

---

---

# ~ TRAINING SOLUTIONS ~

An e-newsletter supporting effective adult learning practices

January 2007

MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT

Issue #14

---

---

## PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING: ENCOURAGING REFLECTION

Written by Susan Harper-Whalen

ped· a· go· gy (pěd'ə-gō'jē, -gōj'ē) n. Study of teaching methods, including the aims of education and the ways in which such goals may be achieved . . . relies heavily on educational psychology or theories about the way in which learning takes place. ~ Britannica.com

### INTRODUCTION

Motivated to excel in the early childhood profession, many teachers/caregivers have come to view lifelong learning as essential practice and are committed to continuous learning and growth. They have seen that change is one of the consistent elements of the early childhood field. This is evident when research expands existing ideas about quality early childhood practice and training, as well as when children and families present new backgrounds and unfamiliar needs.

Motivated professionals also realize that continued experience provides them with frequent opportunities to review, revise, and expand their knowledge base, value systems, and practices. What these same professionals may not know is how to best take advantage of these growth opportunities.

In spite of the certainty of change and significance of lifelong learning, it is common to see training sessions that never address how to keep on learning! However, many trainers are facing the fact that they cannot share all of the information about a given topic in one session or even during a semester-long course. These trainers are searching for ways to provide opportunities for participants to continue learning as an essential part of the adult education process.

One strategy for lifelong learning that can be taught and practiced in the context of any training is reflection. Reflection is the ability to thoughtfully study

one's own practice. Opportunities for practicing the skill of reflection significantly enhance participant ownership of the learning process. Cultivating individual reflection is a key to raising quality and fostering the embedding of current pedagogy in early childhood practice. Through consistent reflection, practitioners are more likely to take what is being taught in a training session and integrate it into their day-to-day work with young children.

### REFLECTION

Reflection is the conscious and intentional examination of behavior, ideas, and feelings generated by a learning experience. Through reflective practice, early childhood practitioners receive multiple benefits.

- 1) They enhance their ability to think critically about their current teaching practice. This includes thinking more deeply about the teaching practices they use right now as well as developing awareness of existing assumptions and beliefs that may support or hinder the effectiveness of their teaching.
- 2) Reflection offers a mechanism for bringing questions to the forefront and linking these questions with their existing knowledge base to discover personal learning needs.
- 3) Practitioners develop the disposition to take responsibility for their own learning and make changes accord-

ingly. Educators using reflective practice never stagnate in their teaching. They continuously apply what is learned (through ongoing experiences and education) and make informed decisions about what to do next—whether to continue using an existing practice or make changes to achieve better or desired results.

Consistently applied, regular reflection on teaching/learning experiences is a critical skill that drives continued professional growth and self-directed learning. It is important to realize that experience alone is not enough to promote learning and change. At the same time, reflection on an experience is not enough either—the foundation for reflection must include a solid knowledge base. It is the artful merging of pedagogy and knowledge with past and present experiences that allows a learner to separate assumptions from facts and supports genuine learning and change.

While reflective inquiry may set the stage for learning how to be a good teacher, reflection cannot happen without content knowledge.  
~ Dr. Connie Bowman

**Cycle of Reflection** Regular reflection provides opportunities for individuals to engage in the following practices and continue to engage in them through multiple repetitions:

- ~ contemplate what has occurred
- ~ think more deeply about specific teaching principles and pedagogy
- ~ identify and consider existing beliefs, attitudes, and values that influence teaching
- ~ compare and contrast new knowledge and skills with existing ones
- ~ consider what might work better
- ~ try out an alternative
- ~ assess whether the alternative is more effective

While it is often assumed that reflection takes place automatically, it usually does not. Without direct instruction and practice, the initial reflections of learners tend to read like a diary—a chronological description of what occurred that lacks insights into the “how” and “why” events occurred and outcomes (desired and undesired) evolved!

What we do depends on how we feel about what we know. ~ Vicky Pankey

**Process of Reflection** Trainers can take a leadership role in both teaching reflection strategies and promoting the use of reflective practices. To provide learners with a process for reflection, three distinct steps can be introduced: a) revisit the experience; b) identify feelings related to the experience; and c) analyze the experience and its relationship to current and future practice. Let’s take a look at each of these features in more depth.

**A. Revisit the experience** To revisit the experience encourage the learner to think about the reading, videotape, learning activity just completed, or teaching experience that just occurred. Use the following questions to help learners revisit the experience:

- What happened during the activity or experience?
- What ideas did the experience generate for you?
- What existing knowledge base, beliefs, and/or attitudes do you have related to this topic or event?
- How does this new information fit with your past knowledge and experience?

**B. Identify feelings** Emotional reactions to a topic or event play a significant role in what a learner remembers or is even willing to consider. Encourage learners to identify their feelings, both positive and negative, connected with the experience. Give them the opportunity to articulate (for themselves or to a group) what interested them most or what ideas were most important and why. During this step, it is effective to respond personally and emotionally to both the learning content and the teaching/learning process. To help learners identify feelings, you can ask them to respond to the following questions:

- What emotions did you feel during the experience?
- What might be the source(s) of the emotions you felt?
- How would you describe the feelings you have about the ideas generated?
- What might need to change before you are ready to adopt this new idea or practice?

