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Implementing reflexivity in teacher education: Feedback and suggestions from student voices

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Abstract

In an increasingly globalised world, Religion and Worldviews education (RWE) is tasked with fostering knowledge and competencies for mutual understanding, equity, and inclusion. Reflexivity, promoted for recognising preconceptions and biases, is widely advocated in RWE research, yet conceptualisations vary, empirical studies are limited, and guidance on how to teach it is scarce. This design-based research (DBR) project developed a low-cost reflexivity workshop for prospective RWE teachers to explore reflexivity. The workshop was iteratively implemented at four different Norwegian universities, evaluated and refined between iterations, with each participant experiencing one session. This paper reports students' feedback with their experiences and perceived learning outcomes and develops recommendations for reflexive practice in RWE teacher education. Data comprised 76 written responses and semi-structured interviews with 11 participants. Reflexivity is positioned as a subject specific form of critical reflection, and student feedback is interpreted with reference to a framework for RWE and deep reflection. Findings indicate that reflexivity was activated but needs scaffolding. Recommendations are posed as design principles developed from the evaluation phase of the DBR trajectory, identifying DBR as a suitable approach to explore reflexivity and to connect theory and practice through iterative design and evaluation.

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Practitioner Notes

1. It is recommended that reflexivity be employed in RWE teacher education.
2. It is recommended that peer-group discussions be used in reflexive work.
3. It is recommended that students' exposure to diverse perspectives be prioritised when working reflexively in RWE teacher education.
4. Students unexpectedly foregrounded core teaching values; this may reflect early professional identity formation and warrants further investigation.
5. Design-based research is well suited to explore reflexivity, connect theory and practice, and develop transferable theory through iterative design and evaluation.

Keywords

Religion and worldviews education, reflexivity, critical reflection, design-based research

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Introduction

Knowledge about religious and worldviews diversity, and the skills to engage positively with that diversity, are widely considered essential components of education for the twenty-first century (UNESCO, 2015). In an increasingly globalised world, concerns about preparedness to navigate this landscape have prompted calls for *religious literacy*, understood as the knowledge and competencies needed to foster mutual understanding across differences (Halafoff et al., 2020; Seiple & Hoover, 2021). Across the Anglophone world, the place of religion and worldview in public education is contested. Whether or not it is offered as a designated school subject, the importance of religion and worldviews education in culturally diverse societies is widely recognised (Barb, 2021; Halafoff & Fitzpatrick, 2026; Valk & Tosun, 2016). In Europe, the significance of religion as an integral component of intercultural education has been acknowledged at the policy level since the early 2000s (Jackson, 2008, 2014). However, there is a growing concern that RWE can perpetuate social injustice by unequal distribution of perceived credibility and epistemic authority (Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2021, 2022; Strhan & Shillitoe, 2022). Reflexivity is considered essential for preparing teachers to engage sensitively with pupils of all backgrounds, to remain alert to mechanisms that may marginalise or silence their voices, and to navigate diverse knowledge structures (Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022; Shaw, 2023).

In teacher education, it is widely acknowledged that defining reflection is challenging (Harvey et al., 2016; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Rodgers, 2002). A complicating factor is that distinctions between reflection and reflexivity, another contested term, are sometimes blurred. Another layer of this complexity is that reflexivity appears to be the preferred term in RWE research, yet it is rarely defined (Kvia & Aukland, 2024). This study understands reflexivity as a subject specific form of critical reflection, drawing on educational research on reflection (Conway, 2001; Korthagen, 2004, 2014; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Nguyen et al., 2014). For clarity, this means the continued use of the term reflexivity to communicate with the RWE audience, while in terms of significance for a wider audience, it refers to critical reflection.

Critical reflection implies examination of consciously or unconsciously held assumptions and is thought of as a tool to explore, uncover and revise any types of assumptions, including political or moral values, biases, or perspectives, that may affect teaching and learning (Nguyen et al., 2014). Uncovering assumptions and making them explicit is often perceived as a first step in assumption revision that can ideally transform actions (Ryan, 2015). Reflexivity, as understood in this study, targets individuals' assumptions pertaining to religion and worldviews. Beyond RWE, it can be argued that reflexivity is important for any teacher in culturally diverse societies to minimise risks of perpetuating stereotypes in education and to support culturally responsive practice (Beauchamp, 2023).

Reflection and reflective practice are widely accepted and applied in teacher education, and the literature is rich concerning conceptualisations, taxonomies, and models for structuring reflection. However, in the context of RWE, there is a paucity of research discussing context specific application of reflexivity in teacher education. Considering that researchers have long suggested that contexts matter to what is achieved through reflective practice, this is an important discussion also for the RWE community (Cornish, 2024c; Harvey et al., 2016; Rogers, 2001). While a fundamental pedagogical assumption across the varieties of reflective practice is that reflection can be taught and learnt (Harvey et al., 2016), there have been concerns about how prospective

teachers engage with and experience reflective practices. For example, Korthagen (2004, 2014) raises concerns about the level of reflection reached by prospective teachers, which was also noted by Edwards-Groves and Gray (2008). In the latter study, students developed aversion to reflective activities, in part due to misconceptions about the nature and purpose of reflection (Edwards-Groves & Gray, 2008).

This paper is part of a research project exploring reflexivity in RWE teacher education. Adopting a DBR approach offered the project three opportunities: 1) to develop the reflexivity workshop to address and explore reflexivity in the RWE context, 2) to explore the design in authentic teaching settings through four cycles of design revisions, and 3) to develop design principles (Hanghøj et al., 2022). The reflexivity workshop was designed to activate and scaffold reflexivity with prospective teachers in RWE and was implemented in iterative cycles at four different Norwegian universities (N: 4). This implies one design implementation at each site with individual participants experiencing a single workshop session. Two publications from the project have already been disseminated, including a review article mapping reflexivity and related concepts in religious education research (Kvia & Aukland, 2024). The second publication reported on the reflexivity evidenced by workshop participants, identifying *basic* and *deep* reflexivity to conceptualise levels and discuss potentials of reflexivity (Kvia, 2025). In line with key ambitions of DBR, the overall research project does not primarily seek to demonstrate the merits of the reflexivity workshop but treats implementations as instruments to explore reflexivity in natural learning settings.

