

## **The Power of Reflection: An Exploration of Its Role in Learning and Teaching**

Mariam Farooq, *University of Saskatchewan*

### **Author's Note**

Mariam Farooq <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4196-4522>

The author declares no conflicts of interest and has no acknowledgments to declare.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mariam Farooq at [qpm628@usask.ca](mailto:qpm628@usask.ca)

### **Abstract**

This autoethnographic exploration traces my evolving understanding and practice of reflective writing, highlighting its significance in both personal and professional contexts. Initially, my exposure to reflective practices within South Africa's education system, and later as a university student, was surface level, with minimal guidance on engaging meaningfully in reflection. My early reflections were largely descriptive, recounting events rather than critically analysing them. It was during my Master of Education programme, while conducting action research to develop students' writing skills through portfolios, that I began to engage deeply in reflection, both as a student and as an educator facilitating reflective practices in others. Through this process, I realised that reflection requires explicit instruction and consistent practice, particularly in educational contexts that prioritise rote memorisation over critical thinking. As a university educator, I revised my approach to teaching reflection by incorporating guiding questions, peer review activities, and technology-based platforms to foster deeper engagement. This shift significantly improved students' reflective abilities, especially in fields such as nursing and education. Now, as a PhD student, reflection remains a central tool in my academic growth and research journey. Overall, this self-reflective journey highlights the importance of intentional and structured approaches to teaching reflection, ensuring it serves its transformative purpose in education by fostering critical thinking, self-awareness, and lifelong learning.

*Keywords:* critical thinking, higher education, life experiences, reflective writing

IN  
EDUCATION

## The Power of Reflection: An Exploration of Its Role in Learning and Teaching

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, the ability to reflect critically on one's experiences, beliefs, and learning processes is increasingly recognised as a key competency for success in higher education (Ryan, 2015; Sudirman et al., 2024). Reflective practice allows students to engage with their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, linking academic experiences to real-world contexts. This process not only enables students to build on their current skills but also helps them identify areas for improvement and gain a deeper understanding of themselves as learners (Adie & Tangen, 2014; Taylor, 2023).

Reflection is a cognitive process that involves the deliberate consideration of experiences, actions, and outcomes, leading to deeper understanding and insight (Crane & Sosulski, 2020). The benefits of reflective activities have contributed to their growing popularity in higher education. Through metacognition, students can develop a better understanding of their learning preferences, strengths, and areas of challenge (Bharuthram, 2018). Additionally, reflective writing offers students the opportunity to connect theory to practice, thereby providing a platform for applying newly acquired knowledge to real-world settings.

A key component of effective reflective writing is the balance between descriptive writing and critical reflection. This balance allows students to go beyond merely recounting experiences to deeply analyse them, thereby maximising the impact of reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Pais Marden & Herrington, 2022). Moreover, reflection encourages students to question why they hold certain views rather than simply stating their opinions, fostering stronger analytical skills.

In this autoethnography, I reflect on my personal journey of learning about reflective writing, beginning as a student and later transitioning into a teaching role. As a student, I discovered both the importance and the challenges of writing meaningful reflections. Now, as an educator, my focus is on helping students develop the skills necessary to write effective reflections, enhancing their academic growth while continuing to inform my own development as a teacher. By intertwining my experiences as both a learner and an educator, this self-analysis offers a dual perspective on the evolving nature of reflective writing in higher education.

The exploration in this article is guided by the research question: *How has my understanding of reflective writing evolved, and how can I help students develop effective reflective writing skills?*

### Positionality

I was born in Karachi, Pakistan, and moved to Johannesburg, South Africa, at the age of ten. Completing most of my schooling and earning my bachelor's degree in South Africa provided me with a diverse academic and cultural foundation that deeply influences my worldview and pedagogical approaches. Growing up and studying in different cultural contexts exposed me to varied educational philosophies.

