Ways to Encourage Reflection

Learning communities of all forms are built around reflection. Teachers consider and discuss the details of their teaching.

Reflective conversations are dialogues focused on teaching practices and how they can be improved. They are carefully structured to avoid the two extreme positions of not responding to someone’s concern or of jumping in to fix or rescue the individual.

Reflective questions could be considered mini versions of the reflective conversation. They are questions that are typically asked by an administrator, although not necessarily. A favourite reflective question, apparently asked by Ralph Waldo Emerson whenever he met up with someone he hadn’t seen for a while, was “What has become more clear to you since last we met?” Or, in slightly less formal terms, “What have you learned this week?”

Journals can be private or public. In both forums, their aim is to promote reflectiveness; that is, they need to include more than a description of events. Killion (2004, p. 127 in Easton) suggests that ideal journal entries also include “the teacher’s response to the event, an analysis of the event in relationship to education research or theory, and a generalization or learning from the experience.” If you want to use journals as a structured reflective tool, see Killion’s chapter in Powerful Designs for Professional Learning.

Q & A: Encouraging Reflection

Q: Is it really possible to teach reflection? Aren’t some people simply more reflective than others?

A: Learning preferences research, including multiple intelligences theory, confirms that some people are more reflective than others and you may not be able to directly teach reflection and expect it to “take.” However, reflectiveness is so important to improving teaching and learning that you should make deliberate efforts to ask reflective questions of individuals who don’t tend to do that for themselves. Make questions quite specific at first—What worked in this activity? Why do you think it worked so well? What didn’t work? Why not? You may never get to Emerson’s “What has become more clear to you since last we met?” with some people, but encouraging reflection through any means will reap dividends for all.