

<http://revped.ise.ro>

Print ISSN 0034-8678; Online ISSN: 2559 - 639X

PRE-PRIMARY STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

Percepțiile studenților profesori din învățământul preșcolar cu privire la
jurnalul reflexiv

Miruna Luana MIULESCU

Journal of Pedagogy, 2024 (1), 35 - 54

<https://doi.org/10.26755/RevPed/2024.1/35>

The online version of this article can be found at: <https://revped.ise.ro/category/2024/>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.
To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Published by:

**CENTRUL NAȚIONAL DE POLITICI ȘI EVALUARE ÎN EDUCAȚIE
UNITATEA DE CERCETARE ÎN EDUCAȚIE**

<http://www.ise.ro/>

<https://rocnee.eu/>

Further information about *Revista de Pedagogie – Journal of Pedagogy* can be found at:

Editorial Policy: <http://revped.ise.ro/editorial-policy/>

Author Guidelines: <http://revped.ise.ro/en/author-guidelines/>

PRE-PRIMARY STUDENT TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS ON REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

Miruna Luana Miulescu*

Education Research Unit
National Center for Policy and Evaluation in Education
Bucharest, Romania
miruna.miulescu@gmail.com

Abstract

Reflection contributes substantially to the development of one’s personality, professional growth, and the enrichment of knowledge. By incorporating reflective practices, individuals and institutions make better informed, impactful contributions to their specific areas, as well as improve their overall wellbeing.

This research study employs qualitative methodology to investigate and describe the perceptions of 14 final-year student teachers of pre-primary education regarding the reflective journal writing as an educational tool and a means to fostering reflective thinking skills within the context of their practicum. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in question, we employed a qualitative, contextual, explorative, and descriptive research design.

While the study served as a platform to begin reflective practices, the findings of our research indicate that the study participants had positive and negative perceptions on reflective journal writing. Data show us that they perceived reflective journal writing to be a beneficial practice, with many citing its value in facilitating personal growth and self-awareness, as well as in promoting intellectual development.

We argue that explicit, strategic pedagogical intervention, accompanied by dynamic resources, is indispensable for the successful, widespread adoption of reflective practices in higher education, primarily for student teachers.

* Senior Researcher, Education Research Unit, National Center for Policy and Evaluation in Education (CNPEE), Bucharest, Romania. Assistant Professor PhD, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania.

Keywords: pre-primary student teachers, reflection, reflective journal, reflective practices, student perceptions.

Rezumat

Reflecția contribuie substanțial la dezvoltarea personalității, la creșterea profesională și la îmbogățirea cunoștințelor. Prin încorporarea practicilor reflexive, indivizii și instituțiile aduc contribuții mai bine informate și mai influente în domeniile lor specifice; de asemenea, își îmbunătățesc și starea de bine generală. Această cercetare utilizează o metodologie calitativă pentru a investiga și a descrie percepțiile a 14 studenți în ultimul an de studiu, care se pregătesc să devină profesori în învățământul preșcolar, cu privire la scrierea într-un jurnal reflexiv ca instrument educațional, ca mijloc de promovare a abilităților de gândire reflexivă în contextul stagiului lor de practică. Pentru a avea o înțelegere cuprinzătoare a fenomenului în cauză, am utilizat un design de cercetare calitativ, contextual, exploratoriu și descriptiv.

În timp ce studiul a servit drept platformă pentru inițierea practicilor reflexive, rezultatele cercetării noastre indică faptul că participanții la studiu au avut percepții pozitive și negative ale completării jurnalului reflexiv. Datele ne arată că aceștia au perceput scrierea unui jurnal reflexiv ca fiind o practică benefică, mulți dintre ei menționând valoarea sa în facilitarea creșterii personale și a conștientizării de sine, precum și în promovarea dezvoltării intelectuale.

Suntem de părere că o intervenție pedagogică explicită și strategică, însoțită de resurse dinamice, este indispensabilă pentru adoptarea cu succes și pe scară largă a practicilor reflexive în învățământul superior, în primul rând pentru studenții care se pregătesc să devină profesori.

Cuvinte-cheie: profesori-studenți din învățământul preșcolar, reflecție, jurnal reflexiv, practici reflexive, percepții ale studenților.

