RELC Journal

http://rel.sagepub.com/

Reflective Writing : Insights into What Lies Beneath
Sujata S. Kathpalia and Carmel Heah
RELC Journal 2008 39: 300
DOI: 10.1177/0033688208096843

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://rel.sagepub.com/content/39/3/300

Published by:
$SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *RELC Journal* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://rel.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://rel.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://rel.sagepub.com/content/39/3/300.refs.html

Reflective Writing:

Insights into What Lies Beneath

Sujata S. Kathpalia

Language and Communication Centre,
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Nanyang Technological University, Block N2, Room N2-01c-128,
50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
MSSKATH@ntu.edu.sg

Carmel Heah

Nanyang Technological University,
50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

Abstract ■ Educationists and writing practitioners consider reflection to be a defining feature of student portfolios (Fink 2003; Zubizarreta 2004; Jones and Shelton 2006). A writing portfolio without reflection is merely a collection of written work which does not contribute to 'real' learning. Reflection in the portfolio approach happens when students examine their work against established criteria, analyse the effectiveness of their efforts and plan for improvement. According to Fink (2003), reflective writing 'focuses on the writer's learning experience itself and attempts to identify the significance and meaning of a given learning experience, primarily for the writer'. This paper will examine the self-reflection of student writers in an undergraduate writing course offered to Science students at *Nanyang Technological University*. An attempt will be made to identify and illustrate the communicative competencies learnt by these students through the process of self-reflection as well as suggest tools to prompt these reflections. It is hoped that this study will unearth what lies beneath the written product and highlight those forces which make writing practice more informed, both for the student as well as the teacher.

RELC

Introduction

The use of portfolios has become popular in education, both at school and tertiary levels as it offers many advantages in terms of learning as well as assessment. According to practitioners, some of these advantages include engaging students in their own learning through reflection, peer-evaluation and teacher feedback. Apart from enhancing student learning, the other advantage of portfolios is in the area of assessment as they enable teachers to base their evaluation on effort as well as achievement. Portfolios are particularly useful for writing courses and have been used extensively to develop the skills of student writers as well as to trace their growth in university classrooms.

The main difference between a traditional classroom and a portfolio classroom is the extent to which students reflect on their work. In a traditional classroom, teachers spend a lot of time correcting student work and providing written feedback but there is little evidence that this is beneficial (Danielson and Abrutyn 1997). This is because students typically discard their marked assignments without making an attempt to improve their work based on teacher feedback. However, in courses that use portfolios, students usually articulate their thoughts in writing for each writing assignment and are inclined to read as well as act on the tutor's comments 'because students know that it is their responsibility to demonstrate proficiency in certain defined learning outcomes' (Danielson and Abrutyn 1997: 16).

There is a proliferation of definitions of portfolios in the literature. However, the one that is most suitable in the present context is the one that prioritizes the role of reflection in portfolios. Many educationists and writing practitioners consider reflection to be a defining feature of student portfolios as it is the mental process through which students convert their experiences into personal knowledge (Fink 2003; Zubizarreta 2004; Jones and Shelton 2006). According to them a writing portfolio without reflection is merely a collection of written work which does not contribute to 'real' learning. Reflective writing 'when viewed as a process and when done properly, has a unique ability to develop the interior life of the writer' (Fink 2003). The act of reflective writing compels 'the writer to examine, clarify, and crystallize thoughts and ideas that might otherwise be floating around the mind in disconnected fragments' (Jones and Shelton 2006: 55). Specifically, reflection helps students to combine experience and knowledge together to produce new learning, to apply theory to prac-

tice, encourage a critical reflection, gain insight into personal development, and manage their emotions throughout the learning process.

The capacity to reflect is not automatic and has to be consciously developed over time. There are some of us who never develop this capacity and others who do not use it consistently in their lives. The only way to enhance this capacity is through constant use and by means of learning strategies like modelling, mentoring and specific instruction. The four aspects of higher order skills that promote reflection are abstract thinking, complex thinking, metacognition and pragmatism (Jones and Shelton 2006). The first of these is the ability to make sense of intangibles that cannot be experienced directly through one's senses; the second is to analyse problems or situations from multiple perspectives; the third is to be aware of one's thinking about thoughts, and the fourth is to apply knowledge to real life situations and problems.

