

‘Reflection, Why Bother’

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This thesis aims to answer the question, ‘reflection why bother’ the author is involved in adult healthcare education, and teaches reflection as an essential part of one the author’s modules.

the author wanted to see if the students continue to use reflection outside of their classes and if they saw any benefits to the use of reflection.

Before looking at the literature review, the author wanted to consider a very important topic of autonomy and student engagement and the role that reflection plays in encouraging the development of the engaged learner. In this area the author also considers the difference between the tutor who encourages the learner to become an active participant in their learning compared to the typical view of a tutor viewed as the expert there to impart knowledge.

Following a comprehensive literature review, where the author identified several themes that highlighted just how important reflection is and should be, the author decided to use a qualitative approach to discover if the themes identified in the literature review were also identified in the authors own research. Using a questionnaire and a follow up interview the author identified several similar themes to the literature review, including reflection as transformation, reflection as dialogue and a theme not identified in the literature review, reflection as personal development.

The research done by the author also brought up a students memories of abuse she witnessed as a young adult on work experience, through reflection the student learned to speak the truth even if her voice was shaking, this wasn't the authors intention but it does show how powerful reflection can be. Also discussed in the results is the use of reflection in a particular bad period of time experienced by another participant.

Although the sample size was admittedly small, just fifteen participants the author believes that the information gathered is representative of those students who utilise reflection in their classroom and in their everyday lives.

The title of this dissertation 'reflection, why bother' was supposed to be the title of one of the authors classes in her healthcare support module. Reflection is an important component of

personal and professional development across many disciplines and the author wanted to highlight that healthcare professionals needed the tool of reflection where ever they are in their careers. When we reflect we not only challenge our personal assumptions, we ask ourselves why we do things we way we do. Within reflection we also identify areas where we feel we are lacking and why we set ourselves the standards we do.

We build meaning from experience, we have learned a lesson from prior experiences and this guides us to how we respond to present experience. Experience is an individual concept but can also be applied in a social setting. Learning for most students is a social activity, classrooms can be a source of peer to peer interaction that an individual may never have had access to.

Today's society is much more complex than ever before, information is readily available at the swipe of a screen and changing rapidly prompting users to constantly rethink, switch directions, and change problem-solving strategies. Thus, it is becoming increasingly important to prompt reflective thinking during learning to help learners develop strategies to apply new knowledge to the multifaceted situations in their day-to-day activities. Reflective thinking supports learners develop higher-order thinking skills by encouraging learners to relate new knowledge to prior understanding, think in both abstract and conceptual terms, and to understand their own thinking and learning strategies.

The use of reflective writing has been shown to encourage learners to view the educational process as an active process rather than a passive one, the author learns as much from the students as they do from her.

Teaching in an adult education setting reveals fundamentally important ideas about the role that the educator plays, reflective writing is hugely important for the educator as well as the student, it would be hypocritical to advocate for reflective writing if the educators themselves

aren't using writing to, change their responses, gain insights into their own teaching and ultimately keep a record of their own significant learning and experiences.

The idea of the educator learning from their students is a new concept as far as the author is concerned, educators are usually seen as an autocratic figure standing at the top of the classroom reciting a class from memory with students struggling to write down every word, the author learned like that, she remembers lecture where a rota system was employed so that one person didn't have to try and write down every word, notes weren't given until the end of the class so you had to remember everything. Ultimately the author isn't saying this method isn't effective or that it discourages student learning but the idea that the educator is an expert she feels is the wrong one.

Educators are a guide on the learning journey, they are there to facilitate their students becoming the best they can be, and this requires the educator to learn from their students just as much if not more than their students learn from them.

Knowles (1970) tells us 'the adult's self-concept of self-directivity in direct conflict with the traditional practice of the teacher telling the student what to learn. It is even in conflict with the social philosophy that society has a right to impose its ideas about what he needs to learn on him'

It is also vital the educators practice reflection themselves, we can no longer be the do as I say not as I do generation of educators, teachers need to become creators and generators of knowledge as they reflect on their own teaching (Zeichner, 1998)

Larrivee (2000) tells us that "unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgements, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves fusing personal beliefs and values into professional identity"

When reflective practice is done well, it is an enormously powerful tool, to examine and transform an educators practice, Hobbs (2007) recommends that reflective practice is used in any field that the participants work with people.

Like everything reflection has a dark side, not everyone ends up feeling empowered, there are some cultural and personal risks involved. Adding reflection to an already busy professional is going to be overwhelming and more likely to be a hindrance rather than a help. In the case of educators who fail to critically reflect on practice, they run the risk of falling back on preconceived ideas of how a teacher is supposed to act and how students are supposed to behave in the classroom.

Boud and Walker (1998) lament the development of a reflection checklist which students work through in a mechanical fashion, without looking at their own meanings, uncertainties or questions. The danger with this checklist concept is that reflection becomes ritualised without any reference to outcomes or context (1998, p.193) leading to the idea that reflection is direct and without problems.

In her own teaching context to avoid reflection becoming linear and unproblematic, the author changed the assessment process to a reflective journal that is kept over the duration of the twelve-week module, the journals main aim is to encourage the student to see that reflection isn't a process to be afraid of, rather a process to enjoy and use to understand the benefits of reflection, not a checklist, or a means to obtain a grade in an assessment.

One of the first things the author does is to ask the student to describe how they felt before they came into the classroom to start the module, to acknowledge the feelings of fear or excitement, unfortunately a vast majority of students that the author has met did not have a good experience in a formal educational setting like school and so do bring baggage with them into the classroom. In fact, one of my students left school at fifteen with no junior or leaving certificate,

so the feelings that this student bring into the classroom like insecurity and fear is something that the author needs to always be mindful of.

Adult learners are vastly different to any other learner, as adults are engaged in multiple roles which impact both time and energy they can devote to their role as a student, being a student is not their full-time role, they are a parent or a spouse first, and classes may not be their top priority.

The use of a learning journal as a form of assessment means that the student has to devote some time out of their primary roles to focus on their classes, this for some of the students can be a challenge, but generally once a student realises the importance of reflective writing they enjoy this space to write.

When we write a reflective journal ‘we take something from inside ourselves and we set it out: it is a means of discovering who we are, that we exist, that we change and grow. The personal journal has been used for hundreds of years to articulate the human drama of living and to explore new knowledge.’ (Wolf, 1989)

Not all students find reflective writing easy, others take to it and recognise the role it plays in learning, some students look at keeping a reflective journal as reminiscent of keeping a teenage diary full of angst, unrequited love and rows with parents and siblings. Others find the idea of the blank page difficult, where to start and what to write, which is one of the reasons the author starts the reflective writing process with an emotive video detailing severe abuse and neglect, in the authors opinion, this removes the fear of the blank page.

Ultimately this reflective journal forms part of the student’s assessment process, simply mentioning the word assessment is enough to strike fear into any student’s heart, however the use of a journal kept over an entire module doesn’t seem as difficult or as frightening.



Some of the main outcomes of assessment include, to give feedback to learners on their learning as well as the reasons for the mark. (Mutch, 2003) the correct method of assessment motivates the student to learn, and to require that the student can apply or transfer their learning to new or unexpected situations, this to the author is an important reason why the keeping of a reflective journal is a better method of assessment by far.

The use of reflective writing as an assessment, means that not only is the student learning a new tool to deal with the difficult area they are entering, they are also learning that assessment isn't to be feared or reminiscent of their previous experience in education.

To adult learners' feedback is extremely important, constructive feedback given in an appropriate manner, can in some instances can help to break down the barriers that may have built up because of a bad experience in their past.

The author through her research wishes to discover the number of students who simply see the reflective journal as a hoop jumping exercise to achieve a grade, but also just how many of the students saw the benefits of reflective practice through the journal and continue to use the skill that they have learnt to benefit themselves both personally and professionally.

There will always be students who have only used the journal as a means to the achievement of the grade they wanted, they reflected for the time they were supposed to, and forgot the skill after they finished the module, the author hopes these are in the minority.

What the author hopes is that the majority of the students saw how beneficial keeping a reflective journal could be and that they continue to use the skill of reflective practice to increase their metacognitive skills. Reflection encourages metacognition, that encourages learners to examine their own learning processes, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Learners who continue to reflect, become active participants in their own learning, the ability to reflect also encourages the development of appropriate learning behaviour.

Another concept that needs to be considered in this section is the ethical concerns regarding the teaching and application of reflection, because the author uses reflection as an assessment process ethical issues are always at the forefront of the authors mind. Ethical issues relate to confidentiality, right to privacy, informed consent and professional relationships, these are of particular concern to the author because the journal is compulsory, Boud and Walker (1998) question the ethical issues associated with compulsory reflection, Quinn (2000) also highlight that students have little choice about reflection because it is demanded by those in authority.

The author has made the journal a compulsory component of the module, an assessment that when completed forms seventy percent of their overall grade, but the students are under no obligation to reveal personal details of themselves, if they choose to do so that is their own choice, the journals are kept in a locked room available only to members of the school's faculty, the students have an option to collect their journals after six months and if they are not collected they are destroyed.

Another ethical issue that can be a concern, is the educator being met with something in a journal they feel they cannot handle alone, the author has never come across this issue, but there should be a support network in place should this occur.

One of the main reasons the author has decided to discuss and ultimately research this topic is a simple one, there is a plethora of literature available on the benefits of reflection in every discipline, from education to social work, but seldom is there available research on the benefits of reflection and reflective writing in the adult or lifelong learning field.

To the author this lack of research needs to be rectified, a recent publication from the Central Applications Office, has revealed that college applications from school leavers is declining, which may mean that leaving certificate students will be coming into the adult further education

sector, and the area of reflection especially in the social and healthcare sectors is going to be an issue that many educators in this area will be facing in the near future

One of the main issues that the author considered when she was researching the subject of reflection in adult learners is the subject of engagement and autonomy within the adult learning

population. Trowler (2010) defines student engagement as ...being concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution (p.3).

