



Refl' Action

PRACTICE BRIEF

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In collaboration with:



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Introduction

Refl'Action is a project financed by the Erasmus+ program, aiming to raise awareness about the use of reflection as a means to promote well-being and transferable learning. Its purpose is to foster the development of young people based on values of well-being and conscious personal and collective growth.

Throughout the different project actions, our primary goal was to share with educational professionals, such as teachers, educators, trainers, facilitators, and youth workers, the possible uses of reflective practices. Through constant dialogue with the stakeholders, we confirmed the potential of reflection and its practices in enhancing learning experiences and long-term educational pathways.

To simplify and transfer the sharing of our experiences and research on reflection and related practices, we developed this manual as a practical tool for educational work and individual life. The underlying idea is to provide the reader with an easily usable and readable tool that allows for the enrichment of educational proposals or the use of reflective practices in different work environments where they can be applied. To this end, this practice brief retraces the different steps of our journey during eighteen months dedicated to theoretical and practical research on reflection.

The first chapter summarizes, in a more concise manner, the five articles published on the project's website. The second chapter provides some reflective practices applicable to different training modalities, with a particular reference to the role of the facilitator. The last section is dedicated to a collection of testimonies from international trainers who use or have used reflective practices or the concept of reflection in their professions.

As a starting point, we want to use this quote from Dewey¹: *"The vital need in education is not for mere information, but for intellectual and emotional intercourse. The task of education, in its intellectual aspect, is to cultivate the conditions in which the habits of reflective thought shall be produced, preserved, and exercised, in such ways that they shall issue in a rationalised and methodised power. Information becomes mind only as it enters into the formation of thought, or into a continuous process of reciprocal interaction and stimulation between impulse and cognition. Intelligence and understanding denote that the various parts of acquired information are grasped in their mutual connection—a result that is secured only when acquisition is accompanied by reflection upon the meaning of what is being studied."*²

What does reflection mean for us? It means experiencing and becoming aware of our own experiences. When we assign a meaning to a certain memory and refer back to a specific circumstance and its specific variables of sensations, emotions, and ideas, we are reflecting.

1. John Dewey. 1859 – 1952. American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer.

2. J. Dewey, *How we think*, D.C. Heath & Company, Boston, 1910

If there is a correct reflection, it is the one that helps the individual to authentically read their life experiences to develop greater awareness of themselves and the world around them. From our perspective, this concept of reflection enables the individual to read and consider their actions, their functioning, and the possible causes and consequences related to their behaviors.

The reflective process allows for the learning of an experience. Specifically, reflection is a human action that involves the emotional, physical, and mental aspects of our being. The amount of time dedicated to reflection depends on the type of experience, its value, and its depth. One can reflect before, after, or during an experience. What changes is the objective that one seeks to achieve through reflection.

In education, reflection is often equated with evaluating a specific situation, experience, task, or process. This provides an opportunity to observe and analyze the facts to verify what works and what needs to be modified to improve performance or knowledge. The focus is primarily on integrating new knowledge and experiences with previous ones to acquire new skills or enrich existing ones. However, interpreting the reflective process as a process of evaluation risks highlighting only some aspects that do not exhaust its potential, including its applicability. Reflection cannot be defined as a logical process of cause and effect; it can include causes and effects, but it is not limited to them.

In fact, within the reflective process, we find different elements that cannot be reduced to strictly logical processes, including feelings, beliefs, cultural baggage, and environmental and developmental factors, closely connected to the individual and subjective area of the reflecting subject. For these reasons, reflection should be considered a valuable resource for different contexts, helpful in understanding not only external circumstances but also internal ones, such as thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, in a more profound way.

In summary, the reflective practice should be understood not as a mere evaluation or purely logical process of cause and effect but as a more complex process of continuous and limitless discovery and understanding. It is a process in which individuals actively investigate the motivations that guide them to achieve greater awareness of who they are, what they feel, what they think, and which patterns they use in their relationships with others. Reflecting means acquiring a dynamic ability to face situations; our idea is that reflection is the key to enriching every experience by making individuals aware of their development.

Promoting reflection as a regular practice within the educational world seems fundamental in forming the individual. Individuals more prone to reflect on their experiences appear more inclined to investigate and understand their behaviors in complex and unknown situations.

The awareness that comes from experiences, achieved through reflection, can create beliefs and examples to which one can return when experiencing a similar situation on a practical, theoretical, physical, and emotional level.

Specifically, gaining greater awareness regarding one's social and emotional competencies, that is, the set of attitudes and behaviors one uses in daily life, can be achieved through reflection.

By increasing self-awareness, reflection triggers a process of discovery that, starting from "how I think", "how I feel", and "how I relate to others", leads to a continuous growth of motivation and willpower that are at the base of learning.

The Research

During the course of eighteen months, Dr. Francesca Salmeri³ attempted to gather the fundamental elements of the concept of reflection, intended within the framework of experiential education as an integral part of every experience, as well as some possible perspectives on the development of its practices. The purpose pursued in the publications was to emphasize the value of reflection as a useful action for educational, professional, and personal development.

Starting from the roots of the term reflection, the first article focuses on defining reflection within the context of experiential education; the second investigates the aspects of reflection related to thought, criticism, and judgment; the third seeks to explore, even in minimal terms, the more spiritual and meditative aspect of reflection, investigating connections with various meditative practices common in the East; the fourth explores the more scientific aspects related to the functioning of our body, such as certain neuronal functions and hormones involved in cognitive, emotional or mental actions present in reflection; finally, the fifth article reflects on some possible reflective activities, emphasizing the importance of the role of the trainer in light of the theory of the five Ws.

³ <https://reflectionproject.eu/research/>

The five articles develop from the conception of reflection as a natural and necessary human activity to deeply understand oneself and the community to which one belongs. In the path designed, we wanted to emphasize the importance of reflective practices in everyday life.

In the first article, titled "*The meaning and value of reflection: finding a common definition*"⁴, we delve into the history of the concept in its most practical and symbolic sense, tracing it back to its Latin root, *reflexio-reflexionis*, which literally means retreat, and even touching upon the Greek *διάνοια* or conscious knowledge.

Like the ancient Greeks and Latins, reflection in experiential methodology is not a static concept but rather a process that is influenced by various factors. The connection to experience is undeniable; for the Latins, reflecting meant folding back and reordering, in the same way, that reflecting after an action involves piecing together the parts that composed it.

Similarly, knowledge for the ancient Greeks was not a finite entity but a continual and dynamic growth process in which individuals collect their ideas, experiences, and emotions within themselves to achieve well-being and self-awareness.

