

# TEACHING STUDENTS TO SELF-ASSESS

*How do I help students reflect  
and grow as learners?*

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## Introduction

Education in the 21st century sometimes seems to be in a new language that has yet to be decoded. The traditional one-size-fits-all method of transmitting knowledge to passive students is no longer adequate. Today, learning is interactive and ever-changing, like our students. With information available in every corner of the world, students no longer rely on a single person to convey content. Instead, they need a guide to help them interpret the facts and the thoughts that they uncover. This new facilitative role of the educator enables students to go beyond what they already know and seek out knowledge that will help them develop and innovate.

To help students grow, we must teach them to develop the skill of metacognition—that is, to become aware of their own thought processes. If we teach students to know themselves well, they can ask the right questions and garner the help they need to become successful in every situation.

*Reflection* is an essential tool that enables students to decode what they know and what challenges them—and, most important, to distinguish between the two. Teaching reflection can help students decipher their own learning needs and elicit evidence from their own work to support their growth.

But giving students time to think about what they learned isn't enough; deep reflection and self-analysis are

not innate skills. Students must be taught how to consider their work intelligently against standards to be able to show mastery and set goals for developing themselves as learners.

Teachers can use differentiation and scaffolding to help students go beyond simple regurgitation of words and facts to engage in deep, thought-provoking discourse about progress. Using a variety of written and spoken means, students can discuss what it is they know without taking tests or being told by a teacher. Providing students with examples of mastery, a clear understanding of expectations and standards, and multiple opportunities to explore content will enable them to grow into mindful, receptive learners, ready to explore the 21st century world.

Reading this book, you will learn

- What reflection is.
- How to teach reflection.
- When to use reflection.
- How to empower students to take charge of their own learning and assessment.

## **What Is Reflection and Why Should We Teach It?**

A few years ago, I decided that it was time to dive deeply and honestly into my own practice. After 10 years of teaching, observation notes and student feedback weren't enough

to push me to the next level, so I took on National Board Certification.

I got my first taste of the task's enormity when the "welcome box" arrived in the mail. It felt like hello in 12 languages I didn't speak. Undaunted, I began the arduous journey. Commencing with 112 pages of standards that defined what reflective teachers do, I eagerly made connections to my own practice, scrawling my annotations on the pages like graffiti.

It soon became evident that content knowledge was only a small percentage of the expectation. I'd need to scrutinize my practice over the course of a year, gathering materials from students, filming my classes, and meticulously examining the choices I made to foster students' learning. I was required to study my feedback to students and the resulting student growth, analyze both whole-class and small-group discussion, and evaluate community outreach and involvement. Watching the footage of my class discussions and group work, like a coach prepping for big game, I analyzed my delivery, questions, wait time, and even vocal intonation. The data I gathered on myself were invaluable and led me to make crucial changes to my practice and my behavior in the classroom.

Since achieving National Board Certification, reflection has become an integral part of my practice and my evolution as an educator. With a critical eye, I explore what works and what needs work, and I find solutions to help me continue to grow and keep up with the changing educational landscape.

Because of the incredible effect that reflection has had on my practice, I was eager to teach this tool to my students.