
Enhancing Teacher Performance and Awareness Through Written Reflection: A Case Study

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Reflective writing has been endorsed by experts in ELT and beyond (see Bolton & Delderfield, 2018; Farrell, 2015; Richards & Lockheart, 1996). This study seeks to catalog the benefits of sustained in-depth written reflections over the course of a semester in a South Korean foreign language high school. The author, drawing inspiration from Bolton and Delderfield, composed 22 written reflections with a minimum length of 500 words each between March 5 and June 25, 2025. Primary benefits of reflective writing included strengthening of professional knowledge bases, principled modifications of materials and teaching practice, and deeper awareness of both multiple dimensions of the author's teaching practice and areas of ignorance related to the author's instructional context. The article concludes with speculation about the prerequisite elements for optimizing the benefits of written reflection followed by a series of recommendations and cautions for readers interested in engaging in in-depth forms of reflective writing.

Keywords: teacher performance, teacher awareness, written reflection, case study, reflective practice

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of reflective writing have long been acknowledged. Among the many benefits, Kim et al. argued that reflective writing can “help narrow the gap between theory and practice ... to discover knowledge embedded in practice” (Kim et al., 2010, as cited in Farrell, 2015). This study seeks to understand the potential benefits of sustained in-depth reflective writing performed over the course of a semester in a South Korean foreign language high school between March 5 and June 25, 2025.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reflective practice has long been associated with John Dewey. The three core dispositions that Dewey cited for engaging in reflection are being open-minded, responsible, and whole-hearted (Dewey, 1933). Farrell (2015) elaborated on this:

Teachers must be open-minded with an active desire to listen to more than one side of an issue and then to admit they could be wrong and as a result must be willing to change a belief or practice. Teachers must be responsible by making careful consideration of the consequences to which an action leads because all teachers' actions impact the students, the community, and the society at large. In addition, teachers must be wholehearted in their approach to reflective practice to continually review their beliefs and actions, and to seek every opportunity to continue to learn and develop themselves as human beings and teachers. (pp. 12–13)

Bolton et al. (2018) provided a thorough rationale for engaging in reflective writing and a multitude of strategies. According to Bolton et al., benefits include recognizing unperceived choices, identifying sources of stress, recognizing what can be changed, learning to work with what cannot be changed, enhancing empathy, rehearsing future behavior, enhancing creativity, making and evaluating decisions, and considering how to apply professional theory (pp. 28, 225). That study mentioned many strategies for engaging in reflective writing. In the interests of concision, I will focus on those that appeared in the data collected for this study. Table 1 summarizes Bolton et al.'s rationale for using these reflective writing strategies.

TABLE 1. Reflective Writing Strategies Addressed by Bolton et al. (2018) and Used in This Study

Strategy	Rationale
Metaphor	Especially original metaphors. Bolton et al. cites anecdotes of reflective writers undergoing paradigm shifts when they reconceive of managerial functions as conducting a symphony rather than fighting a war. Original metaphors, as opposed to cliches, may be transformed into a “memorable mantra” that can nurture further motivation and growth. Metaphor also serves as a vehicle to make the abstract concrete (p. 161–162).
Critical Incident	Most associated with Stephen Brookfield. Bolton et al. quotes Brookfield's definition of this concept: “vividly remembered events” (p. 43). Bolton et al. stresses that less intensely remembered events are also potent fodder for reflective writing.
Perspective Taking	Bolton et al. permits fictional narratives when taking another's perspective. Bolton et al. views this strategy as a vehicle to perceive “fresh possibilities,” garner insight, and purge emotion (pp. 131–134).
Unsent Letter	This strategy, according to Bolton et al., builds insight, empathy, and release of emotion (p. 216).
Poetry	“Can enable exploration and expression of ‘things we don't actually want to say’ but ‘desperately need to share’ ... can succinctly express vital experiences” (p. 150).
Ask WHY	The rationale isn't necessarily directly elaborated by Bolton et al., but it is a strategy that is foregrounded in their work. For instance, they claim, “[Ask WHY] of everything and anything: This is the critical reflexive question form” (p. 238).
Photography	Bolton et al. only mentions this strategy in passing (p. 99). Yet, they endorse it. Lemon (2007) notes photographs can “preserve the appearance of an event or a person or as a metaphor of an experience” (p. 179). Coupled with narrative, photography “can make us understand” an experience more deeply (p. 179).

Farrell (2022), likewise, endorses reflective writing. He stated,

Writing as a tool for professional development has its own built-in reflective mechanism, you must stop, however briefly, to consider what you are thinking about, and this helps organize all the passing thoughts that flow at high speeds. Then after writing..., you can actually “see” your thoughts, and this gives us another chance to consider if they remain relevant for the issue you are reflecting on. (p. 19)

Farrell (2022) illustrated the utility of reflective writing with the case of a South Korean teacher, Minjung (pseudonym), who managed to clarify her values through reflective writing: “A good lesson for me is when students are talking together; today was better because I changed the activities, and the students began to talk more in class” (p. 113).

Hatton and Smith (cited in Farrell, 2022, p. 20) listed four levels of writing: descriptive writing, descriptive reflective, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection. They are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Hatton and Smith’s Four Levels of Writing

Level	Summary
Descriptive Writing	This is not reflective. It is a report with no justification provided.
Descriptive Reflection	Provides justification. Primarily focused on personal viewpoints.
Dialogic Reflection	More detached. Explores multiple reasons for an incident occurring.
Critical Reflection	Takes account of multiple perspectives. Exhibits awareness of factors beyond the classroom (such as social, historical, and political influences) and the role they have on the functioning of a class.