Student engagement can also be viewed as the measure of the investment of time, effort and other resources by both students and educators with the aim of optimising the student experience, enhancing learning and encouraging student development.

This can include multiple activities such as the subject the student is studying, the feedback that the student obtains, taking part in collaborative learning and interaction with other learners and the educator. As an educator it must be understood that the higher the levels of engagement the richer the learning experience will be.

Student engagement is considered one of the primary components of teaching, improves retention and improves the overall quality of the learning experience. Engagement encompasses a range of dimensions and understandings that integrates behavioural, psychological and socio-cultural aspects of the learner's experience.

Some adult education tutors believe that simply because an adult is present in the classroom they are engaged with whatever is going on, but many tutors do not appreciate that these learners are engaged in multiple roles that impact both the time and effort that they devote to their student role, in fact it is the authors own personal experience that it is extremely difficult to separate these multiple roles and focus on the particular role you need to play.

One of the chief goals in teaching and learning should be the promotion of the autonomous learner, this involves acquiring a repertoire of learning practices and strategies, promoting student confidences and developing a positive attitude towards learning. In the field of adult

education, the learners we meet are well used to taking responsibility for themselves, families and others they meet. Yet not all students will have the confidence, and many may expect the type of learning environment's they experienced as children. In this environment information was spoon fed to be regurgitated at a later date for an exam.

Autonomy is considered to be the goal of education, and is emphasised in adult education, autonomy means that one can set your own rules and choose what norms and values you can respect, with regard to educational autonomy you assume that the student is a self-directing person with initiative, intentions, choices and responsibility. Knowles (1975) tells us 'a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes'

How do we as adult education tutor develop an autonomous learner within the classroom is the development of the teacher-learner relationships, the teacher doesn't control or manage their own learning. Learners need to be liberated from dependence on the teacher as the source of knowledge and assume responsibility for their learning. In actual fact we are asking learners in adult and further education to become active participants in their learning, learning is now viewed as collaborative effort instead of the teacher being the expert.

Adults have different attitudes towards the amount of work to be completed in this type of education, many adults disengage their previous life from their new academic life, and don't seem to realise that without prior experiences as a learning tool you are stuck repeating the same mistakes over and over.

Adult students that range in age from twenty-five to sixty have come to further education in a wide variety of developmental stages, in any adult education class there are likely to be students

moving through these stages of transition, and it is often these transitional periods that have triggered their return to the classroom.

To be a successful adult education tutor the author believes that you need an understanding of these stages and how they may impact the student in the classroom. The use of reflection as engagement in the authors context works extremely well, the majority of students that this tool is used with are new to adult education and do bring that baggage with them, the author is not the expert, she is simply on the journey to allow the students to become active learners and to take responsibility for their own learning.

Reflection can be seen as reviewing experience from practice in order to evaluate and analyse the experience, so you can inform and change future practices. Also important in reflection is the willingness to open up your practice for others to review and so requires courage and an open mind, you also have to be willing to take on board and implement changes based on others critical feedback.

Reflection is more than just intellectual thinking as it involves feelings, emotions and experiences, adult learners bring an abundance of these into a classroom setting so we need to use them to their advantage. Reflection allows educators to do just that.

Learning for adults frequently involves a process of reaffirming, reorganising and reintegrating one's previous experiences (Smith, 1981) In previous classes the author struggled to get students engaged with the module as it is theoretically based, there is no practical component to the module, so students just turned up and completed the assessment pieces with little or no engagement. A lot of that lay with the assessment piece, originally the assessment piece did little to engage students it was a five-day journal of work experience but as many of the students were new to healthcare they weren't working in the area. The assessment processes did not encourage or enable student empowerment or enhance student progress in learning.

In the authors context, the introduction of a new assessment technique, encourages engagement as well as reflection by linking past experiences with current learning. For many adult learners in particular assessment is enough to disengage them completely, they fear assessment because of prior negative experiences in the education system. By using reflection as assessment, the author has ensured a process that is simple, doable and ultimately improves the student's learning.

There is little doubt that there is an enormous body of literature available on the topic of reflection, reflection is a topic that can be discussed in any and all disciplines from healthcare to social care, counselling to education, the use of reflection as personal and professional development has also produced a huge body of knowledge. Due to this huge body of research the author has broken the literature down into themes, the themes were chosen by the author as

she believed them to be the most suitable for her area of research, the first theme to be discussed is reflection as dialogue.

### **Reflection as Dialogue**

Encouraging reflective dialogue helps to bring to the surface issues that students may not normally review either because they don't deem the topic to be important, or they are afraid to open up about issues where they may have made a mistake. Isaacs (1993, p. 25) describes dialogue as form of collective thinking and inquiry. It is not about admonishing mistakes made by professionals but simply using those mistakes as a learning tool.

Dialogue is mainly achieved through the use of group reflections, this can also be an issue for some students as it means revealing feelings and opinions which some people may feel are better left unsaid, however in order to achieve effective dialogue professionals need to suspend their assumptions and opinions but also know what gives rise to them in the first place. Dewey (1933) stressed the importance of interactions between peers to enhance the quality of reflection. Rodgers (2002) tells us that through interactions with the world we live in, we both change it and are changed by it.

No one is an island, no one outgrows the need for the input of others, for their support and encouragement and reflective practice is no different, the use of reflective dialogue helps professionals to get an overall balanced view of the situation, not just the one-sided approach that comes from individual reflection.

Dewey (1916) stated: To formulate [an experience] requires getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it, considering what points of contact it has with the life of another so that it may be got into such form that he can appreciate the meaning. . . . One has to assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience in order to tell him intelligently of one's own



experience. . . . A man really living alone (alone mentally as well as physically) would have little or no occasion to reflect upon his past experience to extract its net meaning. (p. 6)

The concept of action learning within reflective dialogue is also of extreme importance, action learning is a process that reflects on real life situations with a group of practitioners in order to develop problem solving and enhance knowledge. (Bishop 2007)

Through the use of reflective dialogue professionals are taken away from the concept that they are the passive recipients of learning and encouraging them to become active participants in the journey of learning.

The majority of learners met in today's higher education settings have come through a traditional rote learning system, they were fed information to regurgitate this information at a later date typically for an exam to determine their future path in life, this rote system of learning doesn't encourage independent thought, critical thinking or indeed reflection, the so call metacognitive skills. Larkin (2002) looks at what metacognition is, as a form of second level or higher-level thinking. Flavell (1985) tells us that metacognition has three classes of metacognitive knowledge, personal knowledge, task knowledge and strategy knowledge. In order to enhance these metacognitive skills and take professionals away from passive learning to active participants is to encourage the use of reflective dialogue.

Typically, in this form of education, teachers were seen as expert others instead of companions on the life long journey that is education. Teachers must move beyond the concept of the "banking model" of learning, where they are simply reservoirs for information (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 72). Teachers must become "recreators" and not "spectators" in the process of teaching and learning (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 85). Encouraging the use of reflective dialogue where peers guide peers ensures that the educators are simply seen a guide to facilitate learning and not an expert ensures that the learners' have ownership over their own learning.

The use of reflective dialogue is something that needs to be encouraged within every discipline, the concept of group reflection is something that people generally are afraid of, they are afraid to open up and reveal their true feelings, in some groups one person can take over and allow no one else to get involved. The research available on the topic of reflection as dialogue doesn't actually deal with the pitfalls of this approach, the disadvantages seem to be colloquial, the usual pitfalls of group work, like poor guidance or supervision, one member of the group doing all the work and nobody else getting a word in. the majority of groups will suffer from these pitfalls at some time or another.

Race (2007) discusses ways that group facilitators can alter group dynamics to ensure that everyone receives the benefits of reflective dialogue, these include using techniques like rounds where everyone speaks about the topic to be explored using reflective dialogue, this is an effective tool to use as an ice breaker, this technique also serves to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak.

The use of reflective dialogue is an excellent method to encourage the use of reflection especially among those who may be new to the concept of reflection, the ability to reflect with peers and guided by the expert other, is a tool that will always need to be developed in students and healthcare professionals. Although the research is mainly positive and focuses on the benefits of using reflective dialogue, the author feels more research needs to be done about the pitfalls of using group reflection. These pitfalls of group reflection are something however that the author feels needs to be explored in relation to the authors own education context.

### **Reflection as Transformation**

The next theme identified in the reflection literature is the concept of reflection as transformation, the idea of critical thinking is intertwined with transformative learning. Transformative learning builds upon Freire's (1974) idea of conscientization, a process by

which people come to comprehend that their interpretations of their world and their place in the world is moulded by social and historical forces which work against their interests. Conscientization leads to a critical awareness of the self as a subject who can both reflect and act upon the world in order to change it.

Mezirow (2003) has his own view of conscientization, as learning that transforms the problematic frames of reference meaning mind sets, perspectives, and habits to make people more inclusive, open, reflective and emotionally able to implement change, so that people can generate beliefs and opinions that are true or justified to guide action.

The ability to critically reflect is the main element of transformative learning, critical reflection demonstrates an understanding that a student's actions are located within and influenced by multiple perspectives but are also influenced by multiple social and historical contexts. (Hatton and Smith, 2005)

Other researchers have discussed the importance of assessing skills like problem solving, critical thinking and reflective learning are integral to transforming a classroom where the educator is seen as the expert other, into a community of learning where everyone contributes to the learning process.

Dinkeman (1999) provides another viewpoint on critical reflection, as the deliberation on the wider social, historical, political and cultural contexts of a discipline, and the careful debate about the relationships between practice and the building of a fairer equitable democratic society, no professional simply exists alone, the ability to view experiences within a wider context is the hallmark of an experienced professional.

Schor and Friere (1987) describe a 'dialogic method' of teaching for fostering critical reflection and transformation in classroom settings, this begins with the identification of real life problems, within the healthcare setting this real life experiences is known as the lived

experience, as a healthcare professional you know the signs and symptoms of illness, you know what is supposed to happen, but no healthcare professional can tell you what it is like to live with that illness, that is a patient's lived experience. This method of using lived experiences in reflection, is a vital teaching tool.