1. General Background

The value of reflection is widely acknowledged, as it covers a variety of fields, such as education, scientific research, psychology, creative arts, engineering, social work, law, sports and athletics, healthcare, and the list could go on. Reflection contributes substantially to the development of one's personality, professional growth, and the enrichment of knowledge. By incorporating reflective practices, individuals and institutions make more well informed, influential contributions to their specific areas, as well as improve their overall wellbeing (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Cowan, 2006; Machost & Stains, 2023).

Despite the rhetoric around the power of reflection, there is no single definition of what it actually means. Nevertheless, most scholars tend to agree on several broad criteria: (1) making sense of experiences through an intentional and attentive process of assessing and learning from them, and (2) redefining future experiences.

By examining the literature, there are some notable definitions of reflection that have shaped our understanding of the concept. In his book "How we Think" (1910), John Dewey stated "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitute reflective thought" (p. 118). Building on Dewey's ideas, Daudelin (1996, p. 39) argued that reflection can be understood as "the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences; learning is the creation of meaning from past or current events that serves as a guide for future behaviour".

Within the field of professional education, findings on reflection can be drawn from Schön's (1983), Kolb's (1984), Boud's et al. (1985), and Moon's (2000) works, as these authors present an up-to-date perspective of reflection and connect it to professional education, with reflection being depicted as a foundational element of professional education.

Schön described reflection as “the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning” (1983, p. 102). He directly linked the effectiveness of professional success to the ability to reflect on action, as the process of continuous learning requires the individual to be conscious of the “why” and “how” things are accomplished.

Following this assertion, Kolb (1984) takes it a step further and describes how experience can be converted into learning by means of a learning cycle that embeds experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting. In his *Experiential Learning Theory*, Kolb sees reflection as a fundamental element of the learning cycle. Another influential reflective cycle is Graham Gibbs’s (1998). While Kolb’s and Gibbs’ theories on reflection share some similarities, such as turning the spotlight on a cyclical learning process, there are cardinal differences. For example, Gibbs’ cycle gives greater priority to emotions and their influence on learning. Furthermore, Boud, Keogh and Walker (2013, p. 19) accentuate the role of reflection in reshaping experiences into purposeful learning.

Reflection is a natural part of human activity, as we do it on a daily basis without branding it as „reflection”. Day by day, we ponder over our actions and choices in many cases without even intending to do so. Even so, by reflecting, even informally, we better understand the past events, enrich our future performances, and gather valuable information about ourselves and our surroundings. As Knipfer et al. (2013, p. 34) state, „through reflective processes we reconstruct this experience; we make sense of it and create our very personal understanding of an experience. Reflection therefore is a relational activity that helps us with recreating the world”.

Nonetheless, in an educational context, numerous students find formal reflection a stressful and complicated concept to apprehend (Meyer & Land, 2005), as they are challenged by the very act of consciously reflecting; they also have difficulties in recognizing the differences between reflection and the simple depiction of an experience. Most of the times, as Murphy and Mahony (2023) noticed, students direct their attention to solely describing the activity rather than their thoughts and hesitate over what to write. Being disproportionately concentrated on actions instead of learning from critically reflecting on the experience (Nguyen et al., 2014, Veine et al., 2020) poses a threat to the students’ sense of self-awareness (Govaerts et al., 2010) and

their opportunities to take better account of the changes and progress they are making through reflection. If there is a poor indication of awareness of themselves changing, students can struggle with a lack of motivation, attention, and effort into their academic activity (Bassett et al., 2017), as well as neglect the countless benefits for their personal and academic development.

The benefits of reflection in education have been proven time and time again through a myriad of studies. It has been demonstrated that reflective practices can lead to the enhancement of academic performance (Cavilla, 2017; Radović et al., 2021) and maintain high levels of academic proficiency (McCormick et al., 2013).

A range of studies have examined the improvement of critical thinking skills (Bekbayeva et al., 2021; McMillan & Weyers, 2012; Snyder & Snyder, 2008), as well as problem-solving skills (Khisty & Khisty, 1992; Reinhard et al., 2021). Moreover, evidence from research shows us that reflective practice is associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation and engagement (Wu et al., 2013). Reflection is a primary component of the learning process, fostering constant learning and adjustment to new personal and professional contexts (Rushton & Suter, 2012; Ryan, 2015).

