

Reflective Teaching as a Strategy for Teacher Growth

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If we hope to improve teaching we must encourage practitioners to practice their art with an eye toward improvement. What seems to be needed is a strategy by which teachers can engage in teaching and then, with the help of others, gain insights that will lead to improvement.

A vehicle with potential for improving teaching has been developed at The Ohio State University. A form of simulation, Reflective Teaching, provides an opportunity for teachers to teach and then reflect on the teaching experience with the intention of improving subsequent practice. The emphasis is on *reflection*—helping teachers think about what happened, why it happened, and what else they could have done to reach their goals. Reflective Teaching encourages teachers to be students of teaching.

Because Reflective Teaching is a carefully structured form of peer teaching, it requires a group of interested teachers willing to teach in front of each other. To participate, teachers must spend time in preparation and reflection. Each session lasts about an hour.

Four Steps

Reflective Teaching is a structured procedure consisting of four steps. In *step one* a group of teachers is divided into one or more groups of four to six persons, one of whom is design-

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nated the teacher for that group. The other group members become the learners.

In *step two* the designated teachers are each given an identical Reflective Teaching Lesson to teach, and in the interval before the peer groups are scheduled to meet again, they plan their instructional method.

Reflective Teaching Lessons have been carefully constructed with several points in mind. They must be capable of being taught in fifteen minutes or less. They must be interesting to teach and interesting to learn. Their content must be relatively unique, not normally a part of academic subjects with which the learners would already be familiar. Finally, they must assess student learning and student satisfaction.

In *step three*, when the peer groups meet again, each designated teacher teaches the lesson. Since there may be several groups, teaching will be concurrent in parts of the room, in separate rooms, or in halls. Designated teachers must arrange for or provide their own materials and equipment if any.

One lesson, The Origami Task, requires teachers to demonstrate to learners how to make a paper butterfly using origami techniques. Since designated teachers do not know this process, they first need to learn it. They then spend about fifteen minutes teaching the process to others. The only limitation given teachers is that they cannot touch learners' papers.

At the conclusion of the time permitted, the designated teachers take a few minutes to assess student

Peer teaching and evaluation by their colleagues gives teachers insight into their teaching strategies.

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achievement and satisfaction using evaluation techniques and/or instruments provided. Designated teachers can grade the “tests” themselves or have learners grade their own. Since Reflective Teaching requires the assessment of learning, the designated teachers always find out to what extent learners learn and are satisfied. In the case of origami, learners accomplish the task if they produce a paper butterfly.

In *step four* reflection on the teaching occurs. Here teachers discuss openly with their peers what the teaching and learning processes were like for them. First the small groups discuss the lesson: how difficult or easy the content was, what the teachers thought about as they prepared to teach, how the learners felt about their accomplishment or lack of it, or how teachers got the students interested in learning. About ten minutes is allowed for the small groups to share these experiences.

Following small group discussion the whole group is reassembled in order to discuss another set of questions. This reflective activity with the whole group encourages the discussion of alternative teaching methods. The leader, who can be a teacher or staff developer, may focus attention on how each lesson was planned, how each lesson was taught, and what happened that seemed to contribute to learning and satisfaction in each group. All participants have the opportunity to raise questions, describe events as they experienced them, and reflect on the teaching of which they were a part. All are prompted to summarize the experi-



ence by describing new insights they gained. Here in a safe and structured environment the complexities and nuances of teaching are openly discussed.

Teachers Respond

Teachers respond well to Reflective Teaching. For example, through the Franklin County Teacher Center in Columbus, Ohio, teachers who expressed interest in looking at their own teaching have participated in Reflective Teaching sessions. Initially, in a course they designed especially for themselves, middle grade language arts teachers participated in three Reflective Teaching Lessons designed to focus attention on designating behaviors: “The Spelling Demon Task,” “The Vocabulary Task,” and “The Teaching Reading Task.”¹ During the feedback and reflection sessions the teachers openly discussed their difficulties in clearly explaining to the learners different ways of remembering new concepts. “It’s always been hard for me to memorize things. Now I know why it’s hard for my students, too,” commented one participant.

Reflective Teaching gives teachers time to think carefully about their own teaching behaviors and opportunity to view other experienced professionals in action. Teachers find themselves engaged in a meaningful process of inquiry which leads them toward renewed self-esteem and interest in teaching. As a result, teachers become more reflective about teaching and more interested in self-improvement. Reflective Teaching is an opportunity for meaningful teacher growth. ■

¹ For further information on these and other RTL’s write D. R. Cruickshank, College of Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210.

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