After completing my undergraduate studies, I returned to Pakistan and began teaching at a primary school. During these early years of teaching, I experienced numerous 'Aha' moments that inspired me to take risks, explore new possibilities, and push boundaries in my quest for both personal and professional growth. These moments became the foundation of my teaching philosophy: that educators, through empathy and reflection, can drive positive change in their students' lives. This belief deeply shaped how I approached teaching and how I encouraged my students to reflect on their own learning experiences.

After two years of teaching, I pursued a master's degree in education, further deepening my understanding of pedagogical theories and reflective practices. Soon after, I began teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses at the university level. Over the course of ten years, I guided undergraduate and graduate students in reflecting on their academic journeys, encouraging them to connect their personal experiences with theoretical learning. These experiences solidified my belief in the importance of reflective writing as a critical tool for both academic and personal growth.

In September 2023, I moved to Canada as an international student to pursue a PhD in Curriculum Studies. This shift allowed me to reflect deeply on my own learning process, especially as I navigated the role of a student once again in a new cultural and academic environment. My academic journey, both as a teacher and a student, has reinforced the vital role reflection plays in creating meaningful learning experiences. This positionality shapes the lens through which I examine and engage with reflective writing in this autoethnography.

### **Background to the Problem**

As an educator and a student, I recognise the importance of developing strong academic reflections. My motivation to write about my experience arose mainly from my teaching practice, where reflective writing was a vital component of class assessment. I often incorporated different reflective activities in my classes; however, it was observed that many students were unfamiliar with the reflective writing process, and as a result, produced descriptive accounts of experiences or events. These descriptive accounts do not meet the true purpose of reflective writing, and as a result, students may find it either tedious or irrelevant, lacking the motivation to engage actively in the process.

As a student, I have become increasingly aware of different teaching styles and have noticed that instructors often assume students already possess the necessary skills for reflective writing or will develop them independently, an assumption that has shaped my own experiences with learning to write reflections. Consequently, instructors may not allocate instructional time to explicitly teach reflective writing techniques in their classes. This can become a significant barrier, as without proper guidance and practice, students may miss out on opportunities to enhance their critical thinking skills while writing reflections, which are crucial for academic success and lifelong learning.

In the Canadian context, reflective writing is integral across various educational levels, from K-12 to post-secondary education (Rolheiser & Ross, 2013). Despite its recognised importance, students continue to struggle with reflective writing, resulting in superficial reflections that do not fully engage with the learning process. The lack of explicit instruction in reflective writing contributes to this gap, highlighting the need for pedagogical approaches that support the development of these skills.

### **Literature Review**

Reflective writing is recognised as a fundamental component of higher education, serving as a bridge between experiential learning and critical thinking. In recent years, educators and researchers have increasingly emphasised the importance of developing students' reflective writing skills to enhance learning outcomes and promote deeper engagement with course content. This literature review argues for the necessity of improving reflective writing skills in higher

education by synthesising existing research on theoretical frameworks, types of reflections, pedagogical approaches, and challenges students face during the reflective writing process.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Scholars have discussed reflection from different perspectives for various purposes. Some of the earliest insights regarding the value of reflection come from John Dewey, who emphasised that education should aim to promote thoughtful reflection, as true learning is not automatic and occurs only when we reflect on our experiences (Holdo, 2023). Dewey's concept of reflective thinking involves actively, persistently, and carefully evaluating any belief or purported body of knowledge in light of the communities that endorse it and the conclusions it is likely to lead to in the future. Dewey viewed experiential learning as a spiral rather than a cycle, with learners progressing along a continuum of learning by using prior knowledge to guide present and future decisions.

Kolb's theory of experiential learning expands on Dewey's ideas. Students advance through four stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle: active experimentation, abstract conceptualisation, reflective observation, and concrete experience (Kolb, 2014). These stages show how students' thinking becomes more sophisticated as they go through the cycle, emphasising the value of reflection in the educational process. Through reflective observation, students can advance their learning to new heights by analysing and drawing inferences from events.