To encourage deep learning, teachers should give students an opportunity to engage in reflective dialogue and self-assessment. Reflection enables students 'to become more mindful learners and thereby become more aware of what they are learning, how they are learning, and the value of their learning' (Fink 2004: 97). When students repeatedly engage in reflective dialogue, they become more aware of themselves as learners and the process of learning becomes even more powerful and long lasting. This is mainly due to the role reflection plays in learning by linking 'experience and emotions to the neural pathways of the brain where information and ideas are stored and can be recalled' (Fink 2004: 97). Students in higher education usually get their information and ideas from lectures and reading relevant materials, they gain some experience through tutorial activities that relate to the content of the lectures but for holistic learning, they need to make a connection between theory and practice. They can achieve this through reflecting on the content of their lectures and the practical tutorial activities to become effective self-directed learners.

Objectives

To explore the role of reflection in a university course, this paper examines the self-reflection of student writers in a portfolio-based writing course 'The Art of Academic Writing', offered to undergraduate science students at the Nanyang Technological University. The objectives of this paper on reflection are twofold:

- To identify the key communicative competencies that students have learnt through reflection in the writing course;
- To suggest tools to prompt and facilitate student self-reflections that motivate deeper levels of thinking.

The next section will provide the context for this paper by elaborating on the course in terms of syllabus, approach, student sample and data. The focus will be on the role of reflection as a learning strategy in this portfolio-based writing course.

Background on Course

'The Art of Academic Writing' is a one-semester course which all first-year students in the School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences in NTU are required to take. The course adopts a portfolio approach to writing instruction and assessment. The portfolio approach was chosen as it enables teachers to chronicle the growth of students' skills in the writing process. In education, the emphasis is often on the products students create or the outcome they achieve without sufficient attention given to the processes required in creating those products or outcomes. However, portfolios 'can combine "process" and "product" teaching approaches, and they can consolidate teaching and assessment practices' (Johns 1993). With its potential for focusing on the process of learning, the portfolio approach gives an insight into processes involved in self-diagnosis and self-improvement as well as the meta-cognitive processes of thinking, through the use of self-reflection, peer evaluation and tutor feedback.

During each week of the 13-week semester, the students attend a one-hour lecture and a two-hour tutorial. The lectures provide theoretical input and guidelines for different types of scientific writing, along with examples from the works of professional writers and scientists. The tutorials are conducted as writing workshops involving teacher-student and peer conferencing as well as self-reflection on writing samples. Students maintain a portfolio of their written work which is reviewed and assessed periodically.

The most critical and distinctive component of a portfolio is the reflective component. As observed by Jones and Shelton (2006: 51), reflection is 'the defining feature of portfolios'. They characterized reflection thus as 'it is the mental process through which human beings convert experience into personal knowledge' and they further empha-

sized that 'it is reflection that distinguishes portfolios from scrapbooks or other kinds of collections'.

The importance of reflection in the course is emphasized from the start of the course. In the course description, reflection is explained to students as follows:

Reflection: Wherever possible, there should be evidence of your reflections upon the learning process and the monitoring of your evolving comprehension of key writing skills. In this course, you will be required to complete self-reflection sheets that reflect your experiences and the thinking processes you have used for particular writing tasks. You will have to complete and file these for each of your assignments. In addition, you will have to include peer and/or teacher reflections upon the products and processes wherever appropriate.

Source: Week 2 Tutorial Handout, p. 1

The study described in this paper was based on the end-of-course reflective accounts written by students who took the course in the 2006–2007 academic year. This cohort comprised 401 students who were divided into 16 tutorial groups, with 25 students in each. A total of 100 self-reflection accounts written by students at the end of the course were analyzed for the present study.

