

REFLECTIVE JOURNALS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORTING EARLY-CAREER ACADEMICS

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Abstract: Reflective practice is increasingly recognized as a fundamental competence for the professional development of university teachers and for enhancing the quality of higher education teaching. Drawing on Donald Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner and on European policies promoting continuous professional development, this paper examines the value of reflective journals as tools for Faculty Development. Based on a review of the pedagogical literature, the study proposes a semi-structured reflective journal model designed for early-career academics, organized into three progressive levels of reflection and supported by University Teaching and Learning Centers. The model aims to foster self-analysis, critical interpretation of teaching experiences, and the redesign of educational practices, highlighting the role of Teaching and Learning Centers as facilitators of professional growth and teaching quality enhancement. Although still at a theoretical and developmental stage, the proposed model offers a potential methodological framework for promoting reflective practice and pedagogical innovation in the professional development of university teachers.

Keywords: reflective practice; reflective journals; teaching professionalism; faculty development

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, the teaching profession has undergone profound transformations driven by the social, cultural, and technological changes that characterize contemporary educational systems. Within this evolving context, teachers are increasingly required to develop the ability to critically analyze and reinterpret their professional practice. Reflective practice has therefore become a central component of teachers' professional identity, emerging as an essential competence for addressing educational complexity and promoting effective teaching and learning processes (Schön, 1983; Perrenoud, 2002). European educational policies have likewise assigned growing importance to teachers' professional reflection. The Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning identifies the competence of *learning to learn* as fundamental for personal and professional development, emphasizing its close connection with processes of self-assessment and continuous improvement (European Commission, 2018). At the same time, in many European countries, including Italy, teachers' continuous professional development has become an institutional requirement aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching through lifelong learning opportunities and systematic reflection on professional practice (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). The centrality of reflective practice is further emphasized in the documents of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, which describes reflective teachers as professionals capable of collaborating with colleagues, valuing diversity, and continuously adapting their educational practices to students'

needs (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022). Similarly, the findings of the TALIS surveys highlight that collaborative reflection and professional dialogue contribute not only to improving teaching effectiveness but also to teachers' professional well-being by increasing job satisfaction and helping to prevent stress and burnout (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2020). Within this framework, reflective practice can be understood as a situated process that integrates cognitive, emotional, and operational dimensions, enabling teachers to critically examine their professional experience and consciously guide their educational actions. Building on these theoretical premises, this paper explores the value of reflective journals as professional development tools capable of fostering a reflective, critical, and socially responsible teaching professionalism.

2. Reflective Practice in the Teaching Profession: Theoretical Perspectives

The concept of reflectivity has occupied a central position in the pedagogical debate on teacher education and professional development for several decades. Although interpreted in different ways by different scholars, reflectivity is generally understood as the ability to critically examine one's professional experience in order to attribute meaning to it, generate new knowledge, and guide the improvement of educational practice. One of the main theoretical references is John Dewey (Dewey, 2003), who defines reflective thinking as an active, persistent, and careful process of examining beliefs and knowledge in light of the reasons that support them and the consequences to which they lead. According to Dewey, reflection arises from uncertainty and doubt and functions as a means through which individuals address problematic situations by constructing meaning through experience. Reflectivity therefore assumes a fundamentally educational function, as it enables lived experience to be transformed into learning. Building upon these foundations, Donald Schön (Schön, 1983); (Schön, 1987) introduced the concept of the reflective practitioner. Criticizing the model of technical rationality, according to which professionals simply apply theoretical knowledge to practical problems, Schön argues that many professional situations are characterized by uncertainty, uniqueness, and conflicts of values. In such contexts, teachers engage in processes of *reflection-in-action*, namely reflection occurring during action, and *reflection-on-action*, which develops subsequently through the analysis of experience. Reflectivity thus becomes the capacity to learn from action and to construct professional knowledge through practice itself. Philippe Perrenoud (Perrenoud, 2001); (Perrenoud, 2002) considers reflective practice to be one of the fundamental competencies of the teaching profession. He distinguishes occasional reflection from reflective practice understood as a permanent professional habitus. According to Perrenoud, reflective teachers develop the ability to critically observe their own actions, analyze professional routines, and transform everyday experience into opportunities for learning and professional development. Within the Italian pedagogical context, Nuzzaci (Nuzzaci, 2011) proposes a particularly significant conceptual distinction between *reflective attitude*, *reflective practice*, and *reflectivity*. Reflectivity is defined as a deliberate and intentional cognitive process that enables professionals to attribute meaning to their experience and promote changes in educational practice. Reflective practice, on the other hand, represents the operational implementation of this process through strategies, procedures, and tools that support the analysis of educational action. According to the author, reflectivity constitutes one of the central elements of teacher professionalization, as it fosters autonomy, responsibility, and the ability to learn from experience. Mortari (Mortari, 2003) also assigns a fundamental role to reflection, considering it the prerequisite for learning from experience. According to her perspective, experience does not automatically generate knowledge; rather, it requires a process of reflective elaboration that enables individuals to interpret lived events and construct new professional meanings. From this perspective, reflectivity assumes a transformative function, allowing teachers to gain a deeper

