

Mindfulness and Transformation: Considerations for Teacher Practice

by Linda Rappel

Summary: This article explores how a reflective practice can be established through mindfulness, reflexivity, and a reflective approach to instruction. Proposing mindfulness as a way to facilitate transformation through reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), this text explains how reflection on action and experience is a process that can impact and inform educational practice.

Keywords: reflective practice, mindfulness, reflexivity, reflective approach, reflection on action, reflection in action

According to Schussler (2020), mindfulness is awareness of the external environment and the ways in which information is processed individually. In contrast to mindless action that leads to routine and unconscious behaviors, careful attention to events that occur externally and internally allows for increased individual awareness and the ability to solve problems through reasoning and intuition (Mezirow, 2012; Schussler, 2020). At its core, mindfulness is connected to acting with intention, whether it be for self-care purposes or to improve educator practice (Schussler, 2020). This article outlines the role of mindfulness in informing educator practice and achieving transformation through reflection on experience and reflexivity.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice encourages professional growth through developing critical thought, relying on educator qualities of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness (Dewey, 1933). In today's terms, reflective practice represents a method of inquiry that sheds light on educational activities in order to discover creative solutions to educational dilemmas (Brookfield, 2017; Lyle, 2017). Brookfield suggested that reflection allows educators to make connections between tacit and explicit knowledge to gain insight into actions, recognize purpose, and generate a greater awareness of the impact educators have within the learning environment. Thorsen and DeVore (2013) highlighted how reflective practice enhances teacher practice through assessing elements of instruction and developing a mindful attitude about educational contexts and activities.

Building a reflective educator practice based on mindfulness can take two forms: through reflecting on experience and developing reflexivity. Each of these processes

contributes to reflective practice in different ways. Developing a reflective sense encourages educators to make sense of information in order to create a mindful attitude, while reflexivity allows educators to make decisions based on active critical awareness (Freda & Esposito, 2015; Schussler, 2020).

Reflection on experience is an aspect of reflective practice known as “reflection-on-action” (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). Reflection-on-action allows educators to consider how improvements can be made to educator practice once an activity has taken place and which changes can be made moving forward (Farrell, 2012). Reflection-on-action is similar to reviewing an assignment once comments have been made and identifying what could be improved for next time. Thinking critically about past experiences and applying that knowledge to practice, educators are able to improve approaches to educational practice through determining what might better suit a particular context or ways to deal with individual events that occur in educational situations (Brookfield, 2017).

An extension of reflecting-on-action, “reflection-in-action” is linked to reflexivity and based on actions that are formed as a result of mindful attention to present activity (Schön, 1983). Reflexivity is a way for formed beliefs based on previous experiences to come to the forefront of interaction and connect to everyday action and activities (Farrell, 2012). Returning to the assignment analogy, the purpose of reflexivity is to flag errors before making the final submission, relying on an active critical awareness to pinpoint areas of weaknesses or misinformation. This relates to educator practice in that the key to developing a reflexive practice is to act on intentional awareness (mindfulness) rather than relying on unassessed, unconscious beliefs to respond to issues that arise through educational practice.

Mindfulness as Reflecting on Experience

Reflecting on experience brings previous experiences into situational contexts, providing a basis for evaluating presuppositions, developing awareness, considering new perspectives and transforming ways of thinking (Mezirow, 2012). Reflection allows individuals to: (1) think logically about events, (2) communicate through giving and receiving feedback, (3) reframe ideas, and (4) revise action (Thoresen & Devore, 2013). Mindfulness and reflection-on-action invokes more than a simple review of action; it is a way of engaging independently and collectively to discover solutions to problems and situations that arise in professional practice (Nager, 2017). In effect, the goal of reflection on experience is to make personal connections from theory to practice through critical thinking (Brookfield, 2017).

Critical reflection lays the foundation for transformation by recognizing how habits of mind and unevaluated assumptions may interfere with creative thought and insightful decision making (Mezirow, 2012). Mezirow outlined how critical reflection can be achieved through cognitive and intuitive reasoning that evaluates content (questioning action), process (questioning procedure),

and premise (questioning motives). This can be connected to Brookfield’s (2017) outline of reflective practice through reviewing prescriptive assumptions, acknowledging power structures that exist in learning environments, recognizing learner identity and values, and taking informed action. These points are outlined in Table 1.