Bolton et al. (2018) was emphatic about what reflective writing is not. It is not about what they termed “confession.” They stated, “Confession can be a conforming mechanism, despite sounding liberating, freeing from a burden of doubt, guilt, and anxiety. Confession has a seductive quality because it passes responsibility to others” (p. 40). Likewise, Bolton et al. insisted that reflective writing is not formulaic and that guided models can “constrain.” They assert that only individuals can empower themselves (p. 90). They also noted that reflective writing is not concerned with generating a final product (p. 172).

In contrast, Bolton et al. noted that reflective writing as a strategy seeks to continually ask why, requires authors to have authority over their compositions, has a future orientation, prioritizes self-illumination, exploration (p. 172), and is open to any dimension of professional experience; they state, “In reflective practice no detail is too trivial or insignificant to write, think, and talk about” (p. 114).

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

I currently work in a foreign language high school in Seoul, South Korea. Since 2015, I have been the “head teacher of the native English teachers” at this institution. This role gives me substantial autonomy in deciding many elements of the curriculum.

I hold an MEd in TESOL and have been extensively involved in professional communities, primarily through Korea TESOL, since 2011. Reflective practice has been a key professional interest ever since undertaking and completing my MEd (see Miller, 2016a, 2016b, 2025). A research article published in 2025 detailed my core teaching values, which include clarity, minimizing non-essential teacher talk, providing incentives to listen to teacher talk and encouraging behavior, and cognitive and emotional forms of engagement (Miller, 2025, p. 46). Self-observation has been a weekly fixture of my professional development routines since June of 2024. I mention all this not for purposes of vanity but to disclose my dispositions and professional routines as they undoubtedly color the nature of the reflective writings that form the basis of this research article. As I have 10 different groups of learners in a semester, I have to teach the exact same lesson 10 times. This provides me with a great incentive to engage in reflective practice. It offers a forum to try out personally innovative strategies in a nearly identical context as well as refine subsequent performances of identical lessons.

This writing project stemmed from my professional reading, especially Gillie Bolton and Russell Delderfield's *Reflective Writing for Professional Development* (2018). Adapting their guidelines for my personal context, I sought to engage in sustained in-depth reflective writing over the course of a semester. This article is an attempt to discern what value that enterprise had.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1. In what ways did professional knowledge get activated through sustained, in-depth reflective writing?
- RQ2. In what ways was this process of reflective writing facilitative of positive behavior change as it pertains to my teaching?
- RQ3. What awareness was partially generated by engaging in sustained in-depth reflective writing?

METHOD

Following Bolton et al.'s (2018) suggestion to eschew formulaic processes for reflective writing, I set up the following personal guidelines:

1. I would write minimally once a week during the semester (weeks with exams were excluded).
2. Each written reflection needed to be 500 words minimum. There was no maximum word limit. I chose this number to keep the activity sustainable and to allow for a somewhat in-depth treatment of the incident selected.

3. The events addressed in the article had to stem from something that occurred during designated instructional time. Insights related to professional literature or experiences and interactions outside of the classroom were not part of the data collection or analysis. Though, at the start of this project at least, there were no additional constraints for what could be considered. This was inspired by the aforementioned statement by Bolton et al. that in reflective practice “no detail is too trivial...”

As this project developed and evolved, I started to add additional features to many of my reflective entries. These included:

1. Giving a title to each written reflection. I chose to do this following Bolton et al.’s aforementioned guidelines to have authority in one’s writing.
2. Giving an epigram to each written reflection. This followed the same logic as mentioned in the immediately preceding item.
3. Making use of recalling of sensory detail. Most written reflections featured an attempt to recall features of the scene, be it surroundings, or features of the student(s) that were the focus of the written reflection. Bolton et al. noted that recalling sensory details through reflective writing may unearth memories that are not readily available (p. 180) and that it may enable “cognitive, affective and somatic ways of knowing” (p. 161).

Data Collection

The critical incidents collected over an approximately three-and-a-half-month period are detailed in the Appendix. The date, a title, a general description, and the strategies used are listed for 22 entries.

Coding Procedures

I read the written reflections multiple times looking for emergent themes (Perry, 2011) related to both the research questions and in general. Following this, I engaged in content analysis and made many tally counts (Farrell, 2015) related to questions that emerged after multiple readings. Aspects of the written reflection content that were tallied included listing of solutions for future performance, direct and indirect knowledge activation, instances of acknowledging ignorance, frequency of the formation of personal constructs, references to personal biography, references to affective concerns, references to technical concerns, instances of critical reflection, and comments celebrating subjectively perceived positive occurrences during teaching episodes. Due to space constraints, many of the coded items are not addressed in this article. Nevertheless, the coding procedures helped provide a richer understanding, which has informed the analysis and interpretation present in this article.

RESULTS

RQ1. In what ways did professional knowledge get activated through sustained, in-depth reflective writing?

It is difficult to provide any level of precision to this question. Any form of reflection is likely to activate a wide range of memories, be it declarative or episodic. However, through content analysis of the written reflections, it was possible to discern that professional knowledge was activated via the act of reflective writing. In the reflections under review in this study, I noted 35 instances of direct reference to key concepts or jargon that I judge as relevant to both the subject of ELT and more broadly of education, as well as 15 indirect references. For instance, concepts such as exploratory practice (Gebhard, 2005), provisional writing (Silver et al., 2013), self-determination theory (Mercer & Dornyei, 2020), and topic-related vocabulary (Nation, 2001) appear in my written reflections.