understanding of their own practice and to consciously orient future educational choices. More recently, Oliverio (Oliverio, 2022) has linked reflectivity to the development of professional judgment. The author argues that the teaching profession is characterized by continuous educational and decision-making dilemmas that cannot be addressed through standardized procedures alone. Reflection therefore becomes an indispensable condition for developing forms of critical and complex thinking capable of supporting teachers in interpreting problematic situations and constructing context-sensitive educational responses. Across these theoretical perspectives, a shared understanding of reflectivity emerges as a dynamic process connecting experience, thought, and action. Despite their different emphases, these authors agree that teacher professionalism is not built exclusively through the acquisition of theoretical knowledge but through the continuous critical interpretation of professional experience. Reflectivity therefore represents a transversal competence that supports the construction of professional identity, the improvement of teaching practice, and the development of a form of professionalism capable of responding consciously to the challenges of contemporary education. The theoretical perspectives discussed above converge in recognizing reflectivity as an essential component of teacher professionalism. From Dewey to Schön, and from Perrenoud to Mortari, the common assumption is that educational experience becomes genuinely formative only when subjected to processes of critical analysis and meaning-making. However, the literature highlights that professional reflection does not constitute a spontaneous or automatically acquired practice, particularly during the early stages of a teaching career. On the contrary, systematic reflection requires time, awareness, and tools capable of supporting teachers in observing, documenting, and interpreting their practice. Several studies have shown that instruments such as portfolios, professional autobiographies, teaching journals, and reflective writing can foster the development of metacognitive and professional competencies by connecting theory with practice and transforming experience into learning. In particular, the reflective journal has proven to be one of the most effective tools for promoting self-assessment, professional awareness, and the redesign of educational practice. The literature indicates that its effectiveness is particularly significant when reflection is supported by prompts and guiding questions capable of progressively orienting teachers in the analysis of their experience (Moon, 2006); (Dymont, 2011). More structured reflective tools appear to facilitate, especially among less experienced professionals, the transition from the simple description of events to a critical understanding of the decisions made, the emotions experienced, and possible future actions (Boud, 2001). This evidence is further confirmed by more recent studies on reflective journals in teacher education, which show that the presence of guiding questions and structured sections promotes deeper and more systematic reflection, strengthening the connection between theoretical preparation and everyday practice while supporting the professional development of novice teachers.

