

Asking more key questions of self-reflection

Introduction and background

This report was born out of the author's personal frustration when attempting to actively engage in self-reflection as part of a process of continuing professional development when working as an English teacher and teacher trainer in Kazakhstan. His quest for information on self-reflection led to hours of online searches which might guide him. It is his intention in this article to gather together the scattered information during his searches, and to present this as an evidence-based 'go-to,' thereby helping individuals to self-reflect as part of their learning or professional development. The article is structured as a series of key questions and answers. This is the second of Simon Brownhill's research reports which we have published. The first was a case study of an EAL learner which we summarised in November.

Key points

Who can and should self-reflect?

- In relation to *learners*, there is evidence that young children can self-reflect. Zelazo (2004) demonstrated in her research how English children aged 4-8 were able to reflect and how their ability to do so increased as a result of journaling, drawing, book-making, and modelling. Valkanova (2004) reports on how digital video editing was used to encourage reflection in English primary pupils learning science. Desautel (2009), reporting on research in an American elementary school, noted that 'self-reflection serves the goal of constructing metacognitive knowledge by making formerly unconscious, intangible, or reflexive processes explicit' for learners.
- There is also evidence of the value of self-reflection for secondary-age pupils. Biktagirova and Karomova (2019) argue that 'self-reflection is necessary for the development of (Russian) high school students since it is due to reflection that the attitude to oneself is revived, and the need for self-development and self-change appear'.
- In a similar vein, McCormack et al (2012) argue that school students who are explicitly taught metacognitive activities, such as written self-reflection, tend to be more highly engaged with their school work, as well as maintaining higher levels of academic proficiency.
- The value of self-reflection at university level is clear. Travers et al (2015), for example, report on research involving students who attended a self-reflective and personal growth goal-setting exercise. Students who consciously set growth goals and made progress towards them demonstrated increased self-esteem and self-efficacy.
- There is a large body of evidence which points to the value of self-reflection for *educators*, be they novice or experienced. Bell et al (2010) argue that 'effective self-reflection is a key component of excellent teaching'. Malatji and Wadesango highlight the impact of teacher self-reflection on professionals, arguing that 'self-reflection is important for (South African) teachers, because it helps them to improve their teaching practice and it provides multiple opportunities for learners to learn.'
- Self-reflection should not be limited to qualified professionals in educational settings but should also be undertaken by other support staff as part of their professional development. It is therefore of concern that the literature places a heavy emphasis on those who work *directly* with learners, with little attention paid to those who work *indirectly* with learners (those at an operational or management level).
- Although there is much evidence of senior management teams and governing bodies in the UK being encouraged to self-reflect through school evaluation mechanisms, or promote self-reflection in their settings, there is surprisingly little literature which focusses on school leaders in education engaging in their own professional/personal self-reflection. The author argues that this gap needs to be addressed.

Where can self-reflection be undertaken?

- The literature often encourages self-reflectors to 'pick a location that makes you feel relaxed, inspired, and which has no distractions' (Warley, n.d). This is, however, not possible for most learners for whom the place is set by educators (mainly the classroom or lecture hall). Such spaces may not be conducive to reflection because of issues with light, noise, or air quality. These issues may impede educators' ability to reflect *in-action* (Schön, 1983).
- The author suggests a number of spaces in the learning environment which may be more conducive to self-reflection. They include: *the reception area or the library in a school, an empty seminar room or a staff communal area at university*.
- Although self-reflectors may prefer the learning environment or workplace, Cambridge University Libraries (2021) suggest that self-reflectors should 'try to take yourself away from where you normally work/study – not only does this avoid distractions, but it helps to get your brain out of work/learning mode'. Alternative locations proposed by the author include coffee houses, book stores, art galleries, & museums. Klaphaak (2021) suggests that a 'daily walk is a great



way to incorporate self-reflection into your busy schedule'. Wignall (2019) advocates the notion of 'stillness within movement' (words of the author), suggesting that self-reflection can take place when sat in a moving car, bus, or train.

- One of the safest locations for self-reflectors is the home. The website 'A Conscious Rethink' (2020) puts forward various 'safe' home-based spaces such as a snug, a warm bath, or sitting in the garden.

When can self-reflection be undertaken?