Analysis of Student Self-reflections

The data for this study was the final self-reflection writing task that was completed by students on the course as a whole. The reason for selecting this piece rather than the ones written through the 13-week course was to have a summative account of students' views on different aspects of the course. This is reflected in the instructions of the writing task which encouraged students to reflect on three specific aspects of the course: course content, skills as a writer and skills as a learner, with specific emphasis on their growth as writers. The instructions were as follows:

How have I grown as a writer?

Reflect on:
- Course content
- Skills as a writer
- Skills as a learner

Course Content:
- What was the most challenging assignment? Why? How did you deal with the challenges? What was the outcome?
- What assignment did you learn the most from this year? What did you learn? Why do you value this learning?
- Is there anything that you accomplished this year that surprised you? What? Why does it surprise you?
- What assignment or task was the easiest for you? Why? What does this suggest about you? Is this your best work? Why or why not?

Skills as a Writer:
- At this point in your writing, what can you do as a writer that you could not do before? Include concrete details about quality writing, writing process, response, etc.
- Look at your portfolio as a whole. What are your strengths as a writer? Offer concrete details.

Skills as a Learner:
- Looking at your work as a whole, what do you plan to focus on to improve your writing after the course? What are your goals?
- What skills have you learned that will help you manage your writing in other courses?

The questions were phrased in such a manner that they compelled students to take an 'I' approach to their writing, to make them aware of their feelings and attitude towards their writing, to size up their strengths and weaknesses as writers and to think about how they could apply these skills to future writing tasks in their course of study. The 100 student responses to this reflective writing task were then analyzed from two perspectives: the communicative competencies that students had learnt through the writing course and the tools that could strengthen their self-reflection skills. The findings of the analysis are discussed in the following sub-sections of communicative competencies and their frequency of occurrence.

Communicative Competencies

The analysis of the students' self-reflections revealed that there were four key competencies that the students perceived to have developed during the 13-week writing course. These include improvements along several learning dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, social and affective. In keeping with Lucas (2007), these competencies are defined as follows:

- The *Linguistic Dimension* refers to the specific language improvements made by students.
- The *Cognitive Dimension* pertains to the development of critical thinking in writing and reading texts.
- The *Affective Dimension* applies to the feelings and attitude experienced in the production of their written texts.
- The *Social Dimension* reflects the notion of writing as a social act.

This framework of learning dimensions was adopted in this study as it best reflects our students' perception of the kind of learning that took place during this course and was instrumental to the development and enhancement of their communication skills.

The Linguistic Dimension

At the linguistic level, the analysis showed that students felt they had improved at the macro and micro level of linguistic realizations. The macro-level improvements were those made at the discoursal level and the micro-level improvements were mainly at the level of grammar and vocabulary. The table below lists the several areas of linguistic improvement mentioned by the students in their reflections:

Table 1. *Indicators of Students' Linguistic Improvements*

Macro-level Improvements	*Micro-level Improvements*
1. The Writing Context (purpose, audience and text-type)	1. Grammar
2. Rhetorical Structure	2. Vocabulary
3. Textual or Clause Relations	3. Referencing
4. Cohesion and Coherence	4. Transitional Devices
5. Composing Stages and Strategies	5. Writing Styles

The examples below illustrate the key linguistic areas in which students claimed that they had improved:

- 'In addition I have learnt that when writing an essay to professionals of varying fields, we should use different language, such as a musician does not know many sophisticated scientific terms, hence we should use simple terms to explain the theory or observation of the experiment.'
- 'I also became familiar with writing the scientific research papers: what are the essential parts of the paper, in which way they should be presented, and which tense and voice should be used.'

- 'Also, my writing skills have improved as there are more transitional words introduced in the essay which has made my essay to have a better flow.'
- 'One valuable asset I obtained was to create an outline before writing an essay. This allows me to stay focus(ed) and develop the writing in a logical manner, instead of having pieces of information everywhere like what I used to do.'
- 'It's easy to write but it's not easy to write a good essay. I have a tendency to write long sentences, and using so-called "fancy" words, which I will try to avoid it in any future task. I am also trying to improve the order and flow of contents, so the readers can easily grasp my ideas.'
- 'I have learnt how to do citations and references. I realized that acknowledging the sources is really an important issue. Also, I found that plagiarism is really an important issue that we should always notice in order to do research papers or any publication smoothly in the future.'