Mindfulness as Reflexivity

Schussler (2020) defined mindfulness as “a way of being” that encompasses an intentional focus on becoming aware of self, context, and others (p. 651). In essence, mindful reflexivity is the result of educator awareness and purposeful action (Schussler, 2020). Reflection-in-action recognizes that everyday educational decisions are made on the basis of educator positionality (personality, background, values, bias) in conjunction with organizational expectations and the use of educational strategies appropriate to the given context of instruction (Lyle, 2017).

Mindful awareness plays a part in reflexivity by invoking knowledge of self in connection with events that emerge in the moment (Schussler, 2020). Because reflexive ability is based on developing an intuitive sense through habitual attention to perception and awareness, it is difficult to identify and specifically articulate (Freda & Esposito,

Action	Critical Reflection (Mezirow)	Reflective Practice (Brookfield)
A student fails to turn in the assignment for undisclosed reasons. The teacher makes conclusions about the student’s ability and/or level of motivation that may or may not be conclusive or accurate.	Questioning action The teacher inquires into the reasons for a failed action or missed communication.	Questioning assumptions (about classroom activities)
From in-class discussions, the teacher recognizes that the student has many outside responsibilities and finds it difficult to keep up with the course load.	Questioning procedure The teacher questions the rationale of classroom standards and procedures.	Acknowledging power structures (that influence classroom activities)
The teacher evaluates the situation and decides not to deduct for late submission at this time but will evaluate the situation and closely monitor the student's motivation, progress, and activity.	Questioning motives The teacher considers alternative ways of resolving issues that recognize specific positions of learners and course context.	Recognizing learner identity and taking informed action (specific to the learner)

Table 1: Example of critical reflection and reflective practice

2015). Reflexivity can occur as thoughts that come up suddenly and disappear just as quickly. These thoughts represent the quiet, helpful prompts received through engagement with others, such as recognition of educator tendency towards impatience and the need, in a particular situation, to wait another moment before moving on to the next student to answer a question. Recognizing small but important details as part of daily interaction can enhance teacher practice and invoke a greater understanding of self and others, providing a segue to awareness and transformation based on interpretation of experience. Ignoring points of awareness can result in missed insight and lost opportunities to transform perspectives.

Transformation: Transferring Knowledge to Action

Theories of transformation reinforce Mezirow's (2012) claim that information alone is not sufficient to change attitudes, behaviors, or theories: thought must be accompanied by action. According to Brookfield (2017), developing reflective attitudes involves a desire to form insightful assessments about behaviors and situations and to act on those assessments. Basing action on informed views prevents a ritualized view of education from guiding practice and offers a way of avoiding unconscious behaviors

through intentional awareness (Schussler, 2020).

Acting on critical evaluation paves the way to a transformational educational practice grounded in the consideration of current realities rather than adhering to routine activity (Farrell, 2012). Brookfield (2017) noted how developing a reflective practice opens educators up to uncertainty and unpredictability and suggested that courage is needed for those who would like to take up this endeavor. Still, the benefits of applying insight gained from intuitive and reflective processes far outweigh the drawbacks educators face as they begin to see beyond conventionality to discover novel and insightful ways of acting and solving problems.

Dewey's (1933) foundation of reflective inquiry provides a basis for developing a reflective practice, reminding educators of the importance of applying theory consciously to practice in ways that are active, persistent and careful in order to invoke awareness of self, instructional situations and the larger social context. Schön's (1983) outline of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action offer two ways of establishing awareness through mindful attitudes and promoting a reflective practice. Using a mindful process of reflection on self, others, and educational context, reflective practice provides valuable opportunities for educator growth and transformation.

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Exploring WIDA’s Argue Language Function: Ideas for the Classroom

by Beth Dillard and Jennifer Green

Summary: This article takes a closer look at what WIDA calls Key Language Uses. The focus is specifically on how students can establish perspective through passive voice and language choice when engaging in the key language use of arguing.

