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**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**
EDUCATION SERVICE

To: All Headteachers of all schools/units

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cc: Advisers, Officers, Advisory Teachers

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Dear Colleague,

BEING A SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE – THE ROLE OF REFLECTION

Last term I sent you a paper that gave ideas about how to develop a school assembly from a values based perspective. This term I am pleased to send you a paper on the role of **reflection**. So many schools are finding that by introducing **reflection** as a teaching strategy they are creating a classroom climate that encourages pupils to be more responsible for themselves and their work.

I do hope that you will find, like me, the experience of Karen Errington, Windmill First School and Alison Williams, Bartholomew School, to be inspiring. I commend the work to you.

Yours sincerely,

Neil Hawkes
Senior Adviser



Introduction - The importance of stillness and reflection

During the past few years a number of Oxfordshire teachers have been developing an effective teaching technique known as **reflection**. They have found that by using it their teaching has become both more effective and enjoyable. Karen Errington, from Windmill First School in Oxford and Alison Williams from Bartholomew Secondary School at Eynsham have carefully developed **reflection** as a key aspect of their teaching and I am delighted to enclose their articles which I recommend for your serious consideration as you look to develop effective practice in your own school or class. I recognise that many teachers will be using the technique, particularly during assembly times, but what follows I hope will help either, those who want to get started or those who want to refine and develop their practice of **reflection**.

Behind this work is the realisation that it is important to create quiet reflective times in the classroom. A period of silence at the beginning of a lesson followed by a simple reflection, when the children are asked to consider and reflect on the work that they are about to do or have completed, is an excellent technique to develop positive thinking skills. The use of reflection develops the imaginative side of the brain that promotes creativity and problem solving. Periods of stillness help to create a learning-centred atmosphere that allows each child to have the opportunity to achieve success. The classroom's quiet and reflective atmosphere is not something that is imposed but grows out of the expectations and behaviour of the teacher. A more reflective atmosphere can be promoted, especially in more challenging classrooms, by using appropriate music during working periods that helps to develop a peaceful atmosphere. If we are clear in our own minds about the aim of a reflection i.e. to relax, calm and still; to focus the mind, create some mental space and get in touch with our inner-selves; then it is of prime importance to become aware that we as teachers are the primary participant and a role model to the pupils. If they are to be stilled and calmed the teacher must be that first! If they are to be focused the teacher must be totally focused too!

Key skills

Using reflection promotes an atmosphere that raises achievement and encourages quality in all aspects of schoolwork. In order to be effective the teacher needs to be self reflective and confident. She needs to be able to model what she expects in the pupils. (Authenticity is so important here as the pupils will spot inconsistencies. Being real and accepting that none of us is perfect is important to share with the pupils.) The teacher should also be a good listener, should respect pupils and develop positive relationships with each one. Socratic questioning – using questioning to enable pupils to develop their thinking - is also a key

teaching skill that bridges the gap between what a pupil needs to know and then understands.

Developing responsibility for learning

Reflection aids the development of good relationships between pupils and between adults and pupils. It promotes the climate for pupils to take responsibility for their learning. The teacher's responsibility is to focus on developing an attitude of mind in the pupil that encourages them to take responsibility. Pupils, as do staff, need positive affirmation. The ideal atmosphere in the classroom supports the notion that teacher and pupil are joint partners in the learning process. This attitude creates a feeling of equal respect and a relationship of working together.

Teachers are most effective when they are giving pupils appropriate questions to consider that extend their thinking. Sufficient time to reflect on teacher questions before being required to answer is so very important in discursive lessons. If not given, the pupil searches for a quick answer that will satisfy the teacher. If the answer is incorrect, then the teacher is likely to ask another more simple question, and so on, until the pupil answers a question correctly. This practice is of limited value in helping the pupil to develop appropriate reflective thinking skills. Reflection gives the pupil times to practice being aware of their thoughts and through this awareness develop both depth and quality. I commend the remarks of the pupils in Years 4 and 11 who give their views about reflection.

In the following two case studies Karen and Alison share their experience of teaching reflection. I am sure that you will find their experience very compelling and want to have a go! Please remember to start with yourself for the more that you are calm and reflective the more the pupils will be too!

