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Professional Reflection: An Easy Way to Improve Educational Work of Teachers?

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Abstract

With current curricular changes in education and increasing pressure on teachers to enhance the effectiveness of educational practice, it is becoming ever more important to focus on the evaluation of one's own personality and professional expertise. This can be facilitated through the reconstruction of teaching practices, followed by the modification of educational objectives and means. The paper analyzes the significance of professional reflection in teachers' work and in the preparation of student teachers, as well as the myths regarding the challenges associated with its implementation. It is argued that successfully engaging in reflective practice—and obtaining meaningful outcomes—depends, on the one hand, on a proper understanding of reflection within the professional context and, on the other hand, on the experience of the educational stakeholders and the school culture that shapes the conditions that support contributions to educational knowledge. Arguments in favor of encouraging reflection among novice teachers (i.e., student teachers) are also addressed, as it serves as a tool for updating their knowledge and skills in response to school requirements and students' educational needs. A useful strategy for promoting such reflection at the faculties of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice involved in teacher education is the "*Magnificent Seven*" model. In conclusion, the necessity of systematically obtaining, evaluating, and utilizing feedback as an approach to personal development and professional growth is emphasized. This underscores the critical role of continuous professional learning, as highlighted in the final dimension of the professional standards for primary and secondary school teachers.

Keywords: feedback, professional reflection, school, student teachers, teachers

1. Reflection as a Foundation for Professional Growth of Teachers

The changes in education in Slovakia presented in the new *State Educational Program for Primary Education* (Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak

Republic, 2023) represent a significant step towards modernizing teaching, with a focus on developing students' key competencies, prioritizing the ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations. This approach requires teachers to adapt their teaching methods to students' needs and societal demands. Professional reflection, as emphasized in the *Professional Standard for Primary and Secondary School Teachers* (Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic, 2025a) and the *Professional Standard for Beginning Pedagogical Employees* (Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic, 2025b), is a tool for ensuring quality education, allowing teachers to evaluate their teaching practice, identify strengths and areas for improvement. Only systematic reflection enables them to respond flexibly to the changes arising from the new curriculum and to develop teaching strategies that support students' individual development in line with current educational trends.

The OECD TALIS 2024 study, according to the Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic (2025c), has long emphasized the importance of collegial learning and the development of professional communities that support the exchange of experiences and innovations. The OECD document (2019), which addresses a successful start in teacher preparation, underlines that one of the ways to support this effective start for teacher candidates is practice-based research, known as lesson study. Its core elements are professional reflection and the analysis of the impact of teaching approaches. In another OECD document (2025), which focuses on research-engaged teacher education, reflective practice is highlighted, with examples from Australia and Ireland showing how it often leads to creative thinking among student teachers.

Professional reflection is one of the most frequently discussed topics in teacher learning (Zakaria, 2020) and has gradually become a key element of their continuous development. It is often recognized for its potential to improve teaching practice and support ongoing professional learning. A teacher should primarily act as a reflective professional who is not satisfied with the current state of their work but constantly considers ways to improve, thus avoiding routine in education. This approach is most appreciated by the students themselves, which can lead to positive changes in their learning outcomes, engagement, and behavior. Machost and Stains (2023) argue that reflection is essential for enhancing educators' work and is a prerequisite for their professional progress.

When reflecting on educational activities, a teacher takes on several roles that correspond to different stages of learning and processing experience. Following the learning model developed by Lewin (later developed into Kolb's learning model), they go through four phases of experience processing. First, they experience it emotionally as an "activist," then analyze it as a "reflector," then consider it as a "theorist," and finally apply the acquired knowledge as a "pragmatist." This cycle allows a teacher to understand and critically evaluate their own practice, which supports the improving of teaching (Petty, 2013).

Ambady (2018), when defining the characteristics of reflective practitioners, follows Eby and Kujawa (1998), who argue that reflective practitioners are:

- Active – They deliberately seek information when solving problems in the classroom.
- Persistent – They are determined to think deeply about complex issues and dedicate consistent attention to them, even though it is often difficult and exhausting.
- Cautious – They care for themselves and others, respecting the individuality of students and creating a positive classroom environment.
- Skeptical – They are aware that few principles are absolute, maintaining a healthy level of doubt toward educational theories and methods.
- Rational – They hesitate to act impulsively or blindly follow trends, basing their practices on evidence and sound judgment.

- Proactive – They transfer the reconstruction of activities into educational actions.