3. The diversity of reflective journals

Professional reflection requires tools capable of supporting teachers in observing, documenting, and critically interpreting their professional experience. Among these, the reflective journal represents one of the most widely adopted instruments in both initial teacher education and in-service professional development, owing to its capacity to foster experiential learning, self-assessment, and professional growth. However, the literature highlights that there is no single model of reflective journal; rather, there is a wide variety of tools that differ in terms of structure, purpose, and mode of implementation. Moon (Moon, 2006) defines the journal as a writing space that enables individuals to organize thoughts, experiences, and reflections within a structured framework, thereby promoting learning processes and professional development. Building on this definition, numerous studies have shown that reflective journals can take different forms depending on their educational objectives and

intended users. A first distinction concerns the degree of structure of the instrument. Some journals are conceived as open-ended tools characterized by free and unguided writing, in which teachers record events, thoughts, and emotions they consider significant. Others, by contrast, adopt a more structured format through guiding questions, self-assessment rubrics, observation indicators, and sections dedicated to specific dimensions of professional practice. According to Bassot (Bassot, 2015), highly structured journals are particularly effective in initial teacher education contexts, as they gradually help teachers develop reflective competencies and deepen their critical thinking skills. Particularly noteworthy is the proposal developed by Ukrop, Švábenský, and Nehyba (Ukrop, 2019), who designed a semi-structured reflective journal for early-career university teachers. The authors distinguish reflective journals according to three main criteria: their internal structure, the number of contributors involved, and the medium used. Regarding structure, they point out that journals may be organized through standardized questions, contextualized prompts, observation sheets, rubrics, or open writing spaces. Furthermore, they argue that novice teachers benefit most from guided tools capable of progressively supporting the reflective process. An especially innovative feature of Ukrop and colleagues' proposal concerns the developmental nature of the journal. The guiding questions do not remain constant over time but evolve progressively throughout the semester, accompanying teachers from reflections initially focused on lesson management and classroom interactions toward more complex analyses related to assessment practices, student feedback, and professional development. From this perspective, the journal does not merely serve a documentary function but becomes an authentic educational tool capable of fostering professional growth through guided and increasingly sophisticated reflection. The literature also highlights the existence of individual, dialogic, and collaborative journals. In the former, reflection remains the exclusive domain of the author; in the latter two, tutors, supervisors, or colleagues actively participate in the reflective process through feedback, comments, and opportunities for discussion. This distinction reflects a conception of reflection that is not only individual but also social, in which professional dialogue contributes to the construction of shared meanings. Another important distinction concerns the medium employed. Alongside traditional paper journals, electronic portfolios, blogs, collaborative digital environments, and multimedia tools have increasingly been adopted, enabling teachers to document and share their professional experiences through different formats. Although technological innovations expand opportunities for reflection and documentation, the literature emphasizes that the effectiveness of reflective journals depends primarily on the quality of the guiding questions and on their ability to support critical analysis of professional experience. Differences among journal models also concern their educational purposes. Some devices primarily focus on documenting teaching activities and collecting professional evidence, whereas others serve mainly autobiographical and self-developmental functions. Goracci, Borgi, and De Santis (Goracci, 2023) highlight how teachers' journals can become valuable instruments for documenting and analyzing educational practice, supporting subsequent processes of reflection and instructional redesign. Benelli and Broglia (Broglia, 2024), on the other hand, emphasize their transformative dimension, underlining the role of reflective writing in the construction of professional identity and the development of educational awareness. Similarly, Mardešić (Mardešić, 2015) identifies reflective journals as particularly effective tools for promoting self-assessment and professional development in initial teacher education.

The analysis of the literature therefore shows that reflective journals may take very different forms while maintaining a common purpose: making teachers' professional thinking visible and transforming everyday experience into an opportunity for learning. The diversity of existing models suggests that no universally valid structure exists; rather, the design of reflective journals should be consistent with the educational needs of their users and the objectives they are intended to achieve. In particular, for early-career teachers it appears

necessary to develop tools that, while allowing room for personal reflection, provide sufficiently structured guidance to support the gradual construction of reflective professionalism. This need constitutes the rationale underlying the model proposed in the following section.