In recent years, reflective practice has garnered significant attention in the educational field, as this rising interest is substantiated by a strong body of research drawing attention to its positive influence.

Acknowledging the transformatory potential ingrained in reflective practices, educators have begun imparting the value of reflection to their students through various means. By employing evidence-based strategies, academics explicitly teach the concept of reflection and its importance with the purpose of helping students understand and employ reflective practices. Oftentimes, teachers apply specific strategies such as discussion and reflective writing, make use of theoretical frameworks for a clear structure and give real-life examples to demonstrate its benefits (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Moon, 1999). It has also become common for some academics to use technology tools, such as e-portfolios and digital journals, for reflective assignments, or to generate online discussion forums. Ayan and Seferoğlu (2011) discovered that e-portfolios strengthened pre-service

teachers' reflective thinking skills, through nurturing a sense of ownership and encouraging teamwork. Champion and Gunnlaugson (2017) showed that online discussion boards can stimulate generative conversations, as well as promote student engagement and dialogue. One of the biggest advantages of such platforms, from Herod's (2003) perspective, is that they can be an affordable alternative for fostering reflective discourse in education.

Another evidence-based strategy refers to the integration of reflection into the curriculum, which could be implemented by planning activities for regular reflection (e.g., weekly reflective journals, reflections at the end of the project, etc.) or reflective essays as part of coursework. Bulpitt and Martin (2005) consider that reflection is a process which should be a carefully considered part of the curriculum and be under the control of the teacher, as this could potentially bridge the gap between learning and doing. Therefore, we believe it is imperative that legal educators instill in students the value of reflective practice, equipping them not only with the skills required by the modern legal profession, but also with a deep capacity for self-awareness and adaptability.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, the purpose of this study is to investigate and describe the perceptions of final-year student teachers of pre-primary education with respect to writing a reflective journal as an educational tool and as a means to fostering reflective thinking skills within the context of their practicum.

2. Methodology

In line with the principles of a phenomenological approach, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of individual situations, with a particular focus on exploring what learners have experienced. This is in order to gain insight into their lived experiences, as outlined by Creswell (2013).

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in question, the specific focus was on focus group and reflective journal. This approach is believed to be conducive to the comprehension of lived experiences of third year pre-primary education students of reflective teaching processes.

We employed a qualitative, contextual, explorative, and descriptive research design in line with the approach proposed by Mouton and Marais (1994).

The findings from our focus group interviews, which we conducted in conjunction with a review of the relevant literature, formed the starting point for our description of guidelines for the effective implementation of reflective journal writing in initial education for pre-primary education student teachers.

2.1. Research participants and sampling strategy

For this study, we opted to employ the convenience sampling method in order to select our participants (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In order to avoid the risk of non-participation in the pedagogical practice classes, they were selected on the basis of their previous participation in courses and seminars from the previous semester (minimum attendance of 80%). Also, to ensure that all their thoughts are not influenced by other journaling experiences, students should not have previous experience of reflective journaling about the learning process in an organized setting.

In the preliminary stages of the sampling procedure, a total of 48 final year students in pre-primary education at the University of Bucharest were contacted and provided with detailed information about their anticipated involvement in the research process. Of the 48 learners contacted, only 14 proceeded to the subsequent stages of the study. The age range of the participants was 22 to 38 years, and all were female.

Prior to the commencement of the study, the 14 students were asked to provide written consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were assured. The group underwent a four-month placement in an educational institution, as part of their final year's mandatory practicum period, and had many opportunities to practice teaching lessons.

The final teaching practicum was chosen because it is designed with the intention of fostering a deeper comprehension of the multifaceted nature of teaching and the underlying prerequisites. Additionally, it seeks to facilitate a constructive interplay between theoretical and practical insights pertaining to the role of a teacher and the pathways of professional growth.

During the four-month practicum, students were instructed in the use of reflective journals, which they were then required to utilize to document their experience. They were asked to focus, as much as possible, on their learning process in their journal, and that the frequency of the journal entries be at least once a week. At the conclusion of their four-month placement, the diaries were to be submitted for analysis.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

A variety of support tools have been designed to promote reflection in teacher education, each offering distinctive benefits and catering to distinct reflective needs and preferences. Some of the most effective tools are journals, videos, reflective and digital portfolios, personal and collaborative blogs and one-to-one conversations (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2014).