Additionally, Schon (2017) defined reflection as the process by which a person deals with and attempts to make sense of “puzzling, troubling, or interesting phenomena” in addition to considering the understandings implicit in their actions, which they surface, criticise, restructure, and embody in further action (p. 50). According to this definition, reflective students analyse their methods, generate suggestions for enhancing their performance, and implement those suggestions. This cycle is known as admiration, action, and re-appreciation (Cheng, 2023).

Moreover, Eyler and Giles (1999) developed the Five Cs of effective reflection: connection, continuity, context, challenge, and coaching. Connection encompasses a wide range of experiences, from institutional links to personal connections with various social groups. Reflection leverages these connections because experiential learning does not happen in a vacuum. Continuity refers to reflecting at every stage of the process, with lifelong introspection being the ultimate goal. Context considers the topic of reflection as well as the location and timing of the reflection. Structural elements can significantly improve or hinder reflective practice. Challenge is based on the idea that while novel experiences foster more complex thought, they should be structured to avoid being overwhelming. Lastly, coaching describes the assistance needed for productive reflection. These elements integrate reflective practices with experiential learning, emphasising the importance of context and structured challenges to foster complex thought (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This theoretical framework collectively highlights the integral role of reflection in enhancing educational outcomes, forming the foundation for the necessity of improving reflective writing skills in higher education.

### **Reflective Writing and Types of Reflection**

Reflective writing refers to the construction of new and deeper understanding and the articulation of knowledge in a more meaningful way (Marshall, 2019; Pais Marden & Herrington, 2022). It is a form of writing in which the writer actively examines and evaluates their own experiences, thoughts, or learning. Rather than simply describing an event, reflective writing involves thinking

critically about what happened, why it happened, and what can be learned from it. It links experience with meaning (Ramlal & Augustin, 2020). As per Schon (2017), there are two primary forms of reflection that are essential to learning and professional development: reflection on action and reflection in action. While people are actively involved in a situation, reflection in action takes place in real time. It entails developing a conscious awareness of one's feelings, ideas, and behaviours as they emerge. This kind of introspection improves a person's capacity for quick decision-making and adaptation by enabling them to modify their behaviour in response to current events (Cheng, 2023).

On the other hand, reflection on action takes place after the experience or event has ended, when people take a step back to think about and assess what happened. Retrospective reflection is more intentional and introspective, requiring people to go back over their experiences, assess the results, and consider different viewpoints or methods (Dewey, 1933). It promotes greater understanding of the fundamental causes of their behaviour, such as feelings, prejudices, and outside influences. Individuals can develop new ideas for future actions and obtain a deeper understanding of their professional practices by reflecting on their actions (Moon, 2013). Together, both types of reflection enable ongoing learning cycles that are vital for improving outcomes, abilities, and accomplishing career objectives in many academic and occupational settings.

### **Teachers' Support and Pedagogical Approaches**

Teachers can help students develop reflective abilities by implementing strategic teaching interventions in the classroom and scaffolding skills pertinent to their current learning phase (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Veine et al., 2020). Students require assistance and encouragement to engage in reflection; it is not something they do on their own. Support may depend on several factors, such as prior reflection experience, language barriers, and cultural variations in the conceptualisation of reflection. Therefore, teachers should provide prompts or guiding questions to scaffold students' reflections and focus their thinking (Moon, 2013). Incorporating peer review or group discussions can encourage collaborative reflection and diverse perspectives. Furthermore, offering feedback on students' reflections is essential to support their development and help them refine their reflective skills.

### **Challenges Associated with Reflections**

Students' lack of experience with reflective writing presents challenges when it comes to reflective writing (Kis & Kartal, 2019; Veine et al., 2020). It has been noticed that students often tend to be superficial and merely descriptive in their reflections. Since students may not immediately recognise the benefit of reflection and have varied levels of exposure to it, this difficulty is emphasised in diverse settings (Dyment & O'Connell, 2010). It is therefore important to support students and make them aware of the importance of reflection for their learning through clear guidance and activities integrated into the course. It is also critical to make sure that reflection exercises and learning objectives are constructively aligned.

