



Literacy Connects

A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue XXII



Reflective Learning

The approaching end of the school year is the ideal time to plan activities that encourage students to reflect on their learning and for us to use that data to reflect on our teaching. Countless studies have shown that metacognition (thinking about your own thinking) and reflection increase learning in all areas. When we make a mistake, two executive systems in the brain's frontal region react, helping us to correct the mistake. When we see, correct and reflect upon our own errors, we learn (Sousa, 2001; Stuphom, et al. 2000; McDonald, et al. 2000). Reflection should occur at all points in the learning process. Making predictions and creating questions at the beginning of a chapter, lesson or unit, provide the scaffold for self-assessment and reflection during and after learning. In our haste to cover curriculum, we often focus only on the end result. Shifting focus so students reflect on the how and why of learning will enable them to transfer skills learned in one situation to other areas (remember the old adage about teaching a man to fish?). Following are strategies designed to promote metacognition before, during and after learning.

Question Swap: A question swap can help focus the learner and create reading with a purpose, as well as provide the basis for reflection after the reading or lesson (see *Literacy Connect Issues I, IV, XVII, XVIII and XXI* for more on generating questions):

1. Students create and write 2 questions about the given topic on a half sheet of paper.
2. They need to know the answer to their own questions.
3. For the first question, they find a partner and swap questions.
4. They answer their partner's first question and include their name.
5. They then repeat Steps 3 and 4 with a second partner for the second question.
6. At the end of the unit or lesson, students reflect upon the questions and answers. What did they get right? Wrong? Why? Have them explain their thinking.

Journals, Learning Logs or Exit Summaries: These forms of informal writing are excellent for promoting metacognition. Following are sample journal starters (see *Literacy Connects XI and XII* for more on reflective writing):

- I understand but I don't understand because
- When I don't understand how to solve a problem, I
- To solve this problem, I had to....
- If I did this again, I would....
- What part did you struggle with?
- What changes did you make and why?
- How did your thinking change?
- Today my thinking is like ... because
- What did you do well?
- With what do you need help?
- What was easiest for you? Hardest?
- Which strategies work best for you when reading...?

Portfolios help students, teachers and parents monitor learning. Have students return to their portfolios periodically and reflect on the work represented there. Ask them to choose examples of their best work, work they are most proud of, or work that shows the most growth and have them justify their choices.

Teacher Reflection: End of the year surveys, as well as reflections and portfolios, provide rich data to assess learning, monitor growth, and reveal student attitudes and motivation towards that learning. Instructional changes based on these factors are often more relevant and useful than other more formal types of data.

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