

# Make teacher reflection count!

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## Abstract

Language teachers always need to develop their teaching. They continue their teacher training and professional development in different ways. Reflecting on teaching practices helps teachers to dig deeper into their teaching opportunities, challenges, and solutions. Teacher reflection helps to develop quality teaching and learning while helping to sustain teachers' professional development as well. Language teaching is a reflective practice and a cyclical process with a series of steps.

## Introduction

Teacher professional development is very important to support teaching and learning processes. To help develop teaching and learning, language teachers should refer to teaching as a reflective practice. Gnawali (2008) thinks that reflection helps teachers to “understand themselves, their practices and their learners” (p. 69). As teachers deliver face-to-face, blended and/or online teaching, they should keep reflecting on and developing their practice. Reflective teachers should be open-minded, and their reflection should help link theory and practice. Teacher reflection is beneficial for teachers and students although there are some misconceptions. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused lots of educational changes and pedagogical challenges, so teacher reflection helps to develop more solutions for more emerging challenges. There are different approaches to teacher reflection.



## Reflective practice

Reflection is a key requirement for teacher professional development. It is the process that helps language teachers to question their everyday practice. Teachers work individually and in communities of practice to check what went well and what would be better in case it would be conducted differently. Reflection helps teachers to develop their performance through learning from their professional practices. It goes beyond checking previous practices into future improvements. It is beneficial for both pre-service and in-service language teachers. Bailey (1997) thinks that “reflective teaching is extremely valuable as a stance, a state of mind, a healthy, questioning attitude toward the practice of our profession” (p. 15).

Teacher reflection should be deliberate, purposeful, structured—linking theory and practice. Teachers should practice reflection consciously and purposefully; they reflect because they need to develop both teaching and learning. Through reflection, teachers should link theory and practice by checking lesson plans and practices in a structured approach. They should reflect on teaching in order to develop students’ learning. They should reflect to help change and develop teaching, learning, and school practices.

There are some principles of reflective practice. Reflective practice is evidence-based; when teachers reflect on their practices, they use evidence to develop practical insights. It involves dialogue; teachers communicate with peers to give, get, and reflect on constructive, developmental, and non-judgmental feedback. It explores beliefs and practices; teachers’ beliefs impact their teaching practices. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore such beliefs and their practices. It is a way of life; it helps teachers, educators, and professionals to get used to reflection as a part of their personal and professional behaviors and development.

Reflective teachers should be open-minded, responsible, and wholehearted. To be open-minded, teachers should have a desire to get, reflect on, and act upon different feedback and insights from others, including students and peers. They should pay much attention to different possibilities and experiences. They should accept the possibility of errors. To be responsible, teachers should be fully aware of the possible consequences of their actions and practices in classrooms and schools. Therefore, they should plan, reflect on, and act upon their teaching continuously. To be wholehearted, they should help to develop teaching, learning, and professional development. To develop open-mindedness and responsibility is to develop wholeheartedness.

## Reflective cycle

According to Bartlett (1990), the reflective cycle consists of five steps. They are “mapping, informing, contesting, appraising and acting” (p. 209).



1. At the mapping step, teachers observe their own teaching. They collect different evidence about their teaching by using different techniques. They answer the question, “What do we do as teachers?”
2. At the informing step, they look for the meaning behind teaching plans they have developed in the previous step by sharing their plans with peers. They answer the question, “What is the meaning of our teaching?”
3. At the contesting step, they try to find underlying reasons for their theory and practice. They answer the question, “How did we come this way?”
4. At the appraising step, they continue to find teaching alternatives. They answer the question, “How might we teach differently?”
5. At the acting step, they act according to the reflective insights they have developed throughout the reflective cycle steps. They answer the question, “What and how shall we teach?”

They should go by this cycle to keep reflective practice, teaching improvement and sustainable professional development.

