



The Reflective Teacher: Taking a Long Look

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School has been in session for a few weeks, and things might be finally settling down for most teachers. Days seem to pass by so quickly that it seems amazing anything was accomplished. Despite the whirlwind start of the year, it's still important to make time for reflection.

It took me some time realize that reflection is vital to my growth as an educator. I also needed to learn what real reflection looked like. It's so much more than thinking that I did a good job or changing one essay question. Here are four things that I've done over the past few years to aid in my reflection and help me grow as a learner and a teacher.

1. Feedback from Students

One always scary but very important thing is asking the students how the lesson went. This can be done in class with a quick show of hands or a Google Form emailed to students and parents. Part of reflection is taking an honest look at how things are going. To do that, it's crucial to hear from others. As valuable stakeholders in the classroom, students and parents might see something that the teacher would not.

The first time I handed students a survey, I was terrified. I didn't really want to hear how badly things were going. I remember receiving mostly positive feedback, but a couple of comments really stung me. They were honest, and it hurt. I remember thinking that the students just didn't get what I was doing and tried to ignore what they said. It took me a few years to brave another attempt -- and I was glad that I did. I needed to mature as a teacher to understand the value of student feedback. By listening to them, I was able to really think about my classroom practices from a different perspective.

2. Write It Down

Teachers often think they can remember it all, but that's rarely the case. We jump from lesson to lesson thinking we can keep the mental notepad up to date as we go. Too often, teachers cannot reflect on a lesson because they've forgotten *exactly* what happened in class -- and the details are important when trying to reflect and grow.

If you use a planner for your lessons, use sticky notes for initial thoughts after a lesson, and stick them in the planner. If you use a digital planner, quickly write out some thoughts in a different color so they'll stand out later. These notes are key for teachers who want to remember certain aspects of lessons that might need to be addressed later. I've used sticky notes and digital notes, and they've been great. As I bounce from class to class, it's tough for me to remember what I need to change or tweak. So in one of my literature books, I still have a sticky note reminding me to emphasize a certain passage that I used to skip sometimes. Every year when I see that note, it reminds me to add that passage to the lessons.

3. Blog It

Blogging has been one of the biggest parts of my professional growth. Once I decided to start sharing my thoughts with the world, I really started paying closer attention to the different parts of my classroom. I'm always looking to change or tweak things that have grown stale. Having a blog allows educators to share their thought process with others and get feedback from similarly passionate educators. Connecting with other great educators through blogging has made learning and growing a collaborative effort. I no longer feel alone when pondering changes for my lesson plans or trying to move away from standardized tests. The blog can be a freeing experience for teachers who are looking to share, but it doesn't have to be public if you don't want it to be.

A blog can be used as a private journal to dump ideas. Some are just for you and not ready for others to see. Setting a blog to private can be a great way to just write ideas, review them, and reflect. Seeing those ideas onscreen can aid reflection in a way that just thinking about them can't. I've written many posts that have never seen the light of day because they were just a way to get some deep reflective thoughts out of my head. They might have been about interactions with students, teachers, parents, and others, because taking a hard look at how I acted is important for me to learn and grow. Those are not the posts I'm looking to share with the public. They helped me see things in a different light. Writing and reflecting have gone hand in hand for hundreds of years. It's time for more educators to join the club.

4. Record It

Something new for me this year is that I've decided to vlog, recording my thoughts for the week on video (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmqHm-Zo9dp3OxGiUjkKBgw>) and giving myself a goal for the upcoming week. Shooting these videos allows me to share what I've learned while giving me a reason to really think hard about what I've done the past week. I strongly believe there's always something that can be learned, and I want to figure out what that is. The videos are short (I limit my posts to four minutes), but the reflections are meaningful, and that's what makes this medium so powerful for me. I'm not sure if many other people are finding them as helpful as I am, but that doesn't matter. I grow as an educator the more I think about my practice -- and that's what is best for my students.

Most teachers will say that there's very little time in the day for reflecting, and I agree with them. But I still make sure that I find time to reflect because it's too important to put by the wayside. All educators need

time in their day to reflect and think about the different ways they can be better. We ask this of our students, so why shouldn't we do the same? I hope everyone will read this post and reflect . . . on reflecting.

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