

Reflective Practice in Pre-professional Arts Education: A Theoretical Examination Through Teacher Education

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Abstract

This study explores how reflective practice theories developed in teacher education can be conceptually reconstructed for pre-professional arts education in the Korean higher education context. Rather than assuming that teachers and artists are similar professional groups, the study focuses on their shared educational position as pre-professionals who develop professional practice within institutional education. In Korea, teacher education prepares pre-service teachers for professional teaching practice, while arts colleges place strong emphasis on studio, performance, and creative practice that prepares students for professional work in their artistic fields. This study conducts a theoretical and conceptual analysis of Korthagen's ALACT reflective cycle and Darling-Hammond's practice-based teacher education, with Schön's reflective practitioner theory as a supporting perspective. The analysis identifies a shared learning structure involving authentic practice, reflection on experience, awareness of important aspects, exploration of alternatives, and renewed practice. However, this structure should not be directly transferred to arts education. Instead, it needs to be reconstructed in relation to the open-ended and context-dependent nature of creative practice. The study therefore proposes a reflective cycle of creative practice, reflection, awareness, alternative exploration, and re-practice. It also identifies documentation, dialogue, feedback, and opportunities for renewed practice as important educational conditions. The study provides a theoretical basis for reconsidering professional learning in Korean higher arts education through reflective practice.

Keywords: reflective practice, pre-professional artists, teacher education, professional learning, arts education

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Introduction

Practical and creative experience is an important part of professional development in arts education. Students majoring in the arts repeatedly engage in activities such as performance, acting, dance, visual production, filmmaking, and other forms of creative work. Through these experiences, they develop technical skills and gradually build their own ways of artistic expression. In the Korean higher education context, arts colleges generally place considerable emphasis on practice within each major and prepare students for professional practice in their artistic fields. In this sense, creative practice in higher arts education can be understood not only as a learning activity but also as part of the transition toward professional artistic work.

However, having more creative experience does not necessarily mean that professional learning has occurred. Repeated practice may improve technical skills, but repeating the same action does not automatically help learners understand their own decisions or adjust them in new situations. Schön (1983) argues that professionals are not simply people who apply established knowledge and rules. They work in uncertain situations, interpret problems, make judgments, and adjust their actions through practice. Eraut (1994) similarly explains that professional knowledge and competence develop through practice, but experience needs to be interpreted and connected with existing knowledge.

From this perspective, reflection can be understood as a process that helps transform repeated practice into professional learning. Dewey (1938) argued that not all experience is educational. Experience becomes educational when it is connected with previous and future experiences and is reconstructed through interaction with the environment. This argument is also relevant to arts education. Providing students with many creative activities may not be sufficient if those experiences remain separate from one another and are not examined in relation to later practice.

Previous research has applied this perspective to arts education by arguing that experience becomes educational not simply because an activity takes place, but because experience is organized through continuity, interaction, and processes that allow learners to make meaning from it (Kong & Kwon, 2026b). From this perspective, the educational question is not only what kind of experience should be provided, but also how one experience can be connected to and transform later experiences.

This issue has become more visible with the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence. Generative AI can produce images, music, videos, and text at increasing speed and quality. This development makes it necessary to reconsider the relationship between the final creative product and the process through which the product is created. Kong and Kwon (2026a) addressed this issue by proposing an AI-mediated extracurricular program that organized artistic learning through repeated cycles of action, reflection, and re-practice. In that study, generative AI was not understood as a substitute for the creator but as a mediator that could help document, externalize, and revisit the creative process.

Such program-level discussions, however, raise a more fundamental theoretical question: Why can reflective practice theories developed in teacher education be considered relevant to the education of future artists?

The present study does not answer this question by assuming that teaching and artistic practice are the same. Teachers engage in educational practice, while artists engage in creative practice. Their professional purposes, working conditions, and criteria for judgment are clearly different.