Neil Hawkes
Senior Adviser



Karen Errington, Windmill First School, Oxford

I have no doubt that my effectiveness as a teacher has been greatly enhanced because I have introduced my pupils to periods of quiet reflection. I demand high standards from the pupils and myself and I have found that the techniques that I talk about in this article have been central to achieving them. In this article written for you the teacher I have outlined:

- ?? some of the reasons why I continue to make time for reflection within the school day;
- ?? Year 4 pupil responses to reflection times;
- ?? suggestions for introducing pupils to the reflection process;
- ?? some tips to ensure your success – should you be tempted to try!

Do you recognise this scene?

Sam and Eric having just had a go at each other in the playground were escorted into class by the senior lunch supervisor. Another child, Suzy is standing next to me sobbing because she says that everyone hates her. Initially the afternoon did not look promising!

Emotions were spiralling out of control and I needed to restore calm and a sense of purpose. If I failed in this I knew that the afternoon would neither be productive or pleasant. At this point I asked the pupils to sit; either close their eyes or focus on a spot on the floor and be very still. I quietly explained that I wanted to give everyone the opportunity to calm down and make the right choices, as I felt some children were about to make choices that may make them feel miserable. Within minutes, the atmosphere of the class had changed from one of tension and diversity to one of calm and unity.

I led the class in a reflection, creating through my words a positive, calm atmosphere in the room. Between pauses I posed questions for the children ... 'Think of a pleasant moment at playtime – either from today or last week. Why did it feel good? What did you do to make it enjoyable? Was today's play as good? Why? If not, how could you have acted differently?'

I finished the reflection on a positive note asking the pupils to feel the joy of love, friendship from another child, parent or adult. After a concluding moment of stillness the children opened their eyes – now more relaxed, focussed and in control of their emotions, ready to concentrate on their afternoon lessons.

This process took about two to three minutes and had a dramatic impact upon the class. This quiet time offered the children a chance to enter their inner worlds and to explore their actions and feelings. Without the external pressure of others judging them, they are more likely to be honest with themselves. This 'time out' gives the children an opportunity to learn about themselves, gain control over their emotions and refocus their thoughts in a positive way.

The use of reflection at these times has particularly made my role as a teacher easier. However, I should make clear at this point that my class have worked hard to develop the skill of reflection - it needs to be built up slowly but is a technique worth developing.

I also use silent sitting to enable pupils to become more involved in a lesson. For example before leading a discussion on caring for animals I asked each child to sit still and to close their eyes and to 'see' their favourite animal being happy ... eating ... moving freely ... and to consider what made it so unique. The children then opened their eyes and listened to a story of an adult mistreating a wild animal. When the story finished I asked each child to consider why the adult hurt the animal. Did he not realise animals feel pain, and can enjoy life?

Often during class discussions pupils are expected to make instant responses with little thinking time allowed. Careful delivery of questions giving the pupils space and time to reach deeper answers is another important feature of reflection.

Time for reflection can further encourage the development of the pupils' awareness of themselves and others, and the role they play in making positive relationships. For example, after a story of two giants losing their temper I asked the pupils to reflect on whether the giants' actions were justified. I then extended their thinking by asking the pupils to consider a time when they lost their temper and whether their actions were reasonable and helped the situation.

Reflection times also provide an excellent forum for raising pupils' self-esteem and helping pupils to recognise positive attributes in each other. I praise and thank the class for their enthusiasm and efforts and make anonymous references to pupils and praising and thanking them too. Whilst doing this fleeting smiles cross faces and I perhaps receive the odd look in my direction. Reflection time in this way enables me to focus on and acknowledge class and individual efforts.

I also use reflection to focus the pupils' minds on key learning objectives either at the start or end of a lesson. When the pupils feel relaxed and calm, they are more likely to concentrate on the lesson and be open to learning.

Lastly, I believe reflection is beneficial for its own sake. During each day pupils and adults are bombarded with thousands of messages from the outside and thousands of their own thoughts from the inside! We are told a healthy lifestyle is all about 'balance', and yet in our busy lives there is little to redress the fast pace, and potentially high stress levels that we face. I believe a few minutes silent sitting helps to restore a small amount of peace to balance all our lives. This process reinforces my view that true happiness comes from within and is not synonymous with buying entertainment!

Periods of reflection enable me to return to the fundamental reason I became an educator, that of making a difference to someone's life, and to the education of character.

I would highly recommend it – for both your pupils and yourself!



Explain carefully

1. What will happen? Tell pupils reflection will involve:

1-2 minutes of listening and paying attention to their thoughts and feelings. Sitting still and relaxed. (Acknowledge reflection is challenging and needs practice.)

