

Experiencing REFLACT: A Workshop Practicing What It Proposes From Theory to Embodied Teaching-Learning Experiences in Complex Contexts

Astrid Dobmeier, Fresenius University of Applied Sciences, Germany
Veronika Sweet, Technical Institute Deggendorf, Germany

The Paris Conference on Education 2025
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In the face of rapid global transformations, educational settings increasingly demand approaches that transcend traditional, linear models of teaching. In response, Dr. Astrid Dobmeier and Dr. Veronika Sweet were invited to design and facilitate a workshop introducing *REFLACT* [sic!]¹—an interdisciplinary framework for meaningful teaching-learning experiences in complex contexts. Rooted in systemic thinking and informed by systems theory, second-order cybernetics, organizational psychology, and learning organization theory, REFLACT fosters learning environments where action and reflection are dynamically intertwined. At its core, REFLACT views learning as a co-created, relational process. Rather than framing educators as knowledge transmitters, the framework facilitates context-sensitive dialogue and collective sense-making. Using a structured choreography—the *Reflect Hoop*—the workshop guides participants through iterative stages: *Act* (Creating Contact), *Reflect* (Check In), *Act* again (Dialogue beyond linear teacher-learner roles), and finally, *ReflAct* (Making deductions, transferring insights, and Checking Out). This article invites readers not only to understand the theoretical underpinnings of REFLACT, but to experience the spirit and flow of the workshop itself. Drawing on moments of interaction, resonance, and co-creation, we trace how the REFLACT Hoop unfolds in practice—opening spaces for mutual trust, embodied reflection, and transformative insight. Our ongoing research suggests that the more trust exists in educational relationships, the more participants can thrive—even in contexts of uncertainty and change. REFLACT offers both a structure and an invitation to engage in learning that is alive, shared, and generative. Universities and colleges have the potential to evolve into ReflActing organisations.

Keywords: REFLACT [sic!], interdisciplinary framework, meaningful teaching-learning experiences, complex contexts, co-created learning, relational process, context-sensitive dialogue, systemic teaching, systemic thinking, systems theory

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

With complexity shaping today's world more than ever, education must evolve beyond conventional, one-directional teaching models. In this spirit, at the Paris Conference on Education 2025, Dr. Astrid Dobmeier and Dr. Veronika Sweet developed and facilitated a workshop centered on REFLACT [sic!]¹—a dynamic framework that blends disciplines to foster meaningful learning experiences in shifting, unpredictable contexts.

The purpose of this article is to invite readers to experience that workshop. Its purpose, thereby, was twofold: to present the conceptual foundation of the REFLACT framework and to trace how it comes to life in a real-world workshop setting. By doing so, we aim to explore how relational, systemic approaches can foster trust, participation, and transformation in learning environments—especially under conditions of complexity and change.

REFLACT is grounded in systemic thinking and informed by systems theory, second-order cybernetics, organisational psychology, and learning organisation theory. It reimagines learning as a co-created, dialogical process, shaped not by the transmission of knowledge, but by mutual engagement, reflection, and adaptive action.

This article offers both theoretical insight and experiential access. It follows the workshop choreography of the *Reflact Hoop—Act* (Creating Contact), *Reflect* (Check In), *Act* again (Dialogue beyond linear teacher-learner roles), and *ReflAct* (Making deductions, transferring insights, and Checking Out). Along the way, we invite readers into the dynamic learning space that REFLACT creates—where trust grows, new perspectives emerge, and knowledge is co-constructed through structured yet flexible interaction.

Experiencing REFLACT – A Workshop Practicing What It Proposes

We wanted participants to truly experience the REFLACT framework. So, we designed a 50-minute session that put its key ideas into practice. All participants collaboratively rearranged the room in preparation for the subsequent learning experience. True to the spirit of *radical education*, we chose a flexible dramaturgy: sometimes relying on slides for visual guidance, mostly working solely with spoken word. This openness reflects our belief that meaningful learning emerges in relation—not from rigid scripts, but from shared energy in the room.