4. Reflective journals as tools for supporting teachers' professional transitions

Professional transitions represent particularly significant moments in the construction of teachers' professional identity, as they involve processes of change, role redefinition, and the re-elaboration of one's representations of teaching. Entering the university teaching profession, as well as assuming new educational responsibilities, constitutes a period of discontinuity that requires teachers to integrate previous experiences, new competencies, and institutional expectations into a renewed professional identity. The pedagogical literature highlights that every transition can be interpreted as a formative process in which individuals are called upon to establish continuity between their past experiences and new developmental perspectives, transforming change into an opportunity for learning and growth (Dewey, 1938); (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012); (Casotti, 2026). From this perspective, reflective journals play a particularly significant role, as they provide a space for narrating, interpreting, and re-elaborating professional experience. Through systematic writing, teachers are able to make sense of lived events, recognize ongoing transformations, and establish connections between previous experiences and new educational challenges. Autobiographical reflection fosters greater awareness of one's professional trajectory and attributes educational value even to situations characterized by uncertainty, error, or change, thus promoting the continuity of experience that Dewey (1938) identifies as the foundation of authentic educational processes. As Casotti (2026) argues, educating for transitions means supporting individuals in their ability to remain within the space between a "before" and an "after," transforming the inevitable discontinuities of professional life into opportunities for redesign and personal growth. Within this perspective, the reflective journal is not merely a tool for documenting experience but a pedagogical device capable of supporting teachers in interpreting the changes they experience, facilitating the development of a dynamic professionalism that is open to change and oriented toward lifelong learning. The use of reflective journals during periods of professional transition therefore appears particularly relevant for early-career university teachers, who are required to confront new teaching, organizational, and relational responsibilities. Reflective writing enables the transition into the profession to become more than a simple process of adaptation, transforming it into an authentic formative experience that supports the construction of a conscious professional identity and fosters the development of the critical, reflective, and planning competencies necessary to address the complexity of contemporary university teaching.

5. A proposal for a reflective journal model for early-career university teachers

The literature highlights that reflectivity represents an essential component of teachers' professional development and that reflective journals constitute one of the principal tools through which experiential learning, professional awareness, and the continuous improvement of teaching practice can be promoted (Moon, 2006; Dymont & O'Connell, 2011). However, the studies reviewed also demonstrate that professional reflection does not develop spontaneously and that, particularly during the early stages of a teaching career, teachers require structured tools capable of progressively guiding the observation, interpretation, and critical re-elaboration of their professional practice (Bassot, 2015; Ukrop, Švábenský & Nehyba, 2019). Building upon these considerations, the present contribution proposes a possible reflective journal model for early-career university teachers, conceived as a professional support device within a broader Faculty Development framework. The proposal is grounded in the belief that

reflective practice should not rely exclusively on the individual initiative of teachers but should instead be supported by methodologically structured tools and organizational contexts capable of fostering dialogue, learning, and professional growth. The model is situated within a perspective of continuous professional development in which reflective writing becomes an opportunity to critically analyze professional experience, attribute meaning to educational situations, and consciously redesign teaching practice. Consequently, the journal assumes a dual function: on the one hand, it supports individual processes of reflection and professional identity construction; on the other, it facilitates the identification of emerging professional development needs, contributing to the design of institutional Faculty Development initiatives that are more closely aligned with teachers' educational needs. The proposal draws inspiration from the developmental model developed by Ukrop, Švábenský, and Nehyba (Ukrop, Švábenský & Nehyba, 2019), according to which reflective prompts should progressively evolve over time, guiding teachers from an initially descriptive level of reflection toward increasingly interpretative and transformative forms of analysis. This approach has been revised and adapted to the Italian higher education context by introducing an additional innovative element: the involvement of University Teaching and Learning Centers as permanent structures for pedagogical support and the promotion of teaching quality. The model is intended for use during the first year of university teaching and is based on two closely interconnected components. The first consists of a progressive three-level reflective pathway that accompanies teachers through an increasingly sophisticated process of professional awareness and reflective competence. The second consists of the support provided by University Teaching and Learning Centers, whose role is to facilitate peer dialogue, pedagogical consultation, and the design of professional development opportunities aligned with the emerging needs identified through reflective practice. From this perspective, the reflective journal goes beyond its function as a simple personal writing tool and becomes an integrated professional development device capable of connecting individual reflection, collaborative learning, and institutional support.