The purpose of professional reflection is reflected in its functions, which, according to Hupková (2006), drawing on other researchers as well (Figure 1 presents our own processing of selected academic sources), include:

1) **Cognitive function –** A teacher gains a deeper understanding of themselves, their teaching approach, and becomes more sensitive to students' attitudes, needs, and interests.
2) **Feedback function –** The teacher reflects on their own work and the progress of the lesson, analyzing and evaluating them. They gather information on how students and colleagues respond to their methods and interventions in specific teaching situations.
3) **Developmental function –** The teacher builds a foundation for professional growth, based on the feedback and recommendations they receive.
4) **Adaptive function –** Reflection helps teachers interpret educational situations and supports changes in teaching methods. It facilitates self-acceptance, including their professional capabilities.
5) **Preventive function –** Through reflection, the teacher anticipates their own reactions in problematic situations and is able to prepare for them in advance. They learn from both their own and others' experiences and can choose appropriate methods for resolving conflicts and preventing their recurrence.
6) **Improvement function –** The teacher reflects on successful situations they have managed, which provides satisfaction from their work, especially when they also receive positive feedback from students and colleagues, motivating them for further educational activities.
7) **Creative function –** Reflection helps the teacher change and innovate their practices to make them more effective. However, it is essential that each change is subsequently verified in practice and its effectiveness evaluated.

Figure 1: Functions of Professional Reflection

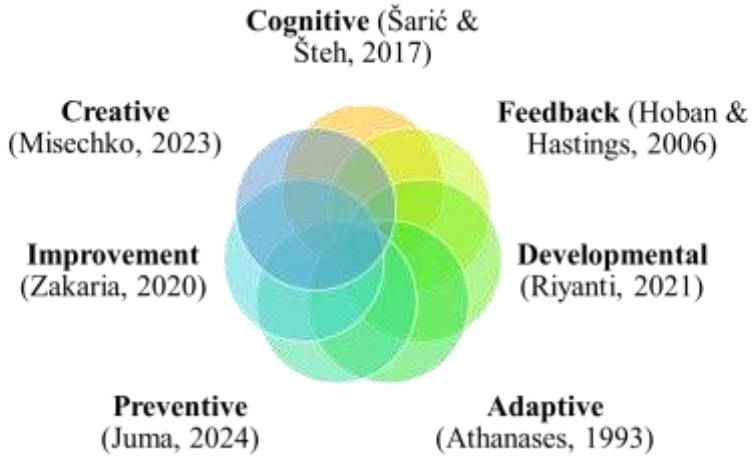


Figure 1 demonstrates that professional reflection is a multidimensional process. Together, these functions support teachers' professional growth, responsiveness to educational change, and capacity for collaborative problem-solving. The interconnected nature of these functions also suggests that reflective practice should be systematically integrated into teacher education and professional development.

In an undeniably dynamic educational environment, reflection, according to Brookfield (2017), is a "gyroscope" that helps teachers maintain balance amidst new curricula and educational standards (Machost & Stains, 2023). Reflection is vital for the professional growth of educators and their continuous journey as lifelong learners. Therefore, it is also described as a "compass," assisting them in deciding which direction they wish to take professionally in the future (Farrell, 2012). The research by Saimon and Mtenzi (2021) showed that reflective practices improve four key aspects of teaching. These include assessment, the roles of the teacher and student in the classroom in terms of cooperation, the teacher's pedagogical competence, as well as teachers' awareness of integrating information and communication technologies into the classroom and their skills in this area.

It essentially represents a platform for the success of a teacher's work within curricular reforms. However, professional reflection is often perceived as a natural part of teachers' work, which is not entirely accurate, and therefore they may not achieve appropriate outcomes and updates in their didactic skills through it. It is a metacompetence (Ferencová & Šuťáková, 2022; Ferencová et al., 2024) that requires the same level of attention as other professional competencies.

1.1. Literature Review

Hanuliaková and Lobotková (2023) identify self-reflection and the cultivation of self-efficacy among the essential competencies of 21st-century teachers, emphasizing the close interrelationship between these constructs (Heng & Chu, 2023; Maharjan et al., 2025). Kaunickienė and Bubnys (2025) highlight the importance of structured reflective practice as a catalyst for teachers' long-term professional development within school settings. Their phenomenographic study demonstrated that teachers who engaged in systematic reflection exhibited higher levels of self-awareness, improvements in pedagogical practice, and a strengthened professional identity. Similarly, Esser-Noethlichs et al. (2024) argue that so-called deep reflection—where individuals critically examine not only their behavior and mistakes but also their values, motivations, and ideals—constitutes an effective tool for the professional growth of pre-service teachers.