One teaching strategy that has been found to be effective is reflective journal writing. This involves students writing their experiences and feelings in their own writing style, without censorship, for further reflection and analysis (Heath, 1998). This pedagogical approach encourages students to think creatively about their own learning needs and to design learning experiences that are personally meaningful to them. As part of this process, they are invited to identify aspects of an experience that are noteworthy or meaningful to them and to record these in their diaries.

We know from the literature that reflective journal writing is one of the learner-centered teaching strategies that helps foster critical and reflective thinking in learners (Sudirman et al., 2021; Tammu, 2022). Also, writing in a reflective journal has been shown to have a substantial positive impact on the academic performance of students (Zhai et al., 2023), and this has been proven particularly true in the higher education sector, where it has the potential to improve learning outcomes (Guo, 2021).

The data collection method was the use of a reflective journal for the four-month practicum period. Students were asked to write in their reflection diaries on a weekly or more frequent basis about what they were experiencing. They were asked to write down what they thought, felt and

experienced during their practicum. Importantly, the only direction given to them on what to write about in their diary was related to their learning process throughout the practicum placement period.

The data was the subject of analysis and codification into relevant categories, and three themes were identified, namely **positive perceptions** of reflective journal writing, **negative perceptions** of writing a reflective journal and **their perceptions of the impact that reflection has had on their learning and development**.

As part of the study, two focus groups with students were organized before the collection of the reflective journals, the first with eight and the second with six students. The composition of the groups was based on their kindergarten placement. The study participants did their practical training in two kindergartens in Bucharest - only eight students from the first kindergarten and only six students from the second kindergarten were willing to take part in the study. The focus groups lasted between 95 and 120 minutes, and the students consented to having it recorded to allow for better analysis of the responses. Focus groups were chosen for their potential to elicit information and perspectives among students about their practicum placement. Main topics of discussion were as follows:

- (1) What has been your experience of keeping a reflective diary or journal?
- (2) How do you benefit from engaging in reflective practice?
- (3) In your opinion, has there been any valuable learning from the reflective journaling experience?

3. Findings

The journals exhibited notable heterogeneity in terms of their composition and structure. As student teachers were afforded the autonomy to develop their journals in a manner that suited their preferences, some of them presented their practicum experiences chronologically, while others adopted a more discursive approach, reflecting on themes such as the student teachers' own role and the learning process. In addition, some students undertaking teacher training considered how their experiences of their practicum related to theoretical sources. The number of pages in the portfolios exhibited considerable variability, ranging from eight to 34.

In terms of the temporal sequencing of reflection, in almost all cases, the reflective process involved reflection-on-action or retrospective reflection, whereby the actions taken were contemplated after the educating experience.

We reviewed students' reflective journal text entries with the aim of gauging the depth of their engagement with reflection processes. The degree of reflection demonstrated by students in their journal entries differed considerably; some students wrote in a concise and thought-provoking manner, while others offered detailed accounts of practicum experiences, which demonstrated less evidence of reflective thinking. A few, however, exhibited high levels of critical reflection and analysis, as shown in the excerpts below:

"It might be said that assessment in kindergarten requires a different approach compared to that which might be employed in older grades. [...] I began with observational assessments, but soon realized that I needed to adopt more structured methods to track progress." (Student F)

"I noticed that one particular child was often a little disruptive during story time. [...] Through analyzing my observations, it became clear that this child found it challenging to sit still for extended periods. [...] I tried introducing some more active storytelling with movement breaks which had a very positive effect on their engagement levels, and also reduced disruptions." (Student N)

"Following a constructive conversation with my mentor from the kindergarten about fostering social-emotional learning, I decided to try out a daily "feelings circle," which provides a safe and supportive space for children to express their emotions. [...] On reflection, it became apparent that this practice had a positive effect on the children's emotional awareness and empathy." (Student D)

Some students even brought up some pedagogical issues in their process of reflection: *"Is this truly the most suitable method to use for this group of children?"* (Student C), *"Are my practices aligned with the most recent findings from academic research literature?"* (Student E), and *"What changes could I make to the class structure to encourage more interaction between children?"* (Student D).