Several DBR researchers have noted the importance of developing theoretical insights with relevance beyond a particular empirical context (Bakker, 2018; Gundersen, 2021; McKenney & Reeves, 2019; van den Akker, 1999). While the term *design principles* has been introduced to characterise transferrable theoretical insights, there are inconsistent conceptualisations of the term (Gundersen, 2021). Generating transferrable theory from contextual empirical studies requires transparency and clarity considering the epistemic status of the proposed design principles (Bakker, 2018). The design principles suggested in this paper are not intended to be prescriptive, rather they are recommendations for the informed reader to consider and sensibly apply to their own contexts. They are substantiated by contextual data, and while they are conclusive in the sense that they constitute knowledge developed in this project, future studies may challenge, supplement, or verify the claims made here.

This current paper develops design principles informed by aggregated student feedback generated across the four cycles of design implementations, prior project outputs, and theory. Understanding students' experiences of reflexivity in the context of RWE is valuable for investigating perceived learning outcomes, but it is equally important due to sensitive nature of the content. Boud and Walker (1998) observed that any application of reflection of reflective practice should attend to and protect learners' personal integrity. Reflective activities in this study implied examining personal worldview and discussing interpretations of 360-VR videoclips from religious communities vulnerable to prejudice. Examining assumptions about religion and worldviews accentuates the need for ethically responsible practice. The recommendations for practice proposed in this paper considers students' reported experiences and perceived learning outcomes and seeks to substantiate these theoretically through Shaw's (2019, 2022, 2023) *framework for worldview literacy*. Analysis of the student feedback identified students' normative statements as an unexpected perceived learning outcome, and its significance is discussed considering Korthagen's (2004, 2014) concept of *core reflection*. This study is theoretically

positioned within pragmatism, exploring best practice for reflexivity (Barab & Squire, 2004; Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Specifically, this study asks the following research questions:

1. What are prospective RWE teachers' perceived learning outcomes from participation in the reflexivity workshop?
2. What recommendations for practice emerge from prospective RWE teachers' reported experiences and perceived learning outcomes of the reflexivity workshop?

Literature

Understandings of reflection and critical reflection

Many authors have acknowledged Dewey (1933) as a major influence on the concept of reflection in teacher education (Cornish, 2024b; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Ryan, 2015). Yet, despite wide acceptance and implementation of reflective practices, multiple and shifting conceptualisations of the term prevail (Beauchamp, 2014). However, attempts to synthesise elements across definitions exist (Nguyen et al., 2014; Rogers, 2001). In an influential review, Rogers (2001) identified four common elements of reflection in literature from teacher education. Reflection is described as an active cognitive process that requires an “individual’s active engagement” including a “self-examination of viewpoints, reactions and suppositions” (Rogers, 2001, p. 41). Other common elements include how reflection is triggered by “challenging or difficult circumstances” and that reflection must include “self-examination of viewpoints, reactions and suppositions” and that these new understandings be incorporated into the “totality of the individual’s experience” (Rogers, 2001, p. 41). The elements correspond with Nguyen and colleagues’ (2014) proposed definition of reflection comprising five core components. The first core component is *thoughts and actions* indicating the content of reflection, the second core component states that the reflective process is *attentive, critical, exploratory and iterative*. Reflection is further differentiated from other forms of thinking by addressing *the conceptual frame* underlying thoughts and actions, stating *a view of change* as its purpose, and links reflection to *the self*. Both aggregated definitions emphasise reflection as a specific kind of thinking that is active and deliberate including a vision of change, for example learning from reflection and to improve future action. The five-component model (Nguyen et al., 2014) extends Rogers’ (2001) self-examination element and suggests that consciously and unconsciously held assumptions are vital to understanding why we perceive, think, feel, or act in specific ways.

In these conceptualisations, the potential for change of action or perspective are associated with some form of deep reflection. Some authors see reflection on underlying conceptual frames as inherently critical in nature (Jones, 2024, pp. 35, 37-38), while others see critical reflection as the understanding of oneself in a broader social and political context (Cornish, 2024c; Harvey et al., 2016). Korthagen (2004, 2014) proposed the concept of *core reflection* to denote this kind of deep reflection. Rooted in positive psychology, the core refers to personal qualities, such as compassion, sensibility, and creativity (Korthagen, 2014). In his ONION model, core features occupy the centre of the concentric structure, while professional motivation (mission) and identity constitute adjacent inner layers (Korthagen, 2004). Seeing personal and professional identities interconnected, teachers are encouraged to identify and focus on their inner strengths and

professional motivation to develop a synergetic relationship between their personal qualities and professional responsibilities (Korthagen, 2014).

Understandings of reflexivity

Conceptualisations of reflexivity vary by context encompassing sociological, philosophical, and methodological dimensions (Doyle, 2012). In qualitative research, reflexivity is presented as a distinguishing aspect (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2024). It involves accounting for the research context and critically examining and articulating the researchers' role and influence on the research (Creswell & Poth, 2024). As an analytical practice, it entails meta-reflection and awareness of the researcher's role in knowledge construction. Rather than neutralising the researcher's presence, reflexivity within an interpretive paradigm embraces it (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021; Finlay, 2002a, 2002b; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). According to Olmos-Vega and colleagues, reflexivity is:

a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes (2023, p. 242).

Researchers positioning themselves in relation to the research may include accounts of personal motivations as well as reflections on power dynamics in interpersonal relationships in the research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Reflexivity is, thus, intertwined with research ethics in the sense of ethical conduct and transparency in reporting the research (von Unger, 2021). Applied across the research process, reflexivity, in this sense, relates to research quality. However, in the educational context, it takes on a different meaning.

In educational discourse, reflexivity is often conflated with terms such as critical reflection and transformative reflection (Ryan, 2015). For Ryan (2015), reflexivity is the deliberate action following reflection, though others refrain from its use due to etymologic link to automatic thinking, a reflex (e.g. Cornish, 2024a). In the RWE context, Robert Jackson introduced reflexivity as a key concept of *the interpretive approach*, framing it as “the relationship between the experience of students and the experience of whose way of life they are attempting to interpret” (Jackson, 2008, p. 174). He delineates three pedagogical applications of reflexivity: *edification*, where learners critically reassess their own perspectives through engagement with others; critical engagement with *learning materials*; and a critical engagement with study methods including awareness of how religious traditions, groups, and individuals are represented (Jackson, 2008).