Alan and Güven (2022) likewise discuss a model of teacher education grounded in the integration of theory and practice, one that extends beyond the mere transmission of experience to learners. Among its primary objectives is the minimization of problems associated with insufficient practical experience prior to formal teaching placements, as well as the preparation of student teachers for the profession through context-specific and continuous feedback. Hußner et al. (2023) further associate reflective competence with teachers' self-efficacy, which serves as a protective factor against stress and burnout; within this context, microteaching plays an important role.

The Council of the European Union's *Conclusions on Effective Teacher Education* (2014) emphasized that initial teacher education should provide student teachers with conditions conducive to the development of core professional competencies. This involves not only subject-content knowledge and the completion of teaching practice placements, but also the parallel cultivation of self-reflection and collaborative attitudes. In this context, particular attention was also drawn to responsiveness to diverse groups of learners and to rigorous pedagogical research that would encourage teachers to continuously update their knowledge and engage in professional preparation for innovative teaching approaches.

One of the outcomes of the project *Innovation of the Professional Practical Preparation of Future Teachers*, supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic, was the publication *Professional Practical Preparation of Future Teachers*

(Kosová, Tomengová et al., 2015). In addition to highlighting the importance of the gradual progression of teaching practice, the publication emphasizes the need to guide novice teachers toward professional reflection. Drawing on scholarly sources, the authors argue that reflective practice constitutes the foundation for the development of contextual knowledge, which ultimately leads to the capacity to reinterpret teaching, learners, and oneself, as well as to critically evaluate one's educational decision-making and professional practice.

1.2. Aim and Scope of the Paper

The aim of this paper is, on the one hand, to analyze the significance of professional reflection in teachers' practice (as discussed in the first chapter), since it enables teachers to identify the areas—particularly with respect to the dimensions of professional standards—in which they experience shortcomings and concerns about failing to meet the expectations associated with educational practice. On the other hand, the paper seeks to underscore the importance of implementing professional reflection among student teachers during teaching practice, as it provides them with a platform for reconsidering acquired didactic theories, evaluating the competencies they have developed, and internalizing the mechanisms and realities of school practice.

Achieving an accurate understanding of the nature of reflection requires awareness of institutional barriers that may hinder its full development, as well as barriers operating at the individual and group levels, where it is necessary to confront myths that prevent reflection from becoming a stimulus for professional growth and instead may reinforce educators' misconceptions regarding their self-efficacy and competencies. To prevent this, it is essential to adhere to a valid model of reflective practice—one that can be adapted to specific educational problems—and to employ techniques and procedures that promote the critical evaluation of instructional management while encouraging openness to the perspectives of more experienced colleagues and to their interpretations of observed classroom practices during lesson analysis.

The paper therefore poses the following guiding question: *How can professional reflection be structured within teacher professional development and education so that it contributes to the reconstruction of educational practice and to learning from that practice?* Put more simply, drawing on Kessels and Korthagen (2011), how can student teachers and practicing teachers be supported in intensifying their phronesis—that is, perceptual knowledge grounded in the interpretation of situations and the "eye" for perceiving details that experts gradually develop through sustained practice and training?

This is a conceptual paper based on a narrative analysis of scholarly literature, the selection of which was informed by studies examining best practices in the implementation of reflective practice among teachers, as well as trends in the preparation of student teachers in response to shifts in educational paradigms (e.g., the teacher as facilitator, the teacher as inspirer, the teacher as a creator of a positive classroom climate, among others).

2. Barriers and Myths in Professional Reflection

The question, then, is whether professional reflection is truly a "simple path" to pedagogical mastery, where teachers critically examine their own teaching methods, beliefs, and interactions. While the benefits are clear, the idea of professional reflection as a straightforward means of improving education is somewhat misleading. Studies also underline the obstacles teachers face in implementing reflection, emphasizing that myths and misconceptions which diminish the complexity and significance of reflective practice should not be underestimated.

As highlighted by other scholars, contextual factors—such as superficial support for reflection, underestimating its implementation in terms of true pedagogical competence, or conducting it in secret without institutional reach—influence teachers' approaches to reconstructing educational activities (Machost & Stains, 2023). Afuye (2026), who analyzed scholarly sources on the nature and benefits of teacher reflection, draws attention to several inhibitors of reflective teaching. These include systemic and workplace pressures (such as teachers' post-instructional responsibilities, the weakening of authentic reflection through attempts to strategically institutionalize it within schools, and staff turnover disrupting continuity), emotional and psychological barriers (including fear of failure, distorted self-perception, and excessive self-confidence), insufficient knowledge and support (limited professional training opportunities and organizational isolation), as well as cognitive challenges (difficulties in shifting perspectives and the absence of clear comparative criteria for reflection).