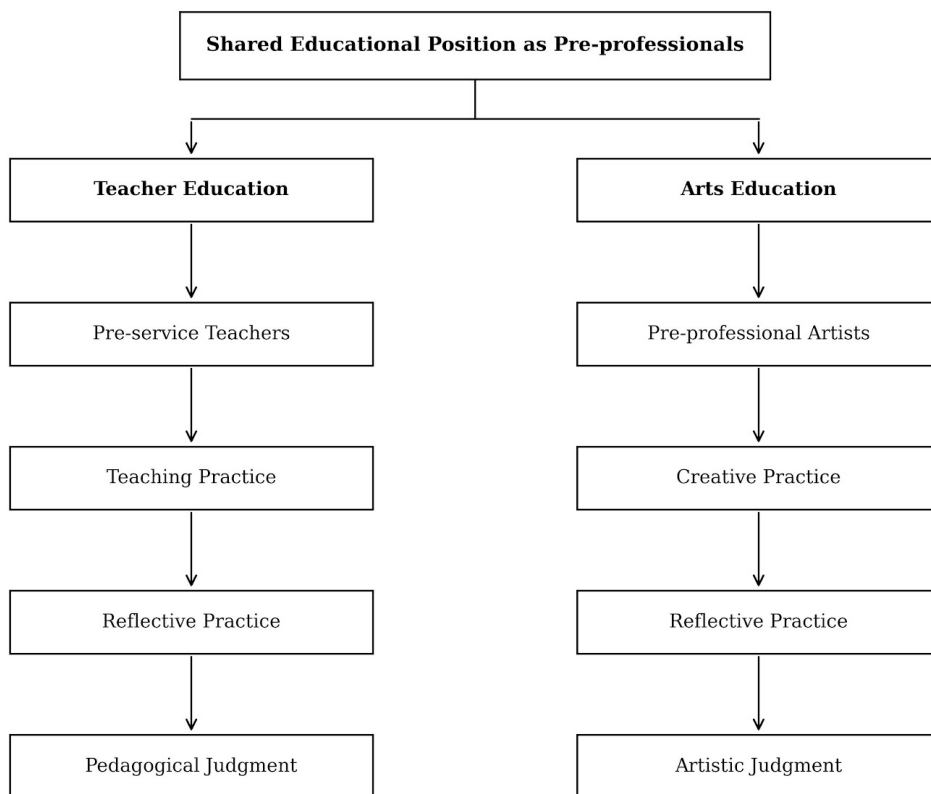
Therefore, directly transferring teacher education methods to arts education would overlook important differences between the two professional fields.

Instead, this study focuses on the educational position of learners before entering professional practice, particularly in the Korean higher education context. Students in colleges of education and teacher preparation programs are educated as pre-service teachers who are preparing to perform professional teaching practice. Similarly, students in arts colleges engage extensively in studio work, rehearsal, production, and performance as part of preparation for professional artistic practice. In this study, such students are described as pre-professional artists.

Pre-service teachers and pre-professional artists prepare for different professions, but both groups learn within institutional higher education before fully entering professional practice. They are expected to transform knowledge and experience into professional judgment through actual practice. This shared position as developing professionals provides a basis for examining whether theories of reflective professional learning developed in teacher education may also provide useful theoretical resources for arts education.

Figure 1

Structural Connection Between Teacher Education and Pre-professional Arts Education in the Korean Higher Education Context



The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the main principles of Korthagen's reflective cycle and Darling-Hammond's practice-based teacher education and to conceptually reconstruct these principles for pre-professional arts education in Korea. The central research question is: How can reflective practice theories developed in teacher education be reconstructed for pre-professional arts education in the Korean higher education context?

Theoretical Background

Reflective Practice and Professional Learning

The concept of reflective practice challenges the idea that professional expertise is simply the accumulation of knowledge and technical skills. Schön (1983) argues that professionals often work in situations where problems are unclear and where existing rules cannot provide complete answers. Professional practice therefore requires continuous interpretation, judgment, and adjustment.

Schön distinguishes between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action occurs while a person is engaged in practice. The practitioner recognizes a problem or unexpected situation and adjusts an action while it is taking place. Reflection-on-action occurs after the practice has taken place and involves reconsidering the experience, the decisions that were made, and their consequences.