Setting the Stage: From Contact to Dialogue Within Our Context

Sitting in a circle, all on the same level and in eye-contact, we began with music to signal a shift away from passive reception and into participatory presence. This set the tone: REFLACT invites energy, emotion, and engagement. Context is key in REFLACT. Contextual elements such as room temperature, time of day, mood, or breaks for nourishment are not peripheral but integral to our capacity for dialogue and interpersonal connection. 12:15pm on the fourth day of the conference, with temperatures significantly above 30 degrees Celsius without airconditioning make a difference that needs addressing and integration. These seemingly mundane conditions shape the relational atmosphere and directly influence everybody's readiness to engage, listen, and co-create meaning in educational settings.

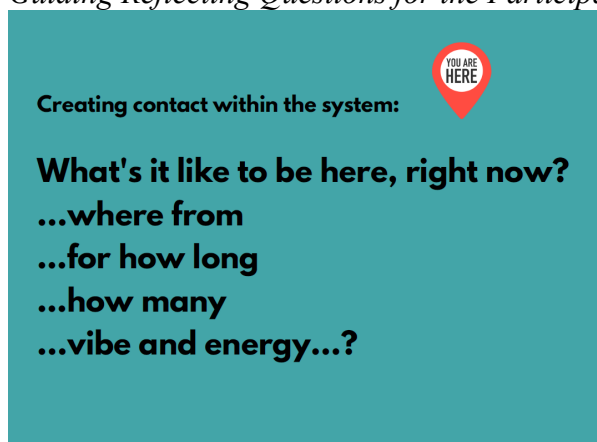
Figure 1
Context, Setting and Spatial Design



Excerpt of ex-post documentation

After welcoming participants, we introduced ourselves not only professionally, but personally: What excites us about this work? What are we curious to discover today? In turn, we invited participants to reflect on *who they are today*: physically, mentally, contextually. This embodied check-in is not a warm-up. It is the first *Act* of the REFLACT Hoop—*Creating Contact*.

Figure 2
Guiding Reflecting Questions for the Participants



Shared via Canva Video Presentation during the Workshop

From Self-Reflection to Shared Meaning

We then moved to *Reflect*: What makes learning meaningful—for you? Participants took time to recall valuable learning experiences in their lives, asking themselves what made these moments stand out. Was it trust? Freedom? Challenge? Encouragement? They then entered into dialogue with peers—activating what we call *collective resonance*. This shift from self-reflection to shared conversation creates a bridge from individual experience to systemic understanding.

Figure 3*Guiding the Check-In for the Participants*

Shared via Canva Video Presentation during the Workshop

REFLECT as Framework and Mindset

As we continued through the Hoop, we introduced the underlying concepts of REFLACT. Learning, we argue, is not something delivered, but co-created. In our experience, students thrive when learning environments acknowledge their complexity—academic, emotional, cultural, and interpersonal. Our research shows that when mutual trust is present, motivation, engagement, and even exam performance increase. The framework is based on systems theory, second-order cybernetics, organisational psychology, and the concept of learning organisations. It is designed to foster spaces where dialogue replaces instruction, and where action and reflection inform each other in cycles of change.

Irritation is Highly Welcome

In REFLACT, irritation is intentionally invited as a catalyst for reflection and learning. Rather than delivering predefined content or impulses, our role as facilitators lies in the art of posing precise, resonant questions. This creates a space in which all participants are encouraged to contribute their own experiences and share insights that hold collective value. In this way, knowledge emerges relationally — through dialogue, not instruction. Our preparation builds on two questions we ask ourselves before every workshop, derived from our theoretical background:

1. How can both students and faculty benefit from prior experience in complex, disciplinary-diverse settings?
2. How can a framework like REFLACT contribute to meaningful transformation in higher education across cultures and contexts?

Participants explored these questions in small group dialogues, or in some cases, carried them into a walk outside—an invitation for self-organised learning continuity beyond the session.

Continuous Orientation by REFLACT Hoops

We provide continuous orientation throughout the workshop process — a clear sense of where we are, what has come before, and what lies ahead.

This structure is supported by the REFLACT Hoops, a guiding framework that enables participants to situate themselves within the flow of the session. These hoops function as

dynamic orientation markers, fostering coherence, transparency, and a shared learning journey.

Figure 4
Guiding the Check-In for the Participants



Shared via Canva Video Presentation during the Workshop

Check-Out: Transfer and Closing the Loop

We closed the session by inviting participants to reflect once more—this time on what they are taking with them. What small insight might shape their own practice? What might they try out, share, question, or unlearn?

