

**ROBERT J.  
MARZANO**

# Becoming a Reflective Teacher



with **TINA BOOGREN**

**TAMMY HEFLEBOWER**

**JESSICA KANOLD-MCINTYRE**

**DEBRA PICKERING**

**THE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES SERIES**

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*Italicized entries indicate reproducible forms.*

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# INTRODUCTION

*Becoming a Reflective Teacher* is part of a series of books collectively referred to as the *Classroom Strategies Series*. This series aims to provide teachers, as well as building and district administrators, with an in-depth treatment of research-based instructional strategies that can be used in the classroom to enhance student achievement. Many of the strategies addressed in this series have been covered in other works such as *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001), *Classroom Management That Works* (Marzano, 2003), *The Art and Science of Teaching* (Marzano, 2007), and *Effective Supervision* (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). Although those works devoted a chapter or a part of a chapter to particular strategies, the *Classroom Strategies Series* devotes an entire book to an instructional strategy or set of related strategies.

Clearly, teaching is a skill, and like any skill, it must be practiced. Just as athletes wanting to improve their skills must identify personal strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and engage in focused practice to meet those goals, teachers must also examine their practices, set growth goals, and use focused practice and feedback to achieve those goals. These reflective processes are essential to the development of expertise in teaching.

We begin with a brief but inclusive chapter that reviews the research and theory on reflective practice. Although you might skip this chapter and move right into those that provide recommendations for classroom practice, we strongly encourage you to examine the research and theory as it is the foundation for the entire book. Indeed, a basic purpose of *Becoming a Reflective Teacher* and others in the *Classroom Strategies Series* is to present the most useful instructional strategies based on the strongest research and theory available.

Because research and theory can provide only a general direction for classroom practice, *Becoming a Reflective Teacher* (and each book in the series) goes one step further to translate that research into applications for the classroom. Specifically, this book addresses how teachers can combine a model of effective instruction with goal setting, focused practice, focused feedback, and observations and discussions of teaching to improve their instructional practices.

*Becoming a Reflective Teacher* also offers a unique feature, the compendium, located directly after chapter 6 and before the appendices. The compendium matches over 270 specific classroom strategies and behaviors to the forty-one elements of effective teaching described in chapter 2. After a teacher selects specific elements of effective teaching as goals for improvement (described in chapter 3), he or she must engage in focused practice of strategies related to the goal elements (described in chapter 4). To

facilitate this process, the compendium provides complete but succinct descriptions of multiple strategies and behaviors for each of the forty-one elements of effective teaching. Without needing to consult other books or sources, a teacher can use the compendium to quickly find and learn about strategies that will help focus practice and growth.

### **How to Use This Book**

Educators can use *Becoming a Reflective Teacher* as a self-study text that provides an in-depth understanding of reflective practice. As you progress through the chapters, you will encounter comprehension questions. It is important to complete these questions and compare your answers with those in appendix A (page 179). Such interaction provides a review of the content and allows a thorough examination of your understanding.

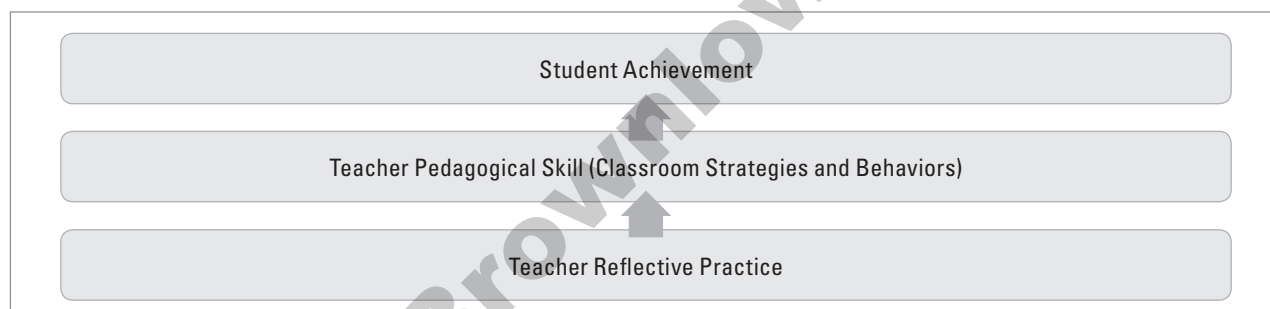
Teams of teachers or entire faculties that wish to examine the topic of reflective practice in depth may also use *Becoming a Reflective Teacher*. When this is the case, teacher teams should answer the questions independently and then compare answers in small- and large-group settings.

As noted, the compendium is designed to be a quick reference tool for teachers and is not intended to be read through from beginning to end. Rather, as you or your team progresses through the chapters of the book, reference those compendium sections that describe strategies related to your growth goals. The strategies in the compendium are designed to be the subject of focused practice and can also add specificity and structure to feedback, observations, and discussions of teaching.

