

Thinking Teachers

How getting into the habit of reflection raises student attainment



Veema
Paper

June
2015

It probably only feels like yesterday that you were sitting in September's INSET listening to your head teacher talk about the year ahead or clearing out your cupboard and recycling old Year 11 exercise books. Ten months later, it's June. GCSE, AS and A-level exams are well under way and you're starting to anticipate the start of the long holiday that heralds the end of yet another memorable academic year.

The summer term has always been a time for reflection: a time to think about the school year stretching behind us and ruminate on what we would do differently if we were whisked back in time to the previous autumn. Taking the time to reflect is one of the most important ways of improving how we teach and how our students learn best. It's part of every new teacher's routine, and yet it's a concept that can slip into disuse unless we're prompted by feedback from a lesson observation or training event.

Asking ourselves important questions like **'what'**, **'why'** and **'how'** isn't just a handy tool for critiquing the odd lesson plan, it's an essential strategy for continuing to create outstanding learning environments for our students.

- **What** should I do differently to ensure they really get this?
- **Why** is it important I motivate my team this week to be the best they can be?
- **How** can I include the ideas given by my students in my next lesson?

'Thinking teaching' progresses teaching and learning within your school. Most of us entered the profession to experience the joy of inspiring others to transform their lives through learning. We can all remember a teacher whose lessons captured our imagination. In order for us to keep motivating our students, we need to find ways of constantly refreshing our approach to teaching so it doesn't get stale. To paraphrase Quilan (2015), falling in love is the easy part. Staying in love, especially when you are snowed under with deadlines, lesson observations, meetings with parents and line managers, is the challenge.

So over the next few weeks why not:

1. Allocate ten minutes at the end of each week to reflect on your progress. Take time to think deeply about what you have achieved and how you can continue to be the best teacher you can be. It's helpful if schools include an opportunity in weekly meetings for staff to share one reflection point.
2. Bin any unrealistic and unachievable targets: the reality is we rarely stick to targets. Performance management by our line managers serves its purpose, but often this does not drive us in our desire to be the best we can. Instead, commit to being a truly reflective practitioner.
3. Invest more into your own CPD. Read up on new pedagogies and practices and spend time developing your own skill-set. Be ready to share knowledge with your colleagues. Effective school leaders should ensure teachers are given the opportunity to disseminate up-to-date literature on teaching and learning during staff briefings and/or after school training events.

While you enjoy your last weeks of term, remember how we teachers ask our students hundreds of questions each week to stretch their knowledge and understanding. In the same way, let's not forget the power of becoming reflective/thinking teachers and make sure we ask ourselves the questions that will allow us to improve our own practice.

Some recommended readings:

Dweck, C. (2012). *Mindset: How you can fulfil your potential*. Hachette UK.

Findlater, S. (2015). *How to Survive an Ofsted Inspection*. Bloomsbury Education.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge.

Peal, R. (2015). *Changing Schools Perspectives on five years of education reform*. John Catt Educational.

Quinlan, O. (2015). *Thinking Teachers*. Independent Thinking Press.

Rogers, B. (2015). *Classroom behaviour: a practical guide to effective teaching, behaviour management and colleague support*. Sage.

Wiliam, D. (2011). *Embedded formative assessment*. Solution Tree Press.

As an educationalist I certainly feel it is important to constantly reflect on the teaching and learning practices taking place within our schools to establish what works best for our students and teachers. If you would like to read more on this subject, visit our website's [News & Media](#) page or our [LinkedIn](#) page.

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