3.1. Positive perceptions

The participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to take part in the study, and they highlighted the valuable insights they had gained. They also acknowledged that the experience had been an important learning journey for them, as the study had pushed them to reconsider their preconceived notions.

The participants believed that reflective journal writing enhanced their problem-solving abilities, enabling them to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application. This was evident in responses such as:

“I believe that keeping such a journal for my own professional learning actually works.” (Student A)

“By taking the time to reflect on and analyze my experiences, I feel that I am now better equipped to adapt my teaching strategies to the needs and characteristics of the children.” (Student I)

“I am grateful to have had the opportunity to engage in this reflection process, which has helped me to gain a deeper understanding of effective teaching strategies.” (Student L)

The participants further stated that the act of writing a reflective journal is beneficial, as it encourages critical thinking and analysis, it provides a framework for future decision-making, allowing the individual to reflect on past experiences and apply the insights gained to similar future situations. As they put it:

“You engage in more critical thinking and analysis.” (Student L)

“Through reflective practices, you can actually adopt a more critical perspective on a given topic and subject it to analysis.” (Student F)

“It undoubtedly enhanced my critical thinking skills, but the key, in my opinion, is to write in the journal as often as possible.” (Student M)

3.2. Negative perceptions

During the initial phases of the practicum period, the trainee educators found it challenging to disengage from their teaching role and focus on their own learning. This difficulty manifested itself in the form of a reluctance to engage in reflective journal writing.

Moreover, at the commencement of the practicum, the student educators sought to differentiate between the concepts of “reflecting on teaching” and “reflecting on learning”. This distinction was established as a crucial element of the journal writing process, with the understanding that reflective teaching practice constituted a single aspect of their overall experience, while reflective learning encompassed a more holistic view of their practicum experience.

Interestingly, it has been observed that not all students responded favorably to the use of journals as a learning tool. Two participants expressed the opinion that the activity was an unproductive use of their time, stating that they had more important tasks to complete, with one stating that they had more pressing matters to attend to than writing a journal, and the other indicating that they felt they did not have sufficient time to dedicate to the task. Furthermore, they perceived a lack of motivation to engage with the reflective journal writing. It can be concluded that the allocation of sufficient time and space for reflective practice is crucial for learners to appreciate reflective journal writing and to enhance the reflective process.

Moreover, one participant expressed negative feelings toward reflective journal writing, citing a lack of clarity regarding the objectives and expectations associated with this form of writing. Furthermore, she felt that she had no choice in the situation and that the activity lacked intrinsic meaning for her:

“I experienced it as a burden... it was an effort to complete it.”
(Student J).

The very act of engaging in reflective practices makes one inherently susceptible to criticism, both from oneself as well as external sources, and to taking responsibility for one’s actions. Another aspect mentioned by two of the students was related to their distrust in the process of journal analysis. A participant articulated the following sentiments:

“I am reluctant to write down my emotions for others to read. I am unsure of how the people reading it will interpret it.” (Student G).
Another participant said, *“I admit I did not write all the emotions that I had while tackling some tough situations for the period I was at the kindergarten [...] I wish to keep some of them private.”* (Student C).

These statements highlight the crucial role of a supportive and safe learning environment for the development of reflective skills. The reflective journal writing process should be designed in a way that is accessible to students, with the intention of fostering a collaborative and supportive relationship between educators and students. This approach is based on the principles of mentorship.

3.3. The perceived effect of reflection on students' learning and development

The instruction to the student teachers to focus on their learning in their journals proved to be an effective strategy. This focus enabled them to gain insight into their learning, the manner in which they learned, and the reasons behind the significance of what they were learning. One of the student teachers described the impact of the task in one of the focus groups:

“During the first two weeks, I felt that I am not capable enough... or I could not find the best entries for my journal. It was also about the pressure... I knew from the beginning that my thoughts will be read by someone else and analyzed, so I wasn't exactly very comfortable with this. It is my journal after all, right? [...] But after a couple of weeks, I began to like writing in my journal... it was interesting because I could better explore my deep thoughts and feel I became a better teacher as the days and weeks passed. [...] I wish I used such a journal in my previous practicum periods... it is really helpful; and also talking about it with other colleagues who had similar experiences with journaling and learning to become a teacher.” (Student D)

A significant number of learners perceived reflective journal writing to be a beneficial practice, with many citing its value in facilitating personal growth and self-awareness, as well as in promoting intellectual development. As one learner noted, *“It's all about you and your personal intellectual growth. [...] It's so rewarding!”* (Student N).