I noted a “recency effect” to the professional literature referenced in the written reflections. Works that I have read in 2025, such as Silver et al.’s *The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core*, Mercer and Dornyei’s *Engaging Language Learners in Contemporary Classrooms* and John Hattie’s *Visible Thinking* were present. This may indicate that reflective writing strengthens a teacher’s personal understanding of many concepts relevant to performing one’s professional duties. Knowledge was not only mechanically reproduced or alluded to. The written reflections also show a more robust and creative use of the concepts. The author occasionally elaborated on core concepts and jargons. For example, with written utterances such as an “oral contrastive gloss,” “delayed oral gloss” or the merging of concepts associated with relatively disparate concerns such as blending exploratory practice (Gebhard, 2005) and Hadfield’s notion of [blank] self (i.e., procrastinator self, default self, future self, etc.; Hadfield, 2019). In the 3-21(b) entry, I refer to an “exploratory teacher self.”

However, I did enter this reflective writing project with a clear bias. I believe in the value of deep processing (see Craik & Lockheart, 1972). Thus, I am always seeking out opportunities to engage in deeper processing of the professional literature I read. That bias likely increased the probability that the terminology used in the literature I consumed would more often appear in my written reflections. Perhaps a reflective practitioner without such an explicit value or aim would not connect their experience to professional concepts in an equally intense manner.

RQ2. In what ways was this process of reflective writing facilitative of positive behavior change as it pertains to my teaching?

As I teach the same lesson content 10 times, I am afforded the opportunity to make minor tweaks to my instruction. Reflective writing allows for explicit listing of changes for subsequent performances of the same lesson. Unfortunately, I did not document every change that resulted from (or at least was partially connected to)

engaging in sustained in-depth reflective writing. That undertaking would be challenging methodologically and entail a significant amount of time. Nevertheless, through reviewing materials and recordings of teaching performance, I was able to identify important changes – that I subjectively deemed as improvements – in my instructional delivery. Three example changes are detailed below.

Better Use of Guided Questions During a Draft Writing and Revision Task

Related to “Keon Hee’s Blank Page (#14, no date),” I enriched the subsequent lesson *following* the lesson devoted to writing the draft of a speech (related to giving someone a celebratory toast). This allowed many students to produce a clearer, more focused draft. For example, many students (an estimated 25%) misinterpreted the third section of the speech titled “Crowning Achievement.” That group of students often simply listed a large number of accomplishments. However, relevant commentary about the significance of the accomplishment(s) was lacking. Guided questions helped to ameliorate that (see Figure 1). Reflective writing contributed to enrichment of materials to guide the written output of learners. Worth mentioning, though beyond the scope of this research, is that the instructional strategy just mentioned was replicated in modified form in the second semester. This may indicate that reflective writing contributed to not only the learning but also the transfer of skills and instructional strategies to different contexts. At least in this instance, the insights garnered in part by reflective writing proved to be relatively enduring.

FIGURE 1. Reflective Writing Helped Stimulate the Creation of Additional Materials to Guide Learners in Composing a Speech

ADVICE FOR MAKING A MORE INTERESTING SCRIPT

Capture Interest

- Use questions in the form of anaphora.

Example: Who can tell me who won the 2018 MVP? Who can tell me who won the 2020 world cup? And who can tell me...?

The Ascent

- Discuss difficulties or failures the person had.
- Discuss how they prepared or trained.
- Discuss criticism they received.
- Discuss where they began their career.

Crowning Accomplishment

- Include a quote from the person. How did they feel when they achieved their “crowning accomplishment?”

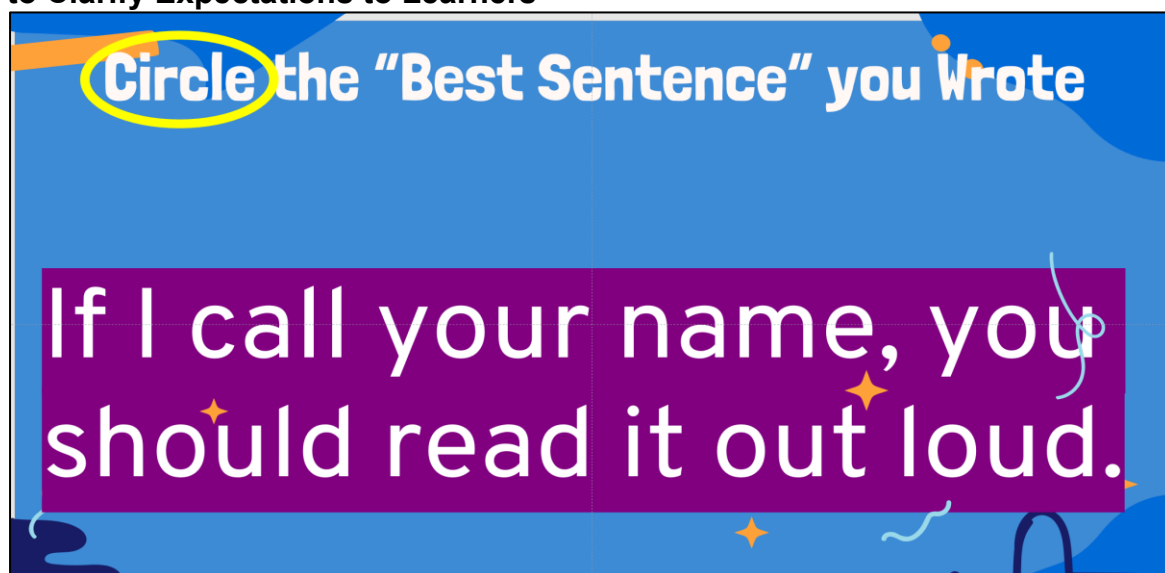
Send Off

- Have a creative technique.
- Have a quote from the person receiving the toast.