Reflection in this sense is different from simply identifying mistakes after completing a task. It involves examining experience, understanding the decisions behind an action, and using that understanding to inform later practice. Schön's work is particularly relevant to the present study because his discussion of reflective professional practice is not limited to teaching. His analysis includes fields such as architecture and design, where practitioners make judgments in situations of uncertainty, uniqueness, and complexity.

Moon (2004) also describes reflection as a learning process through which individuals reconsider experience and develop new understanding. Experience and reflection are therefore not separate parts of learning. Reflection connects one experience with another and enables the learner to reinterpret earlier actions.

This perspective is relevant to creative practice. Artists continually make choices in situations where there is no single correct answer. They choose materials, forms, movements, sounds, images, and ways of presenting ideas. Simply repeating a technique does not necessarily prepare a learner to respond to new artistic problems. Pre-professional artists therefore need opportunities to examine why they made particular choices, what those choices produced, and what other approaches might have been possible.

Korthagen's ALACT Reflective Cycle

Korthagen et al. (2001) describe the ALACT model as a reflective cycle that connects practice and reflection in teacher education. The model consists of five stages: Action, Looking back on the action, Awareness of essential aspects, Creating alternative methods of action, and Trial.

The first stage, Action, refers to actual practice. The learner then looks back on the experience and considers what happened. In the Awareness stage, the learner identifies important aspects of the experience, including patterns, assumptions, or factors that influenced the action. The learner then considers alternative approaches and finally tries a new form of action.

Trial becomes a new Action, meaning that the model does not end after one cycle. Reflection becomes part of an ongoing process of practice, reconsideration, and renewed practice.

A key feature of the ALACT model is that reflection does not end with evaluation. The learner does not simply ask whether an action was successful or unsuccessful. Reflection should lead to awareness of why a particular action occurred and to consideration of what could be done differently in the future. Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) further argue that deeper reflection may move beyond observable behavior and competence to include beliefs, identity, and professional meaning.

This cyclical structure has a possible connection with creative practice. Pre-professional artists also act, review what they have done, recognize aspects of their creative choices, explore other possibilities, and try again. However, this similarity does not mean that ALACT can be directly transferred from teacher education to arts education.

Teaching and creative practice operate according to different professional purposes and forms of judgment. Artistic practice is particularly open-ended, and different artistic choices can have different but equally meaningful outcomes. The present study therefore focuses not on transferring the specific methods of ALACT, but on reconstructing its underlying principles of practice, reflection, awareness, alternative exploration, and renewed practice for creative learning.

Darling-Hammond's Practice-Based Teacher Education

Darling-Hammond (2012) argues that professional teacher education should move beyond a fragmented structure in which theory is learned first and applied later. Instead, professional knowledge should develop through the integration of theory, authentic practice, analysis, and reflection.

From this perspective, pre-service teachers learn not only by studying theories of teaching but also by experiencing real or realistic teaching situations, examining problems that arise in practice, and connecting those experiences with theoretical ideas. Professional learning therefore takes place within practice rather than after practice.

Practice-based professional education emphasizes authentic learning experiences, analysis of practice, feedback, and collaboration. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) similarly identify active learning, collaboration, feedback, reflection, and learning connected with actual professional problems as important features of professional development.

Korthagen and Darling-Hammond can therefore be understood as addressing different but related dimensions of professional education. Korthagen explains how a learner moves from one experience through reflection toward new action. Darling-Hammond provides a broader explanation of the educational environment in which such professional learning can occur.

Taken together, the two perspectives suggest three principles. First, authentic practice is the starting point of professional learning. Second, experience needs to be analyzed and reconstructed through reflection. Third, reflection should lead to alternative actions and renewed practice. Repeated cycles of this process can support the gradual development of professional judgment and agency.