2. What you expect from pupils? Tell pupils you want them to:

- privately consider the questions or statements posed;
- be honest and open with themselves – they won't be made to share their reflection thoughts;
- take this activity seriously and if they are finding it difficult, not to disturb anyone else.

3. Why reflection is worth doing

- Makes explicit the link between a pupil's state of mind and mental/physical performance.
- Makes explicit the link between self-discipline and enhanced achievement – e.g. footballers, athletes, actors, politicians.
- Silent sitting enables individuals to quieten their mind and body and be peaceful. From this state individuals can more ably consider issues and develop their inner thoughts.

4. How to sit

- Ask children to face you, with back and head straight but relaxed (do not face children opposite each other);
- explain how holding left hand in right hand and placing both in lap 'magically' helps still the rest of the body;
- ask pupils to close eyes or focus on a spot on the floor;
- tell pupils you will watch and see how well they manage the reflection. (Explain that when they have mastered the art of reflection you will participate too.)

5. Answer pupil questions

Ask pupils if there are any questions. When questions are answered begin your reflection.

My key reasons for using reflection times include:

1. Helping to create balance in pupils' lives.
2. Giving the pupils a technique that will help them to be calm and to be focussed
3. Increasing the personal involvement in a lesson by developing empathy and by jointly exploring ideas.
4. Giving opportunities to reflect deeply whilst searching for more meaningful answers.
5. Encouraging self-awareness and understanding of others.
6. Focussing on the main learning objectives either at the start or end of a lesson.
7. Developing pupils' self-esteem and self-discipline.
8. Developing pupils' emotional intelligence and thereby raising achievement and standards.
9. Giving the teacher the peace of mind that the whole child is being developed and educated i.e. body, mind and spirit.
10. To return the joy to teaching because it becomes easier as the pupils become more internally motivated.

This is what my Year 4 pupils say about reflection times:

~~✍~~ It is a time just to be calm and relaxed.

~~✍~~ It gives your brain time to think and you don't have everyone butting in all the time.






~~✍~~ I feel like a peaceful river.

~~✍~~ It's a time for you.

~~✍~~ I felt silly to start with but now I'm used to it. I like it, I don't know why!




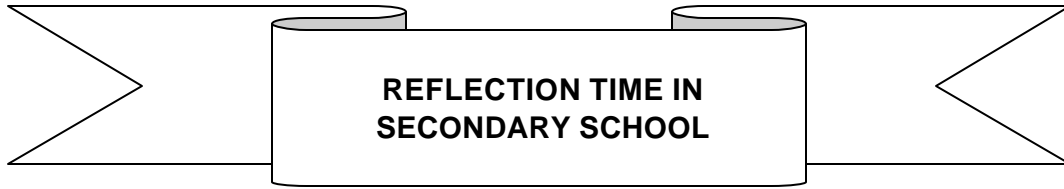
Troubleshooting

-  If some pupils laugh – calmly and quietly ask all the pupils to open their eyes and enquire, "Why do you think some people are finding this difficult?" Acknowledge it may seem strange sitting like this but that it will become easier with practice. Invite those pupils to try again or sit out. (I have only ever had one pupil sit out and he joined in again soon.)
-  Start with short reflections (1 minute) and gradually build up to longer sessions (5 minutes).
-  With challenging classes stickers could be given to several individuals for effort/involvement in reflection.
-  Creating the right atmosphere – dimming classroom lights and lighting a candle can help make reflection time feel special. Music can also help create a calm and reflective mood.
-  You, as teacher need to model how to sit and show you take the activity seriously through tone of voice and well-planned reflections. Never attempt to do anything else during a reflection – other than model the behaviour you require.



At the end thank pupils for their participation and efforts

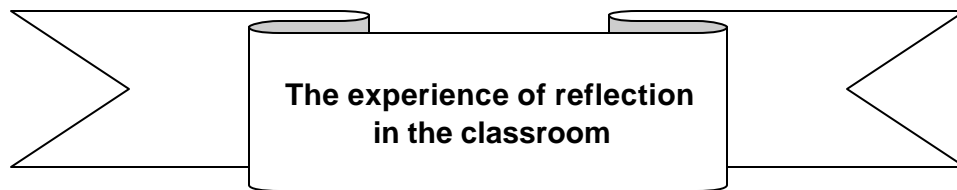
-  At the close of a session try dismissing pupils individually and in silence by a very subtle eye movement. This encourages pupils to have direct eye contact with you and it ensures you acknowledge each child at least once a day!