- In his vision of 'professional artistry', Schön (1983) distinguishes between reflection-*in*-action (individuals thinking about what they are doing while they are doing it), and reflection-*on*-action (reflecting after the event). Killian and Todnem (1991) propose a third category of reflection-*for*-action - this involves thinking about future actions with the intention of improving or changing practice. This would, for example, require educators to anticipate what will occur during a lesson, as well as reflecting on their past experiences.
- One of the key issues cited by self-reflectors is the lack of time. The expectation to spend a long period of time such as an hour self-reflecting is unrealistic. The author recommends that individuals are better to 'start small,' beginning with just a couple of minutes, and then building this up as they grow in confidence and self-reflective ability. Klaphaak (2021) concurs with this, suggesting that we should self-reflect regularly, even if only for a few minutes.
- Engaging in small amounts of self-reflection can have benefits. Research in call centres by Stefano et al (2016) demonstrated that employees who spent just 15 minutes at the end of the day reflecting about 'lessons learned' performed 23 per cent better after 10 days than those who did not reflect.
- Just as individuals must choose the best place to reflect, they must also choose the best time. This could be during breakfast, whilst watching television in the afternoon, or when they are brushing their teeth in the evening.

How can more self-reflection be undertaken?

- Eyler et al (1996) offer a useful reflection activity matrix which has been adapted by the author for learners. It centres around 4 types of activity: *writing activities*, *speaking activities*, *diagrammatic activities*, and *media/performance activities*. Writing activities might include letters to themselves or others, or devising personal goal statements. Speaking activities may involve collaborative learning assignments, or peer/large group discussions. Examples of diagrammatic and media/performance activities include digital stories, music compositions, and images including drawings and paintings.
- For educators, Durham University (2021) provides a structured 'recipe card' which consists of a number of sequential steps for professionals to follow. Imperial College London (2021) offers educators a self-reflection proforma which involves peer observation.
- McCoy (2013) offers a quality example of a self-reflection prompt which can be used with any class. The prompt reads: *Think about your learning today, and using a scale from 1 through 10, with 10 being the best, rate the quality of your work. Then explain why you chose the rating you selected. Additionally...*

describe something you did and/or learned well today and describe something which still poses a challenge for you.

- Asking questions to 'spark' self-reflective practice is fundamental, but the author argues that there is a gap in the literature in terms of creative and engaging ways to do this, particularly with younger pupils. The author offers a suite of practical suggestions to stimulate self-reflection with reluctant learners. Some examples of these are summarised below.

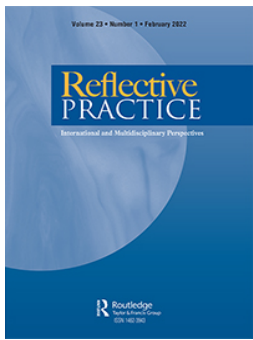
Activities to prompt the engagement of reluctant learners in self-reflection

- Self-reflective questions are written on individual playing cards. The cards are then dealt face down on the table. Learners are to select one card and answer the question chosen. Younger learners can verbalise their answers to educators, whereas older learners could share their answers with peers in written form.
- In an activity called *Bingo Balls*, learners are given a paper list of colour-coded sets of questions numbered 1 to 5. The educator calls out the number which is written on a coloured ball drawn from a bingo ball cage. Learners are then to spend that number of minutes reflecting on the corresponding numbered/coloured question. Reluctant learners' responses could be captured on paper via a drawing or on a computer screen using typed words.
- In the *Nursery Mobile* activity, self-reflective questions are hung on pieces of card from a nursery-style mobile. Reluctant learners are to look up at the mobile and select a question from it. They could enrich the mobile content by adding to the existing cards, or by amending them.
- Educators might like to present reluctant learners with a free online *Wheel of Fortune*-style spinner which is filled with self-reflective questions. Once the wheel is spun, learners should respond to the corresponding question. They could work together in pairs or in small groups where appropriate.
- One activity is called *Fish Bowl*. Individual self-reflective questions are written on fish-shaped pieces of paper which are folded up and placed in a plastic bowl. When they have been mixed up, learners can pull out a 'fish' from the bowl and think about their response to the question. Educators could differentiate by offering easier/harder questions on different coloured fish.

Conclusion

- If learners and professionals are to remain competitive in the workforce, cope with rapid change, and participate in an increasingly diverse society, it is essential that they develop the ability to self-reflect.
- Support for this 'soft skill' demands intellectual investment in clear, thoughtful, and up-to-date resources to assist individuals to engage in this activity.
- The author recognises that additional key questions need to be asked, such as how self-reflection can support learners with additional needs, how the profile of self-reflection can be raised in educational settings, and how it can be used to quantifiably raise academic achievement in students, and performance in educators.

