

Principle 9

Becomes a Reflective Practitioner:

The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

Looks like, Feels like, and Sounds like:

Evaluates own actions (What worked? What did not work? For whom?); reflects on classroom situations (Why? How? What if? What data?); open to colleague guidance and suggestions to improve practice; willing to learn; seeks out innovative ways to teach; takes steps to identify and relieve stress

“Reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it, and thinking about if it works – a process of self-observation and self-evaluation.”

Julie Tice



BECOMING A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Reflective thinking is a multifaceted process. It is an analysis of classroom events and circumstances. By virtue of its complexity, the task of teaching requires constant and continual classroom observation, evaluation, and subsequent action. However, to be an effective teacher, it is not enough to be able to recognize what happens in the classroom. Rather, it is imperative to understand the “why’s,” “how’s,” and “what if’s” as well. This understanding comes through the consistent practice of reflective thinking.

Reflective thinking is a learned process that requires time. Generally there is little, if any, time left at the end to reflect on previous events, and to design meaningful, creative problem-solving strategies. However, given the intent of the student teaching experience, time for reflection should be a critical and ongoing practice. The following are some examples of activities that promote reflection and may be tailored to fit into the school day and beyond.

Think Aloud: Intentionally express out loud thinking about teaching with your teacher intern. This is especially effective when teaching the teacher intern how to plan. It uncovers the reasoning behind making decisions. Another component of the think aloud is describing and analyzing positive and negative experiences as they surface. This can be a therapeutic and valuable tool that can be accomplished on one’s own or in conjunction with individuals from the mentoring team.

Reflective Journal: This is a process of recording and analyzing events in a prescribed manner and it can be a productive strategy to foster reflective thinking. The journaling process may be formal and informal. It can be a description of a significant event or an aspect of teaching on which a teacher intern is asked to focus.

Competency Continuum: Think about the areas in teaching identified in the performance standards on the evaluation form. Select an area and rank yourself on a continuum from most competent to least competent. Begin identify the factors that inhibit your ability to be more competent and identify what would be most helpful to gain more competency. Use this continuum as a tool for discussion and action planning between you and your mentoring team.

Data Collection/Action Research: Consider a problem area such as student motivation that concerns you. Intentionally design a procedure for collecting information (data) to learn more about the problem. Use this data to further analyze the situation, to act on the problem, or to reevaluate.

Video/Audio Tape and Reflective Analysis: Video or audio tape yourself teaching. View or listen to the tape for the purpose of analyzing your instruction and student response. The video or audio tape may be used as a tool for reflective dialogue between the teacher intern and individuals from the mentoring team. It could be combined with a journal entry.

Written Self-Evaluation: This is a structured self-analysis.

Use of the Problem Solving Process: This six step process may be used for any problem situation in or out of the classroom setting. It is intended as a tool for collaborative or individual problem solving and reflective thinking as well as a design for action.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Generate possible solutions.
3. Evaluate the solutions.
4. Design an action plan.
5. Implement the plan.
6. Evaluate the results.

Coaching and Conferencing Process: This is a process that occurs on a regular basis during the student teaching experience. It provides an opportunity to talk about teaching and learning and should be a natural flow of conversation that includes sharing ideas, giving and receiving formative feedback. This process that may be ongoing and informal, or schedules and structured. It may or may not include an observation. The intent of the process is to engage in an activity that promotes dialogue about teaching effectiveness, and encourage reflective thinking about teaching, learning, and performance.

Development of a Professional Portfolio: The process of creating and selecting documents for inclusion in the portfolio requires a significant amount of reflective thinking about yourself as a teacher and your growth related to the performance standards for student teaching. It is an opportunity to talk about your experience and performance with the individuals who form your mentoring team. It can be one of the most intensive processes for reflection.

McKnight, Dorothy. "Becoming a Reflective Practitioner." Field Experience Handbook. 20 Nov. 2002. University of Maryland College of Education. 10 Apr. 2008
http://www.education.umd.edu/teacher_education/sthandbook/reflection.html

Instant Ideas for Busy Teachers...

by Barbara Gruber, M.A. & Sue Gruber, M.A.

www.bgrubercourses.com

Stress Relief for Teachers

The bell rings and your students head out the door at the end of the school day! You need to leave school in forty-five minutes to get to a dental appointment. That should be just enough time to change a bulletin board to go with the theme you plan to begin tomorrow. Just as you tear down the last piece of the bulletin board, a parent drops by for an impromptu conference. Before you know it, twenty minutes have ticked by and the bulletin board is still bare. You dash to the office to get paper for the bulletin board and you are intercepted by the principal who asks how you like the new reading series. By the time you get back to your room, you are left with 14 minutes to complete the bulletin board. You decide it's better to leave it blank than to put up just a portion of it. You tidy up your desk and head out the door frustrated that unexpected interruptions stopped you from completing a simple task! Now what?

1. You can go to school extra early and finish it prior to the before-school faculty meeting.
2. You can put up the bulletin board heading before school tomorrow morning and add to it throughout the day, finishing it up after school.
3. You can postpone the job until after school tomorrow.