Rush (2008) studied how using the idea of lived experience led to a transformation in the student nurse's perception of mental health service users. Forty-six per cent of students identified a transformative learning experience. Some of the main components of transformative learning identified by Brookfield (1987) Mezirow (2000) and Mezirow and associates (2000) were modified and used in Rush's study to identify the students' transformation, these included reflection on the students own or with others without specific reference to their own feelings and critical reflection on relationships that the students had with either other professionals and service users.

The students were interviewed and demonstrated that through the use of reflective practice, not only did their previously held assumptions on mental health service users change, the students learning was also transformed through the use of lived experiences.

The study did have its drawbacks, it is very simple to assume as educators that every student who heard a first-hand account of living with an illness would be transformed, in mental health there is sometimes no identifying features of a service user, no wheelchair or scars, one student remarked that a service user looked like a 'normal person'. It is safe to assume that this technique would be extremely effective in this type of education but hard to generalise if students of other healthcare disciplines would be similarly transformed.

On the other hand, in other healthcare disciplines the use of lived experiences may empower the students, thereby transforming their learning and practice. Fay (1987) offers that reflection offers a process of empowerment, enlightenment, and transformation.

Empowerment is determined by using knowledge acquired and taking appropriate action towards change, this according to Johns (2002, p 36) is the cornerstone of reflection. Reflection can cause a crisis's in an individual when their normal practice is exposed as unlike best and effective practice, only when this practice is identified, and change occurs can transformation truly take place.

Transformative learning is not just about gaining access to new knowledge and information, but instead centres on personal transformation as it alters perspectives, interpretations and responses. Self-transformation requires the individual to be actively and dynamically engaged with the process.

Affective self-transformation changes a person's sense of what is true or inevitable and allows a person to see new methods of social interaction. Listening to another person's perspectives can effectively move a person and change the way they frame topics for discussion.

Recently Mezirow (2009) has discussed the concept of intuition, within the healthcare sector intuition is an idea that has been discussed by Benner (1984) and Johns (2013) according to Benner (1984) and her work on skill acquisition where she described the pathway from novice to expert, A novice simply does not have the tacit knowledge that has been accumulated from prior experience, however the use of reflection as a learning process enables the learner to scrutinise and develop their intuition and begin both personal and professional transformation.

'In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high hard ground overlook a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowlands messy confusing problems defy technical solution.....' (Schon 1987, p.3)

Other prominent authors have discussed what is described as the theory practice gap, where education focuses on technical knowledge, so we have theories and research at our disposal,

but we haven't quite figured out how to apply this knowledge to solve real life situations, the use of reflection can transform this gap and ensure that professionals can apply theory into practice.

Reflection as transformation is an unbelievably important aspect of the benefits that reflection offers both personally and professionally, within adult education especially in the health and social care areas, reflection is not focused on as a method of student transformation, it is a subject simply to be covered, a tick box exercise once the learning objectives have been met, most educators are happy. However, the personal benefits that it offers students are too powerful and important to be overlooked.

### **Reflective Writing**

The next theme that came up repeatedly in the literature was that of reflective writing. Reflective writing is a student focused approach that allows students to discover their holistic mindset. Reflective writing involves an exploration of a task, it involves thinking and writing about a person's anxieties and errors made, as well as the positive interactions with others involved in the experience. Through the process of writing students are encouraged to slow down, to process new information and assimilate this new information into their professional and personal lives.

In one study conducted by Roji et al (2017) the researchers used reflective writing to investigate whether a brief exposure to palliative care education and completing a reflective writing piece help equip a group of students with enough knowledge to feel confident in the area of palliative care. The course consisted of twenty-four lectures, four workshops and one scheduled five-hour visit, forty-eight hours after the five-hour clinical visit the students had to complete a five-hundred-word reflective piece.

Even though the clinical teaching in palliative care was short, the addition of the reflective writing piece, provided the students with a deeper understanding of palliative care. The author also identified something that even they were not expecting the students not only gained a new skill, but the students also seemed to have a life changing personal experience which links into the literature available which describes reflection as having a transformational effect on students encouraged to use reflection.

The introduction of reflection on an experience brings out a person's feelings and experiences relating to the situation allows the person to delve more deeply into an experience and pass judgement on their actions. This method allows a person to obtain a greater understanding of experiences facilitate a deeper understanding and gives an experience a deeper meaning.

When that reflection is in written form it follows precise logic that is influenced by the character of the person, the setting of the experience the knowledge required to resolve the situation and the deliberation required to implement the solution.

Reflective writing as described by Roji et al (2017) involves an exploration and explanation of an event, it involves not only thinking but also writing about a student's anxieties and errors as well as successful achievements. Through reflective writing students are allowed a chance to slow down, and become more aware, reflective writing is the students' response to experience and new information.

The study uses content analysis, which is a qualitative research technique to identify themes from the students reflective writing pieces, using this method the authors of the study have identified a wider range of categories and have clearly demonstrated the role that reflective writing plays in improving any form of education experiences for the better.

The authors acknowledge that content theory has its limits in research, as it cannot reveal any underlying motives for the patterns observed, they mention grounded theory may be a more suitable research method for revealing these underlying motives.

However, this study demonstrates the importance of reflective writing whatever the course content or course length, and how the use of reflective writing is also a powerful tool for student transformation.

The concept that reflective writing can only be effective through traditional methods, is an idea that is losing momentum in the digital age, there are now multiple methods of reflective writing, including the use of blogs. The previous studies on blogs done by researchers like Maloney (2007) Ramos (2004) and Trafford et al (2005) have previously focused on blogs written by students in a classroom setting and monitored by educators. These researchers have demonstrated that the use of blogs have increased student motivation, and because blogs are new and innovative in classroom settings their usage has captured students' attention.

In the study carried out by Majid et al (2011) looked at whether the use of blogs could strengthen reflective writing, and if the use of blogs contributed to the development of reflective writers.

The researchers used a qualitative research approach, this seems to be the case across the majority of research discussing the topic of reflection. Patton (1990) in Crabtree and Miller (1999) tells us that qualitative studies focus in depth on reasonably small samples. The data was obtained through content analysis, which is similar to the previous study discussed. Content analysis is described by researchers as a method that allows the study of human behaviour indirectly, through an analysis of their communication, because in communication students unconscious and conscious beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideas can be revealed in communication.



One of the main differences between the two studies was in the study by Majid (2011) the researchers discussed the studies trustworthiness, a Cohen Kappa reliability score was given to both the pilot study and the actual study. Cohens Kappa reliability score is the most widely used reliability score in research, but it does have its limitations, for example in Cohens Kappa has the assumption that the raters are deliberately chosen as was the case in this study, the rater was chosen because of her experience. Two methods of gathering data was utilised, document analysis and semi structured interviews, this according to the researchers also added to the trustworthiness of the study.

The study believes that although the use of blogs doesn't confirm to expected standards of reflective writing used in academic standards, however some students may benefit from an unconventional approach to developing their reflective writing skills. Blogs provide free expression, as students feel less constrained writing in a blog as opposed to a typical reflective journal. Blogging also facilitated the students critical reflective thinking skills, blogs also provided students with a purpose for learning and motivated students to write and interaction with a wider audience (James 2007)

As an adult educator the author sees the benefits of alternative methods of encouraging students to develop their reflective writing skills, many students feel reflective writing is an old-fashioned approach so new innovative method of developing a student's skill of reflective writing is to be encouraged and alternative methods embraced.

In a study conducted by Wald et al (2010) the researchers used interactive reflective writing to support medical students' rites of passage in this case dealing with the death of a patient. The researchers use reflective writing as a key method of support for the students, also according to Mann et al (2007) helps to foster reflective capacity, and their emotional intelligence. The

use of reflective writing provides an opportunity for student's personal transformation and wellbeing.

The study uses a BEGAN tool which was developed by the medical school faculty to craft quality feedback to students reflective writing (Reiss et al, 2010) the idea of the use of this tool is to enhance a student's exploration understanding and management of emotions so leading to developing emotional intelligence, the tool also helps the faculty to fully capture professional development opportunities offered by the students reflective writing.

This study is important as it doesn't just focus on the students' reflection, it also encourages the faculty to reflect and use their experiences to guide and encourage the students' reflection. As an educator the author is a firm believer in the educator using reflective writing to guide their own practice as well as their students. To ask a student to reflect when the educator doesn't reflect, brings the author back to old saying do as I say not as I do.

Often educators do not understand the need to reflect themselves on their own practice, their own experiences in a classroom setting. In a study done by Greiman et al (2007) with student teachers using three methods of reflection, written, verbal and self-reflection. The authors of this study have cited other researchers who believe that teachers need to become reflective practitioners in order to develop expertise within the professional practice of teaching. (Russel and Munby, 1991)

Requesting that teachers engage in reflective practice within the content of coursework provides the teacher with an opportunity to generate connections between theory and practice, enable them to develop deeper understanding about their own personal beliefs, adopting new viewpoints, and adopting these new viewpoints in their instructional decisions.

The difficulty in keeping and using a reflective journal for both students and teachers seems to all relate back to time, the time needed to stop and reflect can be hard come by in the modern

world, however the time needed to reflect is an important component of personal and professional development so time needs to be found. The learners are forced to stop and think in order to write, and in busy environments as is the case for many adult learners who balance home, work and study can be very difficult to achieve. This lack of time to write has also been considered by authors in other disciplines including engineering (Selfe and Arababi, 1986)

The act of journal writing itself is a barrier to both students and teachers, the common assertion goes back to a teenage view of angst and love, Moon (1999) suggests that some writers find the process of journal writing alien, and as a result struggled with the process. The benefits of reflective writing cannot be ignored, the student teachers acknowledged the support that writing the journal offered them and also the student's identified the benefits of learning from experience and using prior experience as a guide for new situations.

Undoubtedly there is a vast amount of literature available about reflection, the author has looked at some of this under themes that are relevant to the authors preferred area of research. The use of reflection within a healthcare environment has been shown to provide personal and professional benefits, the use of experience guides the student's reaction to their current situation and allows the student to not only own their feelings, but also take ownership of their feelings, their assumptions and understand the role they play in society.