Thompson and Pascal (2012) specified that students may have feelings of vulnerability when sharing their reflections, which could impede candid and in-depth reflection. This may present additional challenges. To foster openness and trust, educators must provide a secure and encouraging environment. Furthermore, because reflective writing is subjective, grading it can be difficult; therefore, in order to maintain consistency and fairness, clear rubrics and standards are needed (Ryan & Ryan, 2013).

By utilising scaffolding techniques, educators can create an environment conducive to reflective practice, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes and more engaged learners. This study aims to enrich the existing literature by providing a comprehensive, inclusive, and practical framework for enhancing students' reflective writing skills in higher education, ultimately contributing to more effective and meaningful educational experiences.

### **Methodology**

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that combines personal experience with cultural, social, and academic analysis to explore and reflect on a particular phenomenon (Adams et al., 2015). It is particularly suited to this paper's topic because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the researcher's experiences, providing a unique perspective on the intersection of teaching and learning. By engaging in self-reflection, the researcher is able to offer rich, personal insights that traditional research methods may not capture. Given that this study focuses on both the personal experiences of teaching and the reflective practices of students, autoethnography provides a framework not only to analyse the personal, subjective dimensions but also to understand them within a broader educational context (Ellis, 2016).

I chose autoethnography for this study because my personal teaching and learning journey forms the core of the inquiry, and the complexity of these experiences cannot be detached from my identity as both researcher and participant. Unlike other qualitative approaches that examine participants externally, autoethnography enables me to critically analyse my emotions, decisions, and interactions from within the context in which they occur. This method allows me to meaningfully connect personal narratives with broader educational themes, making it the most appropriate approach for examining reflective practices, learning dynamics, and transformative moments in my teaching experience.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected mainly through reflections on my lived experiences as both a student and a teacher, and also included reflections based on self-observations, analysis of students' reflective writing, and my feedback on their work.

The data were analysed holistically, integrating current memories and past events to provide a deeper understanding of the evolving teaching and learning process (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). Rather than treating the data as purely objective, I approached the analysis reflexively, considering how my identity, positionality, and evolving understanding shaped both the experiences themselves and my interpretation of them. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, ensuring the protection of the identities of my school, university, and students, with no names mentioned other than my own.

### **An Autoethnographic Narrative**

I vaguely remember that during high school in South Africa, we were occasionally asked to write descriptive pieces after attending educational sessions led by guest speakers or going on school trips. However, I cannot recall whether those write-ups included any true elements of reflection. They were more about recounting what was said rather than critically engaging with what we had learned.

When I first started teaching at a primary school, teachers were required to submit weekly diaries documenting their learning from professional development sessions and classroom experiences. At that time, writing reflections felt like an extra task added to an already demanding

teaching schedule. Interestingly, the term '*reflection*' was never explicitly used, but we were provided with guiding questions to write about our weekly teaching practices. This structure hinted at reflective practice, yet the purpose behind it was not clear to me at the time.

It was not until my journey as an MEd student that I heard the word '*reflection*' formally introduced. This happened during a teacher practicum course when our faculty explicitly asked us to reflect on our teaching experiences. At that stage, I approached it mechanically, simply answering the questions provided by the instructor without a deeper understanding of what true reflection entailed. The feedback I received was that my reflections were too descriptive and lacked the evaluative depth expected at the graduate level. I often missed the critical component of analysing my learning and considering the broader implications of my experiences. As a graduate student, navigating much of my learning independently, I was not sure how to improve my reflections beyond following the given prompts. This early encounter with reflection planted the seed of understanding, but it was not until later that I truly grasped its significance.

Throughout my MEd program, reflections became a consistent component of our coursework. Every assignment seemed to include a reflective element. Even my thesis centred on creating a writing portfolio, where reflection played a key role. Over the two years, I slowly began to appreciate the value of reflection, though I did not initially see how it translated into practical teaching applications. I vividly recall our faculty urging us to maintain a diary during our teaching practicum, a space to document our thoughts, challenges, and learning experiences. At the time, I was naive and did not fully grasp the purpose behind this exercise. It felt like just another task on an already full plate. I was also hesitant to write openly about negative teaching practicum experiences, fearing that my honesty might impact my assessment marks. This fear of judgment led me to write cautiously, without truly engaging with what reflections were meant to uncover. I was essentially going through the motions without questioning the deeper purpose of reflective writing and wrote only positive aspects of my journey.

