

# Developing Hindsight

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What powerful lessons we learn from our past experiences – our successes as well as our mistakes! We make future choices and decisions based on these outcomes, realizing our capacity to learn and to demonstrate skills. When we are successful, we are motivated to try again. I believe that it is critical to give learners time to reflect regularly on their learning so that their depth of understanding is brought to their consciousness level. This strategy empowers learners and contributes to their independence and the possibility of self-initiated learning.

Over the years, there have been many times that students have exclaimed, “Oh, I know that...I learned it last year”; or, “Do we have to do that, it’s too easy”. However, when I asked them to explain it in words, or apply it in a new situation, they (and I) found out that there were gaps in their conceptual knowledge. I also noticed that when we would ‘move on’, focussing on a new skill, some students would lose competency in a previously acquired skill. As a multiage teacher, I had the luxury of a longer time period with my students. I would ensure that students re-visit concepts if needed; but it wasn’t until I started taking time for reflection with my class that I started to notice a shift of impetus for increased effort in my students and more self confidence in their work.

## Reflection Writing

It is not a new idea to ask students to reflect at the end of a shared experience, putting into writing what they found particularly interesting, making connections and questioning thoughtfully. With a little prodding and encouragement, children would push themselves to dig a little deeper into their thinking than if we had just had a brief oral discussion. I remember my experience when I had to write reflections as an assignment for courses. I would sit down at the computer, grumbling because I felt I had nothing to say; but as the words flowed out onto the screen, I became pleasantly surprised at the insight that was ‘buried’ in my thinking.

This year, I have been making more of an effort to take the time for reflection with my class. First of all, I had to teach them some vocabulary to express their thinking and then a structure that would not be too daunting or tedious. I posted words such as: KNOWLEDGEABLE, GENERATIVE, THOUGHTFUL, RESOURCEFUL, ORGANIZED, INDUSTRIOUS, ORGANIZED, RISK-TAKING, SELF CONFIDENT

and made sure that we talked enough about them that the children understood their meaning. Then I gave them a prompted form for them to use regularly, requesting that they use at least one of the posted words each time. (I got this idea from Janet Banks, a multiage consultant from USA)

<p>I was _____ today when I _____</p> <hr/> <p>Tomorrow, I will try to be more _____.</p> <p>I noticed _____ was _____</p> <p>today when _____</p>
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Finding a space in our over-crowded daily schedule for anything new is a challenge. I have learned that routine items can become too automatic, not demanding much thinking. Their effort may wane over time. So I copied four of these reflection forms on one sheet, asking the children to keep them in their reading folders (usually the last scheduled activity in the day). Twice a week, for five-ten minutes before the end of the day, I ask the children to quietly reflect using one of the forms. When the sheet is full (two weeks), I ask them to pass it in so that I can monitor how they are doing. This also lets me know when I need to give another mini lesson on reflecting and when the children are ready to add to their reflection vocabulary.

### **Math Journal**

I have shared with many teachers that incorporating math journal regularly into my math workshop has made the biggest impact on math learning in my class. Usually every Friday, I reflect with the class in a brainstormed list everything that we have worked on that week in math workshop. Then I ask them to write about their personal math understanding for that week, making sure that they explain as fully as they can what they have learned. I encourage them to draw diagrams and give samples with their explanations. I also insist that they include how they are feeling

about their math work that week. I provide the children with lined coloured paper to raise the importance of the activity. In September, I spend a few minutes at the beginning of each session to go over samples of math journals written by previous students so that they learn what I am expecting of them.

This year, I have built onto reflection in math by simply changing a class routine. Instead of the class assembling in a group after recess in preparation for math class, I asked them to immediately find their folder from the pile of corrected work, go to their seat and look over their previous day's work, write the current date with the fraction, decimal and percent for the day. This gives the keen, efficient students a bit of daily independent reflection time as they wait for stragglers coming to class.

## **Portfolio**

Some teachers have abandoned portfolio assessment because of the time it takes; but I am convinced that it is essential to students in order to understand their own learning and to set goals for the following term. In a sense it puts them more "in the driver's seat" in their education.

Two weeks prior to the end of term when we hold student-led conferences, the children work on their portfolios in preparation. Every day or so, they will work on a different subject area to demonstrate their learning that term. For example, to show their math learning, they go through their folders and choose pieces of work to represent what we have worked on that term. They always have to choose at least one math journal and they can have any section in their scribbler photocopied. I encourage them to cut sections of worksheets and arrange everything attractively on the page. They add comments by each sample to explain why it is included. Some children then add decorative touches with markers, showing their talent as "scrap-bookers"! When the parents go through the portfolio with the children, they see a 'snapshot' of their child's learning and thinking and help them set two or three goals for the next term. On the student-led conference agenda, parents are requested to write a short note of encouragement in their child's portfolio. At the end of the year I tell the children that they can keep this one portfolio as a record or memory album of their year's work.

## **Multiage Class**

Now consider reflection in a bigger sense. The older children in a multiage class have daily reminders of their former stages of learning from some of the younger classmates. Even if this demonstration is at a subconscious level, the older child

realizes the measure of progress that he has made over time and this can be exhilarating. One of the most interesting phenomena that I have observed as a multi-age teacher is that the oldest age group benefits the most. I can theorize many reasons why this is often true; but in keeping with this article, I suggest that a multiage structure offers older children a 'reflective learning environment' – and that impacts on their learning, self image and attitude in immeasurable ways!