Some of these examples combine the macro-level and micro-level indicators as decisions made at the higher level of linguistic realization have implications for word choice at the lower level of register. For instance, cohesion and coherence at the discoursal level is achieved through the use of appropriate transitional devices at the sentence level. Similarly, the style of writing is determined through an analysis of the context of writing in terms of purpose of the writing task, the targeted reader and the choice of text-type.

The Cognitive Dimension

Reflection plays an integral role in cognitive development of students along several dimensions: development of metacognition, ability to self-evaluate and problem-solving through critical thinking (Rolheiser, Bower and Stevahn 2000). These three dimensions have been defined by Rolheiser, Bower and Stevahn (2000: 31-32) as the capacity for students to 'improve their ability to think about their thinking', 'judge the quality of their work based on evidence for the purpose of doing better work', and 'engage in higher-level thinking skills'. There was ample evidence of all these aspects of cognitive learning in our student observations in their reflective writing. The table below lists the various cognitive gains expressed by the students according to the three categories:

Table 2. *Indicators of Students' Cognitive Improvements*

Metacognitive	Self-evaluation	Critical Thinking
Learning through self-reflection, peer-editing and tutor feedback	Learning through mistakes	Gathering, filtering, sorting and synthesizing relevant information
Awareness of learning strategies	Awareness of strengths and weaknesses	Multiple perspectives on problem / situation
Learning to learn	Charting growth as writer	Problem-oriented approach to writing
Lifelong learning		Avoiding logical fallacies

Metacognition has to do with students' ability to analyse their thoughts, enabling them to have better control over the many cognitive skills they possess in order to accomplish a task (Rolheiser, Bower and Stevahn 2000). One dimension of metacognition that was apparent in the students' cognition was the knowledge they seemed to have about their strengths and weaknesses, research and problem-solving strategies, and composing strategies that best suited a writing task. The second dimension of meta-cognition was the regulatory one which enabled students to select appropriate strategies and resources to meet a particular goal, to monitor their progress and make adjustments when engaged in specific tasks, and to assess the effectiveness of writing products as well as the processes employed in their completion. The example below illustrates some of the metacognitive elements found in student reflections:

- 'Another skill I obtained was to give frequent self-reflection. Through the self-reflection, I am able to realize my mistakes and to remind myself not to make the same mistakes in the future. It also allows me to recollect what was done and further retain my strength and (avoid) weaknesses, in my mind. This tool enables me to learn much more from a piece of writing. This small progress is the beginning of my new learning journey.'

Self-evaluation is an extension of metacognition, as it is through this that students learn to judge their work against established criteria, analyze the effectiveness of their efforts and plan for improvement. By systematically providing student writers with specific checklists for each writing task and

briefing them regarding expectations related to a particular writing task, tutors were able to ensure that students made correct and positive evaluations. Through this exercise, students were able to accurately gauge their successes and failures, set more realistic goals and work towards them in a confident manner in future writing tasks. According to Rolheiser, Bower and Stevahn (2000: 35), 'An upward cycle of learning results when students confidently set learning goals that are moderately challenging yet realistic, and then exert effort, energy, and resources needed to accomplish those goals'. This is illustrated by means of the following example:

- 'From this course, I realized my strength lies in being able to convey my ideas in words while my weakness lies in constructing clear and concise sentences. In future, I plan to focus on the area of writing clear and concise sentences so that I would be able to work within word limits. I would also like to improve in the area of showing logical reasoning in my arguments.'

Critical thinking involves reading, writing and revising in a manner that is problem-oriented and multidimensional. Students need to have an enquiring frame of mind and this was evident from the student reflections through their comments on gathering, filtering, sorting and synthesizing information for the writing task. According to Jones and Shelton (2006: 54), a critical reader is not simply a consumer of information but asks critical questions like 'What is the author really saying, and from what perspective?' and rather than applying information blindly asks 'How does this relate to my experience/or prior knowledge?', 'How does this fit with what I believe?' and 'How can I use this information?' In addition, students who used their thinking skills effectively were able to identify and revise logical fallacies in their writing and examine a problem from different perspectives before making decisions related to their writing. One such observation related to the selection of readings is given below:

- I have learnt a lot from Assignment 2. It was a challenging assignment because we had really enormous resources and we had to evaluate which ones were to be put into our essay, one by one. This cost lots of time. If our essay was not well organized or we did not have a clear outline, we could never manage those resources.'

