



Why You Should Never Use Reflection Forms

By Michael Linsin

Reflection forms have been around forever.

And at first glance, they appear to be a good idea. Dig a little deeper, though, and they tell a different story.

The way they work is that when a student is sent to time-out, they're handed a form to fill out.

The form consists of a few questions regarding their misbehavior – what they did, why they did it, and what they could have done differently.

The theory is that if they're prompted to reflect on their misbehavior, then they'll learn from their mistakes and be less prone to misbehave in the future.

Again, it sounds good. It seems to make sense. But the theory doesn't match reality.

You see, when you hand a reflection form to a student, four things are likely to happen.

1. They'll tell you what you want to hear.

Most students see reflection forms as just another consequence, a hoop to jump through with the least amount of hassle. So with little thought, they'll scribble down what they think you want to hear. No reflection required.

2. They'll justify for their misbehavior.

Other students will use the form as an opportunity to explain away their misbehavior. They'll point the finger elsewhere. [They'll argue](#) why their actions were justified. They'll recast themselves as victims, while taking no responsibility whatsoever.

3. They'll refuse to fill it out.

When you force students to explain themselves – either verbally or through a reflection form – you either get one of the two outcomes above or they just won't do anything. They'll sit and stew in anger at you and defiantly refuse to fill it out.

4. They'll waste learning time.

Reflection forms take students away from their academic responsibilities. They give them a free pass not to do their work or [pay attention](#). Thus requiring you to check their progress, plead for them to finish, and get them up to speed on what they missed.

How To Encourage True Self-Reflection

It's good for students to reflect on their misbehavior. It's good for them to ponder where they went wrong and how they could have handled themselves better.

But reflection forms are the wrong way to go about it. In fact, they all but guarantee your students *won't* reflect on their misbehavior.

Because self-reflection can never be forced.

It has to happen naturally. And it will as long as you step aside and allow [your classroom management plan](#) to do its job.

When a student breaks a rule, your only role is to tell them what rule was broken and what the consequence will be.

As soon as you tell them what to think or how to feel, as soon as you begin questioning or forcing assurances, as soon as you hand them a reflection form to fill out . . .

You interfere with true self-reflection.

So instead of taking a hard look at themselves, they become defensive and argumentative. They become angry and resentful.

They become resigned to tell you what you want to hear so they can get on with their day.

True self-reflection is the byproduct of well-defined rules and consequences, every-single-time consistency, and a teacher that students trust.

Left alone with their thoughts, and no one to blame but themselves, your students will *naturally* examine and contemplate their mistakes. They'll search their heart. They'll take responsibility.

They'll come through the experience humbled yet determined not to let it happen again.

PS - *The Smart Principal's Recess Behavior Plan* will be available for download [on the website](#) next Tuesday. (See the menu bar at the top of the page.)

I hope you'll check it out or pass the link along to your school principal.

-Michael