Since its introduction, reflexivity seems to have proliferated as a concept in RWE. It now features prominently in frameworks such as *worldview literacy* (Shaw, 2019, 2022, 2023), *epistemic literacy* (Stones & Fraser-Pierce, 2022), in the *RE-researchers approach* (Freathy & Doney, 2025), and is crucial in becoming *worldview conscious* (Flanagan, 2019, 2020, 2023). These frameworks conceptualise reflexivity as epistemic awareness, recognition of personal bias, and understanding of how individual worldviews shape the interpretation and representation of subject content. Within these framings, reflexivity is positioned as integral to the learning process. A salient question is whether reflexivity organically progresses through a dialogic and interpretive learning process or is best maintained through specific facilitation – this is the question that this study seeks to explore through the design and evaluation of a reflexivity workshop.

Teaching critical reflection

Reflection is widely recognised as a multi-layered process that presents significant challenges (Chan & Lee, 2021). Numerous theoretical models have been proposed to guide reflective practice in teacher education (e.g. Brookfield, 2017; Dewey, 1933; Jones, 2024; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Ryan, 2015; Schön, 1987). Teaching experience is the primary basis of reflecting in these models, prompting Conway's (2001) critique that they privilege retrospective reflection. In his expansion of van Manen's (1995) term *anticipatory thinking*, Conway (2001) argues that "looking back" (p. 90) is not limited to reviewing past events but involves an inward process examining both remembered and anticipated experiences. This inward turn allows individuals to gain reflective distance, enabling a deeper understanding of the meaning of their lived experiences and their relationship to the world (Conway, 2001).

Korthagen's (2004, 2014) ONION model integrates this inward and future-oriented perspective into core reflection, complementing his earlier ALACT model, which outlines five steps of reflective practice: action, looking back, awareness of essentials, creating alternatives, and trial (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2022). The ONION model focuses on the content of reflection, progressing through layers such as environment, behaviour, competencies, beliefs, identity, mission, and core. A supervisor's support to reach the deepest levels of reflection is central in Korthagen's approach (2014). Key tasks involve guiding reflection toward students' aspirations, their vision of ideal teaching, and fostering awareness of both their core qualities and internal barriers. The primary goal is not merely to address these barriers for more effective teaching but to promote a more holistic approach to reflection and teaching. According to the ONION model, teachers are driven by their aims (mission) and how their core qualities may be utilised to overcome challenges, ultimately cultivating a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in their teaching practice (Korthagen, 2014).

While most models for reflective practice emphasise reflecting on teaching experience, reflection can also be applied in subject-specific contexts (Harvey et al., 2016). In the RWE context, Shaw's (2023) *worldview literacy* framework foregrounds interconnections between subject content and reflexivity. Unlike Korthagen's pedagogically oriented model, Shaw's framework is conceptual to support worldview education (Shaw, 2023). Drawing on Jackson's (1997) interpretive approach, learning is framed as an interpretive and dialogical movement between subject contents and personal knowledge. Reflexivity emerges through this process as a dialectic movement between "the other" (subject content) and learners' fore-meanings, fostering epistemic awareness and enabling students to recognise their positionality and biases (Shaw, 2023, pp. 203–205). The framework positions subject content as a distinct source of reflection, a perspective employed in the reflexivity workshop. However, a specific emphasis on reflexivity and clear guidance for its practical implementation is often absent when it is embedded within broader theoretical models.

Reflexivity, as conceptualised in this paper and enacted in the workshop, is a form of reflection encompassing critical and iterative engagement with one's personal worldview. This process involves attentive and exploratory thinking that critically examines subjective assumptions and their influence on knowledge and action (Cornish, 2024a; Korthagen, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2014). The study employs worldview as an overarching term to capture a range of positionalities, identities, and lived experiences (Bråten, 2021; Bråten & Everington, 2018; Flanagan, 2020). Reflexivity in this context does not seek to change personal worldviews but to raise awareness of how these perspectives might shape interpretations of "religion" and specific religious traditions.

Developing theory through design- based research

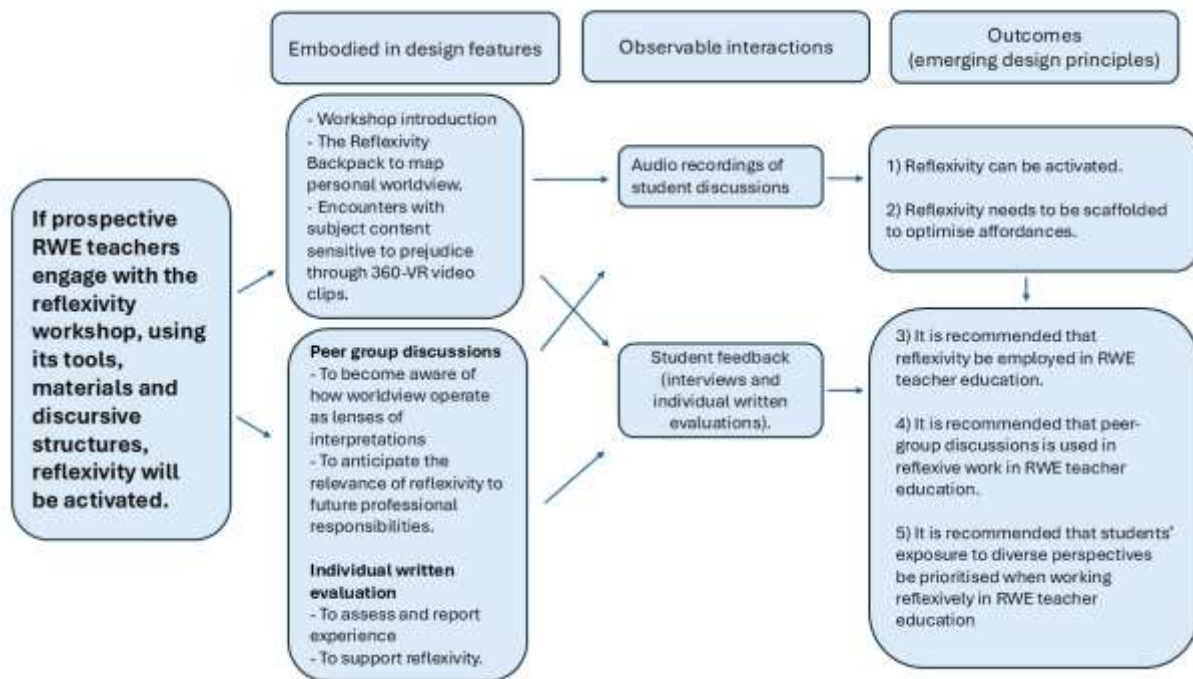
McKenney and Reeves (2019) suggest that DBR studies typically involve three phases: 1) analysis and exploration, 2) design and construction, and 3) evaluation and reflection. Across these phases the educational problem is increasingly understood, and initial design principles to address the problem are identified and refined. Design solutions to address the problem at hand are developed, and through their implementations in naturalistic settings both design solutions and design principles are refined through cycles of evaluation and reflection. While authors can disseminate results from any of these phases, the overall goal of DBR projects is to develop transferrable design principles for application to contexts beyond the specific empirical context (Kopcha et al., 2015). To meet this ambition, DBR is a pragmatic and flexible approach where researchers consider and apply research methods according to the interests and aims of each project.