My transformative moment came during my MEd thesis when I conducted action research aimed at developing students' writing skills through the use of portfolios. As part of this study, I was required to teach lessons in a school setting, and my students were asked to include reflections in their portfolios. For the first time, I delved deeply into the concept of reflection, not just how to write it, but how to teach it effectively. This experience was eye-opening for me. I realised that throughout my education, we had been tasked with writing reflections, but we were never adequately taught how to engage in reflective writing meaningfully. This revelation sparked my interest in teaching reflective practices, and I began to explore how different activities, and pedagogical approaches could incorporate reflective elements into my lessons.

After graduating, when I began teaching at the university level, I quickly noticed that many of my students struggled with writing meaningful reflections as well. Their reflections were often purely descriptive, missing the critical, evaluative aspects essential for genuine reflective practice. Many students lacked the vocabulary to analyse their experiences effectively. Reflecting on this, I recognised that the educational context in which I was working placed a heavy emphasis on rote memorisation rather than critical thinking and self-reflection. This was particularly apparent in fields like engineering and commerce, where the focus was on formulas and finding the '*right*' answer, rather than reflecting on processes or personal growth. However, I primarily taught nursing and education students, where reflection was a vital part of the curriculum and professional practice.

To address this gap, I revised my teaching approach. I dedicated more time to helping students understand what reflection truly is and why it matters. Instead of simply handing out reflective prompts, I spent class time discussing the purpose and value of reflection. I introduced strategies to help students engage more critically with their experiences. For instance, I emphasise that reflection is not just a summary of events but a thoughtful process of considering what was learned, how it affected their thinking, and how it might inform future actions. I provide guiding questions to encourage deeper reflection, such as:

- *What did I learn from this experience?*
- *How did I feel during this experience, and why?*
- *What would I do differently next time?*
- *What connections can I make between this experience and what I've learned in class or in theory?*

I also teach students to analyse their experiences, not just describe them. Reflection involves examining what went well, what did not, and exploring why certain outcomes occurred. I encourage them to consider alternative actions and viewpoints, fostering critical thinking. To further support this process, I share model reflections and examples of effective reflective writing. We discuss these examples in class, highlighting the balance between personal insights and critical analysis, and how to connect experiences to broader academic concepts or professional frameworks. I provide detailed rubrics that outline clear expectations and offer regular feedback to students, focusing on how well they analyse their experiences, connect them to learning goals, and draw meaningful conclusions for personal and professional growth.

In addition to individual feedback, I incorporate peer review activities, allowing students to read and comment on each other's reflections. I feel this is an important step as peer feedback not only exposes students to different perspectives but also helps them refine their own reflective practices. Creating a safe and supportive environment for reflection is equally important. I make sure students feel comfortable sharing their experiences without fear of judgment or penalisation for expressing challenges or failures. I emphasise that reflection is a learning tool, not a performance metric. I also give students ample time and space for self-reflection, ensuring that the process is meaningful and not rushed.

To make reflective writing more engaging, I integrate technology into the process. I use platforms like Padlet, Google Forms, and online discussion forums to facilitate reflective exercises, making them interactive and accessible. These tools allow students to express their reflections in diverse ways through text, images, or even audio recordings, catering to different learning styles and preferences. For example, Padlet serves as a collaborative reflection wall where students post short reflections during lessons, respond to prompts such as *What challenged you today? What did you learn and how might you apply it?* and engage with peers' responses through comments and reactions. This creates a sense of shared learning and community, which is often missing in traditional pen-and-paper reflective journals. Google Forms, on the other hand, allows me to design structured reflection prompts that guide students from description toward deeper thinking questions like *What surprised you? Why do you think this is important?* or *How has this experience changed your view?* The submitted responses also provide quick insights into students' thinking, enabling timely feedback and instructional adjustments. Moreover, online discussion forums promote dialogic reflection where meaning-making occurs through interaction instead of isolated

writing and spontaneous responses. Compared to traditional reflection, these digital tools make the process more dynamic, visually engaging, and less intimidating, encouraging even quieter students to participate meaningfully.