A significant barrier to the effective implementation of professional reflection at Slovak faculties preparing student teachers may be seen in the relatively limited degree of unification regarding preferred models of reflecting on teaching practice, both across faculties and within individual departments. This fragmentation is reflected in differences in educational philosophies, instructional models, and methods used to observe and evaluate students' teaching performance. In courses devoted to teaching methodology and classroom management, attention is often directed primarily toward particular instructional strategies aligned with current educational demands, such as inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, group instruction, and similar approaches.

Barra et al. (2024) found that barriers to fostering positive attitudes toward reflective practices among student teachers include not only interinstitutional conditions, but also the lack of models of reflective practice and the ways in which reflection itself is assessed. The authors further emphasize that the successful integration of reflective practice into teacher education programs requires adequate institutional support, including improved teacher salaries to strengthen the perceived value of the profession, the establishment of cooperative environments, and active support from school leadership. Moreover, without flexibility in curriculum design and in the organization of training aimed at enhancing reflective practices, the implementation of such approaches is likely to be challenging (Zarrabi & Mohammadi, 2024).

It should also be noted that the transfer of reflective teaching into the everyday practice of primary and secondary schools depends largely on long-term cooperation with mentor teachers, who intentionally guide student teachers through the realities of school life and help them understand organizational structures, norms, and institutional culture. However, the forms and extent of such cooperation vary considerably across universities in Slovakia.

The study by Nolan and Molla (2018) focused on exploring teacher professional development and its positioning from the perspective of reflective practice. Findings drawn from data from a national mentoring project for newly graduated early childhood teachers in Victoria, Australia, indicate that for transformative teacher education to occur, the process should be influenced by a pedagogy of discomfort, which calls for openness to emotional and ethical challenges in schools. According to this approach, when teachers encounter discomfort, they can develop deeper insight into themselves and the world around them (which is the essence of transformation, involving not merely the accumulation of facts, but rather a shift in perspective regarding the planning and implementation of education).

Not surprisingly, when considering the true nature of professional reflection, several myths are associated with it, as indicated by the preliminary analysis of Korthagen et al.

(2011). This is something that student teachers and beginning teachers, in particular, should be aware of:

Myth 1. *Professional reflection is a matter of immediate and pragmatic action in the classroom when a problem arises (e.g., disciplinary, educational, or instructional issues).*

Explanation: Professional reflection for teachers is not just a quick response to problems with students in the classroom. It is a much broader process that involves systematically evaluating experiences, learning from successes, and even from our failures. It develops professional identity and deepens pedagogical skills (starting with planning steps to address shortcomings).

Myth 2. *Professional reflection is an academic matter because it is solely associated with research (e.g., with action research).*

Explanation: In reality, reflection takes place in the teacher's daily practice when they consider what they were able to accomplish during a lesson. Although it does not rely exclusively on formal research methods, it involves using self-diagnostic tools that allow the teacher to learn from experiences and adapt their teaching to the needs of students. Therefore, it can be considered a practical tool for professional development, not just a theoretical concept.

Myth 3. *Professional reflection is characteristic of beginning teachers, as they enter a new environment and need to learn a lot.*

Explanation: Professional reflection is not only associated with beginning teachers who are adapting to the new school environment. Paradoxically, this process can be very challenging, which may hinder their engagement in reflection, as they must cope with numerous unexpected stimuli and demands. In reality, reflection is important for all teachers, regardless of their career stage, as it helps not only novices but also experienced educators improve their strategies and methods.

Myth 4. *After professional reflection, teachers usually feel good about themselves (they talk about what went well, what they would improve).*

Explanation: Truthfully, reflection is not always about positive feelings; it can also be emotionally challenging, as teachers confront their mistakes and failures against a certain standard. It involves recognizing achievements, but also objectively assessing pedagogical progress.

Myth 5. *If I frequently engage in professional reflection, I don't need to participate in further education.*

Explanation: Regular professional reflection does not replace the need for further education. In fact, reflection and professional development complement each other, as reflection helps improve daily practice but does not cover all areas of teacher development. Teachers are expected to participate in training to adapt to new educational trends, technologies, and legislation. Professional growth requires a combination of both.