In adult education students bring baggage with them, more often than not this is negative, an education system that favours rote learning or the regurgitation of huge chunks of materials to pass their exams, reflective practice and the action of reflection encourages students to look differently at what they are learning, to become a critical practitioner, yet we don't encourage this in the majority of classrooms. To be critical is not only to be negative, it is looking at a situation and learning from that situation, reflection done properly is always critical, and as a

result can lead to transformation. Students who transform don't transform by looking at themselves and saying that they did everything right the first time.

This is a lot to place at the feet of reflection, it appears to be an unsurmountable task, yet when reflection is done properly, it provides those who use it with unquestionable benefits. One of the most important things in the authors opinion is that reflection is used not only by the students but also the educator themselves, the days of the teacher being the font of all knowledge is gone, both the educator and the student are on a journey, and the journey is undertaken together, the author acknowledges that she learns as much as the students during the class.

There will always be students and educators who don't believe in reflection, those who don't see its benefits or the role that it can play in a person's development. However, in the authors opinion these are in the minority, and will one day see reflection as a tool for growth.

### **Reflection as Feedback**

The next theme identified as being important within the authors own context is the idea of reflection as feedback. Feedback is something that is a vital component of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for example in order for communication to be effective you need the feedback of the other participant in the communication process, without feedback communication can't happen in the ways it was meant.

Feedback can be referred to as the return to the input of a part of the output of a system or process, it is associated with a response especially to those in authority about an activity. Bloom (1976) suggests that feedback can reveal errors in learning shortly after they occur, feedback becomes a self-correcting system so that errors made at one time can be corrected and therefore not repeated, similarly Carlson (1979) tells us that feedback is authoritative information students receive that will modify or reinforce responses.

Reflection is viewed as a personal form of feedback, you as the main protagonist in the situation through reflection can see what was good or bad about the situation and use that personal feedback to improve future practice. Feedback is similar to reflection as it is after all an opinion that is grounded in both observations and experiences that allows the person to know what impression they make on others; the information is revealing and potentially uncomfortable but ultimately results in a change either personally or professionally.

In a study by Jackson et al (2015) assessed two different interventions, namely reflections on feedback and grade-with-holding, overall the classes grades improved over the two years in which reflections were used, with the best grades achieved by students generating the best reflections. Engagement with feedback facilitates effective feed forward into future assignments, which ensures that feedback like reflection do not have once off benefits. Not all of the feedback or the use of reflection was understood by students which comes back to the way in which we teach reflection, there doesn't seem to be a consensus by educators on how we teach reflection.

One of the issues that this study highlights in relation to feedback was the apparent lack of engagement with feedback by student, educators spend a lot of time and effort to generate feedback that is more often than not students ignore, this can be improved due to the use of reflection, because if reflection helps to ensure effective use of feedback, then student engagement with feedback improves.

One of the newer concepts in the use of feedback is the use of feed forward, the use of feedback on generic issues has the potential benefit of feeding forward into future tasks. (Carless, 2006)

In a study by Quinton et al (2010) highlight the fact that student's confidence can be shattered by the incorrect use of feedback, and highlighted students lack understanding and engagement with feedback, simply because they didn't understand its benefits.

In this study the students were given assignment feedback accompanied by a blank reflection sheet which asked the following three questions, (1) how I feel about this feedback, (2) what I think about this feedback and finally (3) based on this feedback what actions I could take to improve my work for another assignment.

Students generally receive feedback that they pay little or no attention to, the aim of this study through the use of the pre-printed reflection form was to prompt the students and kick start the process of reflective learning by ensuring that students have a concrete experience on which they can reflect in an orderly and structured manner with outcomes or actions that can feed forward into future learning activities. This is the hallmark of reflection using prior experiences to guide future practice.

In the author's own learning context feedback is offered throughout the course and takes many forms including written and verbal, however the author feels that feedback and its development is something that needs to be enhanced and developed further.

The use of the blank reflection form is something that highlights the importance of feedback instead of seeing it just as a critical review to be disregarded and forgotten. In the authors context of adult education, the use of these feedback forms might not be advantageous, as the introduction of more paperwork may encourage the students to disregard the benefits of the exercise, the author feels that maybe an alternative to a written form of feedback reflection may need to be considered.

Overall the importance of feedback as reflection cannot be over emphasised, without proper feedback, reflection cannot take place, feedback is as already mentioned a personal form of feedback but the external feedback that comes from peers or educators is also needed to ensure that the student uses the experiences as a learning tool.

Reflection as a topic is an extremely popular topic in the field of research, reflection as a subject can be applied to a wide range of disciplines from healthcare to engineering and everything in between. The idea that reflection is a skill that needs to be taught, is one that is almost universal to literature available on reflection, however the purpose of this literature review was not to look at all of the available research but to look at the literature available that suited the main research topic, of 'reflection, why bother' and hence the idea of thematic analysis was used.

The themes identified by the author as the most relevant pieces of literature that looked at the research question most definitely, themes like reflection as dialogue, reflection as transformation, reflective writing and reflection as feedback are all areas that the author considers important in her own learning context.

Reflection is after all "a window through which the practitioners can view and focus self within the context of their own lived experience in ways that enable them to confront and understand and work towards resolving the contradictions with their practice between that is desirable and actual practice. (Johns, 2013)

Reflection involves the using the everyday learning experiences, it is an in-depth view of the events where the reflector reviews a situation, and attempts to work out what happened, what they felt, who influenced the situation, and how they would respond if the situation was to arise again. Reflection supports lifelong learning, as it encourages self-awareness, and allows for

deeper understanding of analysis and evaluation to strengthen critical enquiry and inform practice (Kirkham, 1997)

Before different methods of analysing data is looked at, the author wishes to look at the ethical issues associated with research. Central to the integrity of research is ethics, researchers are unable to gather data without participants, if we ask them to give up their time and personal information, the least they can expect is that the data gathered and the participants themselves are treated with dignity and respect.

With research comes a certain amount of responsibility, researchers are not above the law, if the activity is illegal for the general public then it is also illegal for the researcher however much it may benefit their research. Within the healthcare setting research is something that people take to be always true and beneficial for their health, but sometimes research only benefits the researcher, if we look at the Andrew Wakefield research that linked the MMR vaccination to the development of autism, that piece of writing was published in a reputable medical journal, and the researcher appeared on every television and radio show he could, it seemed credible, but it was all false. It did lead to a global decline in the uptake of vaccinations which is currently still at its lowest level since vaccination was introduced. Although the research was discredited people still believe his research and continue not to vaccinate their children.

Researchers also have a moral responsibility to ensure that the research they carry out is not offensive or degrading in any way to the participants that have given up their time to participate, some moral responsibilities of the researchers include conscientiousness, a certain amount of power is associated with research and researchers need to ensure that the power does not corrupt, equity is another moral responsibility of researchers, every participants viewpoint is important, even if their viewpoint doesn't give the researcher the answers they are looking for.



Researchers also need to be honest, it can be very easy to fool participants into believing why the research study is being done in the first place. As identified in the Wakefield study, the researcher wanted to market his own vaccines so decided to affect the credibility of the MMR vaccine.

Morals are often seen as personal issues and ethics are viewed as a more professional basis, so any research done in a professional capacity need to have ethical considerations including, ensuring your participants have given informed consent, consent is a vital consideration in any healthcare setting but is also important in research, participants need to give consent in written format, that explains the research study in detail, and ensures them they can withdraw at any time from the study with no ramifications whatsoever. The use of consent ensures that participants are autonomous, and they have not been forced into participating.

Participants in any research study should be free from any harm, including psychological or physical, if participants decide to withdraw from the study they should not be subjected to any detrimental effects to their marks if they are students. The author has used students who have finished their qualification or are finished the modules that the author teaches, this ensures that the participants are under no obligation to participate because they feel obliged.

All research data should be kept confidential, and any identifying factors should be removed, this anonymity is especially important in the authors context as the data generated may not necessarily be the authors viewpoint, as well as the importance of anonymity is the storage and location of the data collected, participants have to believe their data will not be passed onto other researchers, as can be seen with the current Facebook data scandal.

The author will be applying to the college ethical committee to approve her research, this ensures that the study will have integrity, and ensure that the author and her participants will

be protected. This is a process which can take time, but it is a vital component of ensuring that the research is ethical and credible.

One of the downfalls of reflection is an ethical concern, and this has been an issue in the authors experience, in one of the questionnaires a student revealed that she had been witness to what can only be described as severe elder abuse when she was sixteen and on work experience in a local nursing home, the student in question is into her fifth decade, but the use of the reflective journal woke feelings of severe guilt and sadness.

The author wasn't expecting this type of disclosure, the student was spoken with privately and support and guidance was offered, the student had hidden this experience, but reflection had brought it to the surface again, the author wondered if maybe this wasn't the best thing to introduce to students.

However, this is a memory that has remained hidden for over thirty-five years and without reflection, this memory might have surfaced at a later date causing personal issues for my student.

From an ethical point of view, this is something that is an issue with reflection, but one that the author hadn't foreseen in her own research, but it is something that she should have been foreseen by the author, in healthcare research there is a term called compassion fatigue, most people may be familiar with the term burn out, the author wonders if this traumatic experience the student had at the very young age might prevent that burn out, she will always fight to ensure that the abuse she witnessed will never happen again.

Hargreaves (2004) and Rai (2006) question the truthfulness and integrity of reflections, admitting that "we may have inadvertently taught our students to suppress, rather than critique and examine their thoughts and feelings" (Hargreaves 2004, 200). This lived experience

disputes Hargreaves claim and the author believes that in her own learning context students are free to express themselves fully both through the medium of reflective writing and verbally.

There is a significant gap between how research into reflection and the way in which reflection takes place in practice. This is often where the aim is find a singular definition of reflection and a reliable effective quantitative way of measuring reflection.

Quantitative research holds the belief that the study of the society is no different than the study of science like physics or biology. Researchers who use this method have a strong belief in the power that numbers have to represent the world both vigorously and accurately.