4. You can find the article here - <https://reflectionproject.eu/research/>

After many centuries we have come to the contemporary age and the common meaning of experiential learning and the work of John Dewey. In *How We Think*,⁵ the latter describes reflective thinking as "*withdrawing mentally on a subject and addressing it to a serious and continuous consideration.*"

From Dewey, we take the practicality of the reflective tool that arises from the need to get out of a state of doubt. According to the American thinker, reflection is a dynamic process that develops through linked phases and fluid stages, and the process extends to reach the solution. It is not a finished process but a cycle that repeats itself in which each completed reflection represents the starting point of the next one.

For the phases referred to, we refer to the first article of our research, "*The Meaning and Value of Reflection: finding a common definition*",⁶ or to the publication "*An Interpretation of Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory.*"⁷

All this theoretical path leads to the specific cycle of experiential learning that we have used as the starting point of our practical activities: Kolb's Learning Cycle.^{8,9}

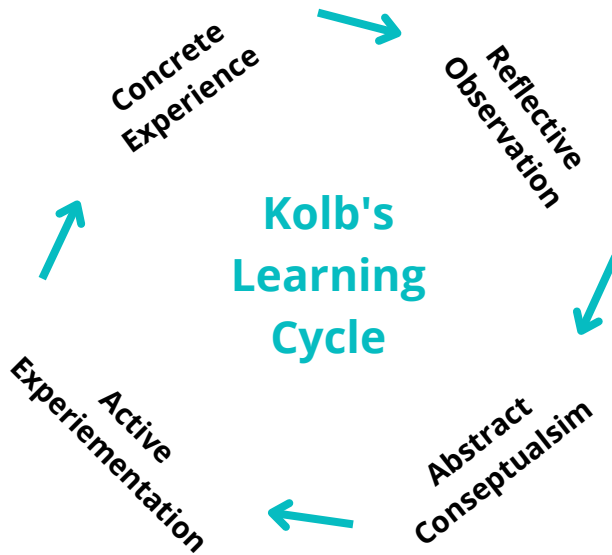
5. J. Dewey, *How we think*, D.C. Heath & Company, Boston, 1910

6. You can find the article here - <https://reflectionproject.eu/research/>

7. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED481922>

8. David Allen Kolb. 1939, Illinois. Theorist of experiential learning, individual and social change, career development, and executive and professional education.

9. To go further about it, please refer to <https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/reflectivewriting/kolb>



In his studies, Kolb focuses on the external inputs necessary for the development of reflection: questions or tools specially designed to facilitate the phase of reflective observation, and it is from this consideration of reflection-action that Refl'Action is born.

We have not adopted the stages described by Kolb as essential dogmas; instead, we have tried to find a meeting point in the foremost exponents of experiential learning, enriching their cycles with the theories of Shon¹⁰ and other modern and contemporary psychologists and philosophers, linking the theory to experiential practices today.

10. Donald Shon. 1930 - 1997. American philosopher.

Therefore, we have considered reflection a *conscious human activity* aimed at dissolving a state of doubt; a cyclical and non-conclusive process closely linked to the characteristics of the individuals and contexts in which it is applied. Reflection is understood as an observation of reality, a tool that supports the individual in achieving greater self-awareness in terms of:

- strengths and limitations;
- identification and focus on objectives;
- clearer perception of the contexts and dynamics in which one acts.

In the second article, "*Reflection thought, judgment, and criticism*"¹¹, the focus was articulated on the mental concepts related to the action of reflecting, concepts that concern the action of reflecting "*But which cannot and must not replace it*"¹²: thought, judgment, and critique.

As far as **thinking** is concerned, this can be defined as an innate and necessary human activity, but concerning the concept of reflection, incomplete as it does not always include some factors present in reflection, such as objectives, feelings, and specific circumstances.

Thought is, in fact, a valuable tool for immediate investigation closely connected to sensory stimulation, but if not guided, it can also be harmful.

11. You can find the article here - <https://reflectionproject.eu/research/>

12. Salmeri F. *Reflection thought, judgment, and criticism*, 2022

It "manifests itself, complicates, is made explicit, and realized based on its horizon. The activity of thinking underestimates or forgets to refer to a specific horizon. It stumbles upon what we usually refer to with the term *Over thinking*, thinking without a clear horizon, which turns into a trap with no way out".¹³

Judgment, starting from the philosophical meaning of the term, is "a logical function that connects, affirming or denying, a subject with a predicate and is expressed in its different application possibilities"¹⁴. In common sense, a judgment is a simple statement that expresses an opinion about something or someone in terms of quality, value, etc. Still, this meaning profoundly limits its field of application, relegating the term to a meaning, more often than not, negative. From the point of view of our research, a judgment cannot be defined as positive or negative, as suitable or not suitable in terms of applicability, as it reflects the ability to understand and express one's opinions, which can undoubtedly be more or less appropriate to a circumstance, but are not and can never be defined as "right or wrong" as they are closely related to the personal perception of individuals.

Closely connected to judgment is the concept of **criticism**. Also, this term is strongly devalued in the common language.

13. Salmeri F. *Reflection thought, judgment, and criticism*. 2022

14. Ibidem

Criticism is expressed as the human ability to examine, evaluate and possibly underline aspects of improvement of a given situation. This is to be able to "*choose, select, express preferences, or make any necessary changes*".¹⁵

As we have already anticipated, reflection is linked to these concepts, which participate in the reflective process, without however exhausting it, since within the reflective process, our thinking, judgment, and criticism skills are associated and always accompanied by our sensory perceptions, by our emotional history and our vision of reality.

In the third article, "*Traveling the same river through different waters: reflections from the world of meditation*"¹⁶, we tried to broadly retrace the history and peculiarities of the different schools and meditative practices, trying to underline their applicability in individual everyday life. For example, the practice of "*awareness meditation*" of Vipassana is described, which, similarly to the use of reflection that we wish to carry on, seeks to help the individual "*not to hold back or become attached to those thoughts that can cause him anxiety and negativity*"¹⁷. In the course of the article, reference is also made to the Buddhist *samatha* meditation of "*calm abiding*", which through nine stages, seeks to stabilize thoughts to reach a state of balance.