A copy of the full article is attached to this summary with the author's permission



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ABSTRACT

The ability to reflect is fast becoming a skill that is globally recognised for its ability to benefit our learning, work and life. Support for individuals to engage in reflective activity can be found in an abundance of sources that include journal articles, online face-to-face coaching and mentoring opportunities, and published guides. However, when learners and professionals in the workforce seek to self-reflect, limited information is available at both a theoretical and practice-based level. Fuelled by concluding comments made in *Asking key questions of self-reflection* (Brownhill, 2022), this thoughtpiece offers a fresh literature-based exploration of this essential skill; this is facilitated by asking and answering more key questions such as who can and should self-reflect, and where and when can self-reflection be undertaken. Efforts to encourage individuals to engage in self-reflective activity are supported by a presentation of more stimulating ideas for use and adaptation. Written to be accessible in both content and scope, this thoughtpiece serves as an original and complementary 'go-to' that has the potential to help individuals self-reflect as part of their learning and/or professional development with increased clarity, appreciation and confidence.

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Introduction

In a world full of 'volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity' (Patterson, 2017, p. 4), the need for reflection is considered pivotal in 'leading ... change, development and growth' (Middleton, 2017, p. 2). In recognition of its high status, a wealth of support is readily available for individuals to engage in reflective activity; these include models for reflection (McClean, 2019), training programmes (Fragkos, 2016), practice-based booklets and workshops (Zalipour, 2015), and research-informed handbooks (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012). Of concern is the fact that if learners and professionals in the workforce wish to engage in self-reflection, levels of support are limited, with some of the information available being contradictory or unclear; this is despite the fact that self-reflection has been recognised as a crucial 21st Century Skill¹ (see Chalkiadaki, 2018). This thoughtpiece, stimulated by the concluding comments offered in *Asking key questions of self-reflection* (Brownhill, 2022), was born out of my personal frustration when attempting to actively engage in self-reflection as part of my continuing

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A thoughtpiece

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professional development (CPD). Few sources of information that solely focussed on this vital skill were deemed sufficiently research-informed or practically orientated to effectively assist me when I worked as a classroom teacher in England and as a trainer of trainers in Kazakhstan (see Turner et al., 2017). As such, ‘this resulted in hours of library and online searches for journal articles, conference papers, practice-based reports and quality websites to inform, support and guide me’ (Brownhill, 2022, p. 57).² In light of the above, it is my intention to amalgamate the scattered information I gathered about self-reflection, presenting this in the form of an original and complementary ‘go-to’ for readers to access and learn from. To structure the discussion, a select number of key questions are asked and answered (these build on those considered in *Asking key questions of self-reflection*,³ as fuelled by the ‘5WH’ cues – *who, what, where, why, when*, and *how* – proposed by Jasper and Mooney, 2013), the first of which seeks to establish who can and should self-reflect.

Who can and should self-reflect?

Given that ‘[i]t is well-known that self-reflection can be a process of evaluating one’s strengths and limitations’ (Pang, 2020, p. 15), the claim that *everyone* can and should reflect is far from an underestimation. To facilitate more of an exploratory response, prominent groups of individuals from across the international education community will be discussed, the first of these being *learners*.

Historically, it was accepted that young children did not have the capacity to self-reflect (Flavell, 1977). Zelazo (2004) opposes this, arguing that children *can* self-reflect, the level at which they are able to do so being determined by their developmental age and language ability. Leigh (2020) supports Zelazo’s assertions, demonstrating in her research how English children aged 4–8 were able to reflect, and increased their ability to do so when given opportunities to practice reflection through journaling, drawing, mark-making and modelling. There is increased evidence in the literature that children (up to the age of 11 years) can and should self-reflect; indeed, Valkanova (2004) reports on the use of digital video editing as a tool for encouraging self-reflection in English primary-school aged children in the subject of science, whereas Desautel (2009, p. 2001) conducted a study on the effects of reflection in an American urban elementary school, arguing that ‘self-reflection serves the goal of constructing metacognitive knowledge by making formerly unconscious, intangible, or reflexive processes or events explicit’ for learners.