5.1 Organization of the reflective levels

The proposed reflective journal is conceived as a dynamic professional development tool designed to support early-career university teachers throughout their first year of teaching. Its structure is based on the assumption that reflectivity is a competence that develops progressively through the systematic practice of observation, critical analysis, and the reinterpretation of professional experience (Moon, 2006; Bassot, 2015). For this reason, the model is organized into a three-level progression that guides teachers from predominantly descriptive reflection toward increasingly interpretative and transformative forms of reflection, in line with the approach proposed by Ukrop, Švábenský, and Nehyba (Ukrop, Švábenský & Nehyba, 2019). Beyond this temporal progression, the journal maintains a stable structure based on five reflective dimensions that accompany teachers throughout the entire process. These dimensions represent the principal areas through which teaching experience can be observed and interpreted, promoting a systematic and multidimensional reflection on educational practice. The first dimension concerns the planning of teaching activities and invites teachers to reflect on learning objectives, teaching methodologies, student engagement strategies, and the coherence between course design, implemented activities, and expected learning outcomes. The second dimension is devoted to the documentation of experience through the recording of significant episodes, critical incidents, relational dynamics, and particularly meaningful situations emerging during teaching activities. The third dimension constitutes the core of the journal and is oriented toward the critical analysis of practice, guiding teachers in interpreting their pedagogical choices and understanding their effects on students' learning processes. The fourth dimension focuses on the construction of professional

identity by encouraging reflection on pedagogical beliefs, emotions experienced, challenges encountered, and competencies progressively developed through university teaching. Finally, the fifth dimension is dedicated to professional development, leading teachers to identify professional learning needs, improvement goals, and possible future pathways for growth. The first level, corresponding to the initial months of teaching activity, is primarily oriented toward the observation and description of professional experience. During this phase, the journal performs a documentary function, enabling teachers to systematically record what occurs during their lessons, paying attention to classroom management, interactions with students, teaching strategies employed, and any particularly effective or problematic situations. The objective is to foster greater awareness of teaching practice and to build a professional memory of lived experiences by making explicit aspects of teaching that often remain implicit within everyday academic life. The second level guides teachers toward a more interpretative form of reflection. The simple description of events progressively gives way to the analysis of pedagogical decisions and their consequences for students' learning processes, fostering a critical interpretation of teaching practice. Teachers are encouraged to question the reasons underlying their methodological choices, the observable evidence of student learning, the relational dynamics that developed in the classroom, and the pedagogical beliefs that influence their way of teaching. At this stage, the journal promotes the construction of professional judgment by encouraging a continuous dialogue between experience, educational theory, and teaching practice. The third level is oriented toward the transformation of practice and the planning of future professional development. Reflective prompts become increasingly complex and guide teachers in reinterpreting their overall professional journey by connecting accumulated experience with the ongoing construction of their professional identity. Reflection focuses on the effectiveness of adopted strategies, innovations introduced into teaching practice, pedagogical competencies developed, and areas requiring further professional investment. The journal thus becomes a tool for redesigning educational practice and intentionally planning future professional growth, fostering a perspective of continuous improvement in the quality of university teaching. The progressive organization of these three reflective levels therefore accompanies teachers along a pathway of increasing reflectivity, in which writing represents not merely a form of documenting experience but also a powerful instrument for professional learning, identity construction, and the development of increasingly conscious and intentional pedagogical competencies.

5.2 The role of university teaching and learning centers in the proposed model

The most innovative element of the proposed model, compared with the reflective tools described in the literature, concerns the role assigned to University Teaching and Learning Centers. In most documented experiences, the reflective journal is conceived as an individual tool or as a device shared with a tutor or mentor, primarily aimed at supporting personal reflection and the supervision of professional development (Moon, 2006); (Ukrop, Švábenský & Nehyba, 2019). In the model proposed here, however, the reflective journal is embedded within a broader institutional Faculty Development strategy, in which individual reflection is integrated with pedagogical support, collaborative learning, and organizational development (Bassot, 2015). University Teaching and Learning Centers therefore assume a facilitative and supportive role, without any evaluative function. Their purpose is to create protected spaces for dialogue in which teachers can critically reinterpret their professional experience, share challenges and successful practices, and transform individual reflection into opportunities for professional growth (Moon, 2006). In this perspective, the reflective journal becomes the starting point of a professional support pathway that connects personal experience with the professional learning opportunities offered by the institution. The activities promoted by the Centers develop in parallel with the three levels of the reflective journal. At the end of the first

