



REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES, REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS, SELF-QUESTIONING AND MANAGING PROFESSIONALLY SITUATED PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of structured reflective questioning as a critical tool for professional development and problem-solving within workplace and educational contexts. It analyzes the theoretical underpinnings of reflective self-questioning, drawing from Dewey's conception of reflective thought and examining its evolution from a cognitive learning strategy to a core practice for managing complex, situated professional challenges. The article argues that such questioning—whether conducted internally or dialogically—enables practitioners to move beyond routine action, surface assumptions, and navigate "ill-structured" problems. To bridge theory and practice, the paper presents and analyzes two concrete reflective instruments: the "Exit Ticket" and the "4 Ls Reflective Journal." A detailed analysis demonstrates how these structured templates systematically guide individuals from comprehension and critical appraisal to metacognition and actionable application, thereby fostering the habits of mind essential for adaptive, self-regulated professional practice.

Keywords

Reflective questioning, self-questioning, reflective practice, professional problem-solving, metacognition, reflective tools, exit ticket, reflective journal, workplace learning, professional development.

Introduction

Reflective self-questioning emerges naturally in professional settings when individuals encounter challenging problems. This paper examines the role of reflective and context-specific questioning in both self-inquiry and workplace problem-solving. For Dewey, such questioning represents the essence of reflective thought. He argued it is superior to passive thinking—such as daydreaming or holding beliefs without examination—because it creates a structured sequence of thought aimed at resolving a problem, ultimately dissolving the issue itself. Questioning is unnecessary in straightforward situations where routine, unreflective thought suffices, as no disruption to habitual patterns occurs.

While scholarly literature on reflective questioning is not extensive, one consistent finding is its unique value. Bourner (2003) suggests that some individuals struggle with reflective learning because they lack a robust repertoire of probing questions. Similarly, King (1994a) and Rosenshine et al. (1996) identify self-questioning as the most effective metacognitive strategy for self-monitoring and regulation. However, theoretical foundations for these questions are often thin, with many resources simply offering practitioners ready-made lists of sample questions. Scholars like Tomm (1987, 1988) and Sofo (2006) have proposed typologies of reflective questions—such as future-oriented, hypothesis-testing, or perspective-shifting

questions—yet in practice, these categories often overlap in dynamic, reciprocal professional dialogues. Such conversations can carry emotional weight, requiring sensitivity when anxieties or concerns are present. Poskiparta, Kettunen, and Liimatainen (1998) note that reflective questioning can both stimulate reflection and offer support.

A common theme is that reflective questions are considered more foundational than other types. Smyth (1992) argued that reflective practitioners ask themselves more “fundamental” questions, while Van der Meij (1994) and Korthagen & Vasalos (2005) suggested such inquiry leads to “deeper” or “core” reflection. Powerful questions enable individuals to reflect while acting, fostering what Schön (1991) termed the truly reflective practitioner. In our view, reflective questions require individuals to examine their existing knowledge and experiences carefully before responding. The primary value lies with the person asking: the respondent is the main beneficiary, with a personal stake in finding answers.

From the 1980s to 1990s, “self-questioning” gained prominence, particularly in studies of reading comprehension and writing. Viewed as a cognitive strategy, it helps learners focus attention, organize new information, and integrate it with prior knowledge. The goal is for novices to internalize expert-like questioning to structure their understanding effectively. Schema Theory informs some of this work, proposing that generating questions about a text activates prior knowledge, bridging old and new information. From this perspective, self-questioning involves discerning what information merits inquiry and empowers learners to take responsibility for their learning.

More recently, self-questioning has been revisited in the context of workplace problem-solving. Researchers like Cho & Jonassen (2002) argue it enhances reasoning by focusing attention on relevant problem aspects, making thinking more explicit. Studies such as Koa Heng Ng et al. (2011) show that self-questioning significantly improves reasoning and problem-solving performance, especially for ill-structured professional challenges. This approach helps individuals become aware of their assumptions and identify blind spots. Common self-questions that arise include:

“Is there a good way?”
“Is there a better way?”
“What will happen?”
“What are the consequences?”

Moreover, next activity can be implemented in classes. Here we have clear explanation and layout of the activity “Exit ticket”

Session Reflection: Exit Ticket

Today's session helped us build on our understanding of _____.

To help consolidate your learning, please take a moment to reflect:

 CONCEPT: What is the most important concept or insight you are taking away from today's session?

(This could be a theory, a strategy, or a new perspective.)

 QUESTION: What is your lingering question or what would you like to explore further?
(What remains unclear or has piqued your curiosity?)



APPLICATION: How can you see yourself applying this in your future studies or teaching practice?
(Be specific!)