Keywords: WIDA, functional language, argument, passive voice

In the [Winter 2021 issue of WAESOL Educator](#), Shafer Willer et al. introduced us to the WIDA 2020 English Language Development Standards Framework, and illustrated points of articulation between ELPA21 and WIDA. In this article we take a closer look at what WIDA calls *Key Language Uses*. We focus specifically on how students can establish *perspective* through passive voice and language choice when engaging in the key language use of *arguing*.

What Is a Functional Model of Language?

WIDA compares language to a toolbox “that we use to communicate, to develop relationships, and to act upon the world. Like any good toolbox, the language toolbox contains various tools that function for different needs” (WIDA, p. 20). This conception of language as a set of meaning-making resources draws on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). SFL conceives of every moment of language being composed broadly of three key variables:

- Topic
- Power dynamics (between speaker/writer and audience)
- Channel (where the “text” falls along the continuum of spoken-like to written-like)

Particular combinations of these three variables solidify into genres, which are “goal-oriented social practices that have evolved in our culture to enable us to get things done” (Derewianka & Jones, 2016, p. 7). Think, for example, of how the genres of a fairy tale, lab report, and newspaper article vary in topic, audience, and format.

Language Use: Argue

In creating the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition, WIDA researchers examined language use and expectations in K-12 US schooling. They identified four

genre families used widely in schools: *narrate*, *inform*, *explain*, and *argue*. In this article we focus on *argue*, or what others refer to as persuasive writing/speaking.

When practicing the language use of ‘arguing’, students at all grade levels are asked to use the following language functions: introduce the topic, select relevant information, and show relationships between claims and evidence. Starting in fourth grade, students are also expected to establish perspective.

At each grade band, and for each language function, WIDA provides concrete examples of the types of language features used to accomplish each function. In the remainder of this article, we focus on the language function of establishing perspective by examining some of the language features that accomplish the function, as well as ways you might enact these in the classroom.

Beginning at Grade 4, students constructing social studies arguments need to establish perspective through the following language resources:

- passive vs. active voice to emphasize the action vs. the doer(s) of the action
- “objective or emotive language to appeal to logic or feelings”
- “evaluative verbs, adverbs, and adjectives” (WIDA, 2020, p. 128)

Establishing Perspective Through Purposeful Use of Passive and Active Voice

Making conscious choices about when to use passive versus active voice allows an author or speaker to accomplish important rhetorical purposes. For example, passive voice focuses attention on the topic—or theme¹—itself, rather than the doer of the action. Active voice accomplishes the opposite goal, naming and calling attention to the doer, or agent. Authors often leave the agent entirely out of passive

sentences because it is already known by the audience (even in a general sense), is not relevant, or in order to purposefully obscure responsibility. Take the example below in Table 1, where passive voice minimizes or even erases the violent actions of colonists.

Passive voice	Indigenous land was stolen.
Passive voice (agent named)	Indigenous land was stolen by colonists.
Active voice	Colonists stole indigenous land.

Table 1: Example sentence in passive and active voice

In order for students to use passive voice effectively, they need to understand both how it appears in mentor texts and what the grammatical structure is. One activity that can help students recognize passive voice is the Passive Sentence Scramble activity. This task is highly kinesthetic and visual as students become the words in a sentence, and together transform active sentences into passive ones. To see how it works, take this sentence: *Someone stole my bicycle*.

Materials:

- Two silly hats
- A pair of sunglasses, “[mustache on a stick](#)”, and/or [a disguise](#)
- Several sample sentences in active construction, with each noun group and verb written large on a separate 8.5” x 11” card

Step 1: For our sample sentence, three students stand in the front of the room. One student, with a hat labeled *doer/agent* holds a card with someone written on it. Another student holds the word *stole*, and a third student, with another hat labeled *done-to/theme* holds a card with *my bicycle* on it. Have them stand in the order of