level, characterized by predominantly descriptive reflection, the Center organizes feedback sessions aimed at supporting teachers in revisiting their initial teaching experiences, facilitating the identification of emerging professional development needs and the main challenges encountered in classroom management. At this stage, introductory workshops may be offered on university course design, classroom management, educational relationships, and effective communication, with particular attention to non-verbal communication, proxemics, voice management, and relational dynamics, aspects that the literature identifies as closely related to teaching effectiveness and the construction of teacher professionalism. The second stage of support, scheduled after the interpretative level of the journal, is primarily oriented toward the critical analysis of teaching practice. Problematic situations and significant episodes emerging from teachers' reflections may be transformed into case studies and discussed collectively through workshop-based methodologies that encourage the comparison of different perspectives. The objective is to provide participants with multiple pedagogical, didactic, and communicative interpretations of the situations encountered, while valuing both shared professional experience and evidence derived from educational research. Within this context, active learning methodologies, classroom simulations, collaborative problem solving, role-playing activities, and guided case discussions enable teachers to experiment with alternative strategies for addressing the challenges that emerged during their teaching practice, fostering increasingly sophisticated reflective and decision-making competencies. During the third level, oriented toward the transformation of practice and the planning of future professional development, the Center assumes a role of guidance and personalized pedagogical consultation. Through individual meetings and professional planning sessions, teachers are supported in defining a professional development plan consistent with the competencies acquired, the remaining learning needs, and the objectives for improving their teaching practice.

At the same time, the Center supports the development of a teaching portfolio in which the main evidence emerging from the reflective journal, completed professional development activities, innovations introduced into teaching practice, and future professional goals are documented, thus enhancing reflective documentation as a lifelong learning tool. The information collected through the journals, when appropriately aggregated and anonymized, may also constitute a valuable source of evidence for the design of institutional Faculty Development initiatives. The analysis of recurring professional development needs enables the Centers to plan educational activities that are more closely aligned with teachers' actual needs, contributing to the development of a culture of teaching quality based on listening to professional experience and valuing reflective practice.

To encourage active participation, the model also includes a system for recognizing professional development that is intended not as a reward or evaluation mechanism but as a formative and documentary process. The continuous completion of the reflective journal, participation in the activities organized by the Center, and the achievement of professional development goals may all contribute to the construction of the teacher's personal professional portfolio, documenting the Faculty Development pathway undertaken during the early years of the academic career. For teachers who are interested, the Center may also facilitate participation in communities of practice, research groups on university teaching, and advanced professional development initiatives, expanding opportunities for collaborative learning and professional dialogue while helping to reduce forms of professional isolation that the literature identifies as potential barriers to teachers' professional development (Dussault, 1999). The reflective journal therefore goes beyond its function as a simple writing or self-assessment tool and becomes an integrated professional development device capable of connecting individual reflection, pedagogical support, and institutional guidance. University Teaching and Learning Centers become the core of a continuous Faculty Development process in which reflectivity

represents not only a personal practice but also a strategic lever for improving the quality of university teaching and fostering an academic community oriented toward innovation, lifelong learning, and the development of a reflective, critical, and quality-oriented teaching professionalism.

