

Introduction to reflection

Reflection in action 2:00 minutes

In order to develop as a teacher and school leader, it is necessary to learn from experience through reflection. Teachers and school leaders are always learning by doing their jobs. However, the process is significantly advanced by reflection.

In order to improve, teachers and school leaders must critically analyse their actions. This reflection can happen at different times. For example, during an activity teachers and school leaders can reflect on what they are doing while they're doing it. For instance, teachers will often adjust their plans during the lesson to deal with unforeseen situations such as a learner finding the work too easy or too difficult.

It helps teachers and school leaders to reflect on their practice if they track and record both their experiences and how they then change their thinking and practice.

Teachers and school leaders can record their reflections during the lesson or activity in various ways. For teachers, one way is to make notes on the lesson plan or in a reflective journal during the lesson. If teachers don't have time for this during the lesson, then they can highlight relevant parts of the lesson plan as a prompt for later reflection.

Teachers can also video or audio record their lesson. They can take photographs of activities or their board work. They can gather feedback from their learners on how they felt the lesson went. Teachers can record feedback from other staff in the classroom such as teaching assistants. School leaders can also seek feedback from other colleagues. They could record this in a variety of ways for example, taking notes or video or audio record the discussion.

The information teachers and school leaders record can then be used at a later stage to enable deeper reflective thinking.

Reflection on action 1:46 minutes

Teachers and school leaders can analyse and evaluate situations after the lesson or activity. For example, if an activity doesn't go as planned, they can explore the reasons and the effects of their own practice.

When something goes well, reflecting on what conditions or resources supported this will embed the new learning and support further development.

Reflection on teaching and leading builds professional competence and confidence. Understanding what went well, or didn't go so well, builds understanding and skills to deal with the challenges of teaching and leading.

To help teachers and school leaders reflect on their actions they should meet with experienced colleagues to discuss what happened and what they're going to do next. We will look at learning with and from experienced colleagues in the next section.

Teachers and school leaders should also develop and shape their reflections in more detail in writing.

As we mentioned earlier, learning how to reflect is a skill you will have to help your teachers and leaders on your programme to develop.

It is a good idea for all educational professionals, including Programme Leaders, to keep a reflective journal.

James Cook University in Australia suggests that pre-service teachers organise their reflective journal into four sections:

- Teaching plans
- reflective writing about workshop content strategies and issues
- a professional diary documenting events which make an impact on their personal view of teaching and
- a critical summary of professional reading.
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A reflective journal is an effective tool, that helps the writer to make better sense of their experiences.

Case studies

06:10 minutes

Are there any practical strategies which you use to reflect on your practice?

Teacher 1

My best advice about using a practical strategy for reflection would be to narrow it down to small pieces of information because if you look at every single student in your classroom and analyse have they learnt what I want them to? It's going to feel a very taxing process and inevitably you're going to feel like you haven't achieved. So the best way that I can see the most practical strategy to use for reflection is to look at an example of a child who succeeded in a lesson and a child who didn't succeed in a lesson to the extent of learning the objectives that you wanted them to and thinking 'Why did this child succeed? What were the properties of the lesson that enabled them to succeed and what could I do that would make that experience different for this child?' And most of the time you can have a conversation with children and they can tell you at that moment in time what it was that was difficult for them that disabled their learning experience. And they're usually extrinsic factors like noise, like grouping strategies where you can make changes and it's amazing what a difference that will make for every single person in that room.

Teacher 2

Some of the strategies that I use to reflect on my practice are to take a couple of lessons each week, different lessons each week and to really sit back and think to myself how do the students get on? What did they get out of it? What was their experience like? Did I differentiate appropriately? Did I have the suitable material or questions for students that were struggling with the concept? Did I have the right questions for those that had got it and who needed to be stretched further? Was I able to take a measure of how students were progressing? Could I assess formatively through that lesson? How did I test at the end of the lesson what they actually knew? And the other thing that you may ask yourself is, Who am I asking? It's very easy and something I've fell foul of in the past is to ask the question to students who want to give the answer when really to get a fair sample you need to randomly ask students in a class. And you need to encourage them to be confident in answering, that it is not just about getting something right that it's about being secure in giving an opinion.

Teacher 3

In terms of reflecting on my practice when I first started teaching I used to take as many lesson plans as I could and just try and note down, even if it was a couple of words, what I'd done well and what things had worked and what hadn't worked. I soon found that it was a bit

time consuming so I started taking a highlighter pen and just highlighting in green things that had worked and highlighting in red things that hadn't and as simple as it sounds it made a difference to me just being able to evaluate what was happening.

Can you give a specific example of when reflection led to improved performance?

Teacher 1

A really good example from my teaching practice is when reflection led to improved performance was when I was looking back over a sequence of lessons and wondering to myself why the children hadn't progressed as I had imagined they would. What I realized was and this was in the context of the maths activity. What I realized was that I needed to do some foundation in times tables, in numerical things before they could progress to using that for measurement and in fractions and all of the applications that I was asking them to do. So upon reflection realising that those foundations were missing I was able to go back and build up their confidence in those areas and then those skills could be applied in context.

Teacher 2

One example where reflection has led to improved practice is where I was teaching a class of 13 year olds. Their behaviour for the year just simply wasn't where it should have been and I reflected on it and I came to the conclusion that, firstly they didn't have ownership of their behaviour, they didn't understand why it was important and second of all they didn't know what the expectations were. So I read up on behaviour management over the summer and I came back at the start of the next school year and I dedicated my first lesson to explaining the behaviour, what the expectations are, what their rights were, what their responsibilities were and how it made sense for their learning. And this was all led by them. They were given examples throughout and so they had ownership of it as well.

Teacher 3

I specifically remember reflecting upon a lesson very early on. It was a science lesson to do with Chemistry and at the end of the lesson while I looked at my plan was highlighting was pretty clear that the children just hadn't understood half of what I had talked about. I think on reflection it had been a little bit too dry, I hadn't talked enough, thinking from their point of view so just being able to step back and reconsider what I wanted to do next made a real difference.