15. Ibidem

16. You can find the article here - <https://reflectionproject.eu/research>

17. Salmeri F. *Traveling the same river through different waters: reflections from the world of meditation*. 2022

An aspect present in all the meditative practices investigated and which we believe is fundamental in the connection to reflection as a tool for personal development is the concept of **habit**: *"the assumption of good habits, capable of transforming the perception, the state of mind, and sometimes the health of the human being."*¹⁸

In the fourth article, *"Neuronal plasticity, memory and hormones: what happens inside us when we reflect"*,¹⁹ we tried to highlight what reflecting entails from a biological point of view, that is, what happens in our body when we put the action of reflecting into practice. We focused on attention, memory, the amygdala, and the hypothalamus, on the presence of some hormones, and the phenomenon of **neural plasticity**; the latter, in particular, is strongly connected to the concept of experience and, for this reason, of great importance for our project. The phenomenon of neural plasticity somehow concretizes experiential theories from a physiological point of view, as it highlights how environmental stimuli concretely influence perception, thinking, remembering, or implementing behavioral strategies.

Therefore, we asked ourselves whether or not the idea of a long-term education that materializes the **reflective personality** that many authors of experiential education deal with was possible.

18. Ibidem

19. You can find the article here - <https://reflectionproject.eu/research>

Educating individuals to reflect to the point of making them autonomous in developing their reflective personality, capable of interacting with every daily or working life situation. At the end of this journey, basing ourselves on some modern theories of neurobiology and emphasizing the importance of habit, we can consider the possibility of developing a reflective personality effectively.

In the fifth and final article of our research, "*Reflective practices: examples and elements to develop and manage a reflective activity*",²⁰ we highlighted some elements that can support professionals and individuals in facilitating and implementing **reflective activities**.

Although we refer to the next chapter for suggestions regarding reflective activities, here we will instead take up the ideas helpful in facilitating practices and activities.

What emerges from experiences in the field is that the result of a reflective activity depends on many factors and that it is essential to know and consider the latter to facilitate a development that reaches the set objective.

To facilitate the understanding of some of these common factors in implementing activities, we have brought these elements back by reworking the famous **5W method**.²¹

20. [You can find the article here - https://reflectionproject.eu/research](https://reflectionproject.eu/research)

21. "The Five Ws of Online Help". by Geoff Hart, TECHWR-L. Retrieved April 30, 2012.

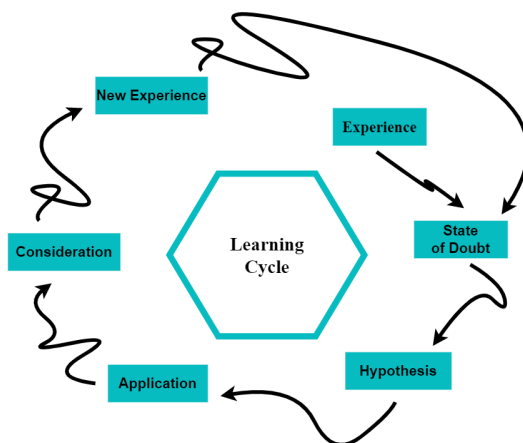
This method helps us to outline the fundamental aspects that every trainer, educator, facilitator, etc., can keep in mind to plan the steps to follow in proposing a reflective activity:

- **What:** What is the activity you intend to carry out? What are the objectives of the activity? What are the expected results?
- **Who:** Who will participate in the activity? What are the characteristics of the participants? What are the specific needs of the participants?
- **When:** When will the activity take place? What are the dates and times? How long will the activity last?
- **Where:** Where will the activity take place? What are the facilities and resources needed to run the business? Are the necessary resources available?
- **Why:** Why will the activity take place? What are the reasons and long-term goals of the business? What are the benefits for the participants and the organization?

The 5W method allows us to identify objectives and resources necessary to plan an intervention. Still, it even pushes us to have a preliminary knowledge of the group to be specific in our proposal. A facilitator must be able to read any needs of the participants to adapt the program to their needs and ultimately achieve the best learning outcomes. In this regard, the invitation is always to remain in a state of active observation, thanks to which the facilitator can always decide to change the direction of the proposed activity or even replace it when he realizes that this does not correspond to the participants' needs.

At the beginning of our journey, we defined reflection as: *"a human activity, which arises from the awareness of not having all the answers (like an admission of ignorance). Its purpose is to dissolve the doubts from which it arises (starting from a state of doubt). It is a process, closely linked to the characteristics of the individual and the context of reference (that is the nature of the reflection). Each reflection is a starting point for the next one, it is not a final process, but a cyclical path."*²²

At the end we have arrived at a definition of reflection that we think could be useful to consider to implement and facilitate reflective activities aimed at groups, individuals, or oneself: *"Reflection is a necessary, voluntary, and conscious human action (Refl'Action) that dispels a state of doubt. It involves individuals' physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions and can concern both the inner plane and be directed towards the outside. It is never configured as a single action but as a cycle that repeats itself endlessly in the direction of awareness and balance of the individuals involved."*



The learning process, described in our conclusive model, is, therefore, the result of a passage of phases in which reflection is inserted in a spiral without conclusion:

- **experience**
- **state of doubt**
- **hypothesis**
- **application**
- **consideration**
- **new experience**

Tool Kit

During our research, we realized that creating and facilitating reflective activities is one of the most challenging aspects. In this chapter, by describing some of these activities, we will try to provide food for thought for those who will have to deal with these challenges.

One of the tools devised during the project was a kit of three dice that can support the facilitators in creating the activities; three dice of three different colors that direct the activities towards a dimension: cognitive, physical, and emotional; that help outline ways of reflection and restitution: individual, subgroups, whole group; and that support in the choice of the instrument to use: music, body, creative, visual, narrated.

It should be underlined that each activity involves all three dimensions but that we can try to give more prominence to one of the three. Before proceeding with the description of these practices, however, there are some aspects that we want to deepen, which are of vital importance to us.

The preparation and facilitation of reflective practices.

The descriptions of the practices in this chapter provide essential inputs on outlining one's activity, built ad hoc for one's participants. However, we want to start by describing the general circumstances influencing the activity's success, with their hypothetical impact on the participants and facilitators. Reflection is very personal, and different people can experience it differently. It is important to remember that there is no "*correct*" way to define the proper outcomes of a given reflection or how it should be lived, as much of this will depend on personal characteristics and environmental circumstances.

In the non-formal education environment, it is said that facilitating learning processes is an art. A facilitator should be able to read the participants' and environmental circumstances to manipulate the activity and facilitate the achievement of one's planned training goal. The facilitator has several roles: he is an observer, most of the time the judge, and sometimes a participant. He must be able to change her role during the activity. He drives at first, then gives more space and listens.

A balance must be struck between being flexible to meet members' needs and keeping the process consistent with the theme. Ensure each group member has adequate and protected space to express themselves authentically.

