The Reflective Teacher – A Promoter of Change in Education

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Abstract: The article analyzes the concept of the reflective teacher as a promoter of change in education, highlighting the role of pedagogical reflection in the context of profound transformations of contemporary educational systems, marked by complexity, uncertainty, and dynamism. The analysis is based on classical concepts of reflection and recent studies on reflective training of teaching staff, arguing that effective teaching practice is not reduced to mechanical application of theories; it rather requires a systematic and critical examination of one's own professional experience. The reflective teacher is described as a practitioner who constantly mediates between theory and practice, transforming problematic educational situations into opportunities for learning and pedagogical innovation. The article highlights the forms of reflection - *knowledge-in-action*, *reflection-in-action*, and *reflection-on-action* - and the impact of their interaction on pedagogical change and professional development. The author analyses structured models of reflection proposed by noted researchers in the field that provide rigorous methodological frameworks to transform experience into professional competence and integrate the emotional dimension of teaching. Furthermore, the article draws upon results from recent research regarding professional learning communities and collaborative reflective practices, emphasizing the importance of a climate of trust, constructive feedback, and teamwork to achieve sustainable educational change. In conclusion, it is stated that the reflective teacher is a key actor in pedagogical innovation, contributing to the increase of educational quality, development of professional autonomy, and adaptation of the educational process to students' needs and the demands of contemporary society.

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The fundamental transformations of contemporary education that take place within a societal context marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, call for a substantial reassessment of the teacher's role and professional competencies associated with it. Within this framework, the teacher is conceived as an agent of pedagogical innovation, capable of developing reflective and critical thinking and coherently integrating theoretical foundations with the dynamic realities of educational practice. The transition from the paradigm of unilateral instruction toward the facilitation of deep, autonomous, and meaningful learning require methodological adjustments and an identity reconstruction in the teaching profession. In this context, the reflective teacher emerges as an active actor of change, able to critically analyze the educational experience, to innovate, and to adapt the pedagogical approach to the needs of a digital generation, contributing to the quality and sustainability of education.

The concept of a reflective teacher, grounded in the idea that pedagogical practice is a continuous source of knowledge, postulates that excellence in teaching is not achieved through mechanical accumulation of experience, but through its systematic examination. In this regard, according to the *Professional Competence Standards for Teaching Staff in General Education (Primary and Secondary)*, the teacher "facilitates students' reflection on the process and results of learning and designs complex activities aimed at improving learning outcomes" (Standards, 2025, p. 11).

In this logic, reflection becomes an essential mechanism through which the teacher mediates between pedagogical theory and the fluid reality of the classroom, ensuring increased relevance of the training process for every student. The quality of education thus depends on the capacity of teachers to function as "reflective practitioners," capable of managing academic content, as well as the social and emotional dynamics of the learning community.

The theoretical roots of the reflective teacher are found in the philosophy of education from the beginning of the 20th century, particularly in the work of John Dewey. He established a clear distinction between "routine action," guided by tradition and external authority, and "reflective action," which involves a careful and persistent examination of any form of knowledge in light of the grounds upon which it rests. In Dewey's view, pedagogical reflection, in the sense of critical analysis of one's own practice, is a metacognitive process that transforms professional

experience into learning. The author argues that reflection is a central concept in the philosophy of pragmatism and education, describing an active, deliberate, and sustained process of critical thinking. Through this process, an experience or belief is analyzed to better understand its grounds, clarify relationships between concepts, and reach a unified understanding, transforming an uncertain (indeterminate) situation into a clear (determinate) one. It is not merely passive recollection, but an investigation to solve a problem and improve the future action, being essential for personal and professional learning. For J. Dewey, reflection is an investigative process through which the individual transforms a problematic and uncertain situation into a clear and coherent one, thus learning from their own experience (Dewey, 1992).