All three of these options are possibilities---why not choose the one that is least stressful?

In a perfect world, there would be no interruptions and tasks would always be completed in the allotted times. Reality is that our world is far from perfect. Every teacher knows that the job of being a teacher is fraught with unexpected happenings and constant interruptions. That's why it's especially important for us to learn to adapt, manage and cope with stress---it is essential to our health, happiness and sense of well-being. We can't eliminate stress---we can learn techniques to effectively manage stress. Stress is an inherent part of life for everyone!

What is stress?

Stress does not happen to us---it is something we talk ourselves into. Our stress levels depend on our reactions to events in our lives. We can choose to let people and situations get us angry and upset or we can choose to let it go. We can react in such a way that we do not feel upset by the inevitable stressors that are part of daily life. For example:

*At the airport, when a flight is cancelled some passengers rant and rave.
Others react by figuring out other travel options.*

*In a traffic jam, some drivers furiously blow horns and yell.
Others accept the fact that they are stuck in traffic, listen to the radio, sit back and relax and hope traffic starts moving soon.*

Before school starts, teachers forewarn you that you will have students with behavior problems and difficult parents. Some teachers get upset and anticipate having a bad year. Others choose to assess students and parents for themselves and then do the best job they can.

At a faculty meeting, the principal announces a new requirement of teachers. Some teachers are upset and agonize over how much more work they will have to do. Other teachers ask themselves what they are already doing that may meet the new requirements. If extra work is required they make time for it by eliminating something that is less important.

Parents suggest how you should be managing your classroom. Some teachers feel stressed and defensive. They rationalize and make lengthy explanations hoping to gain approval from parents. Others listen to the parents' comments while continuing to feel confident about their teaching styles. They thank parents for sharing their ideas and opinions.

Changing the Ways We Think

Life is difficult for perfectionists in our less-than-perfect world. Try your best to let go of perfectionism and strive to be more flexible. If the new learning center isn't "picture perfect," no one will know except you. Your students will like it and that's what really counts. Relax your standards a bit.

Focus less on pleasing others and focus more on pleasing yourself. If other teachers on grade level donate a month of their summer break time to work in their classrooms, that doesn't mean you have to do so. Resist pressure and spend your unpaid days as you wish. During the first week of school involve students in some of the set-up tasks. This builds team spirit and gives children a sense of classroom ownership.

Negativity is contagious! Stay clear of the grouchy complainers and worriers who focus on one negative thing after another.

Surround yourself with upbeat people who are flexible and fun to be around. Energized, enthusiastic teachers know how to handle stress and their classrooms are happy places for children to learn.

Changing the Ways We Work

Organizing your desk and your workspace will make work days less stressful. When you work smart and are organized, there are fewer frustrations at school. Consider taking a course to learn ways to work smarter, not harder. We offer a course that gets rave reviews from K-6 teachers.

Changing the Ways We Communicate

Learning to communicate our feelings honestly is a sure way to avoid bottled up feelings of anger and frustration. Learn assertive communication skills so you can express your feelings and needs in polite, yet powerful ways.

Being able to say no and mean it is one way to reduce stress. At most schools, the same teachers always take on extra responsibilities and assignments. Others seem to fade into the woodwork and avoid participation in extra duties. Give yourself a year off from participating on committees. When asked to take on an extra responsibility say, "No thank you, I've been the PTA representative for two years. Someone else needs to take a turn this year." No matter how you are flattered, coaxed and begged to do it for one more year, stick to your refusal and let someone else do their fair share.

Don't let people and situations put you under pressure. When a parent asks an unexpected question at a conference, tell them:

- You need time to think about it and you will get back to them.
- You need to research the answer and will get back to them.

Jot yourself a reminder note so you are sure to follow up on issues and questions.

Establish some emotional distance from your work. Teaching is a profession with work that never ends---there is always more you can do. It can easily take over your life, if you let that happen. Give yourself permission to work reasonable hours and have some time for your friends, family and yourself. When you treat yourself well, you will have more energy and enthusiasm for your job and for life in general.

Ten Simple Ways Everyone Can Reduce Stress

1. Get up 15 minutes earlier so mornings are less hectic.
2. Avoid over-scheduling yourself so you have a realistic, calm day instead of a frantic day with an impossible schedule.
3. Learn to say "No" to projects, committees and social activities you don't have time, energy or interest in doing.
4. Do a project you are dreading first thing in the morning. Get it behind you so you can enjoy the day!
5. Learn to delegate responsibilities to others.
6. Surround yourself with positive, upbeat friends and colleagues. People who constantly worry and complain manipulate others into negativity.
7. Make sure to get a good night's sleep!
8. Relax and enjoy a change of pace on weekends. Do some things you truly enjoy. Make time for fun, family and friends.
9. Forget about multi-tasking and focus on one thing at a time. Complete one task before moving on to the next one.
10. Focus on today instead of worrying about tomorrow.

When will the stress be out of your life?

Probably never...how you choose to handle stress is what makes the difference. Stress is part of life---there is no way to eliminate it. Choose to cope with stress in ways that are positive. You'll be happy you did!