There were many such comments pertaining to students' metacognitive, self-evaluative and critical-thinking abilities in their self-reflective ac-

counts. These comments gave an insight into the inner workings of their minds which is usually inaccessible in classroom discussions and even one-to-one consultations.

The Social Dimension
The Social Dimension when applied to reflection refers to the students' observations of self and others. This dimension of learning is relationship oriented and encompasses both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication (Jones and Shelton 2006). In the context of the writing course, the internal dialogue students had with themselves when self-reflecting and the discussions they were involved in when interacting with peers and tutors constitute the social dimension of learning. The indicators of intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions in the student reflections are listed in the table below:

Table 3. *Indicators of Students' Social Improvements*

Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Introspection that leads to awareness of strengths and weaknesses Insights into useful strategies	Peer-reviews Tutor feedback Group work Intercultural communication Awareness of readers

Below are some examples to represent the social aspect of learning that students were able to improve on:

- 'Having self-reflections and peer reviews are important parts of writing that I have not been taught before. These reviews give me a clear idea on where I went wrong in the writing process and I can correct myself. In addition, giving peer reviews helps me to learnt through others' wrongs and remind myself not to repeat them.'
- 'I have also learnt to write (a) "tighter" essay and using more relevant things in the essay, after reading the reviews of editors and tutor for those assignments. Furthermore I found out that I am quite a detailed person as I am able to spot certain errors which some other could not. I found my strength and I am happy with it.'

- 'However, in the process of writing the argumentative essay, my group did not answer the question and went out of point. I've learnt from my mistake and will be sure to keep looking back at the question to ensure that we are on track. In the process, I've also learnt to work a lot better in a team and also to manage time well. All our team mates have different modules and different commitments thus resulting in little time to work together. Being able to split the job equally among the team members and putting together a wonderful piece of essay at the end is an enjoyable process.'
- 'I have gained most from writing the expository essay with my partner. Having to do essays individually for the past years, I never thought of how is it like to complete one with another person whose writing habits may be totally different form me. I have learnt that collaborative writing can be done well if we know how to leverage on each other's strength. Besides, I have learnt that in writing, unless we are able to bring across ideas in a way that our target audience can understand, it defeats the purpose of doing so.'

The students' reflections show their realization that writing is not a lonely individualistic activity but involves other participants such as the targeted reader as well as those who provide support in the form of peers and also tutors. In addition, the writing task may involve other students if it is a group assignment and in such a case, the learning that takes place goes beyond the actual writing task to the social experience of working successfully in a group.

The Affective Dimension
The affective dimension of learning covers the feelings that students experience when producing the various writing tasks for their portfolios. Specifically, 'this frame addresses issues related to the success, failure, challenges, strong and weak points, outcomes, and benefits of the activities as they apply to criteria your are attempting to satisfy' (Jones and Shelton 2006: 55). In the context of the present course, the general observation of teachers was that their students found the affective aspect of self-reflection daunting. They were uncomfortable about expressing their attitudes and feelings towards writing and they preferred to write in the third person. However, the tutors' continuous feedback paid off and the

students, who were mainly Asians, got over their initial reserve and started making a conscious effort to express their feelings and opinions in their writing, using first person accounts. The analysis of the students' self-reflection accounts are testimony to this as their voices came across clearly in their final self-reflective task. The indicators of the affective dimension are presented in the table below:

Table 4. *Indicators of Students' Affective Improvements*

Self-oriented	Task-oriented	Tutor-oriented
Like/Dislike Enjoyment Satisfaction Surprise Challenge Confidence	Easy/Difficult Usefulness	Appreciation

The three perspectives from which affective feelings were expressed are self-oriented, task-oriented or tutor-oriented. Examples of these are given below:

- 'I appreciate all these improvements, and I won't stop this learning process even after this course.'
- 'This is indeed a useful and fruitful experience.'
- 'I am glad to see the progression in my writing skill and this course indeed is useful.'
- 'After taking this module, I have become more confident with writing.'