This vision was extended and refined by Donald A. Schön in the 1980s through the introduction of the concept of "epistemology of practice." The American philosopher, learning theorist, and researcher in professional development - internationally recognized for fundamental contributions to reflective practice - criticized the model of "technical rationality" dominant in professional education. In contrast, he proposed the model of "professional artistry," arguing that practical reality is often marked by uniqueness and value conflict - elements that cannot be managed through standardized solutions. Donald A. Schön established the theory of reflective practice, demonstrating that the effectiveness of teaching activity depends on the teacher's ability to reflect both during the action (*reflection-in-action*) and after its completion (*reflection-on-action*), transforming pedagogical experience into a source of professional knowledge. Here is the translation of the requested sections, incorporating the more precise terminology we discussed. *Reflection-in-action* focuses on the spontaneous reactions and decisions that occur during the didactic activity, leading to an immediate reinterpretation of the situation and influencing the teacher's behavior at the very moment of its occurrence. However, this type of reflection presupposes a high level of pedagogical experience, which is why it is not considered suitable for teachers at the beginning of their careers. In contrast, *reflection-on-action* represents a deliberate endeavor, carried out after a didactic situation, especially when unforeseen events occur within routine activities. This process requires from the practitioner to retrospectively analyze their own decisions and interventions, with the goal of adjusting and improving pedagogical behaviors in future situations. *Reflection-on-action* can be facilitated through various educational strategies such as case study analysis, writing reflective journals, using audio or video recordings, and lesson examination, both within initial teacher

training and in current educational practice. Through these efforts, teachers-in-training or those in service take on the role of reflective practitioners, as their pedagogical practice becomes an object of analysis and continuous learning (Schön, 1983).

These theoretical perspectives, as well as the critical reflection formulated by Donald Schön and the idea of continuous learning promoted by John Dewey, represent essential scientific benchmarks for understanding the role and effectiveness of a reflective teacher. These conceptual frameworks are validated and extended by contemporary research, which indicates that teachers with reflective practices achieve higher results in terms of increasing students' academic performance, stimulating critical thinking, and consolidating socio-emotional competences. Specialized studies highlight that through systematic reflection and permanent self-evaluation, teachers succeed in adjusting and optimizing educational endeavors, building a motivating learning climate, and favoring the holistic development of students. Overall, these results confirm the relevance of the reflective teacher and the necessity of promoting such an approach within the educational system.

Table1. Interaction between forms of reflection (Stăncescu, Drăghicescu & Petrescu, 2018, pp. 93-109)

Forms of reflection	Definition and pedagogical application	Impact on change
Knowledge-in-action	Tacit, implicit knowledge in the execution of an action without prior conscious thought.	Allows for teaching fluidity, but can lead to stagnation if not questioned.
Reflection-in-action	The ability to think about what we are doing while doing it, allowing for immediate strategy adjustment.	Essential for managing unforeseen classroom situations and regulating the teaching process "on the fly."
Reflection-on-action	Critical analysis of the activity after its completion, using distancing for a deep evaluation.	Leads to long-term learning and the reconfiguration of future strategies based on collected evidence.

The interaction between these forms of reflection ensures that the teacher does not become a mere "technician" of teaching, but rather a researcher of their own practice. This stance is essential for pedagogical change, as innovation is no longer perceived as a "top-down" directive, but as an organic response to challenges identified through reflective observation.

Specialized research has highlighted that through systematic reflection and continuous self-assessment, teachers succeed in adjusting and streamlining didactic endeavors, building a motivating educational climate, and supporting the holistic development of students. These findings confirm the relevance of a reflective teacher and the necessity of promoting this perspective within the educational system.

In the contemporary European educational environment, reflection is integrated into the competency framework for teachers, serving as a strategic direction for continuous professional development alongside mentoring, inclusion, and the green and digital transitions.

The reflective teacher occupies an essential place in modern education, making a major contribution to the consolidation and evolution of educational changes. They consciously assume responsibility for self-assessment and permanent improvement, realizing that personal development is a fundamental condition for increasing the quality of the educational act. In this sense, A. Zelinnschi (2023) characterizes the reflective teacher as a practitioner who systematically rethinks their pedagogical practice to adapt to students' needs and integrate feedback, acting as an active participant in their own professional training while increasing the efficiency of the didactic endeavor to improve students' academic performance. Openness to innovative ideas and strategies allows them to judiciously integrate them into pedagogical activity, tailored to the students' particularities and needs. Through self-observation and critical analysis of their decisions and actions, the teachers become aware of their direct influence on academic results. Simultaneously, they engage in deep reflection and stimulate students to develop their own capacity for reflection on their learning journey (Zelinnschi, 2023).

