

*How can I see reflection is a way of teaching, so that it's impossible to separate out and itemize, but is instead a moment-by-moment thing that is always with me like a heartbeat? (What it Means to Be a Reflective Teacher, Terry Heick, teachthought.com)*

Reflection is a powerful tool. It sounds so easy because it is fundamental to our practice. Yet many confuse reflecting with reporting. So, what's the difference between the two rituals and why are they both important to the instructional coaching praxis?

First of all, let's define our terminology. There are many definitions for both terms. I think the Webster Dictionary has clear and concise definitions; reflection is defined as *"a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation"* and reporting is defined as, *"a usually detailed account or statement."*

Neither definition is esoteric or particularly cumbersome. In fact, they are short definitions that really speak to what and how coaches should think about their work. Coaches need to document not only what they do but what they "think" about what they did. That means that coaches need to describe a situation (reporting)

**and**

then analyze (reflecting) what to do about the situation. Here's the tricky part... the coach has to help the teacher understand the role of reflection in influencing action and help that teacher become a reflective practitioner. At the same time, the coach needs to reflect on what s/he heard, saw, and discussed and think about ways to help the teacher have a voice and choice about managing that situation. It's all about the coach helping the teacher recognize his/her own potential for growth while reflecting on his/her own practice.

Reflective practice can certainly be modeled. As the coach reflects and details his/her own actions, s/he needs to share the process with the teachers. The coach needs to document and reflect on his/her own practice and help the teacher document and reflect on his/her own practice at the same time. Don't forget... thinking *about*, *in*, and *on* action is what helps set the stage for the next steps. This is particularly helpful because it makes the coach's thinking visible and answers the questions what, how, and why an action was performed. Sharing that process helps the teachers understand why the process is so critical for implementing effective instructional practices and to know when or why adjustments to instruction are needed. And, hopefully, the teachers will begin to reflect and think in similar ways, thus making the reflection process automatic.

It's funny... reflection also means *"the production of an image by or as if by a mirror"* and I can't help to think that both teachers and coaches need to look at themselves through a looking glass. They need to be as objective as possible in thinking about their actions and how their decisions impact instruction and classroom practices. Teachers must think about why they are teaching a specific content piece, identify their goals for that piece, determine what resources are needed, decide which effective instructional practices will help students accomplish the goals, propose what to do if the students are not as successful as planned and then create a blueprint to address what didn't work as well as expected. At the same time, the coach needs to practice how to help the teachers engage in an internal dialogue when planning and then collaborate with the teachers so that they can all "hear" the strategies out loud and begin to discuss the process of teaching and learning. That means that the coach must plan and engage in metacognitive behavior with two basic questions:

*"How can I help teachers change and improve their practice, increase student engagement and influence student outcomes"*

and

*"What do I need to know about this teacher's practice to help him/her be as successful as possible?"*

These are the daily routines influence teaching, learning, and coaching. So, go ahead... talk to yourself and question why you are doing something in a certain way. And, in fact, it's even okay to answer yourself!!

Just remember...reflect, revise, and rebuild ... all essential for successful changes in practice to take root. Start with reflection and all else will follow.

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