Method

This study is a theoretical and conceptual study rather than an empirical investigation. It does not analyze interviews, observations, surveys, or learner-generated data. Its purpose is to examine the conceptual structure of reflective practice theories developed in teacher education and to reinterpret those ideas within the context of pre-professional arts education in Korea.

The analysis was conducted in three stages.

First, the study examined Korthagen et al.'s (2001) ALACT reflective cycle and Darling-Hammond's (2012) practice-based teacher education to identify how each perspective explains the relationships among practice, reflection, and professional learning. Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner, Eraut's (1994) discussion of professional knowledge and competence, and Moon's (2004) work on reflective and experiential learning were used as supporting theoretical perspectives to clarify the broader relationship between experience, reflection, and professional development.

Second, the educational position of pre-service teachers was compared conceptually with the position of students preparing for professional artistic practice in Korean higher arts education. The comparison did not focus on occupational similarity. Instead, it focused on the structural position of both groups as learners who engage in authentic practice within institutional education before fully entering professional work.

Third, the principles identified from teacher education were reconsidered in relation to the specific characteristics of creative practice. Elements that could be conceptually shared and elements that required reinterpretation were distinguished. Based on this analysis, a reconstructed structure of reflective practice for pre-professional arts education was proposed.

The arts education example presented later in the paper is therefore an illustrative example, not empirical evidence collected from an actual course or group of students.

Conceptual Findings: Reconstructing Reflective Practice for Pre-professional Arts Education

Pre-professionals as a Shared Educational Position

The conceptual analysis suggests that the theoretical connection between teacher education and arts education is better understood through the educational position of their learners than through similarity between the professions themselves.

In the Korean context, pre-service teachers study educational and subject-specific knowledge while also participating in activities such as lesson planning, microteaching, and teaching practice. These experiences are designed to prepare learners to make professional judgments in actual educational situations.

Students in arts colleges similarly develop knowledge and skills through rehearsal, studio work, production, performance, and other forms of creative activity. Although the balance between theoretical and practical education varies across disciplines and institutions, practical creative work is an important part of professional preparation in higher arts education.

This comparison does not suggest that teachers and artists perform the same kind of professional work. Rather, both groups are learners preparing for different forms of professional practice.

This shared educational position provides the main theoretical reason for examining reflective practice from teacher education within arts education. Teacher education offers an established body of theoretical work on how learners move from institutional study toward professional practice through experience and reflection. The question is whether the underlying learning principles can be reconstructed for artistic professional preparation.

From Practice to Reflective Re-practice

The conceptual analysis also identifies a cyclical structure of professional learning. When the perspectives of Korthagen and Darling-Hammond are considered together, professional learning can be understood as a cyclical process of practice, reflection, awareness, exploration of alternatives, and renewed practice. In this process, practice is not the end of learning but the starting point of further reflection. Learners revisit their experience, identify important aspects of their decisions and circumstances, consider alternative approaches, and return to practice with a revised understanding.

This distinction is important because repetition and reflective repetition are not the same. Repeating the same artistic exercise may improve speed, coordination, or technical accuracy. However, repetition alone does not necessarily produce deeper professional judgment.

Reflection enables learners to examine relationships between experiences. It allows them to consider why they made certain choices, what assumptions shaped those choices, and whether a different approach might produce another result. In this sense, reflection changes repetition into a learning process.

This argument is consistent with Dewey's (1938) principle of continuity. Experience becomes educational when it shapes later experience rather than remaining an isolated event. Previous work in arts education has similarly argued that educational experience depends not simply on the number of activities students perform but on how experiences are connected and reconstructed (Kong & Kwon, 2026b).

Conceptual Reconstruction for Creative Practice

A further point emerging from the conceptual analysis is the distinction between application and reconstruction.

Direct application would mean transferring the methods of teacher education into arts education without sufficiently considering the characteristics of creative practice. This study does not propose such an approach.

Teaching practice and creative practice involve different purposes and different criteria of judgment. In creative practice, decisions can be shaped by personal artistic values, aesthetic intentions, genre conventions, media, material conditions, and individual interpretation. There is often no single correct solution.

