

Reflections of a Classroom Teacher

Ingredient 5: Collaboratively Reflect to Grow

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This school year, I find myself reflecting on my teaching practices more often than before. At the end of each week, I take a moment to reflect on the past week, asking myself the following questions:

- 1) **Did my students learn what I intended?**
- 2) **How did my instructional decisions impact student outcomes?**
- 3) **What could I have done differently to be more effective?**
- 4) **How can the insights from Questions 1-3 inform my future decisions?**

In addition to weekly self-reflection, my bi-monthly NCLRC newsletter submissions provide me with the opportunity to synthesize my reflective insights in order to provide you, the reader, with a more comprehensive understanding of teacher self-reflection. These experiences have strengthened my determination to believe in a positive relationship between teacher reflection and professional development.

While I don't consider myself a *reflectologist*, or expert on reflection, I strongly believe in the power of self-reflection. When teachers reflect on their practice, evaluating the effectiveness of their instructional decisions, they take a step towards greater self-understanding and professional growth. While the benefits of self-reflection are widely accepted, challenges may arise during self-reflection. Some of these challenges include inaccurate self-assessment (i.e., overestimation and underestimation) and insufficient pedagogical knowledge (i.e., unfamiliarity with the best practices).

In thinking about how to minimize the challenges of self-reflection, it is useful to consider the benefits of collaborative reflection for professional development and collegial support.

- 1) **Collaborative reflection is a shift from top-down, administrator-led professional development models to peer-to-peer models.** In this shift, teachers transfer into the role of learning partners who use their collective expertise and experiences to engage in relevant professional development.

- 2) **Collaborative reflection encourages collegial support.** When teachers collaborate to address their concerns, they may discover that their colleagues encounter similar challenges, which in turn, reminds them that they are not alone in their work. In this environment of increased collegial support, teachers are more likely to develop and maintain strong collegial relationships.
- 3) **Collaborative reflection enhances the decision-making process.** Each collaborator contributes a unique set of expertise and experiences, allowing participants to combine their ideas and/or generate new ideas. Put simply, *one mind is good, but two minds are better.*

I end this article on teacher reflection with a quote from one of the instructional leaders at my school. I asked her to share which instructional resources she found most useful. “My resources are the department instructional assistant, other instructional leaders, and other science teachers.” Her response shows the importance of collaborative practices—this point is key—when teachers grow together via collaborative reflection, they create an environment of shared responsibility in meeting their professional responsibilities.

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