## Chapter 1

# RESEARCH AND THEORY

It is a well-accepted fact among educators that what a teacher does in the classroom has a direct effect on student achievement (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). In other words, a teacher's pedagogical skill in the classroom is causally linked with how well and how much students learn. A corollary is that teacher reflection improves teacher pedagogical skill. This relationship is depicted in figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1: Relationship between student achievement, teacher pedagogical skill, and teacher reflective practice.**

The relationship between classroom strategies and behaviors and student achievement is very straightforward. The causal relationship between reflective practice and pedagogical skill is not as commonly recognized, although the interaction between these elements has been discussed in the research literature for decades.

### A Brief History of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice has been recognized as an important component of professional development for some time. Here we consider five generalizations that characterize the research and theory base for reflective practice:

1. Reflective practice is not a new idea.
2. Reflective practice is widely recognized as important.
3. Reflective practice has been greatly influenced by Schön.

4. Reflective practice is critical to expertise.
5. K–12 education has not fully embraced reflective practice.

### **Reflective Practice Is Not a New Idea**

Reflecting on one's experiences is a foundational idea of many ancient Eastern and Western philosophies. Buddhism emphasizes the central role of reflection in an individual's search for insight and truth. In ancient Greece, Socrates taught his students that "the unexamined life isn't worth living" (as quoted by Plato in the *Apology*). According to Jennifer York-Barr, William Sommers, Gail Ghere, and Jo Montie (2006), a common theme throughout the literature on reflective thinking is seeing reflection as "an active thought process aimed at understanding and subsequent improvement" (p. 4).

Early in the 20th century, John Dewey (1910) defined reflective thought as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 8). He emphasized the role of reflection in examining the beliefs and theories that influence our actions.

### **Reflective Practice Is Widely Recognized as Important**

Reflective practice is highly esteemed and widely used in many professions, especially those that require on-the-spot decisions and adaptations. Such endeavors can be difficult for novices who lack practical experience, and reflective practice can help students of those professions build the experience they need in order to be successful. Filippa Anzalone (2010), discussing the role of reflection in the legal profession, stated that reflection helps students

examine and test beliefs and principles against what is being learned doctrinally. Reflective practice helps students vet their own beliefs and value systems against the mores and norms of the legal profession. Through reflection, they are invited to examine themselves and the profession they are about to enter. (p. 86)

Writing about the nursing profession, Heesook Kim, Laurie Clabo, Patricia Burbank, and Mary Martins (2010) said that reflective practice offers "a way to narrow the gap between theory and practice" and "a way to discover knowledge embedded in practice" (p. 159). In describing the challenges of social work, Marian Murphy, Maria Dempsey, and Carmel Halton (2010) wrote,

There will be times when students and practitioners will be required to acknowledge the limitations of their knowledge and to respond appropriately. In the immediacy of practice situations, reflection facilitates practitioners to draw from their previous practice experience and to apply that which is relevant to new and unfamiliar practice situations. (p. 177)

In these and in many other fields, reflective practice is acknowledged to be a powerful tool for professional development and growth. Reflective practice facilitates the processing and integration of new knowledge and can help students and practitioners make sound decisions when confronted with unfamiliar situations.

### **Reflective Practice Has Been Greatly Influenced by Schön**

In his 1983 book *The Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schön applied the concept of reflection to various professions to demonstrate that not only do researchers generate professional knowledge, but practitioners such as doctors, teachers, architects, and engineers do as well. He maintained that "competent practitioners usually know more than they can say" (p. viii), and he labeled this tacit knowledge "knowing-in-action" (p. 49).



Schön (1987) argued that knowing-in-action was what separated skilled practitioners from unskilled ones, and he advocated that practitioners of all levels use what he referred to as “reflection-in-action” as a way to increase their tacit knowledge, and thus their skill. Schön distinguished between *reflection-in-action* (reflecting and changing our behavior in the midst of an action) and *reflection-on-action* (looking back after the fact). When we reflect-in-action, Schön said, “we can still make a difference to the situation at hand—our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it” (1987, p. 26).

Experimentation also plays an important role in reflective practice, according to Schön (1983). “The perception of something troubling or promising,” he noted, initiates the experimentation and reflection process, which “is terminated by the production of changes one finds on the whole satisfactory, or by the discovery of new features which give the situation new meaning and change the nature of the questions to be explored” (p. 151).

### Reflective Practice Is Critical to Expertise

The research literature on expertise implicitly supports the importance of reflective practice. For centuries, people believed that expertise, or talent, was bestowed on select individuals, and that it was impossible to develop high levels of skill within a given domain unless one had innate talent for that domain. Ancient philosophers believed that extraordinary abilities were gifts from the gods, and experts were simply superior to other humans (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Even in current times, many people believe that certain characteristics (such as intelligence) are fixed and that successful people simply have more of these traits than others, allowing them to perform at higher levels or produce better products than everyone else.