Myth 6. *Reflection is based mainly on self-assessment (self-assessment inventories are enough to master it).*

Explanation: Actually, self-assessment can be subjective and does not encompass the full scope of reflection. Additionally, it is important to consider feedback from colleagues, students, or mentors. Reflection should be more comprehensive and involve various

methods and techniques. It is necessary to draw from multiple sources of evaluation to gain a more complete picture of one's practice.

These factors should be taken into account when preparing student teachers for teaching practice, and didactically oriented courses should analyze the experiential nature of reflection and demonstrate its process through exercises that test a range of valid methods and techniques according to the educational challenges encountered in primary and secondary education.

3. Ways to Work with Reflection

Zakaria (2020) states that teacher education programs should provide teachers with the opportunity to develop reflective practice skills and encourage them to engage in this practice as frequently as possible. However, one of the principles is that such practice should be embraced by the culture of the teaching profession, which forms the core of their education.

There is a strong assumption that professional reflection should be guided and actively fostered during teacher education so that teachers can understand its elements and principles. The following practices, referred to as *The Magnificent Seven*, should be used as part of their preparation:

1. **Micro-teaching analyses** – Short simulated teaching situations that future teachers analyze, working with feedback from peers and didactics experts.

Microteaching contributes to the development of self-awareness among university instructors, strengthens their confidence in their own teaching abilities, and reinforces their teaching style. At the same time, it provides opportunities for deeper understanding of the teaching role and reflection on instructional practice (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2011). Deocampo (2025) conducted a study using a qualitative design with thematic analysis of 22 reflection papers by pre-service English teachers. The findings indicate that microteaching enhances awareness of the importance of feedback, reflection on and acceptance of teaching limitations, development of teaching competence, a positive attitude toward teaching, self-discipline and responsibility, peer learning, student-centered teaching, lesson planning, and autonomy in selecting materials.

Within the framework of general didactics taught as part of the teacher education core curriculum by scholars from the Department of Pedagogy at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice (UPJŠ), students engage in pedagogical reflection following the completion of a microteaching performance (e.g., a model application of a selected teaching method corresponding to a specific instructional problem) and the receipt of feedback. The reflective process is based on Smyth's model (1989, as cited in Orosová et al., 2015) and proceeds through the following stages: (1) Description – the student describes the course of the situation and their own actions; (2) Analysis – the student examines reactions, emotions, and contextual relationships within the situation; (3) Evaluation – the student identifies the causes of the success or failure of their actions; (4) Structuring – the student connects their own actions with students' responses; and (5) Generalization – the student formulates conclusions and identifies possibilities for future improvement.

2. **Peer performance assessment** – Evaluation of teaching practice by peers to improve teaching skills.

Self-assessment and peer assessment are considered useful for preparing for real teaching practice and future career development, as they allow students to learn from feedback and improve their teaching skills (Ratminingsih et al., 2017). The study by Shahzadi and Hussain

(2019) revealed that prospective teachers feel that they are sometimes equipped with the necessary skills to engage in peer assessment, but only occasionally do they receive the tools from their instructors to carry out this assessment for reflective learning. The majority of students agree that peer assessment helps them more effectively identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The Department of Pedagogy at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice (UPJŠ) also provides methodological support for 30-minute microteaching sessions conducted by student teachers (e.g., at the Institute of Geography). At the beginning of each microteaching session, one student is designated as an observer who does not participate in the activities but instead evaluates the performance of a peer using an assessment sheet. Following the completion of the microteaching session, the course instructor also completes the same evaluation form. The peer assessment sheet focuses on three principal domains: (1) professional competencies, (2) verbal and nonverbal communication with peers, and (3) the use of teaching aids and instructional materials (Baluchová & Csachová, 2019).

3. **Mentoring** – Interaction with mentor teachers to receive feedback and recommendations based on observations of educational activities.

The study by Sempowicz and Hudson (2012) shows that mentors shape teaching expectations, model reflective practices for student teachers, and provide opportunities to improve teaching methods, which supports the development of their reflective thinking and pedagogical skills. One of the key findings of the study by Kindall et al. (2017) is that changes and growth in the perception of professional dispositions can be developed through focused mentoring.

In the mentoring of student teachers at UPJŠ by mentor teachers, the reflective ALACT model is employed. This model proceeds through the following cyclical phases: (1) Action – the student gains direct teaching experience; (2) Looking back on the action – the student reflects on their actions, feelings, and students' reactions; (3) Awareness of essential aspects – the student identifies the causes and key contextual relationships within the situation; (4) Creating alternative methods of action – the student proposes new possible solutions; and (5) Trial – the student tests the effectiveness of these alternative approaches in practice (Korthagen, 2011, as cited in Orosová et al., 2023). The success of this model depends largely on the thoughtful assignment of mentors to mentees, based on the didactic instructor's knowledge of the student teacher, in cooperation with the coordinator of teaching practice at the Department of Pedagogy at UPJŠ.