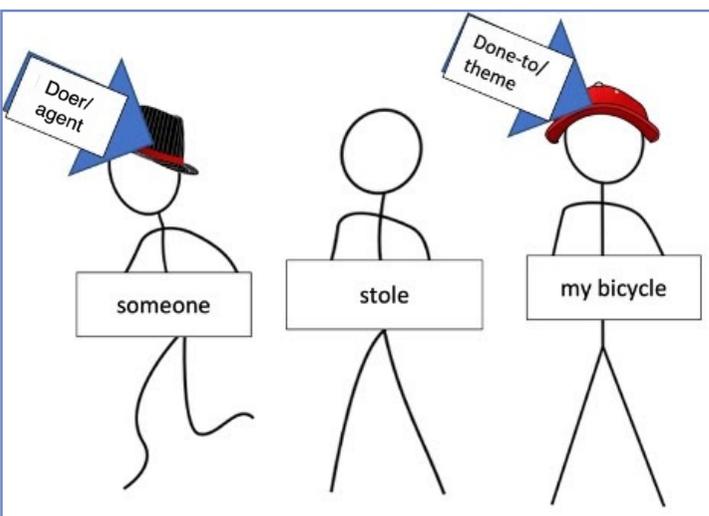


Figure 1: Illustration of sample sentence in original configuration

the sentence, *someone stole my bicycle*, as in Figure 1.

Step 2: Explain that you want to change the sentence to emphasize that your bicycle is gone, not who did the stealing. Ask, “How can we make that happen?” Engage the rest of the class in giving directions to the students in front. The *my bicycle* person should move to the start of the clause, continuing to wear the *done-to/theme* hat since the role of *my bicycle* has not changed. The same is true for someone. Same hat, same role, new location. The sentence should now read: *My bicycle stole someone*, as in Figure 2.

Step 3: Next, guide students to see that changing word order isn’t enough; the word *by* needs to be added to someone so that we know someone is still the agent (even though they’ve moved to the end of the sentence!) Use a small white board to write the needed new word and have students hold it up. The sentence will read: *My bicycle stole by someone* (see Figure 3).

Step 4: Have students read the sentence out loud, calling students’ attention to the verb. The active voice was in the simple past (*stole*), so the passive voice also needs to be in the simple past tense. A *be* verb is needed in the simple past (*was*), and the main verb must change into the past participle form (*stolen*) to make *My bicycle was stolen by someone* (see Figure 4). For young students, we don’t recommend using these technical grammatical terms to explicitly explain the grammar; rather, use this and other similar activities to give students ample exposure to the language.

Step 5: Finally, have the student who is holding *by someone* step away from the sentence and put on a disguise to show how the *doer/agent* can be purposefully hidden. Have students compare and discuss the change between the sentence in Figure 4 with the newly created: *My bicycle was stolen* as you see in Figure 5. You can also ask students to do this activity in reverse—from passive voice to active voice.