Providing Learners with Additional Time and Guidance to Prepare for a Whole Class Response

In the reflective entry titled “Why? Ask Why!” I had a challenge with a student that was not willing to read a sentence that he was instructed to write in a previous task. Upon reflection and after reviewing data I had collected on the student, I noted that this student was the weakest in my class based on a pre-semester diagnostic test and that he had not completed that initial sentence-writing task. I also recognized that I had only provided oral instructions to students. Furthermore, that student was “cold-called” by randomly selecting his name. In later performances of this lesson, I provided visual, written cues to learners to select one sentence that they had written previously and in written instructions displayed on a PowerPoint slide. Learners were informed that they were expected to read that sentence (see Figure 2). Similar breakdowns that prompted that written reflection were not repeated in subsequent performances of that particular lesson.

FIGURE 2. Reflective Writing Influenced Decisions to Provide More Written Input to Clarify Expectations to Learners



Demanding “Uptake” and Not Merely Delivering Feedback

In the written reflection titled “Intervention Is Not Enough,” I wrote about a student who during a small group skit rehearsal failed to have adequate emotion for the role she was practicing. To put it bluntly, the lines were delivered by the student in what I deemed to be a spiritless manner. In past years, I may have simply delivered feedback about the inadequacy I felt a learner had displayed. On this occasion, I insisted that the learner reperform her rehearsal and deliver the lines with appropriate emotion as soon as I noticed what I considered subpar learner performance. I did not leave this group of students until the learner demonstrated a delivery more aligned with expectations (that had been communicated both by my immediate feedback and previous whole class instruction). This type of intervention could be considered

demanding that students perform a type of “behavioral uptake.” Reflective writing coupled with a relevant presentation that I attended about two months prior to this critical incident (see Reeser, 2025) helped facilitate the incorporation of this instructional move into my teaching repertoire.

RQ3. What awareness was generated in part through in-depth sustained reflective writing?

Five categories were noted related to how this form of reflective writing expanded the author’s awareness: affective considerations, awareness of instructional gaps and flaws, a deeper appreciation for the elements that made an activity successful (at least momentarily and partially), recognition of ignorance, and awareness that the act of in-depth writing promotes more meaningful insights.

Affective Considerations

I became more aware of certain tendencies in how I related to students. I noted that I tended to be tendentious. In the written reflection dated 4-10-25, after calling on a student who I knew gave an incorrect answer, I referred to her as “the very confident Park Yeon Hee (pseudonym)” in reference to a comment she had made about herself earlier in that lesson about her level of confidence in giving the correct answer to a question. Shortly afterwards, it was revealed that her answer was actually incorrect. I suspect that my impulse to make the “very confident” utterance came from a desire to elicit an emotional reaction from students. That is understandable. A high school teacher has to call on a wide range of strategies to elicit situated motivation (see Clark & Lyons, 2004) from students. Short-term strategies, such as using a call back (Hoovler, p. 27) to a previous utterance, is one technique. In this instance, I may have caused a slight bit of discomfort to the student. It was a demonstration of an inappropriate use of a strategy to elicit emotion from students. Perhaps my preference for getting an emotional reaction, any kind of emotional reaction, from students clouded my judgement at that moment.

Reflecting on my inability to recall a student’s name (“Say My Name,” 3-31-25) while modeling expectations for an activity allowed me to consider how it may make a student feel if the teacher cannot recall their name. My reflections led me to conclude that by not remembering a student’s name, especially when others are accurately produced by a teacher, an instructor is concretely signaling to a student that they are more marginal than other “well-remembered” peers. Thus, after that incident, I began to take even greater care to learning the names of students as soon as possible. As an aside, it is worth noting that learning the names of students and using them consistently has been endorsed by experts in ELT (see Mercer et al., 2020, p. 66).

Awareness of Instructional Gaps and Flaws

As the semester progressed, my reflective writing took on more of a focus on breakdowns in my instructions. Following Bolton et al.’s (2018) guideline – “at every

opportunity ask: WHY?” (p. 205) – when I chose a topic for a reflective writing entry related to a perceived instructional flaw, I typically asked why did this occur? For example, in the 4-21-25 “seating mishap” reflection, I speculated that three factors had led to students being off-task (seating arrangement, lax body language on my part while monitoring, and multiple cues on the PowerPoint, which served to split attention). In the 6-11-25 written reflection titled “The Tumbleweed,” I noted four factors that may have contributed to the initial difficulty in collaboration among a group of three students. Factors I could have potentially modified included pre-selecting group members (though I noted in this reflective entry that this choice would have entailed additional tradeoffs) and providing more details while modeling expectations. A recurring theme through multiple entries was the need to make the implicit explicit in my instruction and communication of expectations. In the aggregate, the word *explicit* occurred sixteen times over ten entries and *implicit* was present in five entries, appearing a total of nine times. This aligns well with what Bolton et al. repeatedly emphasize, namely, making the implicit – especially values – explicit (p. 124). In sum, in-depth reflective writing helped to cultivate more of a “diagnostic mindset” in which I would be more inclined to consider why an activity was or was not working as intended.

