

Reflect on **This**



We must take the time to teach children self-reflection, says **Paul Dix**. If your opinion is their sole gauge of progress, learning will suffer...

Teaching self-reflection demands more attention than a quick 'what have you learned today?' prompt. Encouraging and, on occasion, requiring children to spend time reflecting on their own understanding/achievement/failure is teaching them the skills that successful learners employ every day.

Successful learners assess their own performance and have been taught to do so. For successful classroom assessment to be sustained, students need to be taught the skills of productive self-reflection. We spend a great deal of time encouraging outside observation and focusing on how other people need to change. Creating regular opportunities for children to self reflect allows their focus to shift. They begin to understand how they are learning and spend less time offering uninvited critiques of others.

Introspection is Howard Gardner's intrapersonal intelligence. People who have developed strong intrapersonal intelligence have a good sense of self and their abilities as a learner. Assessing with children who constantly rely on the teacher's opinion to gauge their own progress is a one way conversation. To prepare children for secondary education and the adult world they must learn to rely on themselves, and on their own assessment of their progress. They need to have established rituals that produce honest, rational and reflective thoughts. Leave your students' self-esteem dependent solely on your approval and they will learn to rely on it over their own.

Japanese culture is often cited as one where individuals learn great empathy and understanding of the self. In Japan, self-reflection is just as much part of the school curriculum as maths and science. It is a taught skill that starts with three simple questions, 'What have I received?' 'What have I given?' and 'What troubles have I caused?'

A ritual that can be taught to children of all ages is Naikan Self-Reflection. Through simple questions you can begin practicing and encouraging self reflection with and alongside students.

Ask the students to reflect and make private lists from three questions: What did you receive from others today? What did you give to others today? What troubles and difficulties did you cause others today? It is important to be specific. For example, rather than state that you received food today, write down the actual food that you received and ate. Don't leave items off your list because they seem "trivial" or you receive them everyday; it is quite important to notice and list just such items.

Balanced self-reflection is at the heart of good mental health. Our habits in self-reflection do not always lead us to productive reflections. Some consider their own efforts and achievements too highly; others

habitually concentrate on what has gone wrong. Simple structures work well, are remembered easily and teach better habits. Ask the children to relate the three questions to a subject, a relationship or a context:

- What have I received from the TA/school /other children in the class?
- What have I given to my teacher/home / my friends?
- What troubles and difficulties have I caused Mrs Bell/other children /the midday supervisors?

Try introducing the three questions once a week. Lead the children through them in circle time or allow 10 minutes for silent self-analysis. In time, the children will be able to do this independently, set their own questions, create a set for the class and lead others in questioning.

Self-reflection often requires the discipline of silence. I love active, dynamic learning yet I also like

Enquire within

TRY THESE IDEAS FOR ENCOURAGING SELF-REFLECTION...

- Music played in for two minute bursts to give students time for personal self-reflection.
- Directed self-reflection – bullet point three things you have done well and one that you need to work on or 'Be ready to tell your partner one idea you have had from your two minutes of self reflection'.
- Creating images/diagrams that reflect on how the work is progressing. Individually on Post-it notes, in an image diary or with a huge roll of paper and all students surrounding it with marker pens.
- Suggesting different contexts; prepare a self evaluation to give to an prospective employer, to show to your grandparent.
- Self-reflection bell to announce a period of silent thinking.
- With younger children or those who find it difficult to look in the mirror then using a proxy can be useful. Try drawing around a child to create a life sized outline and drawing or writing thoughts on it.

to punctuate the day with intense silence, with only the clicking and whirring of young brains for accompaniment. Silence may not be fashionable, but it is absolutely crucial for looking into and decoding the mirror of children's own abilities.

Too often self-reflection and self-assessment is left as an afterthought or an activity with little structure or practical skills attached. I often wonder just what skills children employ during a simple 'think, pair, share' moment. Do their minds immediately leap into intense self reflection and analysis, frantically searching the chaotic filing system of a seven year old brain? Or do more pressing issues of life hijack the moments with GoGo's, Ashraf's clicky pen or 'IT'S SNOWING!'. A moment of self-reflection is not enough.

Heighten the importance of reflective thinking by giving it more time and connecting it with something tangible. It is more productive than reflection that uses thinking time alone. Use self reflection alongside a map of progress, a video of the activity, the response of an audience, a mind map, a recording of a previous discussion with the group, illustration of ideas or the opinion of others.

For older children, prepare for structured self reflection in target setting by collecting the views of others. The 360 degree mirror is as useful for children as it is for your own performance management. Collect balanced opinions from everyone who has a stake in the child's learning. What do the parents think, other teachers, other children, teaching assistants, head teachers etc? With views gathered and filtered appropriately the self-reflection is informed and invigorated.

Giving children structured time for self-reflection is not a quick fix. It needs to be central to classroom assessment, targets setting, personalisation of learning, reporting and differentiation. Used little and often it teaches gratitude, empathy and a deeper understanding of the child's place in their learning and in the world.

'Self-
assessment far from
being a luxury is in fact
an essential component of
formative assessment'
INSIDE THE BLACK BOX,
PAUL BLACK AND
DYLAN WILIAM

Find out more

Paul Dix is a National Training Award winning speaker and trainer. To book Paul to deliver INSET on Classroom Assessment contact Ellie at Pivotal Education on 0207 000 1735.

Paul Dix's new book *The Essential Guide to Classroom Assessment* will be published on May 24th, priced £16.99. Pre-order by calling Pivotal on 0207 000 1735 with a *Teach Primary* discount code DIXCA and get 15% off!