In contrast to this perspective, and as a result of their examination of the research, K. Anders Ericsson and Neil Charness (1994) deduced that “the traditional view of talent, which concludes that successful individuals have special innate abilities and basic capacities, is not consistent with the reviewed evidence” (p. 744). Ericsson and his colleagues Ralf Krampe and Clemens Tesch-Romer (1993) also observed that

the search for stable heritable characteristics that could predict or at least account for the superior performance of eminent individuals has been surprisingly unsuccessful. . . . The conviction in the importance of talent appears to be based on the insufficiency of alternative hypotheses to explain the exceptional nature of expert performance. (p. 365)

These findings led Ericsson and his colleagues (1993) to argue:

The differences between expert performers and normal adults reflect a life-long period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain. . . . We view elite performance as the product of a decade or more of maximal efforts to improve performance in a domain through an optimal distribution of deliberate practice. (p. 400)

The following list presents examples of people whose accomplishments serve to dispel the “innately gifted or talented” myth. These individuals are commonly thought to be successful because of natural talent or innate giftedness, but they actually worked very hard (usually with coaching from their parents or other experts) over a period of years to become experts in their fields:

- **Yo-Yo Ma**—Ma’s father, Hiao-Tsiun, was a music teacher, composer, and conductor, and his mother was a trained opera singer. His older sister studied music from the time she was three, and the Ma family even moved to Paris to pursue Hiao-Tsiun’s dream of creating a children’s orchestra. Surrounded by music from the moment of his birth, Ma heard hundreds

of recordings and live performances of classical music pieces. He desperately wanted to be like his father and sister, and he sought their feedback and criticism about his playing. His father designed teaching techniques specifically for young Ma and allowed him, at age four, to switch from violin to cello (Shenk, 2010).

- **Michelangelo Buonarroti**—Michelangelo grew up in the household of a stone cutter, and he learned to use a hammer and chisel before he learned to read and write. He was apprenticed to the artist Ghirlandaio, for whom he worked long hours each day, sketching, copying, and painting. As a teenager, he worked on frescoes in Florentine churches and was tutored by the master sculptor Bertoldo. Only after eighteen years of practice and work did Michelangelo complete the *Pieta*, which is considered one of his greatest works (Coyle, 2009).
- **The Brontë Sisters**—During their childhood, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne spent hours and hours writing tiny books, most of which contained passages copied from or modeled after magazine articles and books they had read. Although these early attempts were not very good, they developed skill with character, setting, narrative, and plot, and they gradually became better writers. As adults, all three sisters won acclaim for works such as *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Coyle, 2009).
- **Jerry Rice**—Rice played football in high school and college and was successful because of his speed. In the 1985 draft, however, NFL teams didn't think he was very talented, and fifteen teams declined to draft him before the San Francisco 49ers finally signed him. He determined then to work harder than anyone else. After every reception, Rice would sprint to the end zone. He worked out six days a week in the off-season, using a strenuous cardiovascular and strength training regimen that other players tried but couldn't complete because it made them sick. As a result of his hard work, he captured records for total receptions, total touch-down receptions, and total receiving yards, beating previous records by as much as 50 percent (Colvin, 2008).
- **Chris Rock**—Rock's ability to elicit uproarious laughter from audiences caused many people to say he was naturally funny, but he actually spent hours and hours crafting his big shows. He booked warm-up shows with smaller audiences where he tried out new material, evaluated which jokes worked and which didn't, cut unsuccessful bits, and rearranged the good ones until he had a concentrated, finely tuned act, guaranteed to crack up audiences. Only after extensive practice and refinement would he take a show on the road (Colvin, 2008).
- **Warren Buffett**—Buffett's father was a stockbroker during the Great Depression and supported his early interest in investments and finance. Buffett started working in his father's office when he was eleven, but throughout his teens and twenties, he failed both at picking stocks and at trying to time the market. His favorite professor at Columbia Business School refused to give him a job after college. It was only when he opened his first investment business at age twenty-five, after seriously studying business and investing for fourteen years, that he began to experience success (Colvin, 2008).

The concept of *deliberate practice*, identified by Ericsson and his colleagues (1993), flies in the face of what most people think of as practice. Practice is usually thought of as working at a skill until one reaches automaticity with it. For example, when people learn to drive, they first learn the basic rules of driving and how to use the various controls on the car. After they have "practiced" these for a period of time, they begin to show more proficiency and can turn, park, stop, and change lanes smoothly. After more repetition, these actions become automatic, easily executed without much mental effort.