There is much literature to suggest that secondary school pupils (11–16-year-olds) can and should self-reflect. Biktagirova and Karimova (2019, p. 485), for example, argue that ‘[s]elf-reflection is necessary for the development of [Russian] high school students, since it is due to reflection that the attitude to oneself is revived, [and] the need for self-change and self-development appear’. The benefits of self-reflection for secondary school learners are well-rehearsed; Feron and Schils (2020, p. 13), for example, acknowledge the value of self-reflection on study behaviour and expectations to help secondary school students in the Netherlands reach their potential:

... when students have positive beliefs about their own capabilities in relation to school tasks and are able to set realistic achievement goals, they are more likely to be motivated to start with the task and to persist when they encounter difficulties.

McCormick et al. (2012) build on this, arguing that school students (various) who are explicitly taught metacognitive activities, such as written self-reflection, tend to be more highly engaged in their school work, as well as maintain higher levels of academic proficiency.

Moon (1999) sees critical self-reflection⁴ as helping learners to step back from their learning experience and engage in deeper and more meaningful learning. Cheng (2015, p. 1) supports this at the university level (18+ years) in the context of the UK by suggesting that 'critical self-reflection [is an] important transition skill that students would benefit from developing during their university studies'. In the context of final-year UK business-school students, Travers et al. (2015) report on research involving those who attended a self-reflective and personal growth goal-setting course. The outcomes of students setting growth goals and making progress towards them (e.g. better academic performance) resulted in 'increased self-esteem (positive self-evaluation) and self-efficacy (task-specific confidence)' (p. 236).

Another prominent group of self-reflectors [those who self-reflect] are *educators*, be they lecturers (see Pedrosa-de-Jesus et al., 2017) or teachers. Bell et al. (2010, p. 57) argue that 'effective self-reflection is a key component of excellent teaching'; in support of this, Malatji and Wadesango (2014, p. 375) conclude that 'self-reflection is important for [South African] teachers because it helps them to improve their teaching practice and it provides multiple opportunities for learners to learn'. The value of self-reflection for novice teachers in Indonesia (Hidayati, 2018) cannot be underestimated as they navigate their way through the first few years of their career, facilitated (in part) through professional development programmes (Mahmoudi and Özkan, 2015). This is not to say though that expert teachers should not self-reflect; indeed, Sammaknejad and Marzban (2016, p. 84) argue that 'experienced teachers [in Iran should] think about what they have done in the classroom', using action research as 'a form of self-reflective inquiry' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 162) to promote continued professional growth.

The literature recognises other educators such as English teaching assistants (TAs) as professionals who can and should self-reflect (Nicholson et al., 2018). I support this, but argue that learning mentors (LMs), sports coaches, librarians, technicians and IT (Information Technology) support staff in schools can and should self-reflect as part of their CPD as well. Self-reflection is not limited to qualified professionals in educational settings; indeed, Shandomo (2010, p. 102) discusses the 'teacher candidates' [student teachers] she supports in the USA who have to write a self-reflection for each lesson they develop and teach; this is done as it 'gives them means to remember, recall, reconstruct, re-create, and represent what they learn of their teaching practice under supervision'. Given that '[s]tudies have shown that students engaging in reflective activities have reported increased self[-]awareness, self-confidence, and feeling of empowerment to recreate their own self-concept' (Roberts, 2008, p. 118), I believe that *all* work-based students in education can and should engage in self-reflection to benefit their initial professional development (IDP).

It is of concern that the literature available places a heavy emphasis on self-reflection being of benefit for those individuals who work directly with learners, with little consideration being given to those professionals who work at an operational/management level (individuals who work indirectly with learners). Indeed, Pavlou (2004, p. 11) argues that

Self-reflection [is] considered an essential quality if an aspiring leader is able to fulfil their potential and achieve success. If there is little room for self-doubt, it is still vital that self-reflection is maintained.

Whilst there is much evidence of senior management teams and governing bodies in the UK being encouraged to self-reflect through school evaluation mechanisms (see Chapman and Sammons, 2013), there is surprisingly limited literature which focuses on headteachers, deputy headteachers or assistant headteachers engaging in their own personal/professional self-reflection. Instead, senior managers are discussed in the context of either promoting self-reflection in their settings (e.g. Vogels, 2017; in the USA) or offering feedback to support teachers' self-reflection (Diggelen et al., 2013; in the Netherlands) following observations of classroom practice in the school (see Lamb, 2017). I argue that this gap in the literature should be positively addressed to ensure that all members of the education community are reported in using the self-reflective process in subsequent experiences to further improve their ability to learn new information and skills (Zimmerman, 1998).