There are some misconceptions regarding teacher reflection. Some teachers think that reflection takes too much time; however, they can do reflection in action during teaching. Some believe that the focus is on teachers only, but reflection helps to develop teaching, learning, and teacher professional development, as well. Some teachers think that reflection is a negative practice or process, but reflection is a cyclical process that helps to have positive and developmental impact on teachers and students. Finally, some teachers think that reflection is an individual process; really, there are different collaborative approaches and techniques for reflection. For example, teachers can do self-reflection, peer-reflection, and/or group reflection using different techniques. They can record and reflect on their lessons. They can do peer observation and reflect on their peers’ classes. They can record their lessons and have discussion panels to reflect on their lessons regularly.

Reflective practice is beneficial for teachers, students, educational leaders, and supervisors.

- It helps to develop confident teachers who keep reflecting on and developing their practices.
- It helps to make sure teachers are responsible for themselves and their students as well throughout the teaching and learning processes.
- It helps to encourage innovation as reflective teachers find out, develop, and implement innovative solutions for different challenges.



- It helps to encourage engagement of teachers and communities of practice using different individual, and collaborative reflective practice approaches, and techniques.

These approaches and techniques help teachers to get, give, share, reflect on, and act upon feedback. For example, a teacher is encouraged to reflect on a teaching challenge, solution, and opportunity every month. Then, they are encouraged to share their reflections with a peer. After that, teacher communities of practice meet in-person or virtually to reflect on common and uncommon teaching challenges, solutions, and opportunities.

## Reflective approaches

There are different approaches for teacher reflection. Reflection in action is teacher reflection during teaching. It happens during the lesson, so it helps to change the practice at the time of teaching. Reflection on action is teacher reflection after teaching. It happens after the lesson, so it helps to develop practice for the future. There are different techniques for teachers to reflect on their teaching. They are shared planning, peer observation, self-reports, autobiographies, journal writing, collaborative diaries, and recording lessons.

- Shared planning helps teachers to reflect on teaching and learning by getting support from peers to plan lessons together.
- Peer observation helps teachers to explore their teaching collaboratively. Therefore, they get critical reflection on their teaching.
- Self-reports help teachers to reflect on teaching by completing inventories or checklists that highlight their teaching practices during lessons. For example, teachers complete lesson checklists to reflect on their lesson planning and delivery.
- Autobiographies help teachers to reflect on their teaching career by keeping reflective and narrative records of their teaching professional experiences and progress. They help teachers to track their key professional successes, challenges, and future development.
- Journal writing helps teachers to reflect on teaching and professional development by keeping regular accounts of learning, teaching and professional development experiences. It helps teachers to reflect, share, and check back from time to time to see how different experiences, events, interactions, and sessions develop personal professional development. Journals can be written or virtual; they are more detailed than teacher autobiographies as the day-to-day teaching practice is the key focus.



- Recording lessons helps teachers to reflect on teaching and professional development by keeping audio or video recordings of different lessons. Audio or video recordings help to record the moment-to-moment teaching processes as many things happen simultaneously in the classroom.
- Critical analysis helps teachers to reflect on teaching and learning by answering and reflecting on specific teaching situations or practices. Teachers analyze a situation or practice in order to develop future performance. For example, teachers are given a certain situation as a refractive prompt like "You have delivered a writing argumentative essay lesson for a class of thirty fifteen-year-old mixed-ability students. What went well? What would you do differently if you teach the same lesson again?"

## Conclusion

Teacher reflection is key for teaching and learning improvement and professional development. It is beneficial for teachers, students, educational leaders, and supervisors. It helps to link both theory and practice. It can be done in action during teaching or on action after teaching. Individual and group reflection approaches and techniques help teachers to check how their teaching has been delivered and how it will be delivered differently for future improvement. Teacher reflection should go systematically through a cycle of different steps. It helps to develop reflective teachers who are open-minded, responsible, and wholehearted. Reflective teachers are highly interested in and responsible for developing teaching, learning, and professional development, too. They help to initiate and sustain school improvement and educational change and development across classrooms and schools.

## References

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**Author Bio**

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