**C. Analyze the experience** Allow learners to evaluate the usefulness of the experience in relationship to their

individual situations. Give them time to consider ways to use the new information or to continue learning about the topic. Encourage the learner to assess next steps and think about how they might want to use elements of the experience in their "real world"—whether they are a teacher/caregiver, program director, or adult educator. To help learners analyze the experience, ask:

What did you learn?

What part of the experience do you want to repeat?

What would you change?

What would you like to learn more about or try now?

Some trainers and educators use writing thoughts and ideas in a journal as a method of participant or student reflection. Opportunity for reflection can also be provided by pausing and allowing learners to simply think about the learning topic and experience at hand.

Whether you provide a written form or time to think, you will have a more positive effect on actual learning when you use a guided reflection process that includes these three features. The following slightly different examples can be used as models to support reflection in your next training session.

#### Reflection A

- Describe the ideas the activity generated for you OR describe what happened:
- Compare and contrast how this new information fits with your past knowledge and experience:
- Describe your feelings about the activity:
- Based on what you have learned from this activity, describe what you will do now:

#### Reflection B

- Describe the ideas this activity generated for you OR describe what happened during the activity:
- Describe your feelings about the activity:
- This activity reminded you of the following personal strengths:
- This activity made you want to try:

#### Reflection C

- The main ideas presented in this reading were OR the activity you completed was:
- The most important thing you learned from this activity was: because:
- You can use this information to:
- You still want to learn more about: because:

**Promoting the Use of Reflection** You can encourage reflection through purposeful questions and activities built into training experiences. Doing this prompts participants to practice reflecting on their own practice and behavior and to use this thinking as a means for changing what they do. Reflection could be used after any learning experience as an individual written assignment, a small group activity, or as questions for a large group to ponder.

Experience + Reflection = Growth

~ George Posner ~

#### CONCLUSION

Typical adult education workshops and classes rightly focus on teaching content—core knowledge and skills related to the topic at hand. An accompanying focus of adult education should be specific training and experiences on learning how to learn so teachers/caregivers develop the dispositions and skills to continue learning.

Reflection involves learners in examining new ideas from the perspective of their current practice, value systems, and knowledge base. Not only does it help the learner develop a greater sense of self-awareness, it also leads to identification of gaps between belief and actual program practice. Teaching and promoting the value of specific strategies for lifelong learning—such as reflection—can be a component of every early childhood training session and course offered. ~

## RESOURCES\*

\* Reflective Practice in Adult Education by Susan Imel (1992). Contents: reflective practice defined and described; the role of reflective practice in adult education; strategies for reflective practice; and references. On the web at [http://eric.ed.gov/ERIC Docs/data/ericdocs2/content\\_storage\\_01/0000000b/80/2a/16/c8.pdf](http://eric.ed.gov/ERIC Docs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/2a/16/c8.pdf).

\* Reflection by Mark K. Smith (1999). What constitutes reflection and what significance does it have for educators? Assesses the contributions of Dewey,

Schön, and Boud et al. On the web at [www.infed.org/biblio/b-reflect.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-reflect.htm).

\* The Inner Voice of the Teacher: The Key to Quality by Naama Zoran (2000). This paper discusses how deliberation and critical reflection contribute to the quality of teachers' work. The paper concludes with an example of how deliberation and critical reflection are used to improve practice in an early childhood program, in which teachers meet every two weeks to discuss and reflect critically on their practice. On the web at <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/zoran.html>.

**TRAINING SOLUTIONS** was established by the Early Childhood Project at Montana State University with monies from the federal Child Care and Development Fund administered through the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Early Childhood Services Bureau. It is designed to support positive and effective training strategies for use in early childhood professional development.

**TRAINING SOLUTIONS** is published six times a year. Individuals on the Montana Early Childhood Trainer Directory receive the e-newsletter as a benefit through the ECP Trainer Listserv. If you are not currently subscribed to the listserv, or are unsure if you are or not, please check your status by e-mailing [ecp@montana.edu](mailto:ecp@montana.edu). **TRAINING SOLUTIONS** is also available at [www.montana.edu/ecp](http://www.montana.edu/ecp). Contents may be reproduced without permission; please include reference.

If you have stories to share about implementing the ideas described in this issue, please address your comments to your training colleagues at [trainerdirectoryexchange@listserv.montana.edu](mailto:trainerdirectoryexchange@listserv.montana.edu). If you have comments about the topic of this newsletter or ideas for topics to address in future issues, please contact:

Sandra Morris, Editor - Training Solutions

Child Care plus+, The University of Montana Rural Institute, 634 Eddy Avenue, Missoula, MT 59812-6696

1-800-235-4122 or (406) 243-2891

[sandra.morris@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:sandra.morris@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)

**EDITORIAL TEAM:** Sandra Morris; Susan Harper-Whalen; Libby Hancock; Sara Leishman