As a PhD student now, I see how reflective writing continues to play a critical role in my academic journey. It's not only a tool for my development as a researcher but also a way to critically engage with my studies, analyse my evolving understanding, and shape my future work. Reflection has become essential in examining how my learning influences my research practices, methodologies, and academic contributions. It serves as a foundation for continuous professional and personal growth, both as a learner and an educator.

Reflecting on my experiences, I realise that context and culture significantly influence the development of reflective practices. In some countries, reflective writing is still not fully embraced or understood within educational systems. During my school years, it was not an integral part of the traditional curriculum, but this is changing. Educational systems worldwide are increasingly incorporating reflective activities, and teachers are being trained to understand and use reflection in their teaching. There is growing awareness of the importance of reflective practice, yet the question remains: *Are these reflections truly serving their intended purpose? Are students and educators genuinely engaging with reflection in a meaningful way, or is it just another box to check off on an assignment sheet?* These are questions I continue to explore in my own practice as both an educator and a researcher.

### **Analysis and Meaning-Making**

This autoethnographic exploration of my journey with reflective writing highlights the transformative nature of reflective practice in both personal and professional contexts. The evolution of my understanding of reflection, from a task that initially felt burdensome to a critical tool for growth, illustrates how reflective writing is shaped by educational contexts, cultural expectations, and personal experiences.

Initially, my exposure to reflection in high school, primary school teaching in South Africa, and later as a graduate student was limited and superficial. Although reflective activities were embedded in various assignments, there was a lack of explicit instruction on how to engage in meaningful reflection. This aligns with the literature suggesting that students often struggle with reflective writing due to inadequate guidance and support (Ryan, 2015). My early reflections were descriptive, focusing on recounting events rather than critically analysing them. The feedback I received during my MEd studies, emphasising the absence of evaluative elements in my writing, became a pivotal moment in recognising the depth of reflection demands. This experience mirrored Ryan's (2015) assertion that reflective writing is often treated as a routine task, rather than a means to engage in deeper critical thinking.

The shift in my reflective practice occurred during my MEd programme, where I engaged in an action research study aimed at developing students' writing skills through portfolios. This writing experience allowed me to engage with reflection not only as a student but also as an educator facilitating reflection in others. It became evident that reflection is not an innate skill but one that requires positive reinforcement and practice (Sudriman et al., 2024). As I guided students in reflective writing, I realised the need for guidance and explicit teaching to ensure meaningful engagement. This was especially important because many students, like myself, initially struggled with reflecting beyond surface-level descriptions. The realisation that my students, much like me, struggled with reflective writing underscored the systemic gaps in teaching this skill. In

educational systems that prioritise rote learning and factual recall, reflective practice is often underutilised or misunderstood (Moon, 2013). The lack of scaffolding to develop reflective thinking further exacerbates this issue.

As I transitioned into university-level teaching, I recognised the importance of embedding reflective practices into my curriculum, particularly for nursing and education students, where reflection is integral to professional development. By revising my teaching approach to include explicit instruction on reflection, providing guiding questions, and creating a supportive environment, I observed significant improvements in my students' reflective abilities (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Veine et al., 2020). In particular, the use of scaffolding strategies such as sharing model reflections and using rubrics to set clear expectations helped students understand how to move from descriptive to evaluative reflection (Smith, 2024). The incorporation of peer review and technology-based platforms like Padlet and online discussion forums further enriched the reflective process, allowing for diverse perspectives and more dynamic engagement. Peer review opportunities and online tools not only provided students with various modes of expression but also encouraged collaborative reflection, where they could learn from each other's experiences and insights (Boase-Jelinek et al., 2013).