DBR is therefore widely considered as a genre of research characterised by shared features rather than unified by a prescribed methodology, and researchers apply a range of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to build theoretical insights (McKenney & Reeves, 2019). While the DBR community has grappled with what constitutes DBR, authors have suggested some common features that often motivate or describe the approach (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Bakker, 2018; Campanella & Penuel, 2021). DBR is described as future oriented seeking to develop and explore new learning environments (Bakker, 2018; Campanella & Penuel, 2021). DBR is theoretically oriented in building on existing theory and knowledge when developing designs and in the commitment to developing theoretical understanding (McKenney & Reeves, 2019). DBR is also characterised by the intention of proposing theoretical insights and designs that are practical and useful to practitioners (Campanella & Penuel, 2021). While the field recognises shared features, Bakker (2018) describes these as commitments rather than a fixed protocol. However, most accounts converge on the centrality of iterative design enactments in naturalistic learning environments, organised through cycles of implementation, reflection, and revision (Gundersen, 2021).

Design implementations are therefore considered sites to test both design and their embedded theoretical hypothesis also referred to as initial design propositions (McKenney & Reeves, 2019). In this project, the hypothesis embedded in the design was that if students engage with the tools, materials, and discursive structures of the reflexivity workshop, they will activate reflexivity. Inspired by Sandoval's (2014) generalised *conjecture map* for educational designs, Figure 1 shows how this hypothesis was embodied in the design and the instruments employed to assess whether the design achieved what was anticipated.

Figure 1

Conjecture map for the reflexivity workshop



Anderson and Shattuck (2012) suggest that design principles do not represent decontextualised principles but rather indicate “the conditions in which they operate” (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012, p. 17). Delineating such conditions is thought to enable readers to assess the fit of these principles to their own contexts and to consider appropriate adaptations. In this sense, transferability is a shared responsibility: readers determine whether and how to transfer into new contexts while authors provide transparent accounts of how the design principles are developed and substantiated (McKenney & Reeves, 2019). The multi-campus dataset allows patterns to be identified, as well as context specific features, and intervention is treated as an instrument for investigating how reflexivity unfolds in naturalistic settings. Theoretical insight is developed by considering emerging implications for reflexive practice in teacher education. These recommendations are intended for teacher educators seeking to address assumptions about religion and worldviews to promote religious literacy, with readers encouraged to apply and adapt them sensibly to their own context.

Publishing DBR studies can imply focusing on distinct aspects of the empirical data or distinct phases, and details of the overall project may be difficult to include (Kopcha et al., 2015). It is beyond the scope of this current paper to provide a detailed account of the rationale for the design itself, how and why it was revised between each intervention, and the process of developing initial design propositions. The entire DBR trajectory of this project will be addressed in a future publication currently in progress.

Method

The research was approved by Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt) in 2022, adhering to established ethical standards and informed consent procedures. Participants were provided with information about the research through their digital course platform prior to participation in the reflexivity workshop, with this information reiterated in the workshop implementation. Written consent was obtained during the workshop, offering participants with options to consent to none, some, or all of the following: a) submitting written responses to an evaluation form, b) allowing audio-recording of group discussions conducted during the workshop, and c) participating in a follow-up interview.

Research context

Religion and Worldviews education in public schools is delivered either as a distinct subject or integrated into other disciplines (Nelson & Yang, 2023). In Europe it may be separative, aligned with confessional belonging, or integrative, with students from all backgrounds learning together (Alberts, 2010). The provision in Norway is integrative and non-confessional, with a general prohibition of proselytising effective for all school subjects (Education Act, 2024). In the Norwegian context, the designated subject *Knowledge of Christianity, Religion, Philosophy of life and Ethics* (CRLE) is mandatory for all students throughout primary and lower secondary public schools with limited opt-out options (Lomsdalen & von der Lippe, 2025). Teacher education is a five-year integrated master's degree programme, and many universities offer RWE as an elective course preparing prospective teachers for CRLE. Participants in this study were enrolled in such courses. While defined as a regular school subject, subject contents can be closely related to pupils' identities, and teachers need to be sensitive to learners and regulations.

The CRLE curriculum mandates that RWE topics should be taught in an "objective, critical, and pluralistic manner" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). However, visions of "objectivity" and "neutrality" as viable positions have been challenged (Franken & Loobuyck, 2016). Alternatively, *impartial teaching* has been proposed and suggests the non-discrimination of religions and worldviews in teaching and learning (Jackson & Everington, 2016). The notion of impartial teaching emphasises the necessity for RWE teachers to develop sensitivity, skills, and professional judgement, still, it does not present an easy solution (Jackson & Everington, 2016). Teaching RWE involves simplifying complex traditions, and a risk of perpetuating stereotypes in classroom representations (Beauchamp, 2023; Maegli, 2025). Structural challenges, such as secular hegemony in classroom discussions (Flensner, 2018) and the privileged status of Lutheran Christianity in the Scandinavian context, further complicate impartiality (Berglund, 2014; Lomsdalen & von der Lippe, 2025). Research indicates that assumptions may be shaped by personal experiences, belongings, and beliefs (Everington, 2012; Flanagan, 2023), mass media consumption (Weng & Halafoff, 2020), and exposure to polarizing discourses in prior RWE schooling (Toft, 2021; Lied & Toft, 2018). Reflexivity is intended to uncover and make explicit such assumptions and to assist teachers in recognising the variety of ontological perspectives voiced in their classrooms and in navigating conflicting truth claims, including their own (Beauchamp, 2023; Moyaert, 2019; Stones & Fraser-Pierce, 2022).