Through students' self-reflections, it was apparent that they not only make judgments about their achievements but also react to their judgments. According to Rolheiser, Bower and Stevahn (2000: 34), 'Students naturally judge and make decisions about the quality of their learning and react or associate feelings with their judgments—whether or not they know how to do so effectively'. In this context, it is important to coach students to make accurate and positive judgments as inaccurate and negative judgments may affect their learning adversely. Therefore, to enhance student learning, it is essential to provide them with systematic instruction and guidance by means of consistent tutor feedback and student-tutor consultation sessions.

Frequency of Communicative Competencies

A frequency count of the student self-reflections revealed that there was a high percentage of each of the communicative competencies whether linguistic, cognitive, social or affective in the sample. The table below sets out the percentages for each of these competencies:

Table 5. *Frequency of Communicative Competencies*

No.	*Communicative Competency*	*Frequency*
1.	Linguistic Competency	96
2.	Cognitive Competency	91
3.	Social Competency	73
4.	Affective Competency	100

The high percentages in the sample may be due to several reasons, the most important being the fact that this self-reflection was conducted at the end of the course by which time students had ample practice in writing self-reflective accounts for all their major writing tasks. To make the process meaningful, each of these writing assignments was accompanied by a specific checklist. The other tools that may have strengthened the self-reflection skills of students include proper orientation towards this activity, along with modeling, mentoring and specific prompts and cues to facilitate the process. These tools will be elaborated in the next section.

Tools to Promote Self-reflection

The value of reflection in learning is truly beneficial but as mentioned earlier, reflection does not come naturally to students and has to be consciously developed in order to make the most of their learning experience. Many different mechanisms have been suggested to promote self-reflective dialogues: journal keeping, observation logs, one-minute papers and/or periodic reflective writing after each major writing task. There are also many tried-and-tested tools that have been used by practitioners to guide and encourage students to reflect effectively. Some of these include:

■ *Defining Reflection.* As discovered in a study examining students' attitudes toward self-evaluation, limited or no understanding of reflective processes may impede learners' willingness to engage

in that process and may create unnecessary barriers (Ross, Rohl-heiser and Hogaboam-Gray 2000, cited in Rohelheiser, Bower and Stevahn, 2000: 40). One way to overcome these problems is to provide a simple, clear definition of reflection and the reasons it is relevant to students and their learning. For example, the following definition could be given to students: 'Reflection: ideas or conclusions that are a result of your thinking your work. These ideas are connected to specific criteria and may help you to deter-mine future goals and actions.'

Students are then invited to generate words or images that come to mind when they think about reflection. A brainstorming list or mind map could be created to launch a discussion about why reflection is important for learners and their learning.

- ■ *Modelling.* As much of what we learn is through modelling, students need opportunities to observe others, especially teach-ers, model new reflective skills. The information students gain from observations serves as a guide for their own reflective actions. Some ways of modelling the reflection process are as follows:

> - Choose a meaningful reflection from your own professional or personal life to share with students. Ask students to identify the important features of the reflection.
> - Choose two anonymous short reflections written by former students or students from another class. Have students compare and contrast these reflections to identify the characteristics of higher-quality reflections.
> - Choose a weak reflective sample and have the class brainstorm ways to make it a stronger reflection.
>
> Rolheiser, Bower and Stevahn (2000: 41)

- ■ *Completing Reflective Statements.* Students who are new to reflec–tive writing often have trouble getting started. To help them jump-start their writing, a set of incomplete statements are given to them to complete. The sentences are actually writing prompts as exem-plified in the following list:

Completing Reflective Statements

I thought………………………but ……………………..
I believed that ………………..
I always assumed that ………………….
I feel/felt that ………………..
I realized that ……………………
I imagined ……………………
My views on ……………………….have been ………………….
It surprised me to find out that ………………………………
…………caused me to wonder about ……………..and that led me to………
……..is important to me because ……
………..has affected the way I think/feel about …….