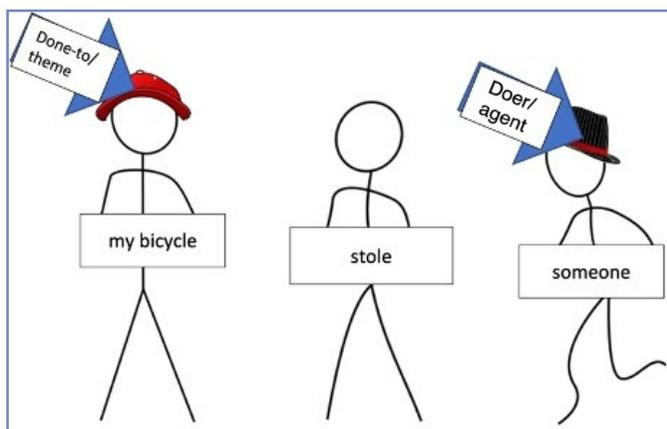


Figure 2: Illustration of sample sentence after passive inversion

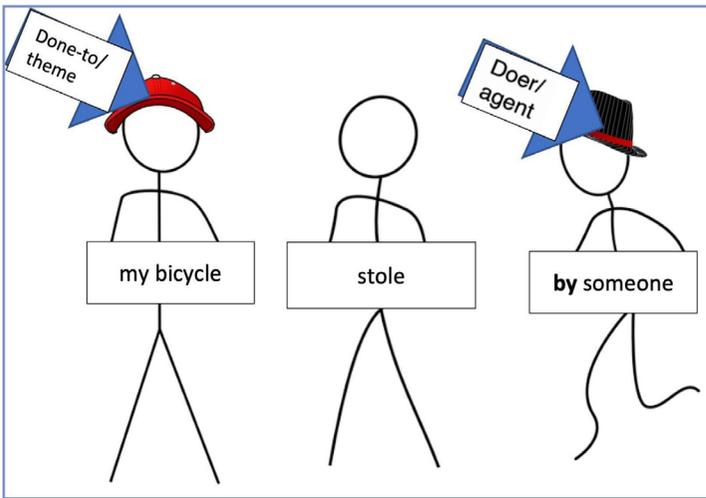


Figure 3: Illustration of sample sentence after addition of “by”

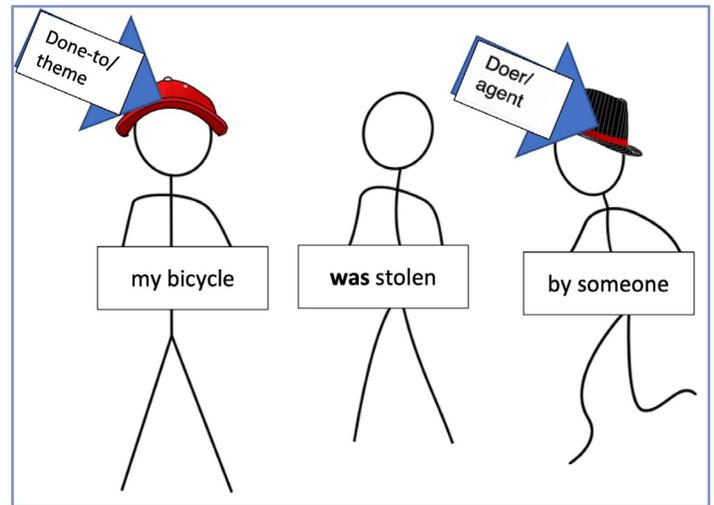


Figure 4: Illustration of sample sentence after addition of be verb

Language to Evaluate, Be Objective, or Express Emotion

Let’s focus now on the use of “evaluative verbs, adverbs, and adjectives” and “objective or emotive language to appeal to logic or feelings” (WIDA, 2020, p. 128). What do we mean by evaluative? According to Humphrey et al. (2012), as we express positive (e.g., smart, love, strong) and negative (e.g., unbalanced, a mess, useless) attitudes toward people, items, and experiences, we can also strengthen and weaken the force of those attitudes (e.g., clutter, a mess, a disaster).

A *word cline activity* allows students to engage with evaluative language as they explore the deeper meaning of words. An example of a cline of verbs related to *walking* or *moving* might be *stroll, walk, jog, run, sprint*. Here is how you can structure this exploration with your students.

Materials:

- Index cards

Step 1: If students are arguing against something that makes them angry, together brainstorm related words, such as *irate, furious, angry, annoyed, frustrated, upset, irritated, mad*.

Step 2: In small groups, have students write each word on a separate index card to create a set.

Step 3: Have students discuss the meanings as they order the words from *volume down* to *volume up*. For example, we might place them in the following order: *annoyed, frustrated, upset, irritated, angry, mad, furious, irate*. Another group might adopt a different order. There isn’t a correct answer for this task; in fact, conversations are better when students disagree.

Step 4: Have each group order their cards on the board (see Figure 6). Have the class compare and discuss the different placements, possible contexts for the different words, and so on.

This activity has the added benefit of expanding students’



Figure 5: Illustration of sample sentence with doer/agent standing apart



Figure 6: Word cline activity

vocabulary. Some students may be familiar with all the words, others may just know one or two. By having students debate a variety of words and their uses, students will add to their lexicon.

The genre of argumentation comprises many different language features. We have shared two of these features

within the function of *establishing perspective*. These activities promote rich conversation—and ultimately progress in language development—as students negotiate meaning with passive voice and evaluative language through peer teaching, visual and kinesthetic language learning, and vocabulary building.

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