Ixer (2012) argues that reflection is a problematic area in the construction of knowledge. Until we can learn more about its defining features, specifics, and significance, he urges mentors to develop a functional conception of reflection and communicate it clearly to students. He created a set of measures for mentors in practice to help them consider how they might approach formulating this perspective between themselves and practicing social workers (this can, of course, be applied to other helping professions, such as teachers). Briefly, he outlines 13 key points, starting with definition and shared understanding, followed by the mentor's responsibilities, creating a reliable learning atmosphere, and concluding with techniques for motivating reflection and assessing it. The following principles apply:

1) There is no single theory of reflective practice. For this reason, the student should discuss with their mentor the model they adhere to, or, if no model exists, both should work together to ensure they have a shared understanding of what professional reflection is.
2) When reflecting, it is desirable to utilize and consider its interconnected aspects – cognitive, affective, moral, and creative (Ixer, 2000a, as cited in Ixer, 2012).

3) Reflection should not be seen only as a means to achieve a goal, but also as a goal in itself. It is based on a metacognitive model, which helps the reflective individual gain deeper insight into their practice and thoughts about it.
4) In preparing for reflective practice, it is essential to address social constructs that will always be evolving and should be part of the solution when confronting the mentor, even if both parties have different cultural backgrounds.
5) Reflecting on one's own values will likely be challenging and at times not fully welcomed, as self-discovery brings many surprises. The key is support without judgment, which should be a permanent part of the mentor's lifestyle, ensuring the integration of reflective practice with values.
6) The mentor must consistently reflect on their practice, consider its nature, and analyze the results gained through it, in order to uncover new insights to share with others.
7) The mentor should always be interested in engaging in critical dialogue with their mentee, as this is part of developing both oneself and the other.
8) The success of the mentee is conditioned by the level of openness between them as a student and their practical teacher as a mentor, supporter, evaluator, and tutor.
9) The mentee reflects on their values and takes responsibility for personal development only when they feel safe and the risk is worth it, because otherwise, they will always tell the mentor only what they want to hear and learn with a purpose.
10) Engaging in reflection should be seen as an individual process, but also as the development of competencies in practice. This will allow the mentee to approach reflection responsibly, learn from experiences, set evaluation criteria, and try new things without the pressure of judgment.
11) There is not just one method for motivating the mentee to reflect (e.g., conversation, observation, etc.). It is important to consider which of these methods seems useful for identifying the scope of development desired in the mentee.
12) The development of values through reflection does not lie in the mentor revealing their own values and requiring the mentee to follow them, but rather in allowing the mentee to explore and identify their own values.
13) Reflection can best be measured (monitored) by the extent to which the mentee can clearly articulate their reflection, as well as what has resulted from it (what they have learned, which values they have adopted, etc.).

4. **Asking standard reflective questions** – Self-assessment of practice to create an interpretive framework for educational situations.

Maguire (2023) declares in his study that pre-service teachers benefit from engaging in reflection-on-action, which helps them develop content expertise specific to their degree program and future teaching career. Microteaching has proven to be an effective tool for supporting the growth and development of these skills. The study by Hozebin (2018) examined the effectiveness of structuring post-observation interviews using SOAP (subjective objective assessment plan) notes to incorporate principles of effective feedback and determine how they influence teachers' self-reflection and practice. Findings showed that teachers perceived these interviews as productive and that they positively impacted their self-reflection and practice improvement.

Orosová et al. (2023) elaborated a set of guiding reflective questions used during post-instructional mentor–mentee discussions concerning students, the teaching and learning process, and professional development. In the area related to students, the questions include, for example: “To what extent am I interested in students’ opinions and problems?”, “How did I demonstrate understanding when students encountered learning difficulties?”, “How did I encourage or positively reinforce students?”, “How did I take into account differences in

students' abilities and working pace?", and "How did I approach the acceptance of students' individual learning styles?" In the area concerning the teaching and learning process, examples include: "To what extent do I possess sufficient subject-content knowledge?", "How do I organize a lesson to ensure its effectiveness?", "How did I address the development of students' higher-order cognitive processes during instruction?", and "How did I motivate students to learn?" In the area of professional development, reflective questions include: "Which methods of self-education do I employ?", "How do I approach the setting of professional development goals?", "How do I improve my educational practice?", and "How do I reflect upon the mentor's advice?"