6. Reflective journals within the framework of quality assurance in university teaching

Recent developments in the Quality Assurance (QA) system of higher education have placed increasing emphasis on the enhancement of teaching quality and the professional development of university teachers. In particular, the AVA 3 model (*Self-assessment, Periodic Evaluation and Accreditation*), promoted by ANVUR, calls upon Italian universities to implement structured actions supporting teaching innovation and the pedagogical development of academic staff, recognizing Faculty Development as one of the key components of quality assurance processes (ANVUR, 2023). Within this framework, the availability of tools capable of documenting and supporting teachers' professional development pathways becomes particularly relevant. Reflective journals may represent a valuable instrument in this perspective, as they allow evidence to be collected regarding the development of teaching competencies while documenting professional learning experiences and innovations in teaching practice. Their adoption is fully consistent with the philosophy of continuous improvement promoted by the AVA system, which encourages higher education institutions to develop systematic mechanisms for monitoring, self-evaluation, and the enhancement of teaching quality. The relevance of such tools is further reinforced by the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG 2015), which emphasize that higher education institutions should provide appropriate opportunities for the professional development of academic staff and foster a quality culture grounded in reflection, innovation, and the continuous improvement of educational processes (ENQA, 2015). From this perspective, the reflective journal can be interpreted as a tool capable of integrating individual professional development needs with institutional quality assurance strategies, contributing to making Faculty Development processes more systematic, transparent, and evidence-based within universities. The growing attention devoted to teaching quality and to the enhancement of the pedagogical competencies of academic staff therefore makes the introduction of structured reflective tools particularly timely, as they can complement traditional professional development activities while providing valuable evidence for both individual teachers and higher education institutions within accreditation procedures and continuous quality enhancement processes.

7. Conclusions and future perspectives

The growing attention devoted by both national and international literature to reflectivity confirms that it represents an essential component of teachers' professional development and a fundamental condition for improving the quality of university teaching. As extensively discussed throughout this contribution, the reflective journal emerges as a valuable tool for fostering processes of self-analysis, experiential learning, and the construction of an increasingly conscious professional identity, particularly when reflective writing is supported by structured devices and pedagogical support contexts. Building upon these theoretical premises, this paper has outlined a proposal for a reflective journal model designed for early-career university teachers, structured around three progressive levels of reflection and integrated into the activities of University Teaching and Learning Centers. The distinctive feature of the proposed model lies in overcoming an exclusively individual conception of reflection by recognizing the Centers as key actors in pedagogical support and professional development through educational consultation, peer dialogue, training workshops, and the design of Faculty Development initiatives aligned with teachers' emerging professional needs.

It should be emphasized that the model presented here is still at a theoretical and design stage and does not yet constitute an empirically validated instrument. For this reason, the present contribution does not include operational appendices or a definitive version of the reflective journal, since its purpose is not to propose a finalized tool but rather to offer a theoretical and methodological framework that can be further refined, adapted, and tested across different academic contexts. Future research will focus on the operational development of the instrument, the definition of guiding questions for each reflective level, and its implementation within University Teaching and Learning Centers in order to evaluate its effectiveness in promoting reflective practice, professional development, and innovation in university teaching. It will also be valuable to explore the potential of the reflective journal as a connecting device between teachers' individual professional development needs and the institutional planning of Faculty Development initiatives, thereby contributing to the development of a culture of teaching quality grounded in systematic reflection and continuous improvement. At a time when university education sometimes risks being reduced to the acquisition of technical competencies alone, the reflective journal redirects attention to the most authentic dimension of teaching professionalism: the capacity to critically question one's own educational practice and to attribute meaning to lived experience. As Schön (Schön, 1983) reminds us, the reflective practitioner constructs professional knowledge through action and through reflection on action, transforming experience into professional learning. Perhaps it is precisely within the silent pages of a journal, among notes, doubts, successes, and challenges emerging from everyday teaching, that the most profound transformation takes shape: a transformation that concerns not only what teachers know how to do, but above all what they choose to become. Within this ongoing process of growth and transformation lie new perspectives for research and pedagogical innovation, in which reflectivity may become a strategic lever for rethinking Faculty Development and promoting university teaching that is increasingly reflective, inclusive, and oriented toward meaningful learning.

Acknowledgement

This paper is the result of the collaborative work and shared reflection of all the authors. Nevertheless, Lucia Mentore is responsible for the drafting of Sections 1, 2, 3, 5, 5.1, and 5.2; Noemi Russo for Section 4; Simone Campanella for Section 6; Luca Refrigeri for Section 7. All authors contributed to the final version of the manuscript and approved its content.

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