With some clarity offered about who can and should self-reflect, the discussion will now consider where self-reflection can be undertaken.

Where can self-reflection be undertaken?

To counter a simple 'Anywhere!' response to the question above, efforts will be made to identify specific reflective spaces (Patton and Kinsella, 2018), both within and outside of the learning environment/workplace, where learners and educators can engage in self-reflection. The literature frequently encourages self-reflectors to '[p]ick a location that makes you feel relaxed, inspired and has no distractions' (Warley, n. d.). For most learners though, the location is already 'set' by educators who ask them to self-reflect as part of a planned activity in the classroom/lecture theatre; there is, however, concern that these spaces may not be conducive to supporting self-reflective thought due to issues with light, sound (noise), temperature and air quality (see Barrett et al., 2015). These issues can also negatively impact on the ability of educators to self-reflect *in-action* (Schön, 1983) during a busy/challenging lesson/session. I assert that there are more favourable spaces in the learning environment/workplace that learners and educators could use for self-reflection; these are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Spaces in the learning environment/workplace for learners and educators to self-reflect in.

Spaces in the learning environment for learners to self-reflect in		Spaces in the workplace for educators to self-reflect in	
<i>School</i>	<i>College/University</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>College/University</i>
School hall	Empty lecture theatre/seminar room	Staffroom	Meeting space
Corridor	Reading room	Classroom (cupboard)	Work office
Reception area/ foyer	Prayer space	Library	Canteen
Playground	Gym/sports field	IT suite	Staff communal area
Cloakroom	Music room	Staff offices (when not being used)	Private study pod

Readers will note that [Table 1](#) offers a mix of quiet, social and active spaces; this is partly in response to the thinking of Bassot (2016, p. 13) who questions the necessity for quiet spaces for self-reflection, arguing that ‘not everyone wants or indeed needs quiet in order to reflect; some of us do our best thinking with life’s regular hustle and bustle around us’. This raises an important point: the space that individuals choose to self-reflect in (if they are given a choice) is likely to be different for different people, and the key is finding what suits the individual best. Indeed, whilst self-reflectors may favour the learning environment/workplace, Cambridge University Libraries (2021) suggest that self-reflectors should ‘[t]ry to take yourself away from where you normally work[/study] – not only does this avoid distractions but it helps to get your brain out of work[/learning] mode’. As such, locations in the local environment such as shops (think coffee houses and book stores), creative spaces (think art galleries and museums) and public spaces (think leisure centres and beaches) offer a suite of what I call ‘self-reflective spaces’ for individuals to choose from. Klapaak (2021) suggests that a ‘daily walk is a great way to incorporate self-reflection into your busy schedule’, this being facilitated in local ‘green’ spaces that encourage movement, e.g. parks, fields and gardens. This is not to say that self-reflectors have to be active in these spaces; indeed, individuals may choose to stand to admire the view (beach), lie in the grass (field), or sit on available benches (park) if they wish. Wignall (2019) builds on this, advocating the notion of ‘stillness-within-movement’ [my words] by suggesting that self-reflection can be undertaken ‘[d]uring your commute home from work[/school]’, this being when sat in the car, on the bus, or on the tram/train.

Irrespective of where individuals self-reflect, it is important that spaces ‘[p]rovide a safe environment for self-reflection’ (Garmston, 1997, p. 2). One of the safest locations for self-reflectors, at least in my opinion, is the home. In support of my assertion, the website *A Conscious Rethink* (2020) recognises various ‘safe’ home-based spaces that self-reflectors can access: ‘a snug, a warm bath, or just lying on your bed is ideal, but you might also wish to sit in the garden’. A common concern of self-reflectors is not just finding the right space for them to self-reflect in, but knowing when to self-reflect, or at least finding the time to engage in this critical activity. It is to these latter considerations that this thoughtpiece briefly turns its attention.

When can self-reflection be undertaken?

Schön’s (1983) vision of ‘professional artistry’ includes two types of reflection:

- reflection-*in*-action – thinking about what individuals are doing while they are doing it, and
- reflection-*on*-action – individuals reflecting ‘after-the-event’.