The concept of self-awareness can be defined as the capacity to have a profound comprehension of one's emotional states, strengths, and

weaknesses. This ability to stand back and observe oneself is a fundamental aspect of self-awareness. However, the crux of the matter is not merely the possession of this ability but rather the manner in which the information at one's disposal is utilized to reflect upon one's actions.

Additionally, many learners perceived reflective journal writing to be an effective tool for developing emotional intelligence, assertiveness, and resilience.

The participants asserted that self-assessment plays a pivotal role in the facilitation of reflective thinking, as it compels them to reflect on their thoughts and actions. Furthermore, they highlighted that when they reflect on their reflective journals, they experience a sense of accomplishment and validation. This is regardless of whether the information is accurate or not, as it will be addressed and clarified together with the mentor or teacher.

It can therefore be postulated that the correct application of reflective journal writing should result in self-evaluation, self-awareness and intellectual growth.

4. Discussion and conclusions

On the surface, the teacher's primary role is to maintain order and ensure their pupils are quiet. In reality, teachers encounter numerous practical and ethical decisions on a daily basis. These include identifying which forms of knowledge are truly valuable, developing effective strategies for managing interactions in the classroom in a fair and just manner, and navigating communication challenges with parents and colleagues who hold different beliefs. These are all important aspects of a teacher's role that demand careful consideration and thoughtful approaches. Given the ambitious nature of such objectives, educators are confronted with a multitude of challenges. Reflection represents a valuable instrument to mitigate these obstacles. Reflective practices are part of a process that requires time, energy, and commitment, but can be really valuable for learners when they are used properly.

This research study employs qualitative methodology to investigate and describe the perceptions of final-year student teachers of pre-primary education on writing a reflective journal as an educational tool to foster reflective thinking skills within the context of their practicum.

While the study served as a platform to begin reflective practices, the findings of our research indicate that the study participants highlighted notable valuable insights they had gained through the process of reflective journaling. The students demonstrated an understanding that reflective journal writing facilitates their abilities to solve problems, thereby enabling them to bridge the theoretical-to-practical gap. This was also evidenced by the focus groups.

In consideration of the aforementioned positive factors, it can be posited that there are also potential negative aspects of reflective journaling, as not all students responded favorably to the use of journals as a learning tool. Nevertheless, these aspects can be averted through the implementation of certain measures, such as an environment that is characterized by the provision of support and safety, which would facilitate the development of reflective skills. Also, it would be beneficial to consider ways to make the reflective journal writing process more accessible to students, with the intention of fostering a collaborative relationship between educators and students. It can be concluded that the allocation of sufficient time and space for reflective practice is crucial for learners to appreciate reflective journal writing and to enhance the reflective process.

Student teachers can sometimes encounter challenges when it comes to understanding the process of learning for the first time. They can appear confident and capable of teaching, but this is not always sufficient. They should be aware of the reasons behind their actions. As a result, it is a high chance they will become better teachers.

The outcome of the reflective process is unique to each individual, with no two experiences or results being identical. The practice of self-directed learning encourages proactive thinking and actions, leading to increased self-awareness and growth in both personal and professional contexts. It can therefore be concluded that reflective journal writing should promote reflective thinking skills, which can be employed to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge and to develop effective problem-solving abilities, self-awareness and intellectual growth.

Higher education has an important role to play in equipping students with the analytical skills needed to examine and mediate their own thoughts and actions in the context of their wider lives, with the goal of achieving improved outcomes. We believe that higher education teachers play a pivotal role in enabling students to develop the capacity for reflective thinking and reflexive approaches to learning, which are essential skills in the pursuit of life projects.