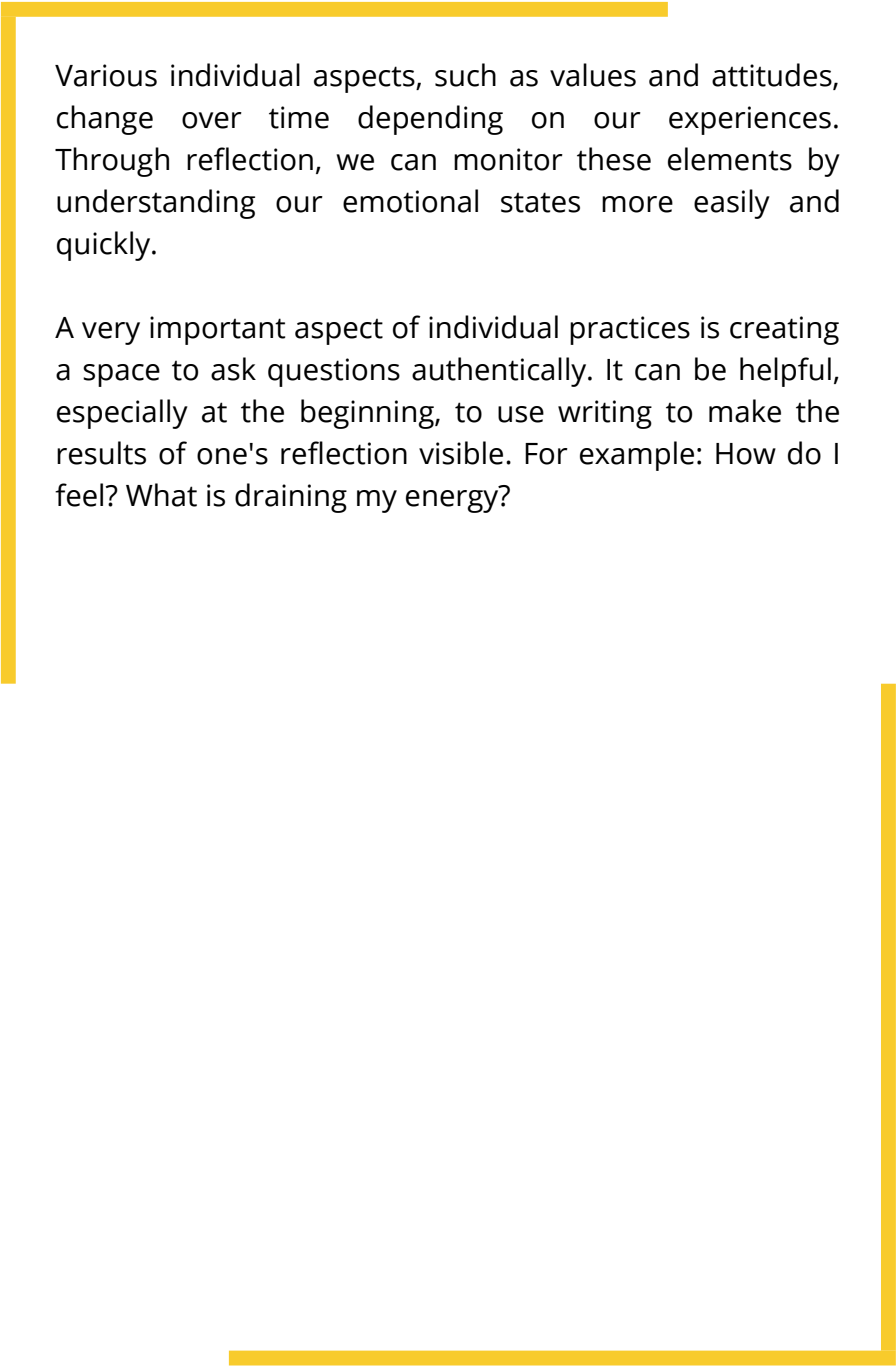
A good facilitator knows how to set goals and prepare for the group to achieve them. He should be able to explain and understand the proposed activity's meaning, implications, and possible criticalities: he is responsible for developing the process.

In planning a reflective activity, remembering the importance of the simplified 5W process, we believe it can be supportive of going through these steps:

- Purpose and specific objectives of the activity.
- Planning how to reach them.
- Preparation of the context: the necessary environment and tools.
- Launching the activity and observing the first reactions.
- If necessary, decide to make changes to the activity to match the current needs of the participants.
- Leave the suitable space for sedimentation-restitution

On the level of individual practices, reflection aims to improve training and become more aware of one's own decisions. Reflective practices help assign meaning to experiences, dissolve intrusive thoughts, and shed greater clarity on experienced emotions or moods.

In individual practices, one often does not start with a direct experience but rather with a question to answer. Concrete experiences are reported as proof or support. We want to underline that, in this case, we mean that ritual reflexive practice that could, for example, be used cyclically in one's daily life.

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Various individual aspects, such as values and attitudes, change over time depending on our experiences. Through reflection, we can monitor these elements by understanding our emotional states more easily and quickly.

A very important aspect of individual practices is creating a space to ask questions authentically. It can be helpful, especially at the beginning, to use writing to make the results of one's reflection visible. For example: How do I feel? What is draining my energy?

The Mirror

This activity aims to identify the elements that cause stress within the dynamics in which the individual usually acts. The participant will create a circle that represents him using natural elements found in the surroundings.

Within this circle, he must include elements that make him feel good and calm (always representing them with natural elements). Thus, he will place the external elements that cause him stress and discontent; the more they negatively affect him, the further he will place them away from the circle.

The restitution takes place in subgroups. Each member presents his mirror to the other participants as he wishes.

NB: this phase should not generate debate; listeners can participate by asking questions about the elements inside or outside the circle, to which the participant is not obliged to answer.

The Hand

Each participant draws a hand on their sheet and tries to give each finger a meaning in terms of emotions:

- Thumb: something that made me feel ok
- Index: Someone who made me feel supported
- Medium: something that made me feel uncomfortable
- Ring finger: something I didn't understand about myself or others
- Pinkie: a commitment to the next activity

The restitution takes place in plenary. Everyone uses their hand to share. The facilitator should try not to create debate but rather to facilitate the emotions individuals feel and make them clear to the whole group.

Empathic exploration

The "Empathic Exploration" activity is an opportunity to develop a deeper connection and mutual understanding between group members. We divide the group into pairs. This will favor the opening towards new points of view and a broader empathy.

Each couple will receive a piece of paper and a pen to take notes during the activity. We explain that there will be two roles: the Storyteller and the Listener. The Storyteller will be the one who will share a situation or a significant moment in her life, while the Listener will actively engage in listening and responding emphatically.

