

Reflections of a Classroom Teacher

Ingredient 6: Reflection at the End of the School Year

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When people find out that I write a column on teacher reflection, one of the first things I am asked is, "How do *you* reflect?" Some ask simply because they are curious to know if I *walk the talk* and align my words with my actions, making time to self-reflect and examine the relation between my actions and their effects. Others ask because they want to use the same method in their own practice, believing that I have crafted a *self-reflection formula* that is profoundly successful. While I do have a formula, it may surprise you:

Select an aspect of your teaching that could benefit from development. Reflect on your strengths, weaknesses, and growth in this area.

Brainstorm one or two solutions, taking time to record your thoughts. When you write your solutions on paper, you are more likely to follow through with them and, more importantly, you are less likely to forget them.

For teachers, the end of the school year is, without a doubt, a critical reflection point. Before we pack up our classroom and wish our colleagues a nice summer, we should pause to engage in a little end of the school year reflection. Unsure of which aspect(s) of your teaching to focus on? I sought the reflections of several colleagues. Their heartfelt responses are helpful in understanding the range of possible reflective topics, such as...

- **Classroom Management:** "I will add a reward system to my tutorial class for extra assignments. Each student is required to complete one assignment during class time. If they finish more than one, they get a sticker. Multiple stickers equal prizes after a period of time."
- **Flexibility:** "This year, I felt overwhelmed because I was assigned to teach four different courses. I could have been more flexible in the beginning but was overwhelmed by the new schedule. For next year I have to be more open and not worry so much. When I feel overwhelmed, I will request help from other teachers who have taught these classes so I know what to do."

- **Student Engagement:** “There is always room for improvement. I will be making a lot of changes to the format of my elective classes to pump some life and new activities into the program. I will also work on my communication. I need to do more of it, and find a way to streamline it.”
- **Organization:** “Ugh - I think I did well this year. Next year I want to focus more on organization and follow through. I'd like to have a little more structure with the pattern of my classes. It's easy to get caught up in the text and then miss certain skills.”
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** “Next year I am going to build strong relationships with those teachers that were distant this year. Next year I want to make sure that every staff member at the school understands my role and how I operate.”

While these areas of reflection may not exactly fit you and your situation, I am certain that they will help you find your own. I've discovered that reflection is an on-going, continuous activity that helps keep me centered and focused on both what I'm doing well and what I need to improve. It lets me know that I'm doing a good job, and that's important to me and to everyone with whom I work.