The use of in-depth reflective writing enhanced the memorability of occurrences in the classroom and promoted more thorough and rigorous efforts to prevent similar missteps during class time. For instance, on a feedback checklist I gave to students, I included a technical term that was not related to the lesson’s content. That became the focus of a 5-8-25 entry. Reflecting on the inclusion of a technical term that students had not been exposed to previously during instructional time in my class on a feedback sheet prompted a student question and made me realize that I added a small, but distracting, amount of cognitive load. Such reflection motivated me to engage in more thorough proofreading to prevent similar mishaps in the future. For a time, I put a picture of the document on my work computer to remind me of the error. The response one student gave during a written mid-semester survey in which they stated that elements of my class (due to repetition of some tasks) were “kind of boring,” prompted a written reflection on 4-25-25. Subsequently, I felt motivated to examine the level of task recycling that went on in my class. I examined several months of previous lesson plans and materials to determine if it would be possible to space out certain tasks I often had chosen to repeat to provide less feelings of redundancy in my students. Perhaps the aforementioned experiences *sans* reflective writing would have prompted me to act in similar ways. It seems plausible though that without sustained attention on these self-selected critical incidents, that I may have never attended to them that much in the first place. As Mccrea stated, attention is “the ultimate currency” of education (cited in Mercer et al., p. 100). Without attention, it is impossible to develop intellectually. Reflective writing is a concrete strategy to maintain attention on a particular concern. That attention, in turn, makes possible actions that can enhance and develop the professional repertoire of an educator.

Recognition of Ignorance

On a written reflection dated 3-5-25, I acknowledged to myself that I was unaware of the content that students noticed when looking at images I had compiled of learners posing for a class photo. Though I had seen learners laughing while looking in the vicinity of the images, given my limited listening proficiency in Korean, I could not be certain if the comments were teasing or not, nor did I have much awareness of how learners received such laughter. Frequently, I was also unable to accurately reconstruct details of critical incidents. For instance, on multiple occasions, I could not recall who a student (who was the subject of my written reflection) was partnered with when the critical incident occurred. I acknowledged to myself on several occasions that my subjective impressions were just that – subjective impressions. As an example, in the written reflection dated 3-21-25, I noted that I believed I had learners emotionally engaged. However, my records indicate that they are “furiously scribbling notes.” That is not indicative of emotional engagement. It is not even confirmation of behavioral engagement, since I did not have evidence of what the learners are taking notes on. On the positive side, this recognition of ignorance did at times prompt me to review data I had collected on students to check my impressions. For instance, after composing “Keon Hee’s Blank Page (entry #14, no date)” I checked all of the learners’ compositions and noted that about 25 percent of the students performed in a manner that I would consider significantly below expectations. This prompted revision of materials for later lessons in that unit.

Deeper Appreciation for the Elements That Made an Activity Successful

On the 4-14-25 entry titled “Break It Down,” I noted a student, who I assessed as lower-proficiency at the start of the semester, had produced a competent form of a rhetorical technique – anaphora. I attributed this student’s uptake of my instruction as partially related to more nuanced detail in my instruction, including guidance on the sequencing of items when composing sentences utilizing anaphora. Again, I reflected on the value of making instruction as explicit as possible (see Figure 3).

In the undated entry titled “I Think That Will Be Negative...,” I documented how a learner was able to infer elements of the meaning of a vocabulary term based on prior information shared by me in the lesson. In this example, the learner was able to incorporate prior instruction delivered by me to draw a reasonable conclusion for an inductive reasoning task. This made me feel that my materials were reasonably clear and that learners were able to actively engage with the materials and draw valid conclusions without me needing to (always) explicitly deliver information about the meaning of the target vocabulary items to learners.

The Act of In-Depth Writing Promotes More Meaningful Insights

On two occasions, I noted in my written reflections that immediately prior to noticing an incident that would become the fodder for a subsequent reflective entry that I was indeed conscious that I “needed” to find a critical incident to write about –

so as to meet my self-imposed obligation. For instance, on the 6-19-25 written reflection “Intervention Is Not Enough,” I wrote the following:

I don't think I can neglect the role of journaling to help generate this level of awareness. Right before I had that moment of “intervene with Jee-eun [pseudonym]” and have her demonstrate a more emotional delivery, I was literally thinking about what would I write for my CI [critical incident] this week.

Did the act of deliberately attempting to find an incident to write about make my experiences more meaningful (through writing), and thus produce more meaningful experiences? It is a fair conjecture to speculate that the act of writing coupled with the personal expectation and responsibility to write promotes a greater sensitivity to one's experience. The act of writing, which in this case was a self-imposed obligation, opens up the possibilities for, and may even stimulate personally, novel discoveries.

FIGURE 3. Reflective Writing Documented Instructional Strategies That I Judged as More Effective. It Facilitated a Deeper Level of Analysis and Appreciation for Why These Strategies Were Effective

The image shows a screenshot of a digital document. At the top, it says "YOUR FINISHED CREATIVE TECHNIQUE IS: (Circle) Anaphora / Word Play". Below this, it asks "Write your creative technique here:" and shows three lines of handwritten text: "He says is the best on Korean fencing team.", "says is the best player on Asian fencing league", and "And. says is the best player in the world". Below the handwriting, there is a pink box with the text "Messi is the best on his team. Messi is the best in his league...AND... Messi is the best in the world!". To the right of this box is a green box with the text "The sentence with the greatest IMPACT should be the last sentence with anaphora." Below these boxes, there is a section titled "BRAINSTORMING SPACE: List at least 5 words or ideas about your topic here." with a list of five lines. The first line is filled with the text "First Brainstorm... Don't write the creative technique yet."