These types of reflection are useful in signalling when self-reflectors could self-reflect – *during* an activity (learners)/teaching exposition (educators), and/or *after* the activity/teaching exposition has taken place. A related concept which was developed from Schön’s work is reflection-*for*-action⁵ (Killion and Todnem, 1991) which refers to thinking about future actions with the intention of improving or changing a practice. This type of

reflection requires educators, for example, to anticipate what will occur during a lesson, as well as reflect on their past experiences, before a lesson occurs (Farrell, 2013), self-reflection thus taking place *before* an event.

Given that '[t]ime is essential for the practice of self-reflection' (Pang, 2020, p. 17), it is surprising that one of the key issues self-reflectors consistently cite is that they do not have (enough) time to self-reflect, or they are unable to make/find time in their busy day (see Miller, 2020, p. 22). The expectation that self-reflectors will engage in self-reflection for an extended period of time – an hour, for example, – is unrealistic given the demands that self-reflection requires of the individual, be they cognitive, physical, and/or emotional in nature. As such, I argue that self-reflectors should 'start small' dedicating just a couple of minutes for self-reflection and building this up, time-wise, as they grow in confidence and self-reflective ability. Klapaak (2021) supports my thinking, suggesting that we should self-reflect regularly, even if it is only for a few minutes: 'If you don't have a lot of free time, try self-reflecting at least once a week.' Engaging in small amounts of self-reflection, time-wise, can have positive benefits – research in call centres by Stefano et al. (2016) demonstrated that employees who spent just fifteen minutes at the end of the day reflecting about lessons learned performed 23% better after 10 days than those who did not reflect. Just as individuals need to choose the self-reflective space that suits them best (see *Where can self-reflection be undertaken?*), so too should they choose the best time(s) for them to self-reflect; this could be during breakfast in the morning, whilst watching television in the afternoon, or when they are brushing their teeth before bed at night.

Thus far, this thoughtpiece has sought to explore who can and should self-reflect, and where and when self-reflection can be undertaken. A key question that was asked in *Asking key questions of self-reflection* (Brownhill, 2022) was 'How can self-reflection be undertaken?' This thoughtpiece seeks to revisit this question, responding with a presentation of more stimulating ideas to extend and enrich the strategies that self-reflectors can choose from to engage in self-reflective activity.

How can more self-reflection be undertaken?

To initially answer this question, Eyler et al. (1996, p. 65) offer a useful reflection activity matrix which I have edited and adapted; this is presented in Table 2 and can be used by different groups of individuals across different disciplines and in different contexts, where appropriate.

Other self-reflective activities noted in the literature include skills competitions (Mayhew et al., 2013), social-emotional storybooks (for younger children; Teitelbaum, 2020), and self-reported reflective learning questionnaires that quantify levels of student self-reflection (Colomer et al., 2013). Of personal interest is the work of Kong et al. (2009) who reflect on a web-enabled video system for self-reflection by student teachers using a guiding framework. To specifically support educators' engagement in their own self-reflection, Durham University (2021) provides a structured 'recipe card' which consists of a number of sequential steps to be followed, whereas Imperial College London (2021) offer educators a self-reflection proforma which involves peer-observation. For educators who wish to promote self-reflection in their classrooms, McCoy (2013, p. 151) offers an example of an appropriate self-reflection prompt that can be shared with any class of learners:

Table 2. Reflective activities by Eyler et al. (1996, p. 65; adapted).

Writing activities	Personal goal statements Written persuasive arguments	Reading responses Letters to self or others	Notes Bulletin board entries	Logs
Speaking activities	Peer or large group discussions	Collaborative learning assignments	Problem-Based Learning groups (e.g. with real-world cases)	Reflective interviews
Diagrammatic activities	Teaching Concept maps	Role-playing Mind maps	Poetry slams Conceptual diagrams	Story telling
Media/ Performance activities	Photos, images, and filmmaking Digital stories	Drawings and paintings Tableau vivants ('a living picture')	Music compositions Murals	

Think about your learning today, and using a scale from one through ten with ten being the best, rate the quality of your work. Then, explain why you chose the rating you selected. Additionally ... describe something you did and/or learned well today and describe something that still poses a challenge for you.

The asking of questions to 'spark' self-reflective thought is a fundamental practice (Malthouse et al., 2015), but I argue that there is a gap in the literature which fails to provide educators with creative/engaging ways to prompt reluctant learners with these questions, particularly those who are in the infancy of their self-reflective journeys (children aged 4–11). As such, I offer a suite of practical suggestions in Table 3 that educators can adapt to stimulate self-reflective thought in reluctant learners (children aged 4–11).

