

On Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher...

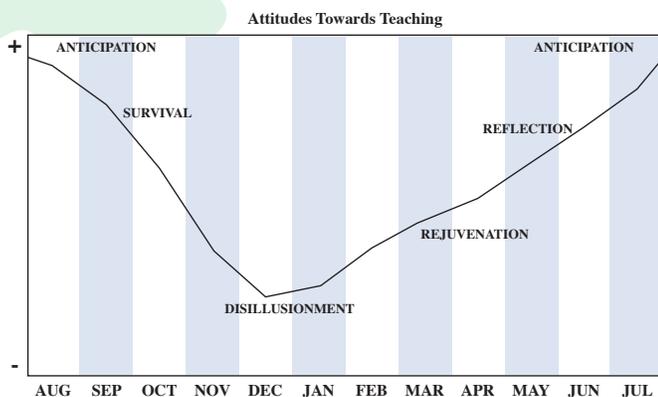
by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

"We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience."
— John Dewey

As another school year begins to wind down, I am reminded of the cyclical nature of our profession. In 1990, Ellen Moir developed a model that reflects the attitudes a beginning teacher experiences during their first year of teaching. Almost 26 years later, Moir's model has stood the test of time and I would contend that whether in your first, third, twenty-third, or thirtieth year of teaching, the phases and attitudes towards teaching repeat. Given that, there seems no better time (June/July) to reflect on the role of critical reflection in the teaching and learning process.

Phases of First Year Teaching

(Moir, 1990)



In his book, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Stephen Brookfield suggests using critical reflection as a tool for ongoing personal and professional development is essential. He argues that the goal of the critically reflective teacher is to garner an increased awareness of his or her teaching from as many different vantage points as possible.

To this end, Brookfield proposes four 'lenses' that can be engaged by teachers: (1) the autobiographical, (2) the students' eyes, (3) our colleagues' experiences, and (4) theoretical literature. These lenses correlate to processes of self-reflection, student feedback, peer assessment, and engagements with scholarly literature. He submits that the metacognition upon these processes provides the foundation for good teaching and the means to become an excellent teacher.

"Reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it, and thinking about if it works - a process of self-observation and self-evaluation."ⁱ

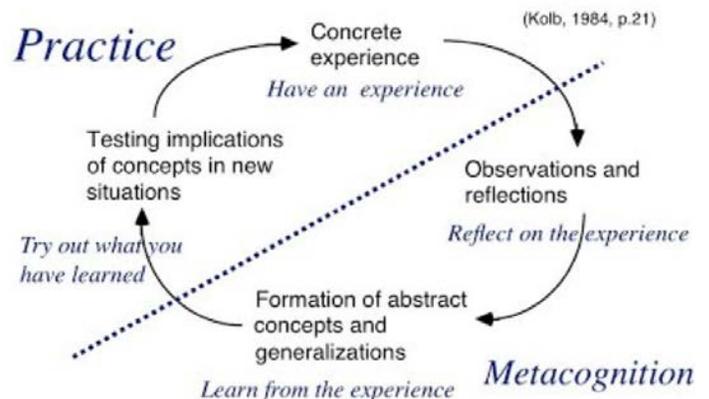
"A critically reflective teacher is much better placed to communicate to colleagues and students (as well as to herself) the rationale behind her practice. She works from a position of informed commitment. She knows why she does and thinks, what she does and thinks."ⁱⁱ

Learning by Thinking vs. Learning by Doing

A 2014 study at the Harvard School of Business explored the role that reflection can play in the learning process. Despite the fact they found that "individuals who are given time to reflect on a task improve their performance at a greater rate than those who are given the same amount of time to practice with the same task. Their results also showed that if individuals themselves are given the choice to either reflect or practice, they prefer to allocate their time to gaining more experience with the task - to the detriment of their learning."ⁱⁱⁱ

The authors go on to pose the following scenario to reinforce their point: "Imagine you are an avid tennis player who has twenty minutes left at the end of your weekly class. You would like to improve your serve, and you see two ways of doing so. You could either hit as many serves as possible in the next 20 minutes, or you could hit just a few serves, and then pause to analyze your stroke. Every minute you spend reflecting on how to get better is costly in terms of lost practice time. Conversely, every minute you spend hitting serves consumes time you could have spent reflecting on how to get better. What would be the optimal choice for you to maximize learning?"^{iv}

What implication does the importance of taking time to reflect on learning (metacognition) have on your classroom practice?



On Becoming More Critically Reflective...

Given Brookfield's four lenses, (1) the autobiographical, (2) the students' eyes, (3) our colleagues' experiences, and (4) theoretical literature, consider new possibilities to critically reflect on your own teaching. Do you keep your own journal or learning log? Do you review lessons once you have taught them? Do you attend conferences or learning events or take part in a personal learning network that allows regular self-reflection? Do you garner regular feedback from your students on your teaching? From your peers? What does the current research and recent scholarly articles propose? How can you build opportunities for critical reflection not only into your own practice, but also find opportunities for your students to reflect on their learning more often?

Confucius once said, "By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third, by experience, which is the bitterest." As another school year winds down, I am sure we have many experiences that have made us wiser – hopefully not too bitter (although I am sure some are sweeter to recall than others). Cheers to critically reflecting on all of it with the goal of becoming even wiser!

I wish you all a well-deserved summer break with lots of time for rest, relaxation and critical reflection...


May I Recommend:

If the idea of critical reflection through the four lenses resonated with you, why not have a closer look at Stephen Brookfield's book, *Becoming A Critically Reflective Teacher*?

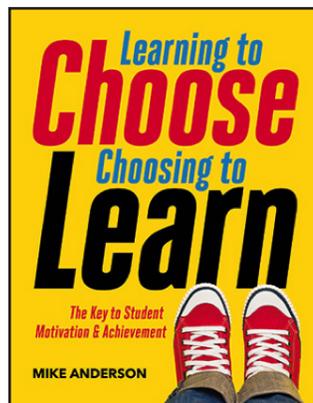
Show & Tell: A Video Column / Getting Better Every Year by Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey in the May 2016 issue of Educational Leadership (pg. 85-86) (available online currently at: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may16/vol73/num08/Getting-Better-Every-Year.aspx>)

The Myth of Average - We May Be Missing An Important Part of the Story! (Stephen Hurley's Blog for CEA found online at: <http://www.cea-ace.ca/blog/stephen-hurley/2016/02/4/myth-average>)

Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to Maria Beltz of Marshview Middle School who was the winner of our March Book Give Away!

Our next draw is for *Learning to Choose, Choosing to Learn – the key to Student Motivation and Achievement* by Mike Anderson. Sound interesting? Drop me an email at ardith.shirley@nbta.ca with the subject line "Book Draw" before **June 28th**!



¹Reflective teaching: Exploring our own classroom practice by BBC British Council found online at <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/reflective-teaching-exploring-our-own-classroom-practice>.

²Where is reflection in the learning process? by Jackie Gerstein, Ed.D. found online at <https://usergeneratededucation.wordpress.com/2011/08/16/where-is-reflection-in-the-learning-process/>

³Learning By Thinking: How Reflection Improves Performance

by Giada Di Stefano, Francesca Gino, Gary Pisano & Bradley Staats found online at <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/learning-by-thinking-how-reflection-improves-performance>

⁴ibid, pg.9

⁵Kolb, 1984 found online at <https://sites.google.com/site/reflection4learning/why-reflect>.

Closing Quotes:

"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will become even more effective action."

— Peter Drucker