In this context, there is a need to investigate reflexivity in naturalistic empirical learning settings to understand how it unfolds in practice and how it can be taught. Accordingly, the reflexivity

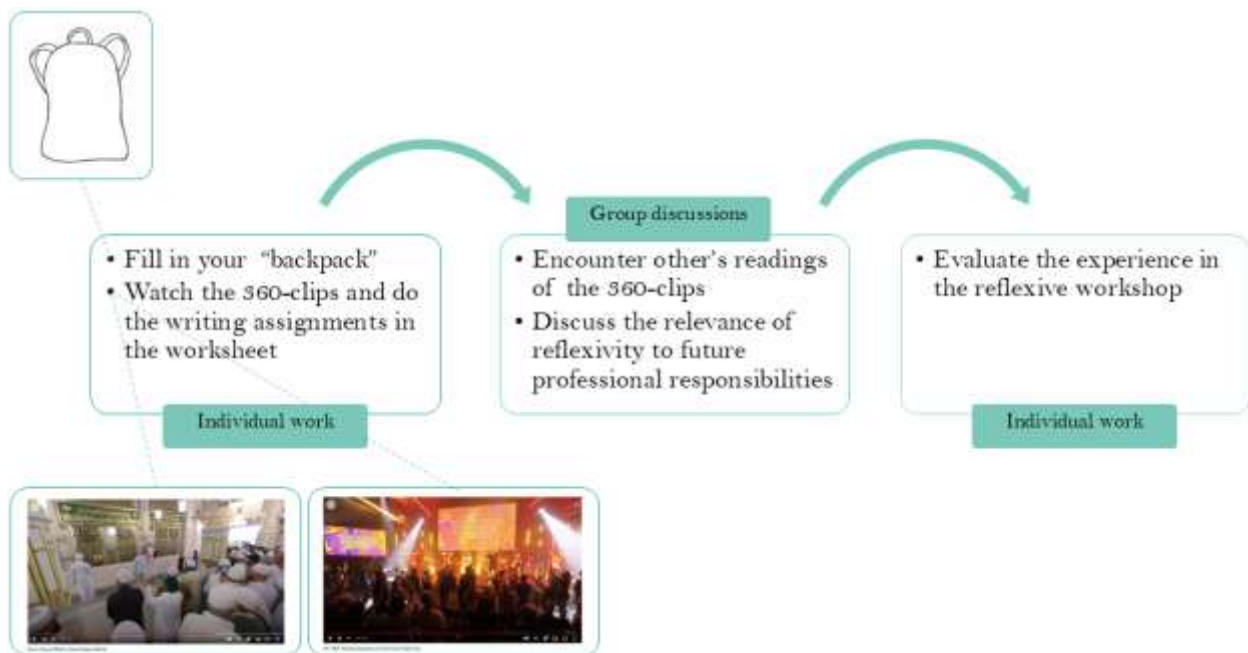
workshop was designed based on insights from the first phase of the DBR trajectory: reflexivity is widely recommended in RWE research; it is treated primarily as a theoretical construct; and guidance for its application in RWE teacher education is limited (Kvia & Aukland, 2024).

The reflexivity workshop design

The reflexivity workshop was designed to activate reflexivity by raising awareness of personal worldview as lenses of interpretation when engaging with two online 360-VR video clips. It provided an opportunity for participants to a) identify key aspects of their religious and worldview beliefs and belongings, b) examine how their worldview informed their interpretations of selected 360-VR video clips, c) engage in a peer group discussion focusing on how their worldview may have shaped their interpretations, and d) discuss and anticipate with peers the relevance of reflexivity to future professional responsibilities. Figure 2 below outlines the learning activities and illustrates the sequencing of tasks.

Figure 2

Workflow of the reflexivity workshop



A whole-class introduction to reflexivity focused on key concepts from Jackson's interpretive approach (1997), including *interpretation*, *representation*, and *reflexivity*, using curriculum examples relevant to the Norwegian context. Flanagan's (2019, 2023) research was also introduced, highlighting how personal worldviews influence teachers' subject content knowledge, and presented an ethical code of conduct to guide the group discussions that would follow.

Then, participants individually accessed an autobiographical task to support students in identifying elements of their personal worldview. A hand-drawn image of an empty backpack

featured in a printed booklet containing all the workshop tasks, and participants filled in their worldview elements before moving to the next task.

The subject content materials and the use of 360-VR technology were selected to provoke cognitive and affective responses, focusing on religious traditions vulnerable to prejudice in the Norwegian context: Islam and Christianity (Domaas, 2019; Makransky & Peterson, 2021; Toft, 2021). The first clip featured a walk through the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, showcasing its interior and visitors engaged in activities such as filming and taking selfies near what is thought to be the Prophet's grave. While open to multiple interpretations, these tourist-like behaviours were intended to challenge perceptions of the mosque solely as a site for prayer, creating an opportunity for a conceptual discussion of "religion". The second clip presented a contemporary Christian charismatic worship service resembling a pop-concert, with features like a stage, band and dynamic lighting. The clip offered a vibrant expression of Christianity with a youth appeal that could challenge stereotypes of Christians as dull or backward (Flensner, 2018). Related tasks involved examining potential relationships between worldview and interpretations of the two clips, first individually then in peer-group discussions. An embedded hypothesis was that some participants would be familiar with the contents of the clips, allowing workshop discussions to serve as encounters with diversity and opportunities for students to learn from each other, potentially supporting reflexivity (Shaw, 2023).

Peer-group discussions also incorporated anticipatory thinking (Conway, 2001), encouraging participants to imagine their future roles as RWE teachers while reflecting inwardly on how their (non)beliefs and experiences shaped their understanding of the religious communities.

