

Are You A Reflective Thinker?

Reflective Thinkers....

- *Are whole-heartedly committed to problem resolution
- *Make intuitive, creative interpretations and judgments
- *Possess a desire for lifelong learning
- *Are open to experimentation and new innovations
- *View situations from multiple perspectives

- *Set personal short-term and long-term goals
- *Plan, monitor and evaluate results of actions
- *Are flexible in search for alternative explanations
- *Use evidence in evaluating a decision
- *Show responsiveness to student needs

- *Question their own aims and actions
- *Frequently review their instructional goals, methods and materials
- *Welcome peer review, critique and advice
- *Write reflectively (journal)

Excerpted from Promoting Reflective Thinking, Taggart and Wilson, Corwin Press

Becoming A Reflective Practitioner

Teachers work hard to find better ways of doing things. We are always seeking to improve. Often we become so adept that we do what we know works, but seldom, if ever, stop to think about it.

Why? It's expedient. Our students seem satisfied, time is our scarcest commodity, and demands on our finite professional resources come from many directions – students, parents, school administrators and our communities. It is hardly surprising that the idea of reflection appeals, but the actual practice of reflection is easily put off. "Someday," we say, "when things calm down." Find time now, because the benefits are just too good to pass up.

How Do You Benefit? The primary benefit of reflection is a much deeper understanding of your own teaching style and ultimately greater effectiveness as a teacher. It validates your ideals, gives you opportunity for diversity in applying theory to classroom practice, enhances your appreciation of the artistry

of teaching, and gives you a valuable way to improve upon "traditional" methods in the classroom. It also enables you to more effectively offer help to other teachers through coaching and mentoring. Reflection is a powerful tool for growth.

Noted educational author Charlotte Danielson says, "Many educators, as well as researchers, believe that the ability to reflect on teaching is the mark of the true professional. Through reflection, real growth and therefore excellence are possible. By trying to understand the consequences of actions and by contemplating alternative courses of action, teachers expand their teaching repertoire."

A reflective practitioner, then, is a teacher who actively and open-mindedly assesses his/her educational decisions and the consequences of those decisions as they relate to student learning, management, discipline, teaching styles, or any other area of his or her school day. In short, as a reflective

practitioner, you learn to observe yourself in action.

Reflection on teaching includes thinking that follows any instructional occurrence. During the follow-up thinking, a teacher considers if his/her goals were met and if the lesson "worked." Sensitivity to student engagement, both in quantity and quality, helps a teacher know to what extent the approach used was appropriate or if an alternative approach would have produced better results.

Stages of Reflective Thinking.
Technical Stage This is the most basic form of reflective thinking. Outcomes for practitioners reflecting at a technical level may involve appropriate selection and implementation of lessons to achieve objectives.

Contextual Stage. Building on the technical stage, teachers reflecting at this level are able to analyze problems according to context, incorporate theory into practice and address the needs of students.

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“Nature has given to people one tongue, but two ears, that we may hear from each other twice as much as we speak.”

*Epictetus,
Stoic philosopher*

Becoming a Reflective Practitioner (cont.)

Dialectical Stage. Practitioners at this level incorporate moral, ethical and sociopolitical issues into decision making. They question assumptions, and tend to look at issues in terms of optimal teacher and student empowerment.

How Do You Get Started? There are several ways to successfully incorporate reflection into your teaching practice. **Action research** is one method in which teachers put theories they've learned into practice and then analyze their teaching strategies with mentors and colleagues. **Peer coaching** is based on data collected by the coach, a colleague, as re-

quested by the teacher. Carefully structured questions to uncover solutions and expose alternative strategies encourage reflection. **Portfolio development** uses the assembly of materials that document teacher competency and is particularly effective for beginning teachers. The teacher must reflect on which teaching practices worked well and why they worked as he/she decides which materials to include in the portfolio. Look below to find strategies for beginning reflection on your own. Turn to the Teacher Center for instruction and support to start reflective practice in your district.

Excerpted from OWL Center Newsbriefs and Promoting Reflective Thinking in Teachers by Germaine Taggart and Alfred P. Wilson.

Questions to Facilitate Reflective Thinking

Here are some options teachers can utilize when involved in reflective thinking, either by themselves, or in a coaching situation with another teacher.

- Describe what was going on today.
- What was the purpose of the lesson?
- What were the reasons for learners to be engaged by this lesson?
- How did you motivate the learners?
- In what ways was the learning appropriate for these learners?
- Did students achieve the learning you wished them to?
- Did anything happen during the lesson that surprised you?
- If so, how did it compare with what you hoped/expected would happen?
- What did you learn from today's lesson?
- What seemed "right" to you?
- What were some issues or concerns you noted that you would like to explore?
- What is your ongoing diagnosis of the learning that is taking place in your classroom?
- What is the next step in the learning sequence and how do you plan to extend the learning?
- What could be some of the reasons things went the way they did?
- If you imagine a replay of this lesson, what would it look like?
- (In a coaching situation) Would you like to share with me what you think I observed?

Developed by Dr. Brenda Stallion, a PLS instructor from Bowling Green, KY. The course was Coaching Skills for Successful Teaching. This article is from "For Instructors Only," No. 125, Performance Learning Systems, CA.

Useful Websites

If your students think current events are boring, get them to check out these websites from major newspapers that cover news and more in a kid-friendly way.

maps and stories about kids from other countries, this interactive site also helps kids learn about different professions with stories like "Be A DNA Analyst."

oriented site focuses on politics and entertainment, featuring short articles written in a conversational style.

wsjclassroomedition.com/teen/index.html. With stories on money and college prep, the Wall Street Journal site is a great resource for older teens.

www.washingtonpost.com/kidspost. Filled with polls,

www.chicagotribune.com/features/kids. This tween-

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