

## Reflections of a Classroom Teacher

### *Recharge Your Battery via Self-Reflection*

Sylvia Lillehoj, Howard County MD Public Schools



This marks my fourth submission to an article series on teacher self-reflection. I began writing this series in July, after completing a literature review on the role of reflection in professional development. Having found empirical evidence exploring how teachers' efforts to enhance their practice through self-reflection can yield multiple benefits (including a deeper understanding of oneself and one's profession), I decided to focus exclusively on self-reflection as a tool for improving teaching practices.

My focus was "adjusted" when one of my students presented me with a handwritten thank you note which stated, "You're the best!" When she asked me where I would display her note, I opened my desk drawer and pulled out a box labeled "Messages of Appreciation". Removing the lid, I shared the contents with her - a collection of thank you notes, letters, and emails that I have received during my teaching career. My Messages of Appreciation box serves an important purpose: it reminds me of my past accomplishments when I am having an emotionally exhausting, "What Else Can Go Wrong" day at work. Sure, the temptation to succumb to feelings of despair and gloom are tempting. Instead, I look back.

I review the contents of my Messages of Appreciation box and I reflect. I reread these messages to recapture my past accomplishments. I reflect upon the story behind each message, asking myself questions such as, "What prompted the message?" "What did I do well?" "What does this reveal about my strengths as a teacher?" I extend this reflection by brainstorming how I can use these insights to improve my current challenges. This focused attention on my past accomplishments reconceptualizes self-reflection as a tool for recharging my battery in order to move forward with confidence in my ability.

Below I describe how I *recharge* my battery.

- **R**eserve space on or in my desk to store messages of appreciation.
- **E**nhance the appearance of my collection by storing it in a decorated box or scrapbook.
- **C**ollect messages of appreciation, such as letters from parents, students, or coworkers, and positive quotes from performance evaluations.
- **H**aving a bad day? Review my messages of appreciation to remind myself of my past accomplishments.
- **A**ccept that my teaching career will include both positive and negative experiences. Collect moments of the positive and try to learn from the negative.
- **R**eflect on the story behind the messages of appreciation. What prompted that message? What did I do and how did it benefit others?
- **G**ive myself a second chance to resolve the stressful situation now that I have reminded myself of my strengths.
- **E**ntrust myself to recharge my battery as needed. We all experience challenges. Avoid allowing these challenges that try to taint my confidence.

Throughout our teaching careers there will be moments when we question our practice. In preparation for these moments, we need to develop strategies which can bolster our “confidence”. Self reflection is one effort to do just that.