The workshop concluded with participants completing the evaluation form, which asked them to reflect on various aspects of the workshop and report their perceived learning outcomes. The evaluation comprised of open-end questions framed as a reflective task for participants to assess whether the reflexivity workshop led to new insights about themselves and their worldview. Those who reported new insights were asked to describe them in detail whereas those who did not were asked to account for their overall workshop experience and explain why it did not yield shifts in understanding. Two check-all-that-apply multiple-choice items followed. The first asked which workshop activities helped to develop new insights, with options listening all workshop tasks. The second asked participants to consider the relevance of their worldview "backpack" as future CRLE-teachers. Response options listed relevant professional activities for example planning; in-the-moment teaching; evaluating own teaching; and relations with pupils. Finally, participants were asked: "What will you take with you from today's session, please provide a detailed answer".

Data generation

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to ensure the collection of relevant data (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The primary criteria for recruiting universities were their provision of RWE for prospective teachers, and students enrolled in such courses were eligible for participation. To achieve data variation and facilitate campus comparison, four universities from distinct regions in southern Norway were selected. Given the study's aim of using student perspectives to inform guidance for this context, maximizing participation opportunities was a key priority. Since RWE is an elective course in Norwegian teacher education, and introductory courses typically attract larger student cohorts than advanced courses, the study targeted entry-level courses.

The author utilised their professional network to identifying relevant course leaders, who were contacted via e-mail with information about the research and invitation to participate. In this process the course leaders acted as gatekeepers, facilitating access to the courses and connecting the researcher with potential participants (Creswell & Poth, 2024, p. 188). The author conducted the workshops as a guest lecturer, with participation in the research remaining voluntary and based on informed consent, as outlined above.

Semi-structured interviews were initially chosen as the primary method for understanding participants' perspectives on their workshop experience (Creswell & Poth, 2024, pp. 197-201). However, due to low recruitment in the first iteration, with only two interviews conducted, a written evaluation form was introduced in subsequent iterations, supplementing the data generation process. As a result, the data comprise of two semi-structured interviews from the first iteration, while the second through fourth iterations generated 76 written evaluation forms and nine additional semi-structured interviews. In this paper, the campuses where written evaluations were used, are referred to as campuses A, B, and C.

Both the post-session evaluation forms and interviews focused on participants' interactions with the workshop design, their overall experiences, as well as their perceived outcomes. This shift in data collection strategy reflects a pragmatic, multi-method approach aimed at effectively addressing the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

From a DBR perspective, the introduction of a written evaluation represents a deliberate design revision informed by insights from the first prototype iteration. Another design revision arose due to a scheduling change at campus C. Whereas the design implementations were delivered around mid-term at the first three cycles, the final workshop was delayed and conducted after only one week of teaching. At this early stage, students were still becoming acquainted with each other, their instructors, and course content. The reschedule of the fourth design implementation provided the opportunity to incorporate an emerging idea: the inclusion of a fabricated text representing an imagined Muslim response to the two 360-VR clips provided and discussed during the workshop. The rationale for this revision was to secure exposure to diverse perspectives to scaffold reflexivity.

Analytical approaches

Empirical data were generated during workshop implementations conducted between January 2023 and January 2024 in line with key DBR principles. Participants' written responses were manually entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and interview recordings were transcribed. Documents were subsequently uploaded to NVivo software for *stepwise-deductive induction*, a qualitative analysis strategy (Tjora, 2018).

To prioritise participants' voice and postpone the introduction of the researcher's analytical perspectives, an inductive analytical strategy was employed (Denzin et al., 2024, pp. 108-109; Tjora, 2018, pp. 28-34). The analytical approach was inspired by Tjora's (2018) *stepwise-deductive induction*, rooted in grounded theory, presenting three analytical stages: initial coding, focused coding, and concept development. For this study, analysis followed procedures for initial and focused coding, while developing design principles replaced concept development stage.

During the initial coding phase, the data were segmented into the distinct ideas expressed by participants, developing empirically close codes (Tjora, 2018, pp. 28-34). A new code was

generated for each unique idea, and the coding followed the ideas. For example, if a participant expressed several different ideas, codes for each of these were generated. While this approach can delineate nuances in the data, it did not indicate the prevalence of each idea. To address this, a manual crosscheck of the data was performed to quantify the significance of each idea. Data from each campus was coded separately to account for potential contextual factors that may have influenced how participants engaged with the workshop design.

The research questions increasingly guided the process of merging and classifying initial codes into categories, known as focused coding (Tjora, 2018, p. 37). Through this process, the categories *reflexivity* and *core teaching values* were established, representing reported perceived learning outcomes.

Findings

This section addresses the first research question posed for this paper, describing participants' self-reported workshop experience according to their reported feedback.

Perceived outcomes of the reflexivity workshop experience

In total, 22 participants reported they had learnt something new about themselves and their worldview through the workshop experience. These included aspects relating to their broader life experience and elements specific to the workshop. For example, that family and friends had influenced prior choices, and awareness of how their cultural background had led to greater familiarity with Christianity. A participant noted that their Christian lens had become apparent to them, because the group discussion had demonstrated different interpretations. Another responded that they realised that they were not afraid to talk about their religious faith, that peers had been respectful, and curious. Through discussions, they reported to have become more confident. The significance of discussions was also captured by a student at campus A who stated that: "I learnt something when what I think, feel, and think internally emerges in conversation with others" (A10). Similarly, others noted they had learnt about Christianity from peer's insiders' perspective, becoming aware that interpretations from a religious and non-religious perspective differ. One participant concluded: "I realised that believing is very unfamiliar and strange to me" (B25).

Of the 35 replies on overall workshop experience, implying that they had not developed new insights, a majority were supportive and nine ambivalent or critical. Supportive comments include workshop descriptions indicating they found it "interesting", "educational", "fun", and "exciting". While some were interested in the 360-VR technology, 18 comments pointed to discussions. An illustrative comment reads:

It was exciting to hear about others' perspectives, and I found it important to listen to them and understand their viewpoints. I felt that we could learn from each other (A8).