A scientific study coordinated by O. Dautova (2020), conducted on a sample of 121 teachers and 760 students, highlighted the characteristics, conditions, and principles underlying the implementation of reflective practice in the modern school. Among the *characteristics of reflective practice*, the study highlights equal relationships between participants, the use of self-reflection and peer-assessment tasks, which facilitate two-way exchanges, and the adoption of a reflective perspective by all actors involved. The development of reflective practice is supported by essential *conditions*, such as a climate of respect and mutual trust, a reduction of evaluative emphasis, and valuing the reflective dimension of dialogue. It also thrives on cooperation and co-creation in the process of developing new educational practices that can subsequently be accessed by other teachers. The *principles* grounding reflective practice include openness, constructive feedback, the organization of

reflection in "reflective circles", and the reduction of subjective bias in mutual appraisals. Participation in professional learning communities offers significant benefits, including the development of leadership skills, consolidation of trust and openness, crystallization of a shared vision for the institution's mission, and stimulation of continuous professional development (Dautova, 2020, pp. 97-104).

To ensure reflection is not an abstract act, teachers use structured models that guide them in the process of transforming the existing experience into professional competence. The experiential learning model proposed by David Kolb represents a central pillar, describing a cyclic process, in which none of the stages can be omitted without compromising the quality of learning. It includes: *concrete experience* (living a new experience), *reflective observation* (analyzing the experience from multiple perspectives), *abstract conceptualization* (building new theories or making generalizations), and *active experimentation* (applying the new concepts to new situations). Integrating this model allows teachers to understand that students' learning, as well as their personal development, is a process of re-creating knowledge through transforming the experience (Kolb, 1975).

Parallel to this, Graham Gibbs' model (1988) offers a pragmatic framework structured in six steps, which facilitates the exploration of the emotional dimension of teaching. In a society that increasingly values emotional intelligence, the teacher's capacity to analyze their own feelings regarding a pedagogical failure or success becomes a prerequisite for resilience and for creating a positive school climate (Gibbs, 1988).

Table 2. The Gibbs Model in Pedagogical Change

Gibbs Stage	Process Description	Role in pedagogical change
Description	Objective detailing of the event (who, what, where).	Establishing a factual database, avoiding initial subjective distortions.
Feelings	Exploring emotional reactions, caused by the situation.	Identifying psychological barriers that may block innovation or may affect the relationship with students.
Evaluation	Analysing what went well and what went poorly.	Recognizing good practices and methodological inefficiencies.
Analysis	Understanding root causes and correlating them with specialised literature.	Moving from intuition to scientific argumentation, facilitating the innovation transfer.
Conclusion	Synthesis of lessons and alternatives.	Generating new hypotheses to replace outdated routines.

Action Plan	Establishing concrete steps for the future.	Ensuring the transformative nature of reflection via effective implementation of the change.

The use of these models transforms the reflective act from a sporadic activity into a rigorous working methodology that supports continuous improvement through self-assessment. Thus, the teachers not only "do" things in the classroom, they also understand "why" they do them and "how" they can be optimized to enhance student performance. Consequently, the teacher's role of change agent presupposes moving beyond traditional classroom boundaries, with the teacher becoming an educational leader who influences the school's organizational culture and the wider community. This stance requires a combination of academic competencies, strategic vision, and social intelligence. To respond to the challenges of globalization and technology, the teacher as change-agent adopts the "4 Cs" paradigm - Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking - as the foundation of instructional design. This involves a shift from individualistic, competitive learning toward collaborative learning, where students and teachers together construct the meaning of knowledge (Program, 2020, pp. 42-44).

In this context, the teacher relinquishes the position of absolute authority (magistrocentrism) to become a facilitator of learning and a mentor. Pedagogical change is manifested through the following actions:

- Promoting student autonomy and preparing them for life beyond the school walls by developing the capacity to "learn how to learn";

- Integrating technology creatively and utilizing digital tools to stimulate interactivity, exploration, and the production of original content by students;

- Adopting an inclusive and equitable approach by adapting methods to ensure the access and progress of every student, regardless of their special educational needs or socio-economic context (Zelinnschi, 2023).

Taking on these actions transforms the teacher into a promoter of innovation, capable of identifying pedagogical areas that require optimization and implementing shifts in emphasis within the curriculum.