The Storyteller begins by honestly and openly describing the situation or experience he has chosen to share. The Storyteller needs to express not only the external aspects of the incident but also the emotions, thoughts, and challenges he has faced. This will help the Listener fully understand the Storyteller's emotional and mental context.

While the Storyteller speaks, the Listener assumes an active listening attitude. It focuses on the voice, non-verbal language, and emotional cues the Storyteller provides. The Listener tries to put himself in the Storyteller's shoes, trying to understand the emotions, challenges, and points of view being expressed.

Once the Storyteller has concluded his description, the Listener takes the sheet of paper and writes a response with delicacy and respect.

This response reflects the Listener's understanding of the Storyteller, showing an emotional connection and a sincere willingness to understand. The Listener can share words of support, reassurance, or personal reflections.

Subsequently, the roles are reversed, and the Listener becomes the Storyteller, allowing both couple members to share their experiences and develop greater mutual empathy.

At the end of the activity, the group comes together to share. This moment of sharing allows you to deepen mutual understanding and discuss the emotions and challenges faced during the activity.

Where is your power?

The "Where Is Your Power" activity has as its primary objective the recognition of one's strength. The activity starts with creating a personal silhouette on a white panel with the support of the other participants. The panel is raised off the ground, thus requiring the physical support of the participants and the assistance of someone to trace the shape on the panel.

Once the silhouette has been completed, the participant depicted is invited to insert a drawing, a word, or a characteristic he recognizes as his "superpower" and wishes to make available to the group. This characteristic can also be associated with the body part the participant perceives as the strongest.

Through this process, participants can self-reflect, identifying and recognizing their unique qualities and potential to contribute positively to the group. Visually representing one's 'superpower' within the personal silhouette creates a sense of connection and sharing among participants, providing an opportunity to celebrate one's strengths and strengthen group bonding.

The activity also requires physical cooperation between the participants as they support each other to lift the panel and create the shape. This physical aspect of the activity fosters a sense of mutual trust and support within the group, creating an inclusive and empathetic environment.

Shaping the clay

In the "Shaping with Clay" activity, participants are blindfolded and given a ball of clay to manipulate. Clay is a "living" material that shapes easily and is a "pure" material known for its purifying and sanitizing properties. During the activity, the blindfolded participants model the clay following the flow of their emotions, creating a shape that represents the expression of their emotional state.

Being blindfolded allows for an intense sensory experience, allowing participants to focus on tactile and kinaesthetic sensations, creating a form visually representing their inner world.

It would be useful to accompany the activity with light music that promotes a relaxing environment and to guide the process with a calm voice that assists the participants in retracing the steps of a specific experience or in focusing on a particular emotional state, facilitating the process of connecting with emotions and transforming the clay, allowing participants to express themselves in a more authentic and liberating way.

At the end of the activity, the clay works can be shared and discussed within the group, allowing for a moment of reflection and connection through artistic expression and emotional intelligence.

The meditation of the flame

Flame meditation is an activity that aims to lead the participants toward a state of inner calm and peace of mind. It is a guided meditation experience that takes just a few minutes and can be practiced while sitting comfortably on a cushion on the floor, in a chair, or lying down.

Before beginning, find a quiet place to focus without distractions. Find a comfortable position: with your back straight but relaxed, or lying down, your hands resting on your lap and your eyes gently closed.

To prepare for this meditation, take a few moments to let go of the worries and commitments of the day. Let your mind relax and become open to the present experience. This moment is entirely dedicated to you and your inner peace.

Start with a deep breath, slowly inhaling the air and letting it flow out of your body on a slow, mindful exhalation. Repeat this deep breathing two more times, allowing your body to relax more and more with each exhalation.

Now imagine that a small flame is lit from the farthest point of your body, from the tip of your big toe. This bright, warm flame begins slowly rising on your body, bringing a feeling of calm, peace, and warmth.

Concentrate on where the flame passes, feeling its warmth gently enveloping every part of your being. Let everything else fade away momentarily and be fully present in this soothing stillness.

Continue following the flame's path, feeling every part of your body welcome its peaceful energy. Breathe gently and allow your mind to rest in the serenity of this moment.

When you feel that you have reached a state of inner peace and calm, take a few deep breaths and gradually open your eyes. Carry this tranquility and serenity with you for the rest of your day.

Flame meditation is a simple yet powerful tool for restoring balance and dealing with everyday stresses and tensions. Experiment with it regularly and enjoy the benefits it can bring to your life.

Sensory experience in pairs

For this activity, we will divide the group into "blindfolded participants" and "guides". The goal is to create an engaging experience that pushes everyone out of their comfort zone and builds trust among attendees.


We start by creating a climate of trust among the participants. We cover the eyes of some participants and assign them a "lead" partner.

We ask blindfolded participants to walk around the environment with their partner guiding them through the voice. During this experience, we encourage participants to experience a lack of sight, rely entirely on their partner's guidance, and explore the world through their other senses.

Halfway through the activity, participants can switch roles so that everyone can experience both driving and being blindfolded.

At the end of the walk, we all get back together and take time for a reflection phase. During this phase, we share our experiences and reflections. Some stimulating questions could be:

- How did you feel at the beginning of the activity, experiencing the lack of sense of sight?
- What supported you during the activity, and what didn't help you?
- How do you think confidence can help both in this activity and your daily life?

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We can add challenges during the activity, such as touching different objects for example. This allows blindfolded participants to further explore the sensory world and broaden their awareness through the sense of touch.

Evocative Cards

For this activity, we can use cards with evocative images, for example, those of the Dixit game. We scatter the Dixit cards in a defined area and prepare a guideline.

The goal of the activity is to share how we currently see ourselves and foster self-awareness through projection. In silence, participants enter the area and find a guideline written at the entrance.

Participants walk through the cards looking for the one that best represents their mood or perception of the present moment.


When everyone has chosen a card, we stand in a circle, and each participant shows their card among the others.

At this point, participants can share if they wish. Some guiding questions for discussion might be:

- What impressed you most about your card?
- What emotions would you associate with this card?
- What was it like to hear others share?

The discussion is open, and participants are encouraged to share their thoughts without pressure or obligation.

This activity offers a non-verbal way to explore and communicate our emotions, moods, and perceptions through the evocative images of Dixit cards.

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It allows us to listen to and learn from others, discovering new perspectives and emotional connections. It is an opportunity to increase self-awareness and understanding of others within the group.

Letters from trainers and participants

This section is dedicated to four testimonials that we have decided to include.