REFLECTION TIME IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Alison Williams, Bartholomew School, Eynsham

One of the tasks I set myself over the last year was to use ideas used in the primary classroom in secondary school. I have visited seven primary schools in the Oxford area, and observed behaviour and classroom activities similar to those described by Karen Errington. Among these were **values** lessons, whole class work in literacy and numeracy, assemblies and **circle time**. In transferring some of the quiet, listening activities of these primary schools, I have developed a secondary style reflective activity called **focus time**. This is a description of how it happens.



The experience of reflection in the classroom

The students are coming up the stairs to my room. It is a year 11 non-exam class. I have taught year 7 and 9 already today, and over lunch it will be homework detentions and after that year 11 again. I hear murmurs of *'hello miss'*, and a few eyes meet mine at the door.

I am tired and feel I need strength to face this bubbling and energetic group. I may have to be very firm, and I know I can't win them all, but I want to get the best out of them and they have the best out of me.

Inside the room, I am faced with a choice. Before we start, do I fulfil the school uniform policy, and nag them about shirts, ties and baseball caps? Do I get into the argument of *coats off 'Miss, but it's cold in here'.... 'Everyone, I said....'* Do I give out books and see the eyes hunt for the grade - ignoring the helpful comment I wrote? Will I get into the wearisome round of *'everyone stop talking'*, and have to work very hard to draw them into the world of thought, without getting irritated and frustrated myself?

There is another way.

Instead, I try **this** start to my lesson.

Before bringing the students into the room, I put on music. I am using a CD called *Time for Peace*. Enya works well, as do *Buddhist* and *Gregorian* chants. The tables are empty. They will find no distraction when they come in. On the board I may have written a values word, for example, 'respect', 'tolerance'; or a statement: 'It is human to ask questions.'

I take a deep breath and open the door.

As they enter, I try to meet everyone's eyes, mentioning many by name, and using words like *'Welcome, come in and get comfortable.'* As the pupils sit down, I move around the room and talk quietly to each, over their chatter, asking them again to make themselves comfortable and to settle down. The chatter turns to *'What's that noise? – We thought you had a choir in the room, Miss!'*

I will not tackle uniform and hats yet. I will not give them the books yet. Gradually, the chatter stops and the music quietly dominates. I return to the front, and sit down.

My first words are, as I gaze around the students, *'It's good to see you all'*.

I ask the class to try to get as comfortable in the chairs as they can, and to listen to the music. I ask a pupil to put a *focus time* label on the door. This asks visitors to wait for 2 or 3 minutes, as we are having a quiet time. I talk so they can hear me; if necessary the music is turned down a little. I tell them I want them to feel relaxed - despite the rushed and busy day they have had. I tell them that our lesson is a time to share ideas, to reflect, and to think about life. I may, at this point, refer briefly to the topic we are going to cover.

I then encourage them to relax their breathing by asking them (without noise) to breathe in for a count of four and out for four, and we all listen to the music for 30 seconds or so.

The room becomes very calm. I want each pupil to feel self-esteem, so I begin talking quietly, over the music, reminding them of the good things we have done in previous lessons. I point out their skills and their strengths; for example, the way they feel happy to speak and share, the way they will try to find different points of view. I encourage them to think of their contribution as positive - even behaviour like *calling out* in discussions is positive, because it reflects their energy and interest.

Then I talk in more detail about the lesson and the skills they are going to use. I encourage them to think about how they are going to change each other's lives by the ideas they will talk about, and the way they will be thinking. This time of reflection is creating a positive feeling and cohesive mood.

I invite them to use the *focus time* remaining minute to relax and listen to the music, before we energise into the lesson.

At this point, I either let them sit and listen to the music, or start quietly to give out books and lesson equipment. The murmur of chat begins to grow but I do not have to force my

presence on it, I am in charge. Where possible I do not argue, and do not let my voice say things in a negative way.

Now I can begin the routine of register, and uniform. The *focus time* label is removed. The mood has altered subtly. They are tuned in, I am relaxed, and whatever else may happen, we have had a positive start to the lesson. The value of the individual, and the strengths of the group have been the focus of the first five minutes.