Adapted from Jones and Shelton (2006: 63)

- ■ *Reflective Prompts.* Another tool students found helpful when writing their reflections is 'Where I started—Where I am—What's next?' This set of prompts can be used to help students engage in professional literature, and make sense of it in their individual contexts (Jones and Shelton 2006: 61).

- ■ *Reflection Checklists.* Students are guided in reflection activities after each major writing assignment by means of checklists. In 'The Art of Academic Writing', the self-reflection checklists are designed with the aim of prodding students to ponder over problems they might have encountered within a particular genre of writing. For instance, after writing a review paper, the following checklist is given to students to guide their reflection on how they document prior research, and on the importance of acknowledging sources and avoiding plagiarism.

Self-reflection Checklist

- • What are your views on plagiarism?
- • What strategies did you use in order to meet the four Cs of citations: courtesy, collegiality, context and cooperation?
- • What particular problems did you encounter whilst writing this review paper?
- • What do you think is the relevance of this writing to your other courses?

■ *Reflective Journals/Weblogs.* The process of learning is even more powerful when the teacher gives students opportunities throughout the course to engage in reflective dialogue and self-assessment. Two mechanisms for doing so during the course are one-minute papers and periodic reflective writing in a course journal or on a weblog. At the end of a class session, the teacher might ask students to reflect and write for one minute on several questions:

- How might you use what you have learned thus far in the course (or after the course is over)?
- What idea did you find most interesting or exciting? Which most puzzling?
- What was most helpful to your learning? What was not helpful?
- What other ways might you have tried to learn what you needed to learn?

The tools proposed in this section are by no means exhaustive but are meant to be used as jump-start activities to promote self-reflection among novice writers. More creative tasks may be designed taking into account the profile and needs of the students. As writing practitioners and teachers, the ultimate goal is to incorporate such self-reflection prompts in the syllabus and to use them regularly until self-reflection comes naturally to the students.

Conclusion

In this paper on self-reflection, the two main objectives were to identify the communicative competencies learnt by the students and to suggest ways in which they could strengthen their self-reflections. The findings show that the four areas of improvement indicated in the student reflections are linguistic (96%), cognitive (91%), social (73%) and affective (100%). This paper has shown that 'reflection clarifies and expresses that which lies beneath the surface of student practice. The unseen forces— values and beliefs—when known and shared become powerful tools in strengthening student practice by making it more informed and intentional' (Jones and Shelton 2006). In conclusion, it is evident that reflection is the key to independent learning and learner autonomy. Once students get into the habit of probing what lies beneath their writing practices and the writing product, they are well on their way to becoming better writers.

REFERENCES

Danielson, C., and L. Abrutyn
    1997   *An Introduction to Using Portfolios in the Classroom* (Association for Super-vision and Curriculum Development; Alexandria, Virginia).

Fink, L.D.
    2003   *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).
    2004   'Learning Portfolios: A Powerful Tool for Enhancing Course Design', in J. Zubizarreta, *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning* (Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development; Alexandra, VA): 92-99.

Johns, A.M.
    1993   'The Portfolio Approach: Integrating Writing Goals, Curriculum and Assess-ment—An Introduction', *Language & Communication Review, A STETS Publication, Issue No. 2.*

Jones, M., and M. Shelton
    2006   *Developing your Portfolio: Enhancing your Learning and Showing your Stuff* (New York: Routledge).

Lucas, R.I.G.
    2007   'A Study on Portfolio Assessment as an Effective Student Self-evaluation Scheme', paper presented at the *42nd RELC International Seminar*, 23-25 April, 2007 (Unpublished manuscript).

Rolheiser, C., B. Bower and L. Stevahn
    2000   *The Portfolio Organizer: Succeeding with Portfolios in your Classroom* (Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development; Alexandra, VA).

Zubizarreta, J.
    2004   *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning* (Bolton, MA: Anker).