In my current experience as a PhD student, reflection continues to play a critical role in my academic and professional growth. Reflection has evolved into a tool for critically engaging with my research, understanding my learning trajectory, and shaping my future work. This mirrors the broader scholarly consensus on the role of reflective practice in fostering critical thinking, self-awareness, and lifelong learning (Cheng, 2023). Reflection, in this context, has become more than a form of assessment; it is a cornerstone of my ongoing development as a researcher and an educator. As I refine my research practices and methodologies, reflecting on my experiences enables me to adapt, adjust, and improve my work with greater awareness and intention.

Reflecting on the cultural and contextual factors influencing reflective practices reveals that while reflection is gaining prominence globally, its implementation and reception vary significantly. In some educational systems, reflection remains a checkbox activity rather than a transformative process (Chan & Lee, 2021). This raises critical questions about how educators can foster genuine engagement with reflective practices. Are we, as educators and researchers, creating environments where reflection is meaningful, or are we perpetuating superficial compliance with reflective tasks? In my own practice, I have sought to provide my students with opportunities to engage with reflection more holistically, with an emphasis on its transformative potential. However, I am also aware that the institutional context and educational culture can heavily influence how reflection is embraced or sidelined (Chan & Lee, 2021). This is particularly true in fields where technical skills are prioritised over personal or professional development, such as engineering or commerce. In such contexts, the emphasis on finding the "correct" answers often limits opportunities for reflective engagement. Therefore, it is essential that educators across disciplines intentionally cultivate an environment where reflection is seen as integral to learning, not just an additional task to complete.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this autoethnographic narrative illustrates how my understanding of reflection evolved over time, from viewing it as a task embedded in school assignments to recognising it as a meaningful process that supports critical thinking, professional growth, and identity development as an educator and researcher. My experience reveals that reflective writing is not an innate skill

but one that develops through explicit modelling, guided practice, and intentional scaffolding. The critical shift occurred when I moved from completing reflections as a requirement to teaching and facilitating reflective writing for others. This dual perspective helped me understand reflection not only as a personal learning tool but as a pedagogical approach that requires structure, feedback, and a safe environment to thrive.

The analysis suggests that students, much like I once did, struggle with reflection when they are not taught what meaningful reflective engagement looks like. Technology integration, modelling, reflective prompts, and multimodal platforms can reduce barriers by making the reflective process more interactive, accessible, and collaborative. Tools and platforms such as Padlet, Google Forms, and online forum discussions provide space for dialogue and self-expression, supporting deeper thinking beyond descriptive recounting. Moreover, the critical narrative highlights how institutional culture and disciplinary norms shape students' willingness to reflect openly. When assessment is tied to perfection rather than growth, reflection risks becoming superficial, a checkbox rather than transformative learning.

Broadly, this inquiry emphasises the need for educators to move beyond assigning reflection toward teaching reflection. Intentional scaffolding, clear expectations, authentic feedback, and opportunities for peer dialogue enable learners to develop reflective competence. At a broader pedagogical level, this narrative contributes to ongoing conversations about fostering reflective literacy as an essential component of higher education, particularly within professional disciplines such as education, nursing, and applied sciences.

As I continue to navigate reflective writing in my PhD journey, I am reminded that reflection remains iterative, constantly evolving as one's experiences, contexts, and identities shift. This work invites further exploration into how reflective writing can be cultivated across disciplines, how technology can further enhance reflective practice, and how educators can ensure that reflection moves beyond description toward critical meaning-making. Ultimately, meaningful reflection is not a product, but a habit of mind that sustains growth, inquiry, and transformation throughout one's academic and professional life.