Nine participants expressed negative or ambivalent experiences with the workshop, citing issues related to the design. For example, one student described it as "a bit boring" (B30), while another found it "a bit unstructured" (C4). Although these entries were short and confined, some elements were clearly articulated: for these students, the goals of the workshop were unclear, it was too complex, and/or their views remained unchallenged. No negative feedback was reported at

campus A, whereas campus C had a slightly higher proportion of negative responses (20 % of participants) compared to campus B (17 % of participants). Due to the limited dataset, these figures should be interpreted with caution. However, contextual factors may help explain the feedback, particularly at campus C where the workshop was conducted early in the semester. Some participants from campus C noted that the reflexivity workshop repeated topics already covered in prior course teaching. This repetition highlights the significance of educational contexts and suggests that the workshop's appeal may partially depend on introducing novel and unexpected content and activities.

In reflecting on what they took away from the workshop, participants frequently referenced the metaphor of the “backpack”. Across campuses, the “backpack” was an effective metaphor for reflexive work, as participants used it to articulate an awareness of their own or others' worldview backgrounds, positionality, or experiences. While some responses were limited to referencing the “backpack” itself (A17, B7, B9, B21, B22, C7), others elaborated on its contents. Examples include mentions of “past events and experiences” (A12), “religious background” (B36), “background” (A2, B30), “baggage” (B29), “values” (B32), “my attitudes and worldview” (B34, C1, C5).

Participants identified various ways worldviews and reflexivity could shape their approach to teaching RWE, including both subject-specific aspects and personal learning outcomes. Some emphasised “the significance of reflexivity, and how much it actually matters” (A13), while others acknowledged, “My attitudes and worldview, both consciously and unconsciously, can influence the CRLE teaching I provide for my students” (C1). Reflexivity was linked to lesson planning and to the representation of diverse perspectives and practices in the classroom. Some participants connected reflexivity to their substantive knowledge, recognizing both the relative dominance of Christianity to their knowledge and becoming more aware of the inner diversity of religious practice. Similarly, one student recognised their need for a broader knowledge base, learning more about other religions, to provide “good teaching” (C2). For some participants, their preconceptions became more evident:

Even though I'm 'not religious', I still have prejudices that I was unaware of, especially against Christianity (A12).

This implies that the student initially perceived themselves as neutral, a belief that was challenged during the workshop. When considering the implications of reflexivity for RWE teaching, some participants extended the metaphor of the “backpack” to include an awareness of pupil's “backpacks”. They recognised the importance of understanding their students' worldviews to differentiate instruction effectively, acknowledging the need to account for the diversity of experiences and perspectives pupils bring into the classroom.

Responses categorised as *core teaching values* reflected workshop outcomes in terms of normative statements about the perceived values and objectives of RWE teaching. These statements were just as significant as reflexivity. Participants frequently highlighted being openminded and respectful as essential qualities or goals for RWE teaching, for instance:

For me, it became important to carry forward values such as openness, curiosity, caution, and understanding. It is crucial to bring these into teaching and the teacher-student relationship (C22).

While this student pointed to the teacher-student relationship, others mentioned this as imperative when engaging with guardians. More broadly, participants suggested that being openminded and attentive, listening actively, and respecting diverse perspectives and various religious practices should underpin RWE teaching. The prominence of core teaching values in the data was somewhat unexpected, given that the workshop primarily aimed to raise awareness of personal worldview in relation to interpretations of the 360-VR clips. However, the combination of learning materials from different religious traditions and the engagement with each other's backgrounds and perspectives, emphasised the need for open-mindedness and respect during the workshop.

Discussion

The second research question asked what recommendations emerge from prospective RWE teachers' reported experiences and perceived learning outcomes of the reflexivity workshop. The findings inform three emerging design principles for reflexive practice in RWE teacher. Unexpectedly, articulating normative statements emerged as a key learning outcome considering the goal of activating reflexivity. This is interpreted with reference to Korthagen's (2004, 2014) ONION model which emphasises inner motivation and deeper meaning in teachers' practice.

Given student satisfaction and perceived learning outcomes, the first design principle recommends employing reflexivity in RWE teacher education. Because examining personal worldview is sensitive, student satisfaction is a key finding. Across the data sources, no concerns indicating discomfort were identified. Instead, findings point to positive experiences, confirmed in interviews that explicitly addressed privacy boundaries. Even students reporting no new insights gave predominantly positive evaluations of the workshop. Jackson and Everington (2016) emphasise the importance of a collaborative and supportive learning environment; this seems to have been established at campuses A and B while the pedagogical culture at campus C was still formative. Despite variations in reported experiences, students valued opportunities to engage with each other's worldview backgrounds and interpretations in group discussions, indicating a willingness to open up to each other. This also suggest an effective management of privacy boundaries in this context. Still, in other contexts, examining personal worldviews may unfold differently, so careful scaffolding of reflexivity remains essential. Articulating and clearly communicating ground rules for discussions can help protect privacy, while a continuous focus on ethically sound teaching practices tailored to local contexts is essential.

Furthermore, the findings identify reflexivity as a key perceived learning outcome, supporting the embedded design hypothesis shown in Figure 1. The "backpack" emerged as a powerful metaphor for reflexivity and was frequently referenced by students. The explicit approach to reflexivity in the workshop introduction may have helped raising awareness of its significance. Where students explicitly acknowledged their assumptions, these included identifying with majority groups, recognising unfamiliarity with religious beliefs and practices, and recognising their situatedness. Despite limited exposure to reflexivity, students reported meaningful learning outcomes from a single low-cost workshop using standard RWE content. While previously voiced concerns about the depth of reflexivity (Kvia, 2025) are not dispelled by this feedback, these findings nonetheless support the recommendation to employ reflexivity in RE teacher education.

The second design principle recommends peer-group discussions. From students' perspective, discussion was a key design feature. Theoretically, discussions can be conceptualised as

interpretive processes, thereby extending the rationale for peer-group discussions beyond student preferences.

Discussions resonate with Shaw's understanding of education as praxis, "an interwoven practice of understanding, interpretation and application that operates in a hermeneutic spiral" (2023, p. 206). As indicated above, the workshop was tailored to create opportunities for discussions to evolve accordingly as a dialectic and interpretive process. The 360-VR clips constituted a shared encounter with subject content and in discussions participants could explore interpretations and rationales for various understandings of the clips, depending on individual lenses of interpretation. As an interpretive process, discussions served as an instance of educational praxis in which open-mindedness and respect was applied.

