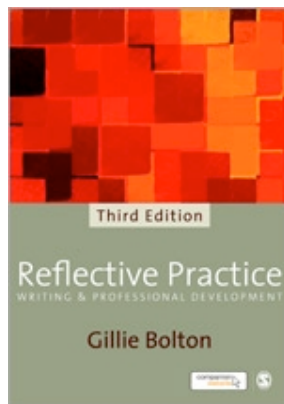


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Reflective Practice: Writing & Professional Development

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Though not aimed at creative writers, the new updated and revised third edition of *Reflective Practice: Writing & Professional Development* is useful in the context of practice-led research, research-led practice and practice-based research in the Creative Arts. In particular, it might provide practitioners with a mode of conceptual inquiry which helps them explicate their methods, methodologies, experiences and processes by creating a diverse yet connected set of thought events underpinned by ethical principles including trust, self-respect, responsibility and positive regard. Some of the principles and exercises offered in this book might also enrich both the experiences of supervision and writing workshop in university writing programs.

In *Reflective Practice: Writing & Professional Development*, the author—a medical educator—draws on her own experience and research to propose a dynamic mode of reflection and reflexivity. Using what she calls *writing-through-the-mirror* writing, an expressive and explorative writing underpinned by critical examination of practice, Gillie Bolton offers an exploratory approach that aims to increase motivation, satisfaction and self-awareness. She clearly explains notions of reflection, reflexivity, perspective and values, narrative and metaphor, as well as the distinction between authority and responsibility, and she grounds her literary and artistic methods in educational theory and values from the start of the book.

In a similarly pragmatic vein, clear step-by-step practical methods are given for every aspect of the process. New to this edition are: ‘a new chapter presenting different ways of undertaking and facilitating reflective practice’ and further international coverage, including material from Australia, New Zealand and the USA. This third

edition also includes an annotated glossary explaining key terms, end of chapter activities and exercises, suggested further reading in addition to clear guides on chapter contents and how to use the book. An accompanying website features discussion blogs, workshop exercises, glossary and online readings. It is claimed that the methods discussed have been tested by students and professionals across the fields of education, medicine and healthcare, psychology, social work, business management and leadership training.

The image of Alice going through the looking glass runs through this book. Alice found herself in a world where everything was as different as possible to any expectations, and Bolton introduces the reader to ways of making the familiar strange, and in doing so, of envisaging ways in which the familiar can be changed. This motif is pertinent to the fields of practice-led research, research-led practice and practice-based research in the Creative Arts as multidisciplinary methodologies and modes of production. As Stephen Muecke has recently written,

What academics produce as research ‘outcomes’ ... now rarely takes the form of commentary, critical or otherwise, on others’ creative work. More often we are composing our own works. In other words we have shifted from *appreciation* to *production*, from critical difference to a sense of progressive engagement from which there is no pause. (Muecke 2010).

Therefore ‘the real challenge’ remains ‘to generate a critical vocabulary and body of knowledge *through* and *about* practice’ (Nelson 2008), for the tensions generated within and by this process of production can only be successfully managed if we develop a heightened sense of reflexivity. This reflexivity means adopting a position whereby practitioners are self-aware and able to reflect upon themselves and their practice. In so doing, they can also provide an account of their own position of enunciation. *Reflective practice* provides a useful tool to this effect in either multi-method or multi-disciplinary projects, for its ‘*through-the-mirror...* writing model involves wide potential interactions’ and ‘opens up developmental reflexive and reflective space’.

The book takes its cue from Richardson’s claim that writing is a method of inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). It is divided in three sections. Section I focuses on ‘Reflection and reflexivity: what and why’; section II on ‘Reflection and reflexivity: how’ and section three on ‘Reflective writing: foundations’. The book’s argument develops by accretion: concepts are first introduced and then revisited and further explained in subsequent chapters, each time from a slightly different perspective. For example, chapter one introduces and describes reflective practice, outlining its political and social dimension. Chapter two in turn throws light on the intangible nature of reflection and self-reflection inherent in the very notion of reflective practice while chapter three revisits the principles of reflective practice from an educational perspective. Chapter four introduces the *through-the-mirror* approach while specifying its three foundations, and suggests facilitating exercises for practitioners. Chapter five broaches some theories of reflective writing as a reflective and reflexive process. Although I found this approach enticing and particularly successful in the transition from chapter two to three, with its emphasis on ethics, I found it repetitive

and counter-productive in other sections. Chapter five is a point in case, but this may be because the book is pitched at professionals who are not familiar with the craft and techniques of, and theories about, writing. For the same reason, Section III was for me the least satisfying of all. Although a richly exemplified discussion of the role of narrative in personal and professional lives, it is a bit light on ‘the power of metaphor’ (chapter 13) and ‘other writing forms’ (chapter 14). The book ends with a succinct, though solid, bibliography.

*Reflective Practice* does not claim to ‘offer solutions to final solutions, but enlightening provisional answers’. In that sense, it lives up to the author’s promise. It is certainly well worth a dip.

### **Works cited**

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