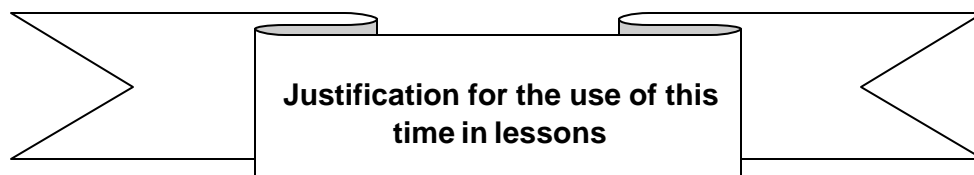
This is a frequent feature of my classroom in all secondary ages, years 7-13. I do this activity with some classes more than others. I have used pasta shapes or dried beans, or glittery stars, or shells and pebbles to help them with the focus. Thinking about a good thing in your life and about your achievements is easier when you have an object to link it to.

I have used reflection activities to draw out the *targets* of a lesson. This involves explaining in some detail the work the pupils will do, during this quiet time, and then asking pupils to think of helpful targets for the lesson. I ask for volunteers to write the suggestions on the flipchart; they may nominate a friend to do that for them. The targets stay visible for the whole lesson. Suggestions like '*We will try to help each other*' or '*Listen to what everyone says*' are frequently suggested, but valuable because they have chosen them, not me.

I have also used creative visualisation, imagination and empathy or use of poetry or song to create a thinking space for the students in the classroom.

Key reasons for using reflection and focus time

- ?? It is an opportunity to focus the pupils, and calm them ready for study
- ?? It is a time to enhance pupil self-esteem, and help them to feel positive about each other
- ?? It is an opportunity to consider the targets and skills which will be used in the lesson – to set the scene for the lesson
- ?? It encourages pupils to spend time with their thoughts and to acknowledge the strengths they have
- ?? If used as a closing activity, it encourages recognition of the learning that has taken place.



Justification for the use of this time in lessons

In secondary school, when time is under pressure with exam results and academic achievement, it is not surprising that this activity might be seen as a waste of time. In my experience, it has both helped me have a better attitude in my classroom, a more positive working atmosphere and a more focused lesson with all ages of students. It can be five minutes or even ten if the pupils get very caught up in the target setting, but the time is well spent because they are tuned into the work, instead of coming to it cold. Thus, it is not a waste of time – in fact the opposite.

What year 11 have said about reflection and *Focus Time*

- ?? I think that *focus time* is a good idea. It relaxes everyone and allows you to forget everything else around you. It makes you think *this is now my lesson and I am free to experiment with ideas, and form my own opinion on the world around me.*
- ?? *Focus time* is good because it lets you relax which doesn't really happen in school. Especially at the end of the day, it helps you to reflect on what has happened.
- ?? It is a good idea. It may not have a deep meaning for me and the music isn't to my personal taste; however, it gives us a few minutes of rest and clear thought, outside the hustle and bustle of the school day... nice.
- ?? I think that *focus time* is good because it helps us to concentrate better.
- ?? I think that music used in this way is very worthwhile and should be used throughout the school in all classes. I wish I had had something like this in the lower years.

There are many **values** that I aim to refer to with the classes. Values are used in primary schools and often referred to in assembly, such as *honesty, tolerance, caring, and trust*. In the past they have not have much of a focus in secondary schools, mostly because teachers are embarrassed about using such language in secondary classrooms. As curriculum continuity is becoming so important between primary and secondary schools in areas such as literacy and numeracy so it is in the social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects. The practice I use builds on the experience that the pupils have had in their primary school and continues to develop it. I use the following concepts in the reflection time of my classes.

- ~~✍~~ Self esteem / personal confidence
- ~~✍~~ Listening and understanding
- ~~✍~~ Self respect
- ~~✍~~ Respect for other's views
- ~~✍~~ Desire to help others
- ~~✍~~ Giving to others
- ~~✍~~ Importance of thinking and learning new ideas
- ~~✍~~ Keeping an open mind
- ~~✍~~ Being a role model to younger pupils

Focus time has made my teaching more enjoyable and effective. I believe that the students gain much more from my lessons because they feel that they are fully participating in them and are being taken seriously as people. Acknowledging the importance of their inner personal worlds has led to a subtle change in our relationship that has meant that behaviour is mutually respectful. I thoroughly recommend the development of focus time.

The role of reflection is the second paper in a series about being a school of excellence. The first was about the role of the school assembly. Further copies of both papers may be attained by contacting Anne Marks at AIS on 01865 428117.