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This month we greet a new contributor to our newsletter. Sylvia Lillehoj will share her thoughts on teacher reflections, what it entails, why it is important, and some strategies for engaging in positive self-reflection. Sylvia has several years of teaching both foreign languages and ESL behind her and will draw upon her experiences as well as those of others.

Creating a Recipe for Teacher Self-Development: The Ingredients for Teacher Reflection

Sylvia Lillehoj

When I first began my teaching career, I was often overwhelmed by the multiple aspects of a teacher's daily routine. In addition to planning, developing, and delivering my lessons, I spent a significant amount of time grading assignments, communicating with parents, and attending school- and district-wide meetings. Preoccupied with these multiple responsibilities, I often neglected another aspect of a teacher's daily routine—self-reflection.

Self-reflection is a key component of a teacher's personal and professional development, but it is often overlooked or disregarded for a variety of reasons. These include inadequate pre-service or in-service training, a lack of time, and/or misunderstanding about the benefits of self-assessing one's teaching practices. By self-assessing the relationship between one's instructional practices and student outcomes (e.g., informal and formal assessments), teachers are more likely to understand how their instructional decisions contribute to student learning and how they can improve their practice.

I learned this the hard way during my first year of teaching. Handed a classroom filled with high school students, many of whom had limited or interrupted formal education and/or low motivation to learn, I aimed to support my students in meeting the intended learning outcomes. Even though I engaged in daily reflection on what went right and wrong with the lesson, I did not know how to effectively record or analyze my insights and use this information to improve my teaching practices. *Being a teacher without a reflective decision-making strategy was like being a chef without a recipe.*

As I acquired more teaching experience, I learned four reflective strategies to enhance my instructional practices. I call them my "Recipe for Teacher Self-Development." I will discuss each one separately in the forthcoming issues of the NCLRC Language Resource. I am also interested in your thoughts on teacher reflection. Email me at Lillehoj@gwu.edu and let me know your feedback and suggestions. They might enhance the flavor of my "Recipe for Teacher Self-Development!"