This "Session Reflection: Exit Ticket" is a structured written reflection tool designed to be used at the end of a learning session (e.g., a lecture, workshop, or seminar). It prompts learners to actively process and personalize their learning by synthesizing key concepts, identifying areas for further inquiry, and planning for practical application. The three-part structure systematically guides the user from comprehension to metacognition and forward-looking professional integration. This activity serves as a powerful catalyst for reflective practice, offering the following specific benefits: moving beyond passive reception, it forces a pause for cognitive processing. Articulating the "most important concept" requires the learner to sift through the session's content, prioritize information, and construct personal meaning, thereby strengthening memory and understanding. The "Question" prompt is crucial for developing metacognition—the awareness of one's own thinking. It encourages learners to assess the boundaries of their current understanding, identify gaps, and articulate curiosity. This transforms confusion from a passive state into an active driver for future learning. The "Application" component is the cornerstone of professional development. It compels the learner to project forward and translate abstract concepts into concrete, contextualized future actions. This step initiates the reflective cycle (plan-act-observe-reflect) by encouraging initial planning for implementation in authentic settings like a classroom or research project. By routinely asking "What is my lingering question?" the activity normalizes inquiry and continuous learning as a professional stance. It signals that learning is an ongoing process, not a finite event, and helps build the identity of a reflective practitioner who constantly questions and improves their practice. The collected exit tickets offer a real-time, qualitative snapshot of learner comprehension, common points of confusion, and interests. This allows educators to adjust future instruction, address misconceptions, and tailor content to meet learners' needs, creating a more responsive and effective learning environment. The activity places responsibility on the learner to define their own takeaways and next steps. This fosters agency and self-directed learning, moving the individual from a recipient of knowledge to an active participant in shaping their professional growth. The completed tickets serve as a concise record of intellectual and professional development over time. Reviewing them allows learners to track the evolution of their thinking, recurring questions, and how theoretical insights have been successfully (or unsuccessfully) applied, facilitating deeper longitudinal reflection.

In summary, this Exit Ticket is more than a simple feedback form; it is a structured micro-practice in reflection that deepens immediate learning, builds essential habits of mind for lifelong professional growth, and strengthens the vital connection between acquired knowledge and practical, impactful action.

Reflective Journal: The 4 Ls
LIKED

What did you like or appreciate about today's session? What was helpful?

LEARNED

What is the most valuable thing you learned today?

LACKED

What was missing or confusing for you? Was there something you felt you needed more of?

LONGED FOR (or What I'd Like to Learn Next)

Based on today, what are you curious to learn more about? What question is on your mind?

The "Reflective Journal: The 4 Ls" is a structured, four-question framework designed to guide a learner's post-session reflection. It encourages a balanced and comprehensive review of an educational experience by prompting responses in four distinct affective and cognitive categories: Liked, Learned, Lacked, and Longed For. This simple yet powerful mnemonic helps individuals move beyond a surface-level recap to a deeper, more nuanced analysis of their learning journey. This framework is an effective tool for fostering reflective habits, offering the following specific benefits: the structure deliberately moves the learner through different domains of experience: affective engagement (Liked), cognitive gain (Learned), critical appraisal (Lacked), and forward-looking curiosity (Longed For). This prevents reflection from being overly positive or negative, ensuring a complete and honest assessment of the session. Starting with "Liked" legitimizes the role of emotion, interest, and personal connection in the learning process. Acknowledging what was enjoyable or helpful increases self-awareness of personal learning preferences and motivational drivers, which is crucial for sustained professional engagement. The "Learned" prompt requires the learner to sift, prioritize, and articulate the core knowledge or insight gained. This process of identification and re-statement reinforces memory and deepens comprehension, solidifying the takeaway from the session. "Lacked" transforms potential frustration into productive critique. It encourages learners to diagnose gaps in their own understanding or in the session's delivery. This moves them from a passive state of confusion to an active role in identifying their own learning needs, a key skill for self-directed development. "Longed For" is a powerful prompt for generating internal curiosity and future learning pathways. By asking "What's next?" it shifts the learner's mindset from conclusion to continuation, fostering a sense of agency and ownership over their ongoing professional growth. It turns reflection into a launchpad for further inquiry. For instructors, the collective responses offer a rich qualitative dataset. Patterns in the "Liked" column highlight effective methods; "Learned" shows knowledge transfer; "Lacked" reveals common points of confusion; and "Longed For" provides a direct roadmap for future curriculum development or just-in-time clarification. The simple, clear prompts (4 Ls) and open-ended format make deep reflection manageable and less intimidating. This lowers the barrier to consistent practice, allowing learners at all stages to engage meaningfully without feeling overwhelmed by a more complex reflective model. In summary,

the 4 Ls Reflective Journal is a versatile and efficient tool that structures the reflective process to be both comprehensive and personally meaningful. It not only helps learners process and retain information but also actively shapes them into more engaged, critical, and self-motivated professionals who view each learning experience as part of a continuous journey of growth.

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