The scientific standard of research asks the researcher to develop and adapt a theory, using the theory and using deductive reasoning generate a hypothesis, gather your quantitative data either through experiments or if working in the social sciences large scale survey, the next step is data analysis using a recognised tool like SPSS and finally the researcher needs to draw conclusions to confirm or deny the hypothesis. (O'Leary, 2017)

If the author was to examine her own research question using quantitative methods, the question would have to change to an examination of whether or not the use of reflective journals improved students' overall marks or look at the students' attitudes to reflection focusing on a number of variables namely gender, previous understanding of reflection and student's use of reflection after completion of the module. The main purpose of quantitative research is to generate truths about behaviour and relationships that are applicable to a wide range of situations.

One of the main issues in quantitative research is the idea of proof, within scientific research proof is of great importance you cannot say if you were researching a surgical technique or a medical procedure that it kind of works. You have to prove the concept beyond a reasonable

doubt. However, it is very difficult to prove a question on reflective practice beyond a reasonable doubt, simply because it deals with human behaviour.

In a study by Knight et al (2010) the researchers used an analytical survey design to investigate the personal and professional value of group reflective practice. The researchers acknowledged early on in their paper that the majority of previous research has been qualitative and descriptive. They also acknowledge that the variances in reflective practice groups make it difficult to draw any firm conclusions, it can be easier to draw conclusions from research if we have a definite set of numbers to work from.

The researchers used a questionnaire, developed using interviews with clinical staff and piloted to ensure ambiguous phrases were removed and also ensured items that gave a limited response were removed. As a society we are exposed to questionnaires on a daily basis, most researchers assume that they are easy to construct but one of the most common problems associated with a questionnaire is poor construction, with questions being asked in a vague manner. Using a pilot group, the researchers ensured this was not an issue in their questionnaire. In regard to the authors question, a questionnaire would be very difficult to use due to the problem with ensuring the questions generated answers needed. Time constraints would also limit the use of a pilot group, to ensure like Knight et al (2010) that questions causing confusion could be removed.

One of the other issues regarding the use of questionnaires is the problem with researchers introducing bias into the questions, by asking questions in such a way we can influence the answers we get. In some cases, this is because of oversight, or there can be some circumstances it can be a strategy. Bias can occur when the questions are worded in such a way that it can be extremely difficult for those answering the questions to agree or disagree. The guidance offered to avoid bias, is to ensure the questions are shaved back to the bare minimum, there should be

nothing in the phrasing to that triggers anything else in those answering the questions. In relation to the authors question, this avoidance of bias may be an issue, even if the question is changed to suit a quantitative method of analysis.

The other issue the author would have in relation to a questionnaire is the number of respondents, in the study by Knight et al (2010) one hundred and twenty-four people replied to the study, the author would only have approximately twenty to thirty respondents. The quality of the authors study would be poor simply because of the sample size. The larger the sample the more likely the results will be generalisable. The minimum participants needed for a quantitative study is thirty respondents, anything smaller and the results aren't going to show statistical significance. The other issue with large sample size is do ability and time constraints, large sample sizes take longer to analyse, and in the authors context time is precious, and a large sample size might yield the best results, but it isn't feasible in this situation.

The author has access to this number of students however the response rates wouldn't be nearly enough, maybe if the research was mandatory and part of the assessment process but that would simply be unfair to the students and ultimately unethical in the authors opinion.

Alternately most researchers who conduct qualitative research aren't looking for data that represents a cohort of people, they are looking for rich data that gives as much information from a small sample size or a large sample size. There are ways as a researcher to ensure rich data is gathered, and one of the main methods is to hand pick your sample, to ensure representativeness based on your own criteria. The second is to pick a sample size that is large enough to ensure as a researcher you have to carry out the minimum statistical analysis. the author again feels that time is an issue here, the author wants to ensure data that is representative of a large cohort of students studying healthcare support.

Overall the author feels that using quantitative research for the current question to be answered wouldn't be feasible given a number of factors including the sample size and more importantly the time constraints associated with carrying out research. If the author was to carry out quantitative research on the topic of reflection, she would need to include all of the classes she teaches and would need more time than is currently available.

Qualitative research is concerned with the way that people live their lives, the meanings they give to their experiences and feelings associated with their condition. It includes approaches such as ethnography, action research and finally case studies. There is no reason that these methods can also contain some elements of quantitative research but are usually more associated with qualitative research methods.

Reflection is associated with experience, using prior experiences as a learning tool, we build meaning using experiences, we learn in relation to our present and prior experience, because the prior experience guides how we respond to a present situation (Jarvis, 1992) Dewey (1938) tells us that an experience exists in time and is linked to the past, the present and the future, the measure of the value of the experience will lie in the perception of the experience, the relationships and the connections that it leads to.

In qualitative research, the methods of data collection vary depending on the subject using interviews, focus groups and document analysis are ways to collect data, in the authors context she was going to use a questionnaire to illicit student responses and then break the groups down into those who use reflection on a daily basis, or those who don't bother using reflection after the assessment component of their healthcare module is complete.

Originally the author had thought of using mixed methods to gather the data needed to complete her research, but after careful consideration, she decided that one approach would be more

feasible, and also due to the nature of the question she wants to answer, qualitative research seems to fit better with the question.

In a study by Bulman et al (2014) the researchers used an ethnographic approach, which simply means they observed individuals or groups either as participants or non-participants and of analysing and structuring the record. (Newby, 2010)

Ethnography is a common research method used within the healthcare setting, however there are a number of common disadvantages associated with its use, including the issue of unintentionally influencing those participants that you are observing, as participants who know they are being watched may change their practice to one that is more acceptable, a domineering personality may assume a meeker role, one of the ways this issue is overcome within the healthcare environment is not to have students assessed by an outsider, students are assessed by staff, and usually more often than not the individuals true behaviour is revealed.

Another common pitfall associated with ethnographic research is misinterpretation, reflection and students understanding can be difficult to analyse and one wrong intrusion can lead to flawed conclusions. In the author's own context, this may be an issue, author bias and interference can lead to flawed research results. The other issue with the use of ethnographic research is for the researcher to identify with the subjects they are researching, the author feels that this is an issue with the authors own research question, the author couldn't separate her own interest in the subject, the author uses reflective practice in all areas of both her personal and professional life, so the author feels that ethnographic research for reflection may not be a suitable approach given her obvious bias to ensure that the research she gathers answers her own question.

Another common qualitative approach to research that the author has considered is the use of a case study, case studies have gotten some bad representation in the field of research as they

were originally developed for sociological research and critics decided the data gathered was purely descriptive, without the ability to actually generate information that would encourage a change. It has experienced a revival, as many researchers now decide that case studies look at particular instances instead of a search for a general truth. Case studies make use of a wide range of methods including external reports, statistics as well as data collected from interviews, questionnaires and documentary sources.

Originally the author had considered just using the students reflective journal to analyse the themes therein, and then maybe consider using a questionnaire and interview to gather the data to answer the research question. Case studies can be a useful as they provide researchers with a wealth of information using a variety of different sources.

There are some downfalls associated with the use of case studies including the issue associated with ensuring that you get the truth from participants, another issue is that case studies can go horribly wrong, and as a researcher you end up with the wrong conclusion, with case studies you can also end up heading off on a tangent and answering a question or looking at an issue that the researcher didn't want to include lastly and in the author opinion most importantly is that research is only valuable when it contributes something to the current body of knowledge, there is no point doing research for the sake of it, a case study should always seek to identify learning that can be transferred.

Finally, the author decided to use a questionnaire, that was sent to the students with a fully informed consent form detailing the mandatory participation, the consent form sent to the students is available in the appendix.

This informed consent in which individuals chose to participate in an investigation after being informed of all of the facts that could influence their decision is also a vital component of



healthcare, so the author ensured that all participants were fully informed and also free to withdraw at any time with no consequences,

Informed consent is a vital component of all healthcare procedures and also any research activities, the consent forms detail all of the information regarding the procedure and risks and benefits associated with the procedure. Polit, Beck and Hungler (2006) define informed consent as follows, ‘Informed consent means that participants have adequate information regarding the research; are capable of comprehending the information; have the power of free choice, enabling them to consent voluntarily to participate in the research or decline participation.’”

The researcher is obliged to provide the participants with all relevant and adequate information when obtaining their informed consent. Because qualitative research is an ongoing changing process the researcher must ensure that the informed consent is kept up to date and changed if necessary.

Researchers who work with vulnerable participants or even topics that deal with sensitive issues will need to ensure that the participants are informed at all times using language or other methods they can understand.

The researcher isn't dealing with vulnerable participants, all of the participants are adults over the age of sixteen and all are free to leave the study if they choose to do so, at any time with no consequences, as previously mentioned the author deliberately choose students who were close to the end of their overall qualification or those who had already completed the authors modules to ensure that they did not feel pressured into participating in any way. To be conscious of the power you hold as both a tutor and a researcher is vital as many researchers allow this power to overcome them and threaten to overshadow their research.

Another important ethical consideration is that of confidentiality, again as the researcher works in the healthcare field, the idea of confidentiality is something that is an extremely familiar

concept to the author, confidentiality ensures that the personal information of the participants is kept only by the researcher, as previously mentioned the student who detailed that horrific experience while she was a young woman, her identity will never be revealed, nor will the facility where that abuse was witnessed be named, the author knows the facility, indeed she knows people that have since worked there, but that data will never be revealed to anyone. This confidentiality and anonymity ensures that participants are confident that their personal details and experiences are used only for the purpose of research and nothing else.

The unpredictable nature of qualitative research means that principles like informed consent and confidentiality are often in danger, however the researcher needs to keep these fundamental principles are kept in the forefront of her mind.

The researcher used a questionnaire which she had designed herself this is in contrary to best practice to alter an existing questionnaire to suit the researchers topic, this was done despite her early misgivings about the method following careful consideration the questionnaire seemed to be the best option as the students had finished for the summer, the questionnaire is a widely used and is an extremely useful tool to gather information, however there are some drawbacks to their use, including the time they take to fill out.