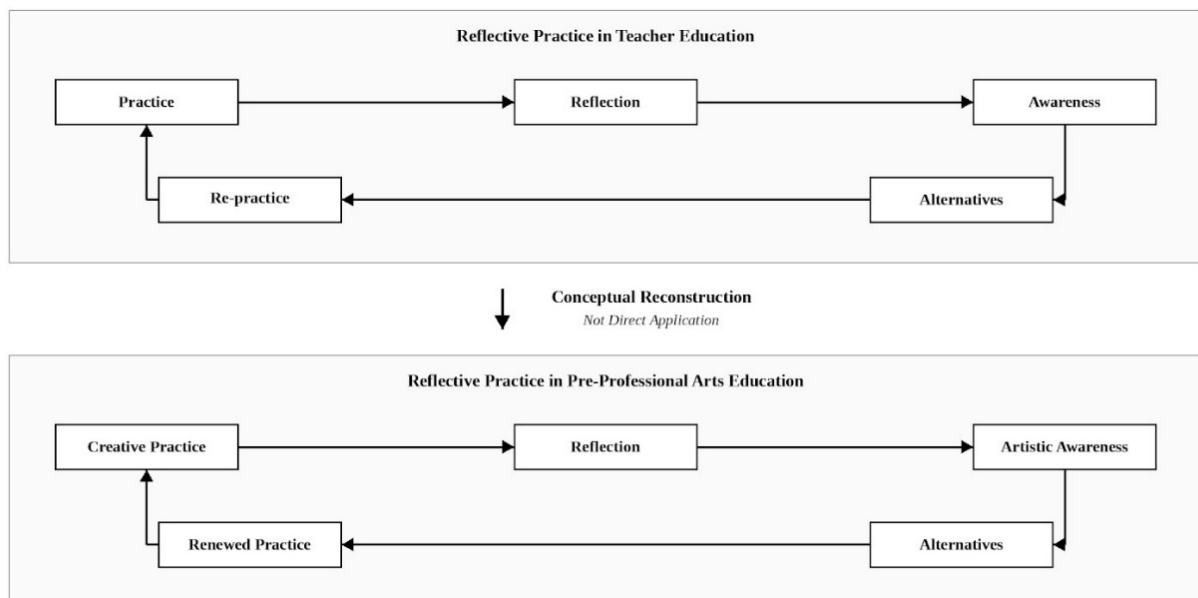
For this reason, the central principles of reflective practice need to be reconstructed in the language and context of artistic creation rather than transferred directly from teacher education. This approach is consistent with previous curriculum research emphasizing the reinterpretation of theoretical principles in relation to a new educational context. Kwon and Kong (2026), for example, reconstructed Dewey’s concept of experience, Tyler’s curriculum structure, and Schwab’s practical perspective into an integrated experience–structure–context framework for film-based liberal arts education. Building on this approach, the present study reconstructs reflective practice for pre-professional arts education as a cyclical process in which learners engage in creative practice, reflect on their creative process and choices, become aware of recurring artistic patterns and judgments, explore alternative possibilities, and return to creative practice with a revised understanding.

Through repeated cycles, learners may begin to understand not only the outcomes of their creative work, but also how those outcomes are connected to the artistic choices they make.

This process should not be interpreted as a claim that reflection directly “produces” an artist’s professional identity. Professional identity develops over time through multiple personal, social, institutional, and professional experiences. Reflective practice is better understood as one educational process that can support professional self-understanding, artistic judgment, and agency, which may contribute to longer-term professional formation.

Figure 2

Conceptual Reconstruction of Reflective Practice for Pre-professional Arts Education



An Illustrative Example in Arts Education

A simple example from performing arts education can illustrate how this reconstructed process might operate.

Consider a student preparing a monologue. The student repeatedly rehearses vocal expression, movement, timing, and emotional interpretation. In a primarily outcome-oriented approach, the quality of the final performance and the instructor’s evaluation may become the main indicators of learning.

From a reflective practice perspective, however, learning continues beyond the completed performance.