Shaw (2023) argues that education understood as praxis has the potential to develop *powerful knowledge*, referring to the ability to encounter diversity with practical wisdom and judgement (pp. 203-4, 207-210). In this perspective, the reported appreciation of discussions suggests that students succeeded in respectful and open-minded encounters. Although students might well have developed such skills prior to the workshop, it offered an opportunity to rehearse key elements of RWE teaching.

The third design principle is to prioritise students' exposure to diverse perspectives when working reflexively, consistent with empirical findings and theory. Shaw (2023) maintains that reflexivity develops in interpretive encounters with diversity. In religion and worldviews education, subject content provides opportunities to engage with diversity, and the workshop also enabled engagement with peers' diverse worldviews and interpretations of the religious communities. Thus, the workshop drew on two sources of diversity: subject content and peers' perspectives.

However, a previous publication from this project raised concerns about participants' level of reflexivity (Kvia, 2025). Given that some students reported that their views were insufficiently challenged, securing exposure to multiple perspectives warrants attention. The feedback indicates that not all group discussions functioned as interpretive processes. Across design implementation cycles, in interviews, informal conversations with participants, and observations, it appeared that student groups were relatively homogeneous, indicating limited within-group diversity. Responding to concerns that Muslim perspectives may have been marginalised, a fabricated Muslim interpretation of the clips was introduced to explore its potential impact. The text, written in first person, described the significance of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina within Muslim tradition - recognising it as the first mosque established by the Prophet and as His final resting place. It also expressed a desire to visit the site and noted unfamiliarity with Pentecostal worship. This text was incorporated into group discussions at campus C, the final implementation cycle, inviting participants to treat it as though a Muslim participant were present. In their feedback, five participants noted that the text helped them identify aspects of their worldview. Although five mentions are few, the comments were offered unprompted on the evaluation forms. While a text cannot participate in conversations, it can provoke thoughts and perspectives. As a mediating artefact, it may contribute to dialectical processes in group discussions.

From a hermeneutic perspective, encounters with alterity are essential for recognising biases and revisiting one's assumptions (Flanagan, 2019; Jackson, 1997; Shaw, 2023). Combined with prior project outputs, the present findings suggest that reflexivity can be activated but needs

scaffolding. Prioritising exposure to diversity from subject content and others' perspectives can help translate the affordances of reflexivity identified in the literature into practice.

Having proposed three design principles for reflexive practice, the discussion now turns to students' perceived learning outcomes framed as normative statements. Given the workshop's goal of activating reflexivity, this was unexpected and raises challenging questions. One question is whether reflexivity was insufficiently activated among students reporting core teaching values as their primary learning outcome. In light of prior project outputs, this may indicate challenges in translating reflexivity into teaching practice. The feedback is inconclusive but indicates that student outcomes of reflexivity are an important area for future research.

Although unexpected, recognising core teaching values can be beneficial to prospective RWE teachers. Korthagen developed the ONION model in response to teachers' tendencies towards superficial reflection, proposing it to help them determine what to reflect on (2014, p. 78). The model outlines topics for reflection that move from external elements to inner aspects such as beliefs, identity, and mission. In this model, mission represents a person's ideals and motivations (Korthagen, 2014, p. 79). The reflexivity workshop explicitly targeted participants' worldviews as the primary topic for reflection. Their reference to core teaching values resembles Korthagen's mission layer, as they emphasised open-mindedness and respect as norms and aims of RWE teaching. The workshop therefore appears to have enabled participants to understand or experience core values of teaching RWE. In line with education as praxis (Shaw, 2023) and the secular educational context, the workshop experience may have actualised open-mindedness and respect for the participants. An alternative interpretation links these values to the development of a professional identity (Korthagen, 2004). Korthagen (2004) questions the emphasis on defining "the good teacher" through competencies and instead highlights the importance of teachers' self-conception and identity. From this perspective, the normative statements may reflect prospective RWE teachers' aspired identities. In this respect, it allowed taking ownership to the core teaching values and accentuated them as ideals, motivations, or visions of the teacher participants aspire to (Conway, 2001). While unintended, the prominence of core teaching values suggest that the workshop provided an opportunity for students to familiarise themselves with essential values of teaching RWE. Through this lens, students may have become sensitised to the professional commitments involved in inclusive RWE teaching.

Limitations of the study and future directions

This study has limitations that may affect the findings. First, participants self-selection may have led to a selection bias. Of the evaluation forms collected, three were submitted blank, and three participants failed to submit forms despite their prior agreement to do so. Additionally, some participants may have opted not to provide feedback if they believed their responses would not align with the perceived expectations. The requirement to allocate study time for interviews may have further resulted in recruitment of highly motivated students or those who viewed the research favourably.

Second, this study reports participants' self-reported outcomes. As a supplement, it would be valuable to explore participants' teaching practices to assess the potential impact of reflexivity on their classroom teaching. Moreover, the sample was limited to participants from the Norwegian context. While this study suggests that the proposed design principles may be applicable to similar

teacher education programs, further research is needed to validate, challenge, or refine these conclusions (Hanghøj et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This paper contributes to RWE teacher education by clarifying reflexivity as a subject specific form of critical reflection and by articulating three recommendations for reflexive practice in RWE teacher education, supported by empirical findings. These are to employ reflexivity, to use peer-group discussion, and to prioritise student exposure to diverse perspectives. The paper shows that a low-cost, single session workshop can activate reflexivity, but that translation into practice requires scaffolding. Effective scaffolding balances support and learning challenges and is tailored to learners' needs and local conditions (Korthagen, 2014). The recommendation to employ reflexivity extends to teacher education more broadly, as stereotypes connected to religion and worldviews can affect any classroom, and ethically responsible teaching strategies should therefore remain a central concern. Although developed for reflexivity in RWE, the recommendations may extend to critical reflection in other higher-education subjects (for example, History and Social Science). The workshop's subject-specific materials would, in case, be substituted with content from those domains, while retaining a clear conceptualisation, triggering elements, and structured tasks. In this way, the design principles may be applied more broadly to support critical reflection, for example to examine assumptions about the past or political views. This paper also identifies DBR as well suited to exploring reflexivity, to connect theory and practice, and to develop transferrable theory through iterative design and evaluation.

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