What was particularly striking: Participants explicitly noted how much more refreshed, alert, and engaged they felt. Despite the high room temperatures, many remained in their small groups well after the official closing — sitting together, talking, and laughing.

Conclusion

As complexity and uncertainty increasingly define our global and educational landscapes, the need for teaching-learning formats that embrace—not avoid—this complexity becomes urgent. The REFLACT framework offers a response rooted in systemic thinking, dialogue, and relational engagement. Rather than presenting knowledge as content to be transferred, REFLACT positions learning as an emergent, co-constructed process shaped by context, connection, and continuous reflection.

This article traced the conceptual foundation and lived application of REFLACT during our workshop at the Paris Conference on Education 2025. By following the REFLACT Hoop, we demonstrated how learning environments can be transformed into dialogical spaces that foster trust, participation, and change. Central to this approach is the deliberate invitation of irritation as a productive force: participants are not passive recipients of pre-set content, but co-authors of meaning-making processes. Their contributions are shaped not only by expertise, but by presence, emotion, and lived experience.

The implications of REFLACT are both didactic and systemic. When students and faculty are guided by shared orientation, dialogical openness, and contextual awareness, learning becomes more than skill acquisition—it becomes a transformative experience. Educators are

invited to rethink their roles, not as content deliverers, but as facilitators of space, structure, and questions that allow meaning to emerge.

The REFLACT framework is relational and situational by design, which means it may resist rigid standardisation or easy scalability. It also demands a high level of self-awareness and flexibility from facilitators—skills that may require further professional development and institutional support. Additionally, while qualitative feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, further empirical research is planned to examine the long-term impact of REFLACT on learning outcomes, behavior change, and systemic transformation in higher education.

We Offer the Following Recommendations:

For educators: Experiment with dialogical formats that integrate embodied, emotional, and contextual awareness. Practice a systemic attitude and stance. Start with questions rather than content, and notice what emerges without judging or comparing.

For institutions: Create spaces where innovative didactics like REFLACT can be explored, adapted, and evaluated—without immediate pressure for quantifiable outcomes. Given the appropriate orientation and commitment to reflection and action, universities and colleges can develop into what may be termed ReflActing organisations.

For researchers: Further study is recommended to assess how systemic frameworks like REFLACT perform across disciplines, cultures, and educational levels. Mixed-method and longitudinal studies could yield valuable insights.

Ultimately, REFLACT does not claim to be a universal solution, but rather a mindset for engaging meaningfully with complexity. It is a framework in motion—responsive, curious, and grounded in the belief that learning is a shared, living process. Our experience in Paris confirmed this: even under challenging conditions, participants stayed, listened, reflected, and laughed together. In a world often marked by fragmentation and speed, such moments of genuine connection are perhaps the most powerful form of education we can offer.

References

- De Shazer, S. (2004). *Das Spiel mit Unterschieden*. [Playing with differences.] Carl-Auer.
- Dewey, J., Montessori, M., Strzemiński, W., Piaget, J., Vygotsky, L., von Foerster, H., & Morin, E. (1997). Constructivism (learning theory). *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages*, 9, 9–16.
- Hüther, G. (2020). *Wege aus der Angst: Über die Kunst, die Unvorhersehbarkeit des Lebens anzunehmen*. [Ways out of fear: On the art of accepting the unpredictability of life.] Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Königswieser, R., & Exner, A. (2019). *Systemische Intervention: Architekturen und Designs für Berater und Veränderungsmanager*. [Systemic Intervention: Architectures and Designs for Consultants and Change Managers.] Schäffer-Poeschel.
- Radatz, S. (2007). *Coaching-Grundlagen für Führungskräfte: Mit Coaching neue Weichen in der Führung stellen* (Vol. Systemisches Management). [Coaching basics for managers: Setting a new course in leadership with coaching (Vol. Systemic Management).] Systemisches Management.
- Reich, K. (1996). Systemisch-konstruktivistische Didaktik: Eine allgemeine Zielbestimmung. [Systemic-constructivist didactics: A general definition of objectives.] In R. Voß (Ed.), *Die Schule neu erfinden*. [Reinventing the school.] Luchterhand.
- Reusser, K. (2016). Jenseits der Beliebigkeit. “Konstruktivistische Didaktik” auf dem Prüfstand der empirischen Unterrichtsforschung. [Beyond arbitrariness. ‘Constructivist didactics’ on the test bench of empirical teaching research.