## References

- Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S. L., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford University Press.
- Adie, L., & Tangen, D. (2014). The use of multimodal technologies to enhance reflective writing in teacher education. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Teaching reflective learning in higher education: A systematic approach using pedagogic patterns* (pp. 127-138). Springer International Publishing.
- Ash, S. L., & Clayton, P. H. (2009). Generating, deepening, and documenting learning: The power of critical reflection in applied learning. *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education*, 1(1), 25-48. <https://scholarworks.indianapolis.iu.edu/items/5f06a791-b5c1-4da2-95c7-120df70f5a65>
- Bharuthram, S. (2018). Reflecting on the process of teaching reflection in higher education. *Reflective Practice*, 19(6), 806-817. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2018.1539655>
- Boase-Jelinek, D., Parker, J., & Herrington, J. (2013). Student reflection and learning through peer reviews. *Issues in Educational Research*, 23(2), 119-131. <https://www.iier.org.au/iier23/boase-jelinek.pdf>
- Chan, C. K., & Lee, K. K. (2021). Reflection literacy: A multilevel perspective on the challenges of using reflections in higher education through a comprehensive literature review. *Educational Research Review*, 32, 100376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100376>
- Cheng, M. (2023). *Transition skills and strategies: Critical self-reflection*. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. <https://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/ethemes/student-transitions/critical-self-reflection.pdf>
- Cooper, R., & Lilyea, B. V. (2022). I'm interested in autoethnography, but how do I do it? *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 197-208. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5288>
- Coulson, D., & Harvey, M. (2013). Scaffolding student reflection for experience-based learning: a framework. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18, 401-413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.752726>
- Crane, C., & Sosulski, M. J. (2020). Staging transformative learning across collegiate language curricula: Student perceptions of structured reflection for language learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(1), 69-95. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/flan.12437>
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. DC Heath.
- Dyment, J. E., & O'Connell, T. S. (2010). The quality of reflection in student journals: A review of limiting and enabling factors. *Innovative Higher Education*, 35(4), 233-244. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10755-010-9143-y>
- Ellis, C. (2016). *Revision: Autoethnographic reflections on life and work*. Routledge.
- Eyler, J., & Giles, D. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* Jossey-Bass.

- Holdo, M. (2023). Critical reflection: John Dewey's relational view of transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 21(1), 9-25. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/15413446221086727>
- Kis, S., & Kartal, G. (2019). No pain no gain: reflections on the promises and challenges of embedding reflective practices in large classes. *Reflective Practice*, 20, 637-653. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2019.1651715>.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT Press.
- Marshall, T. (2019). The concept of reflection: A systematic review and thematic synthesis across professional contexts. *Reflective Practice*, 20(3), 395-415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2019.1622520>
- Moon, J. A. (2013). *Reflection in learning and professional development: Theory and practice* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203822296>
- Pais Marden, M., & Herrington, J. (2022). Encouraging reflective practice through learning portfolios in an authentic online foreign language learning environment. *Reflective Practice*, 23(2), 177-189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2021.2001321>
- Ramlal, A., & Augustin, D. S. (2020). Engaging students in reflective writing: An action research project. *Educational Action Research*, 28(3), 518-533. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1260449>
- Rolheiser, C., & Ross, J. A. (2013). Student self-evaluation: What research says and what practice shows. In M. Grover (Ed.), *Student assessment and learning*. Canadian Education Association.
- Ryan, M. E. (2015). *Teaching reflective learning in higher education*. Springer.
- Ryan, M., & Ryan, M. (2013). Theorising a model for teaching and assessing reflective learning in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 32(2), 244-257. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07294360.2012.661704>
- Schon, D. A. (2017). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Routledge.
- Smith, T. (2024). Using rubrics to guide reflective writing in nursing education. *Journal of Nursing Primary Health Care, JNPHC-103*.
- Sudirman, A., Gemilang, A. V., Kristanto, T. M. A., Robiasih, R. H., Nugroho, A. D., Karjono, J. S., ... & Rais, B. (2024). Reinforcing reflective practice through reflective writing in higher education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23(5), 454-474.
- Taylor, E. (2023). Promoting student reflection through reflective writing tasks. *Journal on Empowering Teaching Excellence*, 7(1), Article 6. <https://doi.org/10.26077/eafb-b4ea>
- Thompson, N., & Pascal, J. (2012). Developing critically reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 13(2), 311-325.
- Veine, S., Anderson, M. K., Andersen, N. H., Espenes, T. C., Soyland, 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>