Two trainers and two participants offer a valuable perspective for understanding the usefulness and effectiveness of reflective practices in promoting individual and group well-being and growth.

LETTER A - Trainer

I want to share an educational experience that I carried out with a group of 15-year-olds, where reflection was a fundamental part of the experience allowing participants to deepen their understanding of their own experiences and those of others. It allowed them to develop greater self-awareness and apply what they learned in real situations.

The reflective activity I organized took place in a forest following a physical group activity which consisted of building a shared shelter with the forest branches.

The reflective activity was structured as a single moment in which the participants retired in solitude and silence, exploring the environment through the senses and retracing the various moments of the previous experiences of the day.

At the end of the activity, the restitution took place in a group, and I decided to use a reflective approach that investigated emotional states and perceived limits; I avoided asking questions like "What did you learn?" or "How are you feeling?" and to manipulate the conversation to arrive at pre-packaged standard responses. I tried, instead, to create a safe, open space where participants could authentically share their experiences, opinions, emotions, and sensations.

I used open-ended questions that invited them to reflect on how they were feeling and on their personal experience, such as "What happened?", "Which word can describe your experience?".

The reflective moment allowed them to explore different aspects of the experience, to understand themselves better, to improve their understanding of others, and to develop greater situational awareness.

The most interesting part was generalizing emotional states by linking them to real situations and using experience to grow personally and emotionally and plan different future behaviors.

LETTER B - Trainer

I was in the mountains about two years ago.

I had been with my group for a few days. We still didn't know each other well. During the first few days, we usually dedicate a lot of space to getting to know each other to allow for the group's most straightforward creation and consolidation. A good atmosphere was created among the boys and girls, about fifteen in total.

Only one of them, M., showed more difficulty in letting himself go to the knowledge of the other.

One morning, we were in the forest, and I asked the group to try a new activity: "I have never tried it with your age group, but I think you might like it. It is an activity inspired by forest bathing, a very useful Japanese practice to increase relaxation and connect with nature."

I asked the boys to sit in a circle among the leaves and branches of the beech trees that surrounded us. We closed our eyes and listened to the sounds of nature. I told the group that each could choose whether he remained seated or always with his eyes closed, getting up to go in the direction of the sound most capturing him. I would help them move if they needed it.

At first, only M. did not move.

The others slowly and carefully, listening to the nature surrounding us, chose their places, slightly more distant from me and M.

We listened, trying to indulge in the pampering of the leaves, the wind, and the sound of the twigs broken by a few distant steps. At one point, M. began to speak. With a voice neither too high nor too low, on his initiative, he began to recite Manzoni's "Cinque Maggio," a meaningful poem for Italian literature.

In those days, many of the boys and girls in the group had begun to get to know each other, to play together, and to share important moments. For M., it was more difficult. He couldn't find a common path between himself and the others. He didn't want to play football with the other boys; he wasn't interested in communicating with the girls, and he didn't particularly like the outdoor activities included in the program. He participated in everything, but it was visible that he manifested a different need to express himself and connect with others.

As if by magic, as his voice merged with the sounds of nature around us, the group began to move again. The boys and girls got up, still with their eyes closed, and joined the poem's sound that accompanied them. After M.'s recitation, many of them cried, excited.

We opened our eyes and were silent for a while. At that point, I asked them a straightforward question, "What happened?" a girl started talking, "We met M., and he finally came to us."

We continued to talk about the experience, about how nature had helped us relax and observe, albeit with our eyes closed, aspects of ourselves that we did not know. The reflection involved emotion, the brain, and the body.

Everything in them moved towards a new goal, changing the very goal of the activity. The group's purpose was no longer to experience a moment of serenity in contact with nature but to let themselves be carried away by that same serenity towards an extra piece of construction of their group.

The reflection that we have carried on after the activity has opened our eyes to our characteristics, our passions, and the spaces we need to express ourselves, get to know others, and show ourselves without fear of receiving negative judgments.

Many moments and experiences followed that morning. But that group remains engraved in my memory, like the moment when I truly understood the value of reflection within our work.

This reflection gave me one of the sweetest memories an outdoor trainer can keep.

LETTER C - Participant

Today I share my experience concerning a Kamaleonte event I attended.

The first part of the activity that of the spider web, was a stimulating experience. At first, I was somewhat reluctant to go through the holes in the spider's web. I felt insecure and worried about derailing the group. But then, with the encouragement of others and the supportive atmosphere that had developed between us, I decided to overcome my fear.

The other participants made me feel safe and showed me I could trust them. And so, one by one, we managed to pass the test. It was an absolute triumph of trust and team collaboration.

Although the whole experience was very significant for me, the second moment - the reflection activity in couples - left a strong impression on me.

While walking through the forest with another participant, we could answer questions given to us by our facilitator. Each question was presented only after answering the previous one.

This method has created a kind of "waterfall evaluation," which has allowed us to deepen our awareness.

This activity made me realize how important it is to reflect on myself and how useful it was to do it with another participant I didn't know before that day.

I got to understand my limits and had the opportunity to express them and share them with my partner in activity.

The moment of reflection as a couple allowed me to explore my emotional states and limits and better understand what I felt during the first part of the activity, that of the spider web, and what helped me to interface with what I was experiencing.

In the beginning, I was very hesitant, I didn't want to be relieved, but thanks to the presence of the other participants, I understood that there was nothing to fear. I was safe and could overcome my fears.

Sharing my emotions and listening to those of my partner allowed me to see things from a different perspective. I understood that, often, the limits we feel are only in our minds and that, thanks to the collaboration and support of others, we can overcome them.

I hope to be able to participate in more activities like this in the future and continue to explore myself in greater depth.

LETTER D - Participant

I wanted to share a powerful experience from the Training of Trainers in Sabaudia that deeply impacted me.

During an activity, all participants had physical limitations, challenging us to work together towards a goal. Later, during reflection, we opened up about our feelings and concerns, realizing the importance of understanding and sharing emotions to avoid exclusion.

The activity in Sabaudia presented a unique challenge, as each participant had a physical limitation. Initially, frustration and helplessness arose as we struggled to accomplish the task.

However, during the subsequent reflection session, something extraordinary happened. We shared our thoughts and emotions, creating a space of vulnerability and connection.

We discovered the significance of empathy and understanding, acknowledging that individuals can feel excluded without them.

This experience highlighted the power of reflection to foster inclusivity and build stronger communities.

The moment in Sabaudia remains a lasting memory, reminding me of the transformative impact of reflection.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of Refl'Action and look forward to continuing this journey of personal growth and collective transformation.