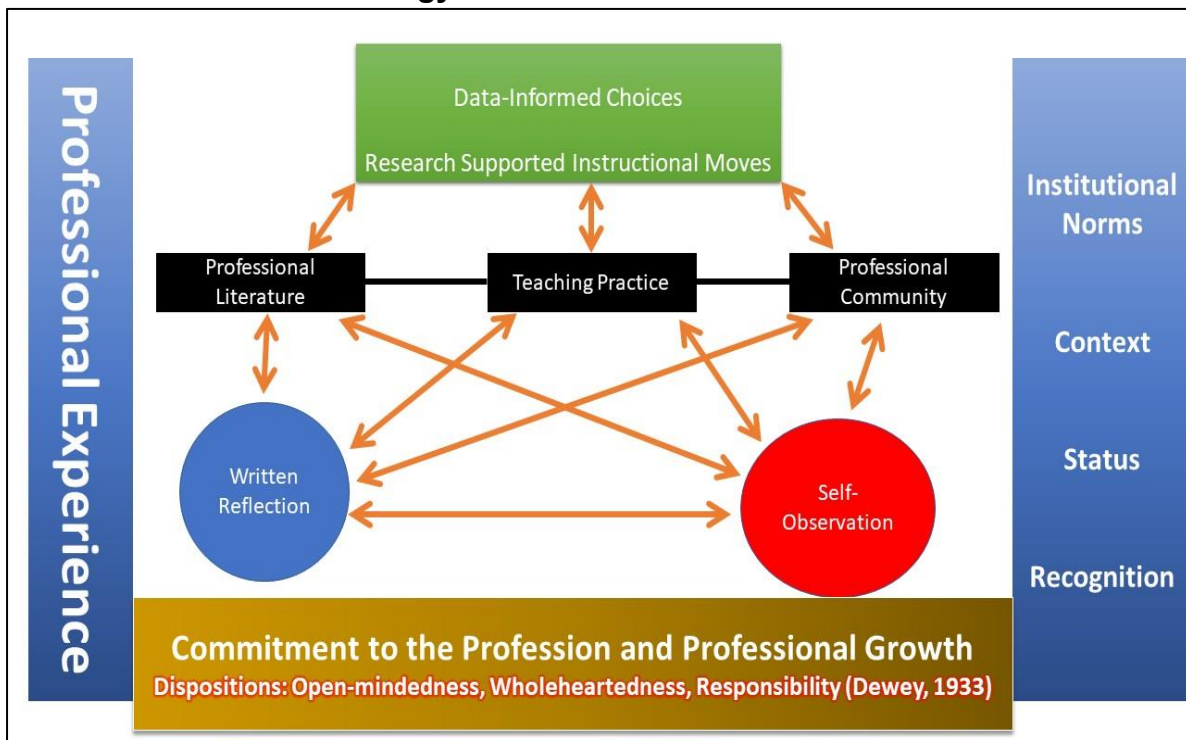
DISCUSSION

Sustained in-depth reflective writing had a positive impact on my teaching. It reinforced my professional knowledge base and increased awareness of multiple tendencies while teaching. Though it is tempting to make the argument that reflective writing is responsible for the shifts that occurred in my teaching performance and lesson preparation during the period under consideration in this study, that statement disregards much of my personal and professional context. First, I have engaged in near weekly sessions of self-observation of my teaching performance since June of 2024. This is a different form of reflection, and it undoubtedly informed the reflective writing I engaged in during the time period reviewed here. Additionally, I have been engaged with professional communities (most notably Korea TESOL) since 2011.

Also, I have a fair amount of autonomy, status, and trust with my supervisors at my current place of employment. Perhaps reflective writing is less relevant if any of the aforementioned elements are absent.

Nevertheless, I experienced the process of engaging in reflective writing to be invigorating and an accelerant of positive change in my professional life. In an attempt to explain why reflective writing “works” for me, I put forth the following model. It situates reflective writing as a minor component in a larger professional ecology that is conducive to at least a subjective perception of professional growth. It is my belief that absent a nurturing ecology, reflective writing is of limited relevance. I do wish to stress that this model is based on my personal experience. I make no claims that such forms of professional activity will be conducive to professional growth in other contexts (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. A Hypothetical Model of the Factors Enabling Reflective Writing to Become an Effective Strategy for Professional Growth