5. **Reflective journals** – Writing about teaching experiences where the solution did not align with established methods.

In Göker's (2016) study, the impact of reflective journal entries from 16 student teachers at the Faculty of Education in Turkey on improving their teaching practice was examined. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the reflective journals pointed to the positive contribution of journals to pedagogical practice. This essentially applies to in-service teachers as well, who may turn to reflective journals as an accessible form of reflective practice, although some may prefer alternative approaches such as video recordings or classroom observation (Zulfikar & Mujiburrahman, 2018).

Orosová et al. (2018) developed the methodological publication *Self-Reflective Pedagogical Diary*, intended for recording experiences and reactions arising from teaching practice. The diary helps both teachers and student teachers during teaching placements to better understand themselves, their students, and the relationships emerging within the instructional process. It is important that the diary include not only negative experiences, but also positive ones, and that it be written voluntarily in conditions where sufficient space and opportunity for reflection are provided (Hupková, 2006, as cited in Kouteková & Novocký, 2017).

6. **Portfolio** – A collection of materials (e.g., lesson plans, self-assessments) used to track professional growth and successfully addressed educational problems and dilemmas.

The study by Krishnan and Yunus (2017) highlighted the importance of e-portfolios in supporting reflective practice. Primary data were collected from student teachers through interviews, focus group sessions, and the analysis of their reflections on observed English lessons. The e-portfolio provided students with the opportunity to document their experiences, reflect on their own teaching, and develop peer reflection. Pais Marden and Herrington (2022) investigated how reflective portfolios support foreign language students' engagement in reflective practice in a blended learning environment. The findings showed that writing down their thoughts in the portfolio encouraged students to reflect on their own learning and engage in collective reflection and problem-solving.

In teaching practice at UPJŠ, the portfolio has once again begun to gain prominence within pre-service teacher education, although currently primarily as a component of final theses, reflecting the structure of portfolios used in teachers' professional development. The process of portfolio construction is divided into several stages: (1) data collection, (2) data classification, (3) data organization, (4) justification of data collection, (5) data evaluation, (6) drawing conclusions from the data, and (7) portfolio presentation (Brandl, 2004, as cited in Valent, 2019).

7. **Video recordings of lessons** – Recording and analyzing one's own teaching to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Raja Harun and Singh (2015) conducted a study with a qualitative design, using thematic analysis of reflection entries from 20 ESL student teachers. The findings indicated that observing and reflecting on recorded teaching sessions enhanced pedagogical insights, teaching skills, and awareness of personal teaching limitations. The study also noted that the process could be initially intimidating for students. The study by Tiarina and Rozimela (2017) used action research with a qualitative approach to investigate the implementation of reflective teaching. The participants were 19 student teachers. The research was conducted in three cycles: students taught a lesson, their performance was video-recorded, and then they reflected on their teaching through diaries. In the second and third cycles, the procedure was repeated, with students first articulating their own performance evaluations before receiving feedback from the instructor and peers. Data were collected through observation, teaching evaluation, and interviews. The results showed that the combination of reflective diary and video recording was effective in improving students' teaching skills and supporting their awareness of weaknesses.

Among the topics observed within the training schools cooperating with the Departments of the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science at UPJŠ, which prepare future teachers, are themes such as Teacher–Student Interaction in Non-Standard Pedagogical Situations, The Course and Stages of Instruction, and Humanistically Oriented Assessment of Students' Learning Activities. Each topic includes a work procedure, an observation scheme, and reflective questions. The objective is not merely to observe teaching performance, but to engage in its analytical examination and the synthesis of conclusions based on previously acquired theoretical knowledge (Orosová et al., 2019). This approach simultaneously reflects the principles of equality and inclusion, particularly the teacher's ability to critically evaluate their own approaches toward students from diverse educational, cultural, and social backgrounds. Reflection may therefore contribute to the development of more inclusive teaching strategies and more sensitive responses to students' needs.

These techniques represent an integrative approach to the preparation of future teachers, building on the connection between theory and practice. Their combination is crucial for improving pedagogical skills and adapting to various situations, helping teachers transform experiences into educational knowledge (Moon, 2004; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993).

As stated in Table 1, it's not just a matter of becoming a teacher, but also of enhancing educational knowledge and remaining in the profession, where adaptability, flexibility, and problem-solving at the team level are essential (in terms of building didactic reflective communities). It highlights significant differences between non-traditional/adult student teachers and traditional student teachers, particularly in terms of autonomy, reflective capacity, and professional self-efficacy. These findings support the argument that reflective practice develops differently depending on prior professional and life experience.