A shared understanding of reflection among those involved is often presumed to exist. But it is evident that this is not always the case. Therefore, the concept merits explicit exploration, with the objective of fostering greater clarity and cohesion on two distinct levels. On the one hand, this entails elucidating the concept within the university course itself. On the other hand, it requires illuminating the concept within the context of the practicum placement.

According to Dobbins (1996), in order to optimize the learning experience for both students and teachers in training, the following recommendations are put forth based on the study findings: the formation of student-teacher groups and subsequent placement of these groups in schools; the allocation of half an hour per day for reflection; the convening of weekly group meetings; the creation of opportunities for involvement in activities outside of the classroom (so that reflection may be based on the entire school experience, rather than just one classroom).

Reflective practice is frequently incorporated into the assessment criteria of higher education subjects, often without the requisite support structures or clear expectations for students. There is a paucity of theoretical guidance on an effective approach to the teaching of reflective learning in higher education programmes and courses. Therefore, we argue that explicit, strategic pedagogical intervention, accompanied by dynamic resources, is indispensable for the successful, widespread adoption of reflective practices in higher education.

5. Limitations

The study does have limitations that require further exploration. Firstly, the nature of the study (qualitative, exploratory) does not allow us to draw general conclusions about the investigated topic. Secondly, the data presented in this

study were collected through self-report. It is not possible to verify self-reported data independently, as it is susceptible to a number of potential biased sources, including selective memory, attribution, and exaggeration. In such cases, it is crucial to encourage respondents to provide complete and accurate information. This could be achieved by emphasising the significance of their contributions to the research outcomes. Furthermore, the utilisation of multiple data sources or analytical techniques to corroborate the information in question can provide a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective, thus enabling the detection of inconsistencies.

Also, the scarcity of available human and time resources and the relatively small sample size are two factors that limit the scope of this study.

References

- Ayan, D., & Seferoğlu, G. (2011). Using electronic portfolios to promote reflective thinking in language teacher education. *Educational Studies*, 37(5), 513–521. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2010.539782>
- Bassett, J. F., Cleveland, A. J., Acorn, D. A., Nix, M., & Snyder, T. L. (2017). Are they paying attention? Students' lack of motivation and attention potentially threaten the utility of course evaluations. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42, 431–442.
- Bekbayeva, Z. S., Galiyev, T. T., Albytova, N., Zhazykbayeva, Z. M., & Mussatayeva, A. B. (2021). Fostering vocational students' critical thinking through multi-level tasks. *World Journal on Educational Technology: Current Issues*, 13(3), 397–406. <https://doi.org/10.18844/wjet.v13i3.5948>
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4th Edition). Open University Press.
- Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (Eds.). (1985). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. Kogan Page.
- Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (2013). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. Routledge Ltd.
- Bulpitt, H., & Martin, P. J. (2005). Learning about reflection from the student. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 6(3), 207–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787405057751>
- Cavilla, D. (2017). The Effects of Student Reflection on Academic Performance and Motivation. *Sage Open*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017733790>
- Champion, K., & Gunnlaugson, O. (2017). Fostering generative conversation in

- higher education course discussion boards. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 55(6), 704–712.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2017.1279069>
- Cowan, J. (2006). *On becoming an innovative university teacher: Reflection in action*. Open University Press.
 - Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches*. SAGE Publications.
 - Daudelin, M.W. (1996). Learning from experience through reflection. *Organizational Dynamics*, 24(3), 36–48.
 - Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. D.C. Heath & Company.
 - Dobbins, R. (1996). The Challenge of Developing a ‘Reflective Practicum.’ *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 24(3), 269–280.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866960240305>
 - Gelfuso, A., & Dennis, D. (2014). Getting reflection off the page: *The challenges of developing support structures for pre-service teacher reflection*. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 38, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.10.012>
 - Gibbs, G. (1998). *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford Brooks University.
 - Govaerts, S., Verbert, K., Klerkx, J., & Duval, E. (2010). Visualizing Activities for Self-reflection and Awareness. *International Conference on Advances in Web-Based Learning*.
 - Guo, L. (2021). How should reflection be supported in higher education? — A meta-analysis of reflection interventions. *Reflective Practice*, 23(1), 118–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2021.1995856>
 - Hatton, N., & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(1), 33–49.
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X\(94\)00012-U](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(94)00012-U)
 - Heath, H. (1998). Keeping a reflective practice diary: A practical guide. *Nurse Education Today*, 18, 592–598.
 - Herod, L. (2003). Promoting Reflective Discourse in the Canadian Adult Literacy Community: Asynchronous Discussion Forums. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 17(1), 13–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.10156>
 - Khisty, C. J., & Khisty, L. L. (1992). Reflection in Problem Solving and Design. *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice*, 118, 234–239.
 - Knipfer, K., Kump, B., Wessel, D., & Cress, U. (2013). Reflection as catalyst for organisational learning. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 35(1), 30–48.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2012.683780>
 - Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning*

and development. Prentice Hall.