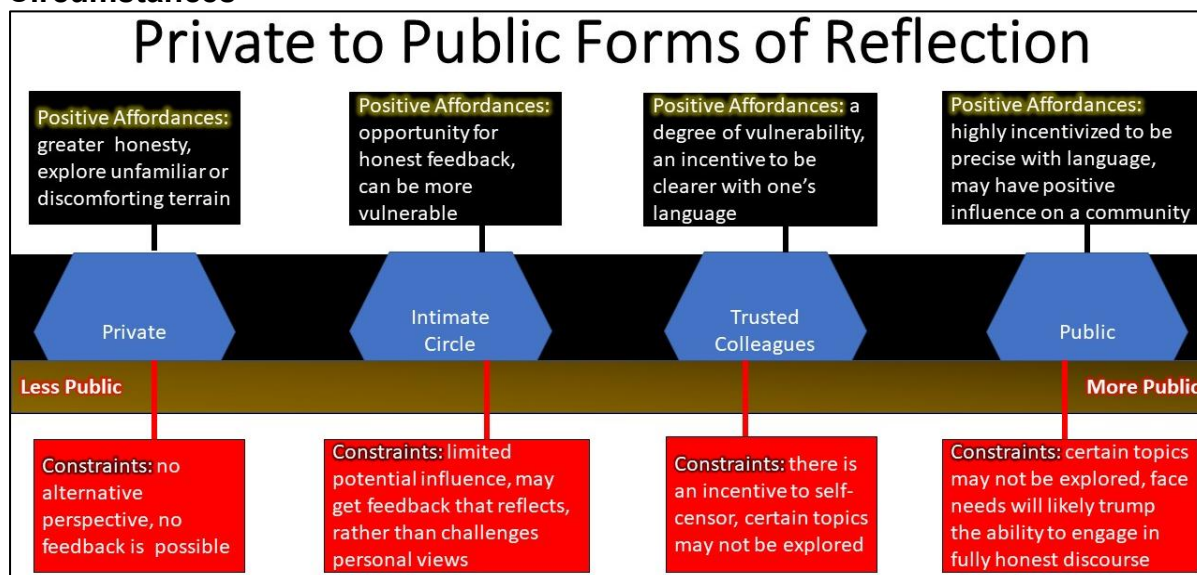


Though this project was heavily influenced by the work of Bolton et al., I did not incorporate one major suggestion that appeared in their work. This form of reflection was not done in a community setting. Many have suggested that reflection in community settings is highly beneficial (see Bolton et al., 2018, and Kuroda, 2024). Bolton et al., while acknowledging the value of private reflection, continually nudge the reader to share at least parts of their documented reflections (for example, see p. 223). However, I would note that there are affordances available for reflection undertaken in a variety of circumstances, including exclusively private ones.

One could conceive of reflection as occurring on a continuum from public to private (see Figure 5). Private is something that is not shared with anyone. This allows for greater self-honesty and the exploration of topics which might be discomforting,

even taboo in certain communities. Reflection could take place within an intimate circle. This might allow for more open sharing than other arrangements. Reflection among trusted colleagues might allow for a sense of vulnerability, but since literally one's livelihood is connected to this community, the members of such a reflective community will likely be relatively guarded. Finally, reflection can be done in a public setting, perhaps in a workshop or even expressed through a journal article. In this latter context, one would expect the reflecting practitioner to have the lowest degree of authenticity along the continuum I have sketched out and to engage in the highest degree of self-censorship. When considering that all members of the community in a public forum are similarly compelled to perform in such a guarded manner, one must wonder to what degree is genuine honesty degraded in more formal and public settings for reflection? I mention this not to deny the value of more public forms of communal reflection, but rather to emphasize that certain affordances and constraints are present in all types of reflection.

FIGURE 5. Affordances and Constraints of Reflection Undertaken in Different Circumstances



In the written reflections under consideration in this article, I have explored topics that I would not be willing to discuss among trusted colleagues. For instance, without going into the details, my written reflection dated 3-21-25, entitled “The Water Bottle Leads to Cognitive Lacunae,” included a few meditations on the role material objects play in communicating status and how they mediate human communication in the classroom and beyond. I referenced elements of evolutionary psychology, a field associated with the relatively controversial scholars Geoffrey Miller and David Buss. I currently feel the reflection and the content in that written reflection were valid to being an effective teacher. I wrote on that critical incident to attempt to understand the factors that led to a student being briefly off-task. Nevertheless, I would partially self-censor myself in a professional setting if similar topics were broached. I share this illustration merely to assert that private reflection is something that has merit and that the nature

of the reflection will vary depending on the context in which the reflection is undertaken.

Recommendations

At the start of this project, I was not able to fully conceive the direction it would take and many modifications were made during the process of composing written reflections at a rate of more than once per week over the course of a semester. For readers interested in engaging in such a project, I would recommend the following:

Take Pictures

The value of photography for reflective practice has been documented, explored, and recommended by multiple educators (see Lemon, 2007, and Benévolo França, 2017) For myself, taking pictures added the ability to compare and contrast aspects of seating arrangements before and after I composed a written reflection on the topic. Additionally, I documented a variety of items via photography throughout the period under consideration: samples of student work (both that which disappointed me and that which impressed me), teaching materials I considered flawed or inadequate in some way, revised materials for future teaching performances of similar lessons, and moments of perceived professional competence in the classroom. The incorporation of photos into my written reflections increased my sense of ownership and connection to the project of consistently engaging in in-depth sustained reflective writing.

Be Precise About Data Collection

I had dates missing. I did not initially give titles to my reflective entries. I didn't engage in any form of categorization of the nature of the entries until well after the period under consideration in this study. Upon reflection, I see that I could have classified the entries as primarily oriented in an affective, critical (i.e., as in taking account of larger factors beyond the classroom; see Farrell, 2015), technical, celebratory, or even a self-critical direction. However, I wish to stress that these shifts and expanding levels of awareness emerged somewhat organically through the process of consistently engaging in reflective writing.

Balance the Nature of the Reflections

Relatively early in this project, I noted that my first three written reflections were focused primarily on affective concerns. Thus, I deliberately began to address more technical concerns, such as an undated reflection (#10, "To Gloss or Not to Gloss – That Is the Question") on my decision to not gloss a low-frequency vocabulary item. Other areas where better balance might have been achieved are between those entries focused on celebratory aspects of my teaching performance versus more self-critical entries. According to my content analysis, I classified 14 items as containing self-critical features and six as having predominantly celebratory aspects. This was an unprincipled tendency. Several experts in the field of reflective practice warn against

self-laceration (Farrell, 2018) or mistaking reflective writing for “confession” (Bolton et al., 2018).

Certain entries included confession and self-laceration. For instance, my 4-14-25 written reflection included the following: “the result of a teacher’s neglect of responsibility.” This was in reference to the omission of guided questions to assist students in composing their first draft of a speech. Later in the same entry I wrote: “I recognize that I have failed this student.” This self-critical tendency was present in later entries, such as 6-13-25, in which I described an incident that involved one group (out of 5 groups total in that class) that had challenges getting started on a project. I labeled that incident as a “pedagogical disaster.” This type of self-lacerating confession is a distraction from the primary purpose, in my view, of reflective writing: to improve future performance.

