

Promoting Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

REFLECTION AND SELF-EVALUATION – Part 1

This article first appeared in the May, 2001, issue of the Gazette on <teachers.net>.

Learning is not compulsory, but neither is survival.

W. Edwards Deming

Reflection is a powerful teaching and learning strategy that is too often overlooked. The key to reflection is the skill of asking self-evaluative questions. It is the most effective, yet neglected, strategy both in learning and in dealing with people. Using this skill also reinforces the other two practices of positivity and choice.

REFLECTION AND LEARNING

Reflection is necessary for long-term memory reinforcement. Its absence in the learning process can be likened to chewing—but not swallowing. The food is tasted, but unless it is digested, there is no nutritional value. Before elementary students leave a subject or middle and high school students leave a classroom, teachers should lead students to reflect upon the lesson. “John Dewey phrased this concept in a formula: “Experience + Reflection = Growth.”

In order to create meaning from a new informational experience, we need “internalizing time.” The human brain is a meaning-seeking organism. Much of what we are exposed to in learning happens so fast that we need time to process it. The brain continues to process information before and long after we are aware of it. This is the reason why many of our ideas seem to “pop out of the blue.” For this reason, a teacher can either call for learners’ attention to new information or have them make meaning—but not both at the same time. This “down time” (which is not really down), is a significant step for enhancing long-term memory.

Cramming more content per minute or moving from one piece of learning to the next without reflection virtually guarantees that little will be retained. Planning time for reflection also encourages students to let the teacher know when they did not understand or did not get a point the teacher made.

A quick-check technique is for the teacher to stop every so often and say, “In case you did not understand something, you and your partner write it down and turn it into me, and I’ll read it over.” Often, students will ask a question about something that the teacher thought was made clear but for some students was unclear.

A good way to promote reflection at the end of a class period is for students to keep a daily learning log. Students jot down at least one thought they had as a result of the lesson and explain the significance of the thought. Helpful prompt questions are, “What did I learn today?” “What do I need to work on tomorrow?” “In what did I do well?” and “What could I have done differently?” The questions asked are often more valuable than the answers.

A "keeper journal" is another reflective approach and has the advantage of feeling more personal. Students write down one comment, thought, or learning that they would like to *keep* (remember). If such a journal were started at the beginning of a typical American school year (although the activity can be started any time), each student would accumulate 170-200 specific remembrances from a teacher. What a wonderful way to extend a teacher's influence.

(Continued next month)

To read about the failings of punishments and rewards, go to
<www.AboutDiscipline.com>.

Subscribe to the free monthly newsletter, **PROMOTING RESPONSIBILITY**, at
<www.DisciplineWithoutStress.com>.
Enter e-mail address and click on "Subscribe."

<www.MarvinMarshall.com>
Copyright © 2001 Marvin Marshall