The student may review a rehearsal video and record why a particular movement, rhythm, or vocal choice was made. Through discussion with peers, the student may discover a difference between the intended expression and the way others understood the performance. The student may also notice a repeated habit, such as using similar movements whenever a particular emotion is expressed.

In the next rehearsal, the learner can try a different use of space, movement, pace, or vocal rhythm. The new performance can then be compared with the previous one to consider how different choices relate to the artistic intention.

The purpose is not to identify one correct performance. Rather, the educational focus is on the process of acting, revisiting choices, recognizing patterns, exploring alternatives, and returning to practice.

This example should not be understood as empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the model. It is an illustration of how the principles of reflective practice may be reconstructed while maintaining the open-ended character of artistic creation.

Educational Conditions for Reflective Practice

Reflection does not automatically occur simply because students are asked to reflect on their work. Several educational conditions are needed if reflective practice is to become part of professional learning.

First, learners need authentic creative practice. Reflection requires an actual experience that can become an object of examination. For pre-professional artists, this may involve rehearsal, studio work, production, performance, or other forms of creative activity.

Second, learners need ways to document and revisit the creative process. Many decisions, revisions, failures, and changes disappear from the final product. Creative journals, rehearsal videos, audio recordings, sketches, portfolios, and other forms of documentation can make aspects of the process visible again. Kong and Kwon (2026a), for example, proposed documentation as a way to help learners externalize their creative process and examine patterns that might otherwise remain unnoticed.

Third, reflection needs dialogue and feedback. Individual reflection is important, but learners may continue to treat their own artistic habits as natural or unavoidable if they do not encounter other perspectives. Questions from peers and instructors can help learners reconsider their choices and recognize that an existing approach is one possibility among several.

Fourth, learners need opportunities to try again. Reflection that ends with a written evaluation or discussion may remain separate from professional practice. Learners need opportunities to turn the outcomes of reflection into new creative action.

These conditions also help explain why extracurricular learning may sometimes provide useful support for reflective practice. This does not mean that extracurricular learning is better than the formal curriculum or should replace it. Formal curricula require clear educational aims,

assessment criteria, and learning outcomes. However, environments with relatively lower assessment pressure may provide additional space for experimentation, failure, revision, and process documentation.

Generative AI may also be considered at this level. AI is not the central focus of the present study and does not replace human reflection. Rather, it may function as a reflective mediator by helping learners organize records, compare different stages of work, or revisit descriptions of their own creative process. Previous research has similarly conceptualized generative AI not as an agent that replaces creative judgment but as an environment that can support documentation and reflection (Kong & Kwon, 2026a).

Accordingly, extracurricular learning and generative AI should be understood as possible educational conditions or mediators that can support the cycle of practice, reflection, and re-practice rather than as the theoretical foundation of reflective arts education.

Discussion

This study examined how reflective practice theories developed in teacher education can be reconsidered in pre-professional arts education. The analysis suggests that the connection between the two fields is not based on occupational similarity. Instead, it is based on the structure of higher education that prepares learners for professional practice.

This point is especially important for explaining why teacher education was selected as the theoretical starting point of the study. Teacher education has developed substantial theoretical work on how pre-service teachers experience professional practice, interpret their experiences, and gradually develop professional judgment. Korthagen and Darling-Hammond both address this transition from learner to professional practitioner.

Within the Korean context, higher arts education also has a strong practical dimension. Although curriculum structures vary across artistic disciplines and institutions, students commonly engage in sustained creative and performance-based practice as preparation for professional artistic work. For this reason, arts students can be understood as pre-professionals who are developing the ability to transform technical knowledge and creative experience into artistic judgment.

The two educational contexts therefore share a structural problem: professional practice cannot be learned through theoretical knowledge alone, but practice alone is also insufficient.

Learners need experience, but they also need opportunities to understand that experience. They need to recognize the judgments behind their actions, consider alternatives, and return to practice with a different understanding. This is the central point at which reflective practice from teacher education becomes theoretically relevant to arts education.