On the positive side respondents cannot be coerced into the completion of the questionnaire, the researcher sent her questionnaire out to twenty-five participants and received fifteen responses, so filling in a questionnaire is entirely the participants choice. Those who choose to fill out the questionnaire do so because of a variety of reasons including the informed consent, their right to withdraw at any time and also the issue of beneficence, those participants see some benefit in taking part in the research.

The participants that completed the researchers questionnaire, come from a variety of backgrounds with a wide variety of educational abilities, as previously mentioned one of the

participants had never finished school, she had children early and never went back to education until she was in her forties, this is one of the amazing attributes of adult education to bring people back into the learning environment, you are never too old to participate in lifelong learning, other participants who answered the questionnaire were doing the course simply for themselves the course wasn't mandatory as they had no involvement in patient care, other participants were involved already with patient care and had to complete the healthcare course as it now a mandatory requirement.

The majority of the questions in the researcher's questionnaire are open questions that are designed to explore the topic of reflection and whether or not the students find it useful or simply the means to obtain a grade, the use of open questions in the researcher's questionnaire also ensured that the respondents could write a free account, in their own terms to explain and quantify their responses and avoid the limitations of pre-set responses. Open questions do have their limitations, they can lead to irrelevant and redundant information, the respondent may not know what information is needed. This thankfully did not happen with the researcher's questions, although they were open questions they were specific to reflection.

The issue of reflection can be viewed as a sensitive topic, whilst the anonymity of a questionnaire does offer the participant some leeway to respond to questions honestly, there will always be those participants who may feel that this information is personal, for many the very act of reflection is a personal issue, and they may not feel comfortable answering questions about it. Why should they share personal information with others, what's in it for them?

A questionnaires appearance is also vitally important to consider in this section, generally questionnaires should look easy, attractive and uncomplicated, this may have been a factor in the number of respondents the author received, according to Dillman et al (1999) respondents expect to less of a form filling task than is actually required, they expect to read a question,

read the response and make a mark, then move on, so in theory and practice the less uncomplicated the questionnaire is the better.

The author feels that this was a definite issue in her own questionnaire, the open questions were easily read, with no complex terms but it was cluttered and definitely not attractive, if she was to design the questionnaire again it would be very different. The researcher had originally decided to use a pilot group to check the viability of the questionnaire, and this would have been possible if an electronic tool was used but unfortunately due to time constraints this was not possible.

Originally as mentioned the author was going to use an online forum to survey the participants, they would have received a login code via email and the author would have then had instant access to the data, however a brief overview of the students revealed that this may have suited some of the participants, some of the older students would have been put off immediately, the author had previously tried to introduce an online learning forum similar to Moodle to cut down on paper wastage, and help the environment, however within the first week of the class the author was being asked for the paper version of the notes, there was access issues, printer issues, and overall reluctance to change from the way they were used to. This appears to be in contrast with the younger students whom the author is involved with, they preferred to have online access to their notes, have online discussion forums, overall, younger students tend to feel more engaged with technology as they have grown up using different kinds of technology and generally have a higher comfort levels with using online forms of education compared to older students.

This was a downfall in the researchers sampling technique, if she was to ensure that all of the participants were chosen simply on the basis on them feeling comfortable enough with technology to use an online questionnaire, then she feels she would have been missing out on

a wealth of information, also looking at the topic of reflection, writing plays such an important part of the process, so the use of an online tool may have been a better option with regards to time, the author feels that the students ability to give deep and meaningful answers would have been stifled completely.

One of the other issues the researcher feels may have been an issue is the sample size, generally a sample size of thirty is acceptable for a researcher doing quantitative research where the aim is to generate statistical evidence this was not the researchers aim, she aimed to generate information about a phenomenon that is individual, not numerical, it is very difficult to put a numerical value on the idea and use of reflection. The questionnaire was sent to twenty-five students picked to ensure a wide variety of age, experiences and educational backgrounds.

The main issue and an area that could be explored further is the gender balance within the sample group. Gender is an issue in all aspects of society in general, there has been numerous media reports about the gender bias in the work place, however healthcare is generally female dominated and the author's healthcare classes are no exception. The researcher would have loved to compare male and female viewpoints on reflection and see if there is a difference between them but unfortunately this would not be possible unless the author sent the questionnaire to other centres of adult learning, which may be an avenue to be looked at for further research.

Without a doubt the use of the questionnaire did have some drawbacks for the researcher's study, time was an issue which could have allowed the researcher to have a larger sample size or indeed look at comparative groups and gain a bigger perspective. The questionnaire itself could have been done in an online format which may have made it simpler to complete, or could have given the researcher more responses, however the researcher knows that the majority of the participants whom the questionnaire was sent to prefer the old-fashioned

method of pen and paper. Although the questionnaire could have been more attractive the main aim of the questions was to ensure a wide and varied response so as to gain as much information from the students as possible.

The ethical concerns of the study were handled in the researcher's opinion well, the participants had all received a letter detailing the purpose of the study, received a fully detailed consent form. All of the data that was obtained through the study will be maintained confidential including the disturbing experience one of the participants had when she was just sixteen. This information was handled to the best of the researcher's abilities and empathy and compassion displayed including the offer to take the matter further if the participant so wished.

As the researcher works in the healthcare environment, the importance of ethics and morals are of extreme importance and this has carried over to her research, although a small-scale project this is of extreme importance as both researchers and healthcare professionals to ensure that any work that is done is carried out with the participants and patients in mind, to ensure they come to no harm.

One of the other concerns related to methodology is the idea of researcher bias, although reflection is a topic that the researcher feels extremely passionate about, she has been extremely careful to avoid transference to her students, for some of them this reflective journal will simply be the means to achieving a grade in a module they will never again reflect on anything and that is completely acceptable, the last thing the researcher wished to do was to make reflection seem like the holy grail of an accomplished healthcare worker, but when used has the power to ensure that all experiences both good and bad have learning potential.

The idea of looking at themes was something that was highlighted in the authors literature review, thematic analysis is the most commonly used method of looking at data gathered through qualitative analysis. Qualitative approaches are incredibly multifaceted and nuanced

(Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as ‘it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis’ Thematic analysis is also useful in the authors opinion as it is a very flexible method, particularly in the field of education research also thematic analysis is not a methodology but a method so it is not tied to any particular perspective.

Themes can be considered as those areas that are particularly important to the research study, in the authors study themes that were identified included reflection as transformation, reflection as feedback, reflection as dialogue and reflection as feedback, some of the themes were also highlighted in the authors results which highlighted in the authors opinion the most important areas of reflection.

Most critics of thematic analysis say that the use of themes as a method of data analysis is used by those lacking in sophistication to complete analysis using what they would consider a more advanced method like grounded theory, but the author takes issue with this, yes this is the first time she has done research in education but it is not her first time doing research and the author felt that the use of thematic analysis was the best fit for the results she generated, the fact that thematic analysis is so flexible and easy to use with any method of data gathering in no way removes from the quality of the participants responses and the conclusions made.

The fact that the use of thematic analysis is the most common method of looking at data in the area of qualitative research also discredits the critics, the idea of qualitative research is that it looks at a viewpoint of an individual, not definitive statistics on the use of reflection or the participants personal views of reflection.

The main aim of the authors research has been to answer a question on why would the author bother teaching reflection, she aims to ensure that the participants are treated in an ethical safe

manner and ultimately the use of thematic analysis has ensured that the participants who did answer the questionnaire had their views identified in a credible manner.

The sample size of the authors study has been the main issue with the authors research, most transferable research would need a sample size greater than fifteen, but sometimes the author believes that it is quality over quantity and thematic analysis has ensured that the data generated is of a high standard and has generated many questions for future research.

As a result of the poor response to the questionnaire the author also decided to do a follow up interview by phone, the downside of this technique is unfortunately the difficulty in ensuring that the conversation was fully transcribed by the author, the idea of recording the phone conversation was considered however the author believed when the participants knew they were being recorded their responses may have been guarded, however the difficulty of developing a rapport with the participant is far more difficult over the phone versus face to face, however the phone call was a very useful technique used to develop a deeper understanding of the issues raised in the questionnaire, and to gain a further insight into the participants understanding of the subject of reflection.

This summer has been one of the warmest we have experienced since the nineteen seventy's and understandably the participants were out enjoying the fine weather with their families, so the follow up phone call was in the authors opinion a far easier approach than trying to organise a focus group which was the authors original plan, maintaining participants anonymity was not influenced in any way through the use of phone interviews,

The aim of this research was to answer the question 'Reflection, Why Bother' but ultimately to discover why educators in disciplines from engineering to nursing are teaching reflection, what benefits do the students themselves receive from learning the skill of reflection but also what benefits do the educators receive from reflection, it would be ridiculous for educators to



be teaching this important skill to their students and not using it themselves. The do as I say not as I do mentality that seems to be endemic within certain education sectors.

Similar to the authors literature review the results have been divided into themes, some of which overlap with the themes in the literature review, which in the authors opinion highlights the overarching similarities between how reflection is viewed by academics and individuals alike.

Reflection is after all “a window through which the practitioners can view and focus self within the context of their own lived experience in ways that enable them to confront and understand and work towards resolving the contradictions with their practice between that is desirable and actual practice. (Johns, 2013)

Although the author admits that the sample size of fifteen is a weak sample, there is no excuses, but unfortunately environmental and technological issues conspired against her, the author still believes that the data she gathered is representative of those students who have been taught the skill of reflection and don't just see it as a means to an end to achieve a grade.