CONCLUSION

In sum, sustained in-depth reflective writing can motivate professional growth, strengthen a teacher’s understanding of key concepts in their chosen field, and increase an instructor’s awareness of many dimensions of their professional life. However, it is unlikely that the act of writing is the sole factor in generating such positive outcomes. Rather, reflective writing is a professional development strategy that is more likely to produce beneficial outcomes if several conditions are present. These include appropriate dispositions, a supportive context and community, as well as a substantial amount of relevant knowledge coupled with a significant amount of experience. Absent these elements, the benefits of sustained in-depth reflective writing are unlikely to be fully realized.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1. Data Collected for This Study (March 5 – June 25, 2025)

Order	Date	Title	Description	Strategies Used
1	3-5-25	No title	On the first day of class, I took a picture of the class. I noticed that several students did not smile in the image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsent letter • Perspective taking • Descriptive reflective writing • Dialogic reflection
2	3-14-25	No title	The perceived relevance of adding more emotion and exaggeration to the word “disgusting” while delivering a discussion prompt to students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poem • Listing of implications • Descriptive reflective writing
3	3-18-25	No title	Use of playful teasing to generate more curiosity from learners before I revealed an answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal construct formation • Discussion of future considerations
4	3-19-25	Why? Ask Why!	What factors led to a student not following directions from the teacher when prompted near the end of class?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poem • Ask WHY
5	3-21-25	The Water Bottle Leads to Cognitive Lacunae	A student is off-task during a pair discussion task. Part of her off-task behavior includes asking for a drink of water. Why did this off-task episode occur?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive reflective writing. • Listing of implications • Ask WHY
6	3-21-25(b)	Eye Contact and Comfort for the Other	A reflection on experimenting with different levels of eye contact with different classes and the reaction that I perceived learners to have.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive reflective writing
7	3-25-25	Eager Eye	A student unprompted by the teacher uses visual clues to discern the answer to a question asked by the teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photography • Perspective taking • Poem • Descriptive writing
8	3-28-25	The Instructional Blob	Working from a lesson plan designed by another teacher, there were a few communication breakdowns with learners. What features of the materials and my communication contributed to those breakdowns?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photography • Rehearsing future behavior • Descriptive reflective writing • Dialogic reflection • Ask WHY
9	3-31-25	Say My Name!	I forget one student’s name during an instructional sequence. She has an emotional response to my inability to remember.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive reflective writing • Perspective taking
10	No Date	To Gloss or Not to Gloss – That Is the Question	Related to a speech writing assignment, the section titles included low-frequency vocabulary items (such as “the ascent”). Without a translation, student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poem • Perspective taking (an expert) • Descriptive reflective writing

confusion results.

11	4-8-25	Learned Helplessness	Lower-proficiency learners do not immediately grasp the expectations of a task they need to perform. I explore what may have led to this communication breakdown.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Rehearsing future behavior ● Future implications ● Ask WHY
12	4-10-25	"I'm 1000% Confident"	A student claims all of her answers for a review activity completed with a partner are correct, stating she is "1000% confident" about the accuracy of her answers. Later it is revealed that not every answer was correct. I choose to lightly tease the student about it near the end of the class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Poetry ● Perspective taking ● Dialogic reflection ● Ask WHY
13	4-14-25	"Break It Down"	I provide a more nuanced level of teaching related to the rhetorical technique anaphora compared to years prior. A student who scored low on a beginning-of-the-year diagnostic test does a competent job producing an example of that technique.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Photography ● Descriptive reflective writing
14	No Date	Keon Hee's [pseudonym] Blank Page	A student produces a subpar first draft of a speech. I recognize that the task needed additional scaffolding and cues to supplement the worked examples and think-aloud instructional strategies provided to students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Photography ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Implications for the future ● Rehearsing future behavior ● Ask WHY
15	4-21-25	Seating Mishap	I allow students to revise their individual speech scripts while they are seated in pairs sitting face-to-face. I perceive that many students were not fully on task during the time allocated for revision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rehearsing future behavior ● Poetry ● Future implications ● Dialogic reflective writing ● Perspective taking ● Ask WHY
16	4-25-25	"...So Felt Kind of Boring"	Ruminations about what one comment from a student survey says about my teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poetry ● Descriptive reflective writing

17	5-8-25	What Is Acronym?	Due to a last-minute change in the curriculum plan that was beyond my control, I left a rhetorical strategy (acronym) that was studied in a previous unit on a sheet given to students in the semester in which this article is focused. However, the acronym was not studied during the semester in which data for this article was collected. Confusion and questions result.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Future implications ● Photography ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Metaphor ● Critical reflection ● Ask WHY
18	5-15-25	Take a Knee	After observing (through videoing of teacher performance) myself standing while interacting with students who were sitting, I change strategies and come down to students' level physically by taking a knee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Photography
19	No Date	"I Think That Will Be Negative..."	A student uses information shared previously in the class to infer a correct answer. As a teacher, I am pleased to see the student using inference skills and feel reassured that a more inductive approach has merit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Descriptive reflective writing
20	6-11-25	The Tumbleweed	Three students grouped together don't collaborate well initially. Thus, they have significant delays in initiating their project compared to their peers. How did my grouping and modeling strategies contribute to this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Future implications ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Ask WHY
21	6-19-25	Intervention Is Not Enough	A student is rehearsing a skit performance. I feel the student needs to display more emotion (as specified during prior instruction and the grading criteria). Instead of merely providing feedback, I insist that the student deliver a few lines with "emotion."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Metaphor ● Future implications ● Ask WHY
22	6-25-25	Gone in .6 Seconds	Students in a speaking task requiring them to respond to a prompt while standing at a particular learner station (Gilmore & Goldberg, p. 17), go off task within 20 seconds. What features of the physical environment and the task design contributed to this occurrence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Descriptive reflective writing ● Future implications ● Ask WHY
