



## CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

*CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.*

---

### Reflective Teaching Practices

Sandra Lee McKay

#### Introduction

Teachers are constantly making decisions:

How should I introduce this topic?

Who should I call on to answer this question?

How can I explain this grammar point?

Reflective teachers think about these decisions and have specific reasons for their choices. In this article we will consider the basis for making classroom decisions and discuss the characteristics and benefits of reflective teaching.

#### Foundations for reflective practices

Often teachers make the decisions they do on the basis of the following factors.

- Classroom experience: Teachers have spent many hours in a classroom both as a student and teacher. This experience forms the basis for particular beliefs they have about the role of the teacher and students and about what makes a good lesson and what makes a poor lesson. Frequently, reflective teachers draw on these beliefs when they make decisions about what to do in their own classrooms.
- General knowledge: In becoming teachers, teachers learned a good deal about the content they teach, about learners and the learning process, about course objectives and design, and about classroom management and interaction. Reflective teachers often base their decisions on what they have learned in their teacher training.
- Personal values: Teachers have particular educational, political, social and moral values based on their own life experiences. These values can influence the decisions they make in their own teaching practices.

#### Characteristics of reflective teachers

Reflective teachers have the following characteristics.

1. Reflective teachers attempt to solve classroom problems.

Generally, teachers' reflections arise from classroom problems they face. Reflective teachers begin by identifying classroom problems. Then they solve a particular problem by gathering information that will help them deal with this problem.

2. Reflective teachers are aware of the beliefs and values they bring to teaching.

As was pointed out earlier, teachers bring to the classroom beliefs they have about teaching and learning based on their own educational experiences, their knowledge of educational practices, and their personal values. Reflective teachers recognize their own values and educational assumptions.

3. Reflective teachers take part in curriculum development and are involved in school change effort.

Reflective teachers realize that what they do is part of a larger educational context. Hence, they participate in overall curriculum planning, and they are involved in school changes that will lead to more effective teaching and learning.

4. Reflective teachers take responsibility for their own professional development.

Reflective teachers realize that becoming a more effective teacher involves continually learning more about the content they teach and about effective pedagogical practices. Because of this, they attend lectures and workshops and read relevant books and materials. They also contribute to the process of professional development by sharing their reflections with other teachers.

### **Benefits of reflective practices**

There are many benefits that arise from reflecting on one's teaching. Some of these benefits are the following.

1. Being a reflective teacher frees teachers from routine behavior.

It is easy to teach in a routine fashion. Following a textbook exactly as the book is designed or teaching a lesson in the same way it was taught in the past does not require much effort or reflection. However, it often results in ineffective lessons since the teacher has done little to modify the lesson for a specific class. Being a reflective teacher frees one from following a routine and can result in more creative and effective lessons.

2. Being a reflective teacher enables teachers to act in a deliberate manner.

When teachers reflect on their teaching they often consider why they do something in a particular way. Thinking about the reasons one has for doing something allows teachers to act in a deliberate manner. Teachers are no longer doing something merely because that is what the textbook says or that is what they have done in the past. Rather teachers are teaching the lesson in a particular way for a specific reason.

3. Being a reflective teacher improves teaching practice.

Being a reflective teacher involves considering various ways of teaching a particular lesson. In deciding on which of these ways to teach the lesson, teachers often consider such factors as the proficiency level of their students, the interests of their students, the goals of the



curriculum, and the teaching time that is available. Considering these factors in deciding how to teach a particular lesson will generally result in more effective classes. There are then many benefits that can arise from trying to be a more reflective teacher.

Please take the time to give us the addresses of anyone else you think might be interested in receiving this newsletter of the CAPE Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk. And don't forget to write us with any comments you might have. Mahalo!

Contributor: Dr. Sandra McKay, Professor of English, San Francisco State University  
Jai-Ho Yoo, CAPE President