Following this line of thought, we refer to the four competence domains reflected in the *Professional Competence Standards for Teaching Staff in General Education (Primary and Secondary)*, updated in 2025 through alignment with reference models from Estonia, Finland, Australia, Great Britain, and Singapore (Figure 1).
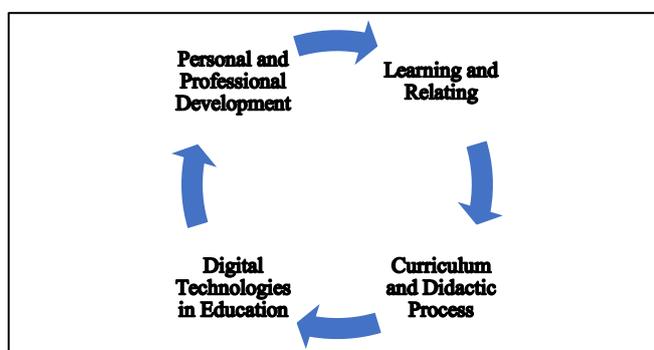
Figure 1. Competence domains included in the professional standards for teaching staff (Standards, 2025, p. 4)

The capacity for pedagogical reflection constitutes a transversal core that integrates and enhances all domains of the teacher's professional standards. The link between these domains and the qualities of the reflective teacher can be argued through the role of reflection as a mechanism for critical analysis, self-regulation, and continuous optimization of educational practice.

Domain 1. Learning and Relating. The teacher with reflective competencies constantly analyzes the dynamics of educational relationships, student learning styles, and the impact of their own pedagogical interventions. Reflection allows them to identify emotional, social, or cognitive barriers influencing learning and to adjust communication and support strategies. Thus, empathy, active listening capacity, and relational flexibility become qualities consolidated through reflection, contributing to an inclusive and motivating educational climate.

Domain 2. Curriculum and Didactic Process. In this domain, pedagogical reflection is manifested through the critical evaluation of content relevance, objective coherence, and the efficiency of didactic methods used. The reflective teachers avoid the mechanical application of the curriculum. Instead, they contextually adapt the school curriculum based on students' real needs and the results obtained. The ability to analyze the successes and difficulties of lessons leads to improved didactic design, diversification of teaching-learning-evaluation strategies, and an overall increase in educational quality.

Domain 3. Digital Technologies in Education. Pedagogical reflection supports critical and responsible use of digital technologies. Reflective teachers evaluate the opportunities and limitations of digital tools, relating them to educational objectives and their impact on student learning. Through reflection, they select appropriate

technologies, integrate digital resources in a pedagogically justified manner, and adjust their practices based on feedback and results, developing authentic and functional digital skills.

Domain 4. Personal and Professional Development. The capacity for reflection is essential for the formation of a mature professional identity and for lifelong learning. Reflective teachers analyze their strengths, limitations, values, and training needs, taking responsibility for their own professional evolution. Reflection facilitates self-assessment, openness to feedback, and engagement in continuous improvement efforts, transforming didactic experience into a constant source of development.

In summary, pedagogical reflection ensures the coherence and interconnection of professional standard domains, transforming formal competencies into conscious, adaptive, and innovative educational practices. A reflective teacher respects professional standards, internalizes them, and values them critically, actively contributing to the increase of educational quality. Furthermore, a reflective teacher understands that change in education is a complex process that is most effective when teachers collaborate through the exchange of experiences and constructive feedback. The development of schools as "learning communities" is based on the idea that all members of the institution - students, teachers, and managers - are engaged in a continuous process of evolution.

Table 3. Distributed Leadership of the Reflective Teacher

Leadership Role	Specific Actions	Systemic Impact
Mentor and tutor	Guiding novices and interns through the professional insertion process (regulation, 2024)	Ensuring continuity of good practices and modelling a reflexive attitude in new generations.
Practitioner researcher	Carrying out classroom-level micro-research to solve learning issues (Vicol & Pogolșa, 2022, pp. 108-119)	Generating validated pedagogical learning through practice, reducing the gap between theory and action.
Project coordinator	Managing international partnerships to stimulate cultural and digital openness (Șova & Bețivu, 2025, pp. 19-23)	Integrating European standards and methodological innovations nationally.
Well-being facilitator	Creating a supportive emotional climate and managing conflicts through assertive communication (Șova, 2014)	Increasing student motivation and reducing dropout and professional burnout.

These roles demonstrate that the teacher is both an implementer of educational policies and a co-author of them, adapting macro-systemic visions to the micro-social realities of the community in which they operate.

Although national normative acts and practical experience insistently promote the development of reflective capacity in teachers, various barriers from the external and internal environments are observed during the implementation process. These barriers can slow down or block the process of change in education and the transfer of pedagogical innovations.