- Machost, H. R., & Stains, M. (2023). Reflective Practices in Education: A Primer for Practitioners. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 22(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-07-0148>
- McCormick, C. B., Dimmitt, C. A., & Sullivan, F. R. (2013). Metacognition, learning, and instruction. In *Handbook of psychology* (pp. 69-97).
- McMillan, K., & Weyers, J. D. (2012). *How to Improve Your Critical Thinking & Reflective Skills*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Meyer, J. H. F., & Land, R. (2005). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (2): Epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning. *Higher Education*, 49(3), 373–388. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6779-5>
- Moon, J. (1999). *Learning Journals: A handbook for academics, students and professional development*. Kogan Page.
- Moon, J. (2000). *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*. Kogan Page.
- Mouton, J., & Marais, H. C. (1994). *Basic concepts in the methodology of the social science*. HSRC Publishers.
- Murphy, C., & O’Mahony, T. (2023). Submitting the ‘right’ reflection. *Reflective Practice*, 24(3), 347–360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2023.2198204>
- Nguyen, Q. D., Fernandez, N., Karsenti, T., & Charlin, B. (2014). What is reflection? A conceptual analysis of major definitions and a proposal of a five-component model. *Medical Education*, 48(12), 1176–1189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.12583>
- Radović, S., Firssova, O., Hummel, H. G., & Vermeulen, M. (2023). Improving academic performance: Strengthening the relation between theory and practice through prompted reflection. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 24(2), 139–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146978742111014411>
- Reinhard, A., Felleson, A., Turner, P., & Green, M. H. (2021). Assessing the impact of metacognitive postreflection exercises on problem-solving skillfulness. *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, 18, 1–10.
- Rushton, I., & Suter, M. (2012). *Reflective Practice For Teaching In Lifelong Learning*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Ryan, M. (2015). Introduction: Reflective and reflexive approaches in higher education: A warrant for lifelong learning? In M. E. Ryan (Ed.), *Teaching Reflective Learning in Higher Education: A Systematic Approach Using Pedagogic Patterns* (pp. 3–14). Springer, Springer Nature.
- Snyder, L. G., & Snyder, M. (2008). Teaching Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills. *The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, 50, 90–99.
- Sudirman, A., Gemilang, A. V., & Kristanto, T. M. A. (2021). The power of reflective journal writing for university students from the EFL perspective.

Studies in English Language and Education, 8(3), 1061–1079.

<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v8i3.19105>

- Tammu, R. M. (2022). The role of reflective journals for biology education students in genetics course. *Journal of Biological Education*, 58(2), 430–443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00219266.2022.2067581>
- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed Methods Sampling: A Typology with Examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806292430>
- Veine, S., Anderson, M. K., Andersen, N. H., Espenes, T. C., Søyland, T. B., Wallin, P., & Reams, J. (2020). Reflection as a core student learning activity in higher education—insights from nearly two decades of academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 25(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2019.1659797>
- Wu, X., Anderson, R. C., Nguyen-Jahiel, K., & Miller, B. (2013). Enhancing motivation and engagement through collaborative discussion. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(3), 622–632. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032792>
- Zhai, N., Huang, Y., Ma, X., & Chen, J. (2023). Can Reflective Interventions Improve Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-analysis. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 49, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2023.101373>

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://revped.ise.ro/category/2024-en/>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Versiunea online a acestui articol poate fi găsită la:
<http://revped.ise.ro/category/2024-ro/>



Această lucrare este licențiată sub Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Pentru a vedea o copie a acestei licențe, vizitați <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> sau trimiteți o scrisoare către Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, SUA.