There will always be a cohort of students who will do anything possible to achieve a passing grade in all modules, this seemed to be common among the older female students who were using the skill of reflection as assessment, one student when discussing the assessment process with the author uttered the words

*‘how about you just tell me what I have to write to pass this, it's easier that way because then I know what you are looking for and you will get what you want, after every class you can tell us’*

When the concept of reflection was explained again to the class and indeed this student, the author was again met with the words

*'I only want a pass, I'm never going to use reflection again, I mean how often do people really reflect, you say you do, but I know you don't, sure nobody has time for that in healthcare, this is something that you have to cover, it's not an important thing to do'*

To be fair to her, she had a point, a lot of students assume that educators who teach reflection don't bother reflecting themselves, unfortunately the majority of educators don't reflect, they don't see its benefits or long-term usefulness to both students and teachers. The author has highlighted this area as an area of future research, and to ensure that she wasn't seen as one of the do as I say educators, the author did bring her own professional reflective journal into the students as an example of the content, but also the action plan which is an important element of reflection.

The concept of thematic analysis was considered as a method of describing the authors results as when analysing the results, the themes identified were similar to the authors literature review content, to be completely fair this was not what the author was expecting but on careful consideration, the idea of reflection is universal, professionals who reflect know how powerful it can be, but this hasn't reached the general population just yet! When the power of reflection is realised it is very difficult to forget how to reflect, it doesn't have to be written down, it can be verbal, visual or auditory, the use of the senses is often overlooked by professionals as they prefer facts and figures instead of intuition or experience.

The use of intuition which you can describe as the display of implied knowledge, a way of knowing that is deeply embodied but is unable to be expressed in a rational way, and experience being overlooked is a common issue within healthcare education, so a new tool has been utilised, using patient stories as a learning tool to understand the lived experience, is an area that is gaining popularity, giving students a personal experience instead of the generic signs and symptoms that are universal.

In her classes the author uses lived experience as a learning tool, she has had people who suffer with disabilities and a wife who cares for her husband who has dementia, the students then reflect on these classes, and use them as a learning tool. This has proved to be a powerful class with excellent reflective pieces.

*'the patient stories really brought home the person behind the illness, like dementia, no one knows what this disease is until they have lived with it, I have a greater insight into the person and what is like to live with dementia'*

*Listening to patient stories are a great learning tool, commitment to patients comes first, life experiences are there to be shared and we learn from other experiences'*

One of the first themes identified was the role that reflection played in transformation, transformation is a topic that society is increasingly familiar with, every January we talk about a personal transformation, and we watch others try and transform on our televisions, at the heart of this transformation be it physical or emotional is reflection.

Transformative learning builds upon Freire's (1974) idea of conscientization, which the author believes that most of her participants would not understand but it is a process by which people come to comprehend that their interpretations of their world and their place in the world is moulded by social and historical forces which work against their interests. Conscientization leads to a critical awareness of the self as a subject who can both reflect and act upon the world in order to change it.

Some believe that reflection is always critical, so all reflection that is done properly can lead to transformation, the author disputes this concept, reflection doesn't always have to focus on the negative, in fact to be able to focus on the positive is just as important but far more difficult for people than the negative, however the majority of participants have used the negative power

of reflection to ensure their transformation, ultimately any reflection is beneficial and has the power to transform.

*‘reflection helped me to realise that my opinion is important, and that the words speak the truth even if your voice shakes applies to me, and I know now that I can make a positive change for people, all those years ago when I witnessed the abuse, I didn’t know that I was important enough to speak up for those victims I was only a child that the other staff members took advantage of, I was part of the culture of the time that kept their mouth shut because it was easier, but now if I saw it happening again I would be the first to speak out and not stop until someone listened’*

This powerful piece of writing from one of the authors participants demonstrates the power that reflection has to transform, transform from one who doesn’t believe their opinion matters to one who will not be afraid to speak out until someone listens no matter how much their voice shakes.

*‘I have learned so much, I will stand up for the vulnerable, I have learnt from a patient’s perspective why they should always be involved in their care, they have rights and those rights are to be upheld at all times, this has transformed my thinking on so many things from life to work to how I speak to my children, I definitely wasn’t expecting this from writing a reflective journal for a class I wasn’t sure about in the first place, it was supposed to only be part of the assessment process but it turned into so much more’*

Transformation is a powerful benefit of reflection, as the use of reflection empowers the individual to achieve something significant in their lives, Greene (1988) tells us “to become different is not simply to will oneself to change. There is the question of being able to accomplish what one chooses to do. It is not a matter of the capacity to choose; it is a matter of the power to act to attain one’s purposes. We shall be concerned with intelligent choosing, and

yes humane choosing, as we shall be with the kinds of conditions necessary for empowering persons to act on what they choose’’

*‘I have gained self-esteem and feel able to voice my opinions confidently and effectively, I am no longer afraid of my opinions, my opinions matter, I can’t believe that something like reflection has given me so much power, I was terrified of the change I was undertaking because I had no experience, but I do, I have life experience which is worth so much more than I thought’*

Recognising that participants have a voice could be considered a metaphor for transformation, knowing that what you have to say is important and beneficial means that you instinctively transform into an individual that uses reflection to continue your transformation. The participants in the authors study have highlighted the role that reflection plays in the transformation of the participants. One of the participants also highlighted the glaring fact that the ability to reflect should be taught in all schools and colleges.

*‘we teach our students mindfulness, we teach them coding, we should be teaching them how to reflect, children need to realise that all experiences are a learning opportunity not something that if you do badly in to forget or if you do well relish, all experiences make us who we are and the ability to reflect can transform who we become in the future, I am forty three and reflection has transformed me, can you imagine the power it would have if you were ten or twelve’*

This was a transferable opinion between the participants and indeed shared by the author, the idea of higher order cognitive skills including reflection, need to be looked at when considering education of our young people, we expect students to be able to reflect yet we don’t teach reflection, to the author it seems ridiculous. Reflection honours the self at the centre of the experience, reflection acknowledges the individual as significant and their fears as valid. This

seems like the perfect information to be teaching children, that who they are, their beliefs and opinions are important and need to be heard.

We have a tool in reflection that has the ability to transform individuals both young and old, yet it's not utilised as widely as it should be and is in the authors opinion an area for further discussion and research.

The concept of transformation is a powerful one, but the concept of transformation like reflection is a continuous one, you cannot believe that both are not a process that requires a person to work on, that you will have good and bad days where neither transformation or reflection happen.

*'I found it difficult to give myself the time I needed to reflect, to ensure that this transformation into a reflective practitioner is a bit like a diet they both take time and effort, you need to devote a space to ensure that you get the best out reflection, if you don't allow this time, it's the same as the new year's diet, lasts a few days and you feel great but you slip back into old bad habits and you are back eating chocolate in no time'*

Developing a voice, is not the same as transformation, the key component of transformation is action, the participants also highlighted this fact in their answers

*'having a voice is not the same as using it, one of the key components of Gibbs reflective practice cycle is action, you have to do something with the voice, if I saw that abuse again I would stop it, I would take action, I wouldn't ignore the suffering any more, action is the most important part of reflection, doing nothing is not an option'*

Unfortunately, most transformations fail because of lack of commitment, the author believes that reflection fails because we don't commit ourselves to the process, this was echoed by the participants within the study.

*'working a full day, then going to class from seven to ten and then trying to reflect is time consuming and difficult to commit the time to spend to reflection, but that is life, it will not stop me reflecting but it's hard after a long day to want to spend that time reflecting, it's easier just to turn on the telly'*

Reflection as transformation is an unbelievably important aspect of the benefits that reflection offers both personally and professionally, within adult education especially in the health and social care areas, reflection is not focused on as a method of student transformation, it is a subject simply to be covered, a tick box exercise once the learning objectives have been met, most educators are happy. However, the personal benefits that it offers students are too powerful and important to be overlooked.

The author did not realise the benefits that reflection played in the role of personal transformation, yes, the students were asked to complete a reflective journal as an assessment piece, but it has changed into a deeper personal understanding for the students and will continue to ensure that reflection is not just a one off for passing a module.

The next theme identified was again similar to the authors literature review, the idea of reflection as dialogue, dialogue is so much more than conversation, it takes many forms like storytelling, as a nation Ireland is renowned for storytelling and literature, reflection is a form of storytelling but a story that you learn from almost Aesop's Fables, a story with a moral lesson.

Story telling is a tool that is employed by healthcare educators in an undergraduate setting but is often not considered in the adult education setting, it's almost seems to be considered immature to talk about stories to adults, and the role that stories play in everyday life isn't even considered to be educational.

As previously mentioned the author uses patient stories to highlight the lived experience of an illness but these are own stories, our own personal insights into experiences, before the author asks for student stories she will begin to tell them one of her own, the author has worked in healthcare for over fifteen years so there are plenty of stories, most of the authors stories have good outcomes, but there are some with bad outcomes and these deserve as much time as the positive ones.

The very personal nature of stories, there is a risk that those who are listening to the stories will avoid being critical, it is difficult to be critical for two main reasons, the first response of listeners to stories an emotional one, to be sympathetic rather than critical most people who tell their story aren't looking for sympathy, the next response is to ensure that the audience have a safe space by avoiding difficult issues so the audience don't have to face their own issues in telling their own stories. So, the authors response is to be critical with herself and ask the participants to be critical of the situations and see what they would have done better.

*'using stories is an immensely powerful tool used to encourage reflection, most stories are full of tensions, and contradictions, things that you should have said or things you wished you hadn't said, to be able to reflect on this is a powerful tool, like having a conversation with yourself, a form of written internal dialogue but one you learn from'*

Story telling is a reflective act, they are not icons but are inquires on which further investigations take place, by the act of telling them and through others response to them. This concept is being utilised in other healthcare settings, the use of Schwartz Rounds as a method of reflective story telling have be introduced in healthcare settings like hospices, the concept of these rounds involves an individual telling a story related to a theme previously decided and other participants listen and reflect on the story. The main idea behind the rounds is to encourage dialogue between all members of the healthcare team from catering staff to



consultants. These rounds are vital to introduce the concept of reflective practice into an organisation, but in the authors opinion, most of these rounds will be hijacked by individuals who for want of a better analogy love the sound of their own voice.

Individual reflective story telling can be a far more useful tool, the use of a reflective journal means that no one has to feel afraid to express an opinion that may be considered less popular to the majority. Most people don't like to converse in a group, they prefer the written medium, as they feel that the paper doesn't judge.