At the same time, the analysis also shows why conceptual reconstruction is necessary. Teacher education and arts education cannot share the same criteria for successful professional practice. Teaching involves educational aims, student learning, and pedagogical appropriateness, while creative practice involves artistic intentions, aesthetic judgment, interpretation, and the characteristics of particular media.

The reflective questions therefore need to change when the theory moves from one professional field to another.

The contribution of the present study can also be distinguished from earlier program design research. Kong and Kwon (2026a) used Korthagen and Darling-Hammond to propose an AI-mediated extracurricular program in which creative experience, documentation, reflection, feedback, and re-practice were systematically connected. That study primarily addressed the question of how reflection could be organized within a program.

The present study addresses an earlier theoretical question: Why is it reasonable to draw on teacher education theory when examining reflective learning among pre-professional artists?

The answer proposed here is the shared educational position of pre-professionals. Teacher education is therefore not treated as a model to be copied. It serves as a theoretical resource for understanding how practice becomes professional learning through reflection.

This distinction is central to the argument of the study. The value of reflective practice for arts education does not lie in transferring a teacher education model into another discipline. It lies in reconsidering the relationship among creative experience, reflection, and renewed practice within the professional preparation of future artists.

Conclusion

This study examined reflective practice theories developed in teacher education and explored how their main principles can be conceptually reconstructed for pre-professional arts education in Korea. The analysis focused primarily on Korthagen's ALACT reflective cycle and Darling-Hammond's practice-based teacher education.

Four main conclusions can be drawn.

First, pre-service teachers and pre-professional artists prepare for different professions, but within the Korean higher education context they occupy a similar educational position as learners preparing for professional practice. This shared position provides a theoretical basis for reconsidering reflective practice across the two areas of professional education.

Second, the synthesis of Korthagen's and Darling-Hammond's perspectives identifies a common structure of professional learning involving practice, reflection, awareness, exploration of alternatives, and re-practice. Repeated practice alone does not guarantee professional development. Reflection helps learners interpret experience and connect it to later action.

Third, this structure needs to be conceptually reconstructed rather than directly applied to arts education. The study therefore proposes a cycle of creative practice, reflection on creative choices and processes, awareness of artistic judgment, exploration of alternative possibilities, and renewed creative practice.

Fourth, reflective practice requires educational conditions that support it. Authentic creative experience, documentation, interaction with peers and experts, and opportunities for renewed practice are important. Extracurricular learning and generative AI may support some of these conditions, but neither should be understood as a replacement for reflection itself.

The contribution of this study is therefore not the direct application of teacher education theory to arts education. Instead, it identifies a structural connection between two forms of pre-professional education and reconstructs the principles of reflective practice for the particular characteristics of creative learning. This perspective allows creative practice to be understood not only as technical training or production of artistic outcomes, but also as an educational process through which learners can gradually develop artistic judgment, agency, and professional self-understanding.

The study also has several limitations. First, it is a theoretical and conceptual study and does not include empirical data from pre-professional artists. The arts education example presented in the paper is illustrative rather than empirical. Future research should therefore examine actual reflective processes through materials such as creative journals, interviews, rehearsal records, peer feedback, and portfolios.

Second, the study is grounded primarily in the context of Korean higher arts education. The argument assumes a context in which arts colleges place substantial emphasis on studio, performance, and creative practice and in which higher education can serve as preparation for later professional artistic work. The purposes and curriculum structures of higher arts education, however, may differ across countries. For this reason, the structural relationship proposed between pre-service teachers and pre-professional artists should not automatically be generalized to other national contexts.

Future comparative research could examine how arts colleges in different countries understand professional preparation and whether the educational position of the “pre-professional artist” is shared across different higher education systems. Research across different artistic fields, such as music, visual arts, performing arts, and film, could also clarify how the objects and forms of reflection change according to the characteristics of creative practice.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to support English translation, language editing, and the organization of written expression. Google Gemini was also used to generate the visual representations of the conceptual frameworks presented in Figures 1 and 2. The author reviewed and revised all AI-assisted outputs and takes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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