Research conducted by A. Balan and T. Șova (2023) specifies the following barriers to the transfer of pedagogical innovations arising from external and internal environments:

External Environment Barriers:

- *Family resistance* – parents do not support innovation because they have limited parenting skills and are not actively involved in school life.

- *Weakly developed economy* – the economic sector does not provide sufficient funding for social innovations.

- *Administrative instability* – frequent changes in top management lead to a lack of sustainability in the hierarchical monitoring of innovation implementation.

- *Limited institutional autonomy* – most innovations are introduced "top-down" and have a mandatory status.

- *Scarcities of domestically developed innovations* – innovations are most often implemented through international projects, which require adaptation to the specific characteristics of the national education system.

- *Local control* – weak improvement incentives offered by Educational Departments attenuate the diffusion of innovation.

- *Segmented application of innovation* – innovation is implemented only at certain levels of the education system.

- *Insufficient communication between researchers and practitioners* – researchers disseminate innovation for short periods and only through limited channels (conferences, presentations, scientific publications).

Internal Environment Barriers:

- *Low capacity* – the institution lacks human, financial, and material resources to implement innovations.

- *Fear of failure* – there are no guarantees that every new idea will work. It must be accepted that failure is an important part of learning, development, and progress.

- *Mindset* – the institution is more concerned with preserving tradition and comfort; innovation is perceived as a source of anxiety and stress.

- *Limited sharing* – innovative teachers concern themselves little with the dissemination of good practices in innovation implementation.

- *High complexity* – pedagogical innovations require specific competencies, effort, creativity, time, and resources.

- *External funding is difficult to obtain* – pedagogical innovations require additional funding. Grants are more frequently awarded to institutions with extensive experience in executing innovative projects.

- *Weak incentives* – innovators are not sufficiently motivated by management or their colleagues.

Recognizing these barriers is the first step toward overcoming them through effective innovation management. A path worth following is to train teaching and management staff in the areas that determine the transfer of innovations in education and to simplify workplace collaboration. Communication and understanding within the institution initiating the innovation transfer must be a two-way street. Essentially, managers must transform innovation into daily operational activity (Bălan & Șova, 2023, pp. 32-47).

Amplifying the pedagogical reflection of innovative teachers can be achieved by reserving time for critical analysis and peer collaboration, utilizing digital technologies as a means to extend the cognitive and collaborative capacities of both teachers and students, focusing on institutional well-being, and aligning with international standards. The reflective teacher is the one who "constructs the history of their own profession," giving meaning to the educational act through permanent questioning of reality and a tireless desire to contribute to the growth of each student's potential. In an age of automation, the capacity to reflect, to feel, and innovate remains the supreme attribute of the educator, transforming them into the most important agent of social and human progress. Indeed, transforming the teacher

into an agent of change requires a reconfiguration of educational policies so that reflection is perceived as the very essence of didactic professionalism.

Teachers with a reflective orientation are distinguished by their openness to innovation and the use of a diversified set of methods and practices designed to support continuous evaluation and improvement of didactic activity. These include reflective journals, in which observations and impressions regarding the flow of lessons and interactions with students are recorded. Such a tool becomes a valuable resource for the subsequent analysis of the educational endeavor, facilitating the identification of strengths as well as aspects requiring improvement. At the same time, the exchange of experience and receptivity to peer feedback constitute essential dimensions of reflective practice. Through professional collaboration, new perspectives and relevant ideas for optimizing the didactic process can be obtained. Observing and analyzing the activity of other teachers also offers the opportunity to adopt and adapt effective strategies and techniques into one's own practice.

Creative exploration of educational technologies represents another characteristic of this approach, contributing to increased engagement and interactivity in the classroom. Using online learning platforms, interactive applications, or multimedia tools allows for the design of attractive and accessible lessons. Concomitantly, a safe and stimulating educational climate is promoted, where students are encouraged to express their ideas, participate actively in the learning process, and provide constructive feedback. Open dialogue and reflective questions support the development of critical thinking, as well as consolidation of communication and collaboration skills.

By systematically valuing professional experience and transforming it into innovative pedagogical practices, the reflective approach asserts itself as an essential factor of change in education. Self-analysis and the willingness to adapt support the continuous professional development of teachers and contribute to increasing the quality of the educational act. In a society that is in permanent flux, this type of teacher emerges as a benchmark of educational excellence and a responsible actor in shaping autonomous, confident generations capable of meeting contemporary challenges.

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