Reflective writing as described by Roji et al (2017) involves an exploration and explanation of an event, it involves not only thinking but also writing about a student's anxieties and errors as well as successful achievements. Through reflective writing students are allowed a chance to slow down, and become more aware, reflective writing is the students' response to experience and new information.

*'writing down my responses to the stories was far easier than having to say it out loud, it is a personal response to a situation, and I felt happier expressing a contrary opinion far easier in writing, I'm not afraid of speaking out, but I prefer the anonymity of writing'*

The anonymity of writing was an important component of using reflection as dialogue, the author found this surprising, most of the students she believed that the students were vocal and not afraid to express their views and opinions however controversial they were, but the participants who completed the questionnaire and participated in the follow up phone call, believed that writing was the form of personal internal dialogue that reflection encouraged and enhanced.

*'I found myself not just reflecting on our classes, but on my life experiences and relationships, I had two journals on the go, the one for my class and my own personal journal, I wrote conversations with others, I used the journal as a dialogue, I used it to work through issues I*

*had with my partner, my family and my children, I never realised how important dialogue is, even if it is with yourself and how much better you feel, and how this dialogue prepares you for future experiences'*

Encouraging reflective dialogue helps to bring to the surface issues that students may not normally review either because they don't deem the topic to be important, or they are afraid to open up about issues where they may have made a mistake. Through the use of reflective dialogue professionals are taken away from the concept that they are the passive recipients of learning and encouraging them to become active participants in the journey of learning

The use of reflective dialogue is an excellent method to encourage the use of reflection especially among those who may be new to the concept of reflection, the ability to reflect with peers and guided by the expert other, is a tool that will always need to be developed in students and healthcare professionals.

The author believes that the importance of dialogue cannot be overlooked in the process of teaching reflection, this is an important outcome of the reflective study and one that wasn't expected, this is another area that could be looked at further, either by the author or other educators in the healthcare field.

The next theme identified was one that wasn't identified in the literature review, it is however linked to both transformation and dialogue but is a far more individual, the idea of reflection being used as personal development, and the use of reflection in a personal relationships, originally reflection was designed to be used by individuals in a professional setting, or by students in an educational one, but the personal benefits are often overlooked and considered unimportant and irrelevant, but this benefit is far too important in the authors opinion to be overlooked and is one that was repeatedly brought up by the participants in the authors study. Reflecting on yourself does require a lot of confidence to be able to acknowledge your own

limitations and deficits but this through the mirror writing can allow the individual to gain perspective, release power to take responsibility for their actions and allow a safe space to work through problems and issues they may have.

*'I went through a very bad period in my life after I completed the reflective module, but I realised that I had a tool to help me that required nothing more than a pen and paper, it was a godsend, I used the journal as a space to write down all the issues I was facing, what I needed to do now and what could wait until I got through this period, I never realised that reflection could be used for anything other than professional development, although we did speak about the other uses in class, I never associated it with anything other than my job, but it has helped me in more ways than I ever imagined'*

This piece taken from one of the participants showed the author that reflection overall is a useful tool not only in a professional capacity, however it doesn't always have to be a major episode that you use reflection for, reflection is a useful tool for any problem in a person's personal life, just as it is used for any experience in someone's professional life, in general it is not the big issues in our lives that stop us in our tracks, it is the mundane everyday tasks that we do on auto pilot, it is the mundane tasks that we need to use reflection for, to make sense of the experiences we are having.

*'I am involved in my child's parents association, I have used reflection to look at experiences I have had with other parents, I use reflection when there is conflict regarding what to do about fundraising, I use reflection for every experience I have with the association and I have found it an invaluable tool for myself, to make sense of the experience, as I have never before taken an active role in anything like this'*

One of the areas that the participants felt could be expanded on is the role that being self-aware plays in the reflective process, most participants have heard of the idea of self-awareness and

the important role that it plays in an individual's personal development, but again time issues play a role in ensuring that students receive a good introduction to the concept of self-awareness, this is more of an issue for the author as opposed to a wider area for further study, but this research has demonstrated areas in the authors teaching that could be improved.

*'I would have loved more discussion on the concept of self-awareness, the idea plays a huge role in both healthcare and in our own personal lives, I feel that only one class isn't enough to cover this important issue, especially as self-awareness is an important component of reflection'*

For the author, the concept of reflection is everything that has been demonstrated by the participants, it is the reason that the author uses several reflective journals, this is done to prevent crossover between her role in healthcare and her role in education, but undoubtedly the use of reflection is an excellent self-preservation tool as both areas are hard and have periods of amazing highs and extreme lows, reflective writing for the author is not an assessment piece but it does ensure survival for the author.

The use of reflection as a benefit to educators in the adult education sector is another area that the author may look at further among her own colleagues, there is a wide range of disciplines being taught in the school where she works, it would be interesting to find out how many educators use and benefit from reflection.

The authors aim when she undertook this research was to answer the question 'reflection, why bother' what the results have shown to the author is reflection why not, why educators are avoiding the topic of reflection, unless it is a mandatory learning outcome, the majority of the authors participants had heard of reflection in other modules, but it hadn't been more than a footnote, nothing more than a cursory glance at a topic designed to help the student's in their personal and professional roles.

The author wonders if educators are afraid of the topic of reflection, does reflection scare educators, it is a very personal topic, that requires those who reflect to examine themselves under a microscope and people prefer to live a life that is unexamined, live a life solely on the surface without going deeper. It's safer than admitting their fears, weaknesses and opinions that may be controversial.

The benefits of using reflection far outweighs the negative effects, the results have demonstrated the personal growth that reflection has on those who use it, the author wasn't expecting the participants to reveal so much about themselves, the student who witnessed the abuse of elderly residents in her care, who now will try and always speak the truth even if her voice shakes and will not stop speaking until she is listened to, she carried that story with her for over thirty years and it took what originally was an assessment piece to help her deal with it, the author is not claiming that she or reflection is solely responsible for this transformation but the role that reflection has played cannot be under any doubt.

Reflection also played a role in the way they dealt with a period of depression, again the author wishes to clarify that in no way is reflection a substitute for medical advice and input, but the author does know, that the majority of therapists and counsellors will encourage the use of reflective writing as an aid to recovery, this student already had that tool in their personal arsenal to help them deal with the feelings they are experiencing. In fact, many professionals who look after people with long term illnesses like cancer encourage the use of reflective journals to help with the experiences of the illness and the journey they are embarking on.

The benefits of reflective practice has been demonstrated in the results of the authors research, although it was a small sample, it does show how overwhelmingly beneficial it can be, although it started off for many participants as an assessment to achieve a good mark in, for the majority of them it became so much more, assessment is an important element of all healthcare courses

and for many the sole aim of any modules is obtaining a passing grade, however the author decided that by implementing reflection into the assessment process, she effectively killed two birds with one stone, by ensuring the student's understood the benefits of reflection and passed a mandatory component module on their healthcare course.

The participants and indeed the students on the module vary in age from school leavers to adults over a certain age, and those who are retraining, they all bring different experiences to the classroom, and the use of reflection not only as an assessment tool but also as a personal development tool surpasses the age gap, the technological generation gap, the schooling gap, reflection is non-discriminatory, non-judgemental and overall more beneficial than anything else.

The author feels that the results of this study have opened up several areas that could be considered for future research, one of the first areas that need to be considered is why the majority of adult educators avoid the topic of reflection completely, why is reflection just a footnote to be passed over with a cursory glance, yet the students are expected in all of the assessment pieces for the majority of the healthcare courses require a reflective element to be integrated into the piece. How can we expect students to reflect if tutors don't give the topic more than a passing glance?

Another issue here is the do as I say mentality of some of the tutors that the author has come across, how can educators demand that their students reflect if they don't use reflection themselves, the author came across this, one of the participants who has since completed her course, believed that the author was only saying she had a reflective journal and used reflection on a daily basis, it wasn't until the author brought in the reflective journal did the participant believe the author, as educators we shouldn't have to prove ourselves to our students, as educators we need to be a guide on the learning journey, facilitate learning not play the expert,

above reproach who stand at the top of the class and believe in the do as I say not as I do method of teaching.

Overall the research the author has embarked upon has opened up more questions for further research, this wasn't originally the authors intention, as there is already a plethora of research available on the topic of reflection, but not within the adult education setting.

The participants in the authors study showed without a shadow of a doubt, how beneficial reflection has been and indeed continues to be for those who completed the module, it has encouraged transformation and the realisation that their experiences, opinions and viewpoints are important and worthy of expressing. The participants came to the classes with the idea of learning how to work within a healthcare setting and the issues associated with this area but left with a tool that transfers to both personal and professional lives.

The real question that the author feels needs to be answered by educators everywhere is reflection why not!!!

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**“Reflection why Bother”**

**Research questionnaire**

**Please answer all questions, if you require any clarification please do not  
hesitate to contact me**

1. Before you began this module, had you ever used or heard of reflective writing, if your answer is yes, please discuss
2. What did you find most enjoyable about the process of reflective writing
3. What did you find most challenging
4. Give one thing that you found most enjoyable and challenging while you were keeping this journal
5. Since you completed this journal have you used reflection in either a personal or professional capacity
6. Give an example of when you used reflection in either your personal or professional lives
7. Did you use this journal simply as a means to obtain a grade in this module
8. If you simply saw the journal as a means of passing the module please did you see the potential benefits that reflection may offer you
9. Has the use of a reflective journal altered your opinion towards the benefits of reflective writing
10. What if anything did you learn about yourself while keeping this journal

Thank you for your participation.

**“Reflection Why Bother”**

**Maria Fortune**

**Consent to take part in research**

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data two weeks after it is collected, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves the completion of a questionnaire and if necessary participation in a follow up phone call where further discussion on the themes identified in the questionnaire will take place.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details which may reveal my identity.
- I understand that disguised extracts may be quoted in a masters dissertation, if the information is to be used in any further forums the author will contact me to gain further consent.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

- I understand that the data collected will be held in a password protected computer for five years and then be destroyed.

Signature of research participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_