Reflection about reflection

How can we be sure that the activity or moment of reflection we want to develop with a group is suitable? The first step in planning an activity program is to consider the **target group**.

Whether it is reflective, creative, sporting, or educational activities, it is always vital to consider the group that will be facing the program to develop a learning process that is genuinely realistic and useful for the participants involved.

People have different needs and requirements, and very often, it is difficult to know their personalities before taking a course; however, keeping in mind some general characteristics and categories - Characteristics such as age group, gender, the community of belonging, motivations, and expectations concerning the course in which one participates, etc. - and by associating them with **the objectives** we want to achieve with the proposal of our activities, it is possible to create a starting point that takes into consideration the differences and peculiarities of the participants.

As we mentioned in our project's research, the goal of a reflection can be very variable, depending on the circumstances and the people involved.

From the letters of the previous section, it can be seen how a reflective activity can be used in the formation phase of the group to facilitate knowledge among the participants and help them to observe and understand different points of view; at the same time, it can be used on an individual level and propose an activity that allows participants as individuals to reflect on their strengths or limitations.

Logically, target groups and objectives alone cannot help us develop a program. Another fundamental aspect remains that of the location: different places offer different inputs and possibilities for reflection; deciding whether to carry out one's indoor, outdoor, or online activities can also be a decisive choice regarding achieving the objectives we want to accomplish through our program.

It is essential to consider the available locations, the external and internal environments, and the tools we can use because these influence practically the learning opportunities we can offer to our groups, whether it is personal or group challenges, always keeping in mind that providing places that do not belong to the participants' daily lives means already posing a significant level of challenge for reflection: that of adaptability.

Once these aspects have been considered, we can choose which reflective activities we want to include in our program.

From a personal point of view, I find it very useful to plan the first days of the course and to organize the following ones only after I have known a group more in-depth.

Even in the case of a single day of activity, it may be interesting to start the process with a couple of activities that allow the trainer to discover something personal about his/her participants to be able to collect essential data for the construction of subsequent activities and the consequent reflective moments.

It is good to prepare several alternatives, which may vary according to the circumstances, the weather conditions, and the personalities we meet.

Reflection is a cyclical process; when we decide to reflect on ourselves, somehow, we are always learning. Because we are allowing ourselves to grow, ask ourselves questions, and find answers that we may not have known before. Obviously, this does not mean that every type of reflection can be considered functional in the same way and that the work of the trainer who decides to use the reflection tool is limited to proposing any question once the target group, objectives, and places have been considered.

The reflection that has a tangible impact on the participants of a course is the one that, taking up Dewey, helps them to dissolve a state of doubt, an inner question that until then has not found an answer.

Reflecting, for example, on how to reach a group goal without being able to use **our strengths** allows us to look at ourselves through a more accurate mirror, which asks us to get involved and to have faith not only in our potential but also in our limits, which observed from another point of view can be **opportunities**.

Observation of the people we interact with is essential. To be able to offer them a reflection or a question that is useful and works, I must have interacted with my group. I must have studied it in some way. So the questions we will ask are designed for the people who will have to answer and are not just general ideas but helpful for those specific personalities. To do this, authenticity in the trainer is a crucial factor. You cannot direct a reflective process by pretending to be other than what you are. **Authenticity** is the key to any functional reflection.

By communicating to the group what has been noticed, referring to specific moments and easily

understandable examples, and trying never to express value judgments, you can start a path that has as its objective to be an integral, if not the most essential part, of the learning process.

We are trainers and educators, but at the same time, we are people. It is entirely normal for our personality to influence us in our work. For this reason, the control of our reactions, our behaviors, and what we decide to investigate through reflective activities is and must be constant work, constantly verifying that we are developing the questions and the process in relation to the needs of the participants, even in the case in which they have not shared them.

It may happen that different people react, especially in the first moments of a training course, in different ways. We simply think of the shyness of the participants. It can be difficult for a person to agree to share his thoughts and emotions with a trainer who, until then, is little more than a stranger, just as it can be complex to decide to open up in a group in which he has been part for a few minutes, it is essential to this point of view to create a friendly and reassuring atmosphere and environment. And in my head, the first way to do that is still about authenticity. In this case, the trainer's role is to gain the trust of his participants to lay the foundations for the reflective process.

As trainers, facilitators, and educators, it is always good to respect the different "*entry points*" and the **different needs** of people. Some may be aided in reflecting by movement, some should prefer natural surroundings, and some by language.

Developing a variable program, open to possible changes, and trying to use different methodologies, such as creative, technological, human, sports tools, etc., is undoubtedly a good starting point.

First, it is important to think of generic reflective activities which can embrace as many people and personalities as possible. For example, leaving the participants of an activity to choose the tools to use in their reflection: they can decide to write, draw or keep silent... it is not the tool with which I express myself that identifies me, but for some, it can be more difficult share with words or write about emotions.

Sometimes, a participant's facial expression can say much more than a word. Furthermore, in planning the reflective activities, it is important to try to insert a ladder into the program, which gradually leads the participants to a more significant phase of reflection.

Start with simple guiding questions and leave adequate space to express yourself without demanding or insisting too much.

Gradually, through more excellent knowledge of one's group, it will be easier to direct reflection toward the specific objectives of the people who make it up. The key is always observation and reading by the trainer.

Technology is also a tool and, as such, cannot be defined as good or bad. It is a wealthy resource from which we can draw advantages and limitations. Like many other tools, I believe that technology can be helpful for reflection, for example, by exploiting the sources it makes available to us.

During a training course on the importance of nature, we did an activity that involved using a phone camera to photograph a particularly interesting natural element. Once again, through the smartphone, we have been invited to discover the superpower of that natural element that we have chosen.

At the end of the activity, we shared our discoveries and reflected on our perceptions and tastes. We developed a sense of empathy generated simply by discovering "what is interesting for the other." I have done the activity with many different groups since then.

The most exciting thing for me has always been reflecting with the kids on the different uses of the tools.

In the case of this activity, technology has been a helpful tool for discovering the nature that surrounds us, but also the starting point for a reflection on the use we decide to make of the tools at our disposal.

While on the one hand, technological tools can allow more people to participate in the proposed activities, let's think of the physical limitations that can put a person in conditions of immobility, the video calls that allow us today to collaborate with our partners abroad, all those kids who have found the answer to a physical disability in technological tools; at the same time, however, it can limit an authentic relationship based on the interaction of bodies.

There is no answer to whether or not it makes sense to use technology within programs designed to develop reflection. On the one hand, nowadays, it seems redundant to think of being able to do without it, but I believe it is important to be aware of the use that we want to make of the tools at our disposal.