Conclusion

If learners and professionals (e.g. educators) are to 'be competitive in the twenty-first century workforce, participate appropriately in an increasingly diverse society, use new technologies and cope with rapidly changing workplaces' (Scott, 2015, p. 8), it is essential that they develop the ability to self-reflect. Support for this soft skill demands intellectual investment in clear, thoughtful and up-to-date resources to assist individuals when engaging in this vital activity. The discussion above provides an original and complementary 'go-to' for those who seek answers to important questions such as who can and should self-reflect, where and when should self-reflection be undertaken, and how can self-reflection be undertaken. The limitations of this discussion are fully recognised; additional key questions need to be asked of self-reflection such as how can self-reflection support learners with additional needs, how can the profile of self-reflection be raised in educational settings, and how/can self-reflection be used to quantifiably raise academic achievement (grades) in students and performance in educators. It is through these questions, and many others, that a deeper understanding of self-reflection can be attained, and the value of self-reflection to lead informed and thoughtful deliberations on one's behaviours and actions can be assured (Lew and Schmidt, 2011).

Table 3. Table to show creative ways to prompt the engagement of reluctant learners (children aged 4–11) with self-reflective questions (inspired by Brownhill, 2005).

Idea	Detail
<i>Pick a card – any card!</i>	Self-reflective questions are written on individual blank playing cards. The question cards are dealt face-down on the table. Reluctant learners are encouraged to select one card and focus their self-reflective thoughts on answering the question chosen. Younger reluctant learners (aged 4–7) could verbalise their answers to educators whereas older reluctant learners (aged 7–11) could verbalise their responses to their peers.
<i>Bingo balls!</i>	Reluctant learners are each given a paper list of colour-coded sets of self-reflective questions, these being numbered 1–5. The educator calls out the number that is written on a coloured ball drawn from a small bingo ball cage. Reluctant learners are then to spend that number of minutes self-reflecting on the corresponding numbered/coloured question. Responses by reluctant learners could be captured on paper via a drawing or on a computer screen using typed words.
<i>Nursery mobile!</i>	Self-reflective questions are hung on pieces of card from a self-made nursery-style mobile which reluctant learners are encouraged to look up at and select a question from. Reluctant learners could enrich the mobile content by adding to/amending/replacing existing question cards with new ones.
<i>Wheel of Fortune!</i>	Educators create a free online <i>Wheel of Fortune</i> -style spinner that is filled with self-reflective questions for reluctant learners to respond to once the wheel has been spun. Reluctant learners could work together in pairs or small groups to answer individual questions, as and where appropriate.
<i>Fish bowl!</i>	Individual self-reflective questions are written on fish-shaped pieces of paper which are folded up and put in a plastic bowl. Once these have been mixed up, reluctant learners can pull out 'a fish' (a question) from the bowl and think about their response to it. Educators could differentiate the self-reflective questions for the different abilities of reluctant learners by offering easier/harder questions on different coloured fish.
<i>Cover-me coin/counter!</i>	Reluctant learners are offered a 5 × 5 square grid – in each square is written a self-reflective question. Reluctant learners are to toss a coin or counter over the grid; whichever square the coin/counter (mostly) covers is the question that reluctant learners are to give their reflective consideration to. For younger reluctant learners, a 3 × 3 grid could be used to limit the number of questions that they have to respond to.

Notes

1. Self-reflection is labelled as a *Personal skill* under the sub-category *Self-development and autonomy*.
2. Key questions, such as *Who can and should self-reflect?*, *Where can self-reflection be undertaken?*, and *When can self-reflection be undertaken?* were used to narrow my exploration of the available literature, these questions being of particular interest to me from a theoretical and practice-based perspective. Specific terms such as *self-reflectors*, *spaces* and *time* were used to search different databases, e.g. *Scopus* and *British Education Index*, for relevant literature that was largely published between 2000 and the present day. Whilst most of the information collected was of worth, some of it offered disjointed and, at times, confusing insights.
3. Questions answered in the first thoughtpiece include *What is 'self-reflection'?*, *Why is self-reflection so important?*, and *How can self-reflection be undertaken?*
4. Critical self-reflection refers to the process of questioning one's own assumption, presuppositions, and meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2006).
5. Wilson (2008, p. 183) refers to this as both 'reflection-on-the-future' and 'reflection-before-action'.

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