Table 1: Comparison of Characteristics of Nontraditional/Adult and Traditional Student Teachers

Non-traditional/adult student teachers	**Traditional student teachers**
Analytical about experience (thorough conversations, increased scrutiny of assumptions, etc.) [reflective practitioner]	Descriptive about experience (limited detail or reflection provided) [procedural/behavioral practitioner]
Self-initiating (more autonomous, prone to take on professional teaching duties early on) [self-directed]	Less self-initiating (more reliant on external feedback when taking on professional teaching responsibilities) [directed by others]
Self-confident about goals, abilities, and the desire to teach early in the experience [professional efficacy]	Less confident about goals, capabilities, and the desire to teach until later in the experience [low professional efficacy]
Student/learner centered early in the experience [focused on learning and development]	Curriculum/lesson centered until late in the experience [focused on teaching performance]

Career/job focused [future orientation]	Completion of experience focus [present orientation]
Perception of themselves as practitioners in need of time and practice [teaching as a developmental process]	Perception of themselves as students who need to learn the skills from scratch and within the semester timeframe [teaching as the acquisition of skills]
Perceive mistakes as developmental, part of the process of trial and error; leading to success [enrichment]	Perceive mistakes as deficiencies working against overall success [deficit]
Aware of consequences of behavior in relation to the culture and politics of schools [future orientation]	Less aware of consequences of behavior in relation to the culture and politics of schools [present oriented]
Able to develop collaborative professional relationships [collegial, peer-like interactions]	Worked cooperatively but subordinate to the cooperating teacher; hierarchical relationship [expert dependent]

Source: Adapted from Rodriguez et al. (1998, p. 27)

It is also considered important to point out that there is no single universally appropriate model for reflecting on pedagogical practice. Such a model should be based on the actual experiences of student teachers, didactics specialists, or mentors, as well as on the nature of the subject being taught, the educational needs of the students, and the professional requirements of beginning teachers. The school culture and the implementation of educational ideas in classrooms should not be overlooked.

4. Limitations

The first limitation of the present paper is that it does not present original research findings based on empirical data; rather, it synthesizes key findings from existing studies intended to clarify the often ambiguous understanding of the implementation of professional reflection both at the school level and within faculties preparing student teachers for educational practice. A second limitation is that the paper does not constitute a systematic literature review in the form of a review study, in which the selection of sources would be guided by research questions emerging from an analysis of gaps in the literature. Instead, the paper was informed primarily by practical experience in coordinating teaching placements and by feedback provided by student teachers following the completion of their practice. A third limitation is that the recommendations discussed are specifically related to the (re)organization of teaching practice in Slovakia, particularly within the context of the Faculty of Arts at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice.

5. Conclusion

Professional reflection is undoubtedly a tool for enhancing teachers' work. It is a process that fosters educators' personal growth as well as their ability to effectively manage the diverse obstacles they face in the classroom. It is important to recognize that reflection is not a "quick fix" for improvement, as it might initially appear. It is a demanding process that requires effort, critical thinking, and a system of support from colleagues and the professional environment. Reflection is not limited to a one-time evaluation or self-observation; it involves a continuous commitment by educators to refine their skills and approaches to teaching. For professional reflection to be effective, it must be integrated into everyday school life, not only on an individual level but also within a broader community that provides space for sharing experiences and solving educational challenges.

When a reflective approach is effectively implemented, it becomes a transformative process that contributes to the formation of adaptable educators. Teachers supported in this way become capable of responding to changes in students' needs and providing education focused on fostering their key competencies through diverse learning experiences.

Professional reflection is an invaluable tool not only for teachers' continuous learning but also for the preparation of future educators who are in the process of acquiring foundational pedagogical skills. Student teachers who regularly reflect on their teaching practice lay the groundwork for creating innovative teaching methods that they will later be able to apply in real classroom settings.

Reflection during teacher education enables student teachers to better understand their strengths as well as identify areas requiring further refinement. This, in turn, influences the broader school context by fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous learning between experienced teachers and novice educators, thereby contributing to the creation of a stable learning environment. Reflective practice prepares student teachers to become competent and flexible educators capable of contributing to the improvement of the educational environment in the future.

A key recommendation, therefore, is that the formulation—and especially the refinement—of professional standards (as well as student teachers' profiles) should emphasize professional reflection as a transversal competency. The cultivation of this competency should begin already during teacher education, for example through didactic courses or reflective seminars integrated into teaching practicum.

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