A trainer can choose reflective activities that make it easier for the participants to observe themselves. How to put a mirror in front of our personality and our abilities. By allowing participants to observe each other without judgment but with honesty, the trainer builds the road to change. Suppose during a team building activity, for example, participants find it challenging to listen to or respect each other.

In that case, a good reflection will show them the differences between an activity carried out through listening.

At that point, after reflection, it may be helpful to give the possibility of repeating the challenge, emphasizing that part of the effort will be dedicated to listening. By obtaining different practical results, it will be easier for the participants to observe their own changes and decide what needs to be tested to grow.

Observing the changes within the groups, this response to our claim to know the outcome of our work. I don't think it is possible to indicate a scale of votes, from one to ten, on the success of a reflection.

Most of the time, it is a personal fact, a transformation that requires different times and awareness. As a trainer, I try to develop activities and reflections designed explicitly for the group I am working on. Try to work on shyness and public communication if the participants have difficulty expressing themselves and on self-knowledge, helping them discover something new about themselves if I see that it can be helpful for them.

The reflection that doesn't work is the "*canonical*" one, organized a priori by the group, without closely observing the characteristics of the people we work with.

When we work with authenticity, we ask ourselves as people, more than as trainers, what would be good for us if we were in their place, what would be good for me, in a similar condition, then at the end of the process, very often it is the participants themselves who come from you to thank you, it's their evaluations that make you understand if you've done an excellent job or not. To do this, you need to practice, as in everything. As in any experience, the final step is nothing more than the first of a new path.

Francesca Salmeri

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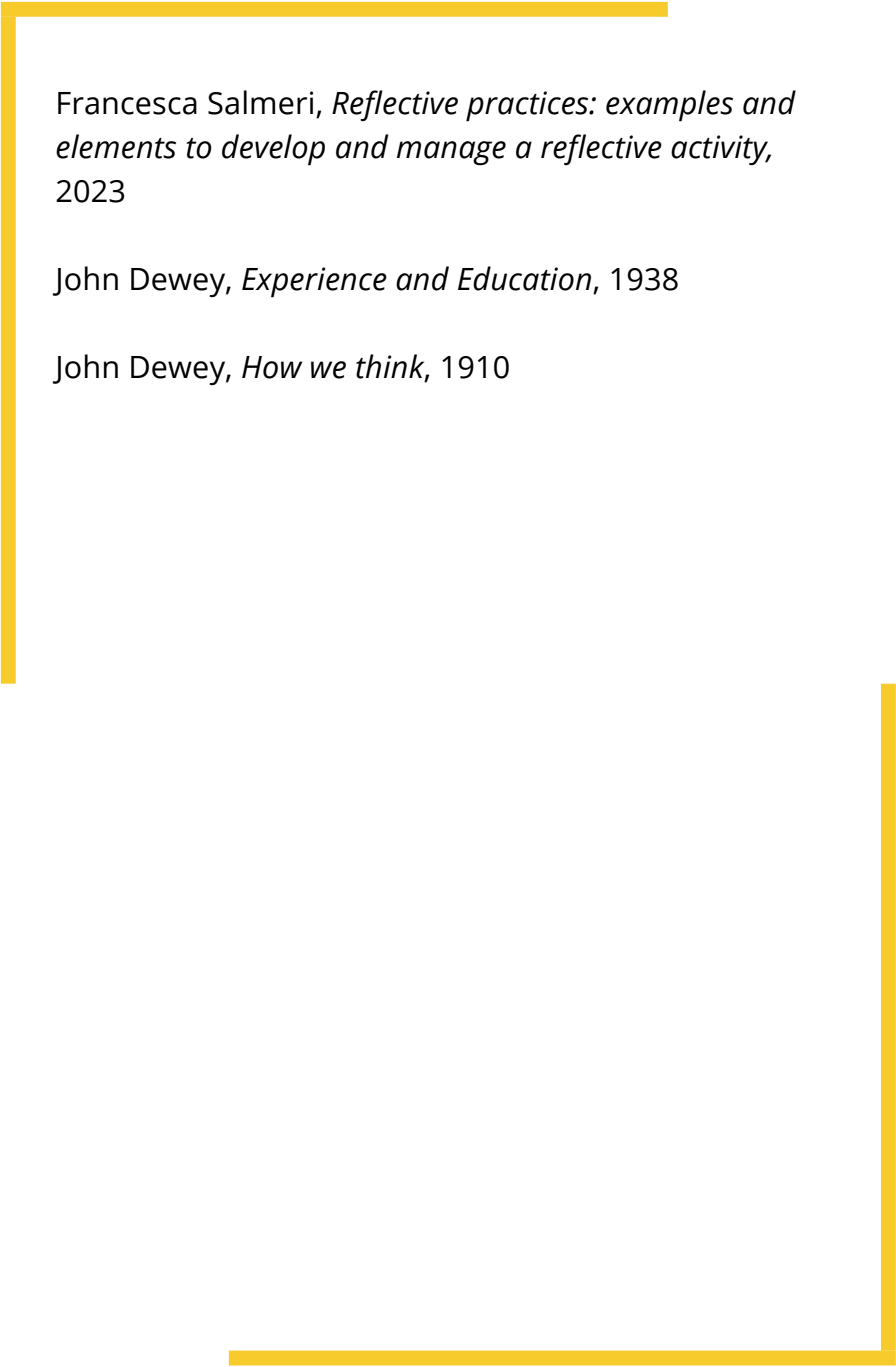
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Francesca Salmeri, *Reflective practices: examples and elements to develop and manage a reflective activity*, 2023

John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 1938

John Dewey, *How we think*, 1910

Useful Links

<https://reflectionproject.eu/research/> our research

<https://libguides.hull.ac.uk/reflectivewriting/kolb> Simple summary of Kolb's experiential cycle

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jon-Ord2/publication/270338098_John_Dewey_and_Experiential_Learning_Developing_the_theory_of_youth_work/links/54a7c6010cf267bdb90a3779/John-Dewey-and-ExperientialLearning-Developing-the-theory-of-youth-work.pdf John Dewey and Experiential Learning: Developing the theory of youth work

<http://www.kamaleonte.org/wp-content/uploads/REFLECT-Holding-the-space.pdf> A useful manual on reflection, published by Kamaleonte for the European project "Reflection as a core transferable competence in higher education and adult education" (REFLECT)

Consortium

If you want to know more about the project and its results, please get in touch with the organization from your country or visit the website reflectionproject.eu



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