulo Freire (1974). New York: Seabury Press, page 4.



Raising people’s consciousness is a developmental process that makes people aware of social, economic and political systems that oppress people. Awareness leads to action to against oppressive systems. The theory of critical consciousness assumes that oppression is a reality world-wide and it is in the best interest of people to fight to remove it from our midst. One of the key components of the theory of critical consciousness is that it frees both oppressors and the oppressed, that the problem of oppression can be as much structural as it is personal.

People need to fight against oppression and create a world that is safe and good for everyone. Critical consciousness is viewed as a transformational process because it has the power to change the way we look at our world and how people are treated, and strengthens human resolve to make the world a better place for all to live. A critically conscious society would change the way we relate to each other.

### **Critical Consciousness is Fundamental to a CBA**

When individuals exercise critical consciousness they explore questions related to human dignity, freedom, authority, social responsibility and personal purpose. School counselors help students develop critical consciousness by teaching them about the contextual nature of the interconnectedness of life and the importance of the sanctity of life achieved through human rights.

We still live in a world filled with oppressive systems. Students need to be aware of what constitutes oppression and proposed strategies for addressing it. Critical consciousness is important because oppression, in its many manifestations, touches the lives of our students on a daily basis. All we need to do to understand why we should be helping students develop their critical consciousness is to imagine what this world would be like if we were not conscious of the injustices all around us, and what the quality of life would be if we were not aware we could fight against it in an effort to make this world a better place.

The students we teach and counselor today will inherit the world we leave them, a world in which we have not yet come to terms with and resolved the many injustices which permeate our lives. If we expect our students to do a better job at ending inequalities and injustices than we have accomplished, they need our support and guidance on how to achieve that elusive goal.

We have been seeing the centrality of self-reflection in every aspect of a CBA. Self-reflection is required of students as well as school counselors and all members of the school community. Because one of the functions of school counselors is to help prepare students to establish and sustain a better world than we are handing over to them, a primary goal of school counseling programs must be to help students engage in a self-reflective process that leads to their own development of critical consciousness and sense of personal and social responsibility and empowerment.

### **Additional Resources Related to Critical Consciousness**

The Internet is a wonderful tool for accessing information on just about any topic. It has been invaluable in helping us to identify what research has demonstrated to be strongly related to students' academic achievement and well-being, and evidence-based practices that provide concrete examples of how to translate the research findings into meaningful learning opportunities that support student development.



Staying informed about what works and does not work to help students achieve and succeed is one of the defining characteristics of a professional school counselor. Internet search engines can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the topics discussed on the CBA Website. To get you started, here are some additional resources you may find helpful. These resources, however, only scratch the surface of what is available on the Internet or in published books and articles. We encourage you to use search engines to find more resources that will increase your understanding and build your capacity to apply these ideas in your work as school counselors.

## Videos

Excellent Ted Talk on the “consciousness gap in education-an equity imperative” by Dorinda Carter Andrews.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOrgf3wTUbo#t=815>

Excellent “Intro to Developing Critical Consciousness” by Craig Callaham, a talk about how the world works and how we fit into it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTRQFsp3qc0>

## Websites

An article entitled “Empowerment theory for the professional school counselor: a manifesto for what really matters.” This article addresses the nature of oppression for students from marginalized communities and their experiences in the American school system.

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Empowerment+theory+for+the+professional+school+counselor%3a+a+manifesto...-a0165235177>

“Meeting the Challenges Together: School Counselors Collaborating With Students and Families With Low Income.” This article explores the role of school counselors in school-family

partnerships, and in challenging biases and educating stakeholders, and engaging in advocacy for these students and families.

<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ895909.pdf>

An article on “Challenging Racism, Sexism, and Social Injustice: Support for Urban Adolescents’ Critical Consciousness Development.

<http://diemer.wiki.educ.msu.edu/file/view/Diemer+Supports+for+Urban+Adolescents+Critical+Consciousness+Development+in+CDEMP.pdf>

This article argues that developing personal and professional critical consciousness about racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity should be a major component of pre-service teacher education.

[http://www.wou.edu/~tmcwilliams08/Developing%20Cultural%20Critical%20Consciousness\\_files/ContentServer.pdf](http://www.wou.edu/~tmcwilliams08/Developing%20Cultural%20Critical%20Consciousness_files/ContentServer.pdf)

An abstract from an article on “Critical Consciousness: Current Status and Future Directions.” The abstract provides a link to the full text.

[http://www.researchgate.net/publication/51858311\\_Critical\\_Consciousness\\_Current\\_Status\\_and\\_Future\\_Directions](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/51858311_Critical_Consciousness_Current_Status_and_Future_Directions)

## Books

Paulo Freire: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973). Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, was one of the major proponents of critical consciousness. He believed that pedagogy should be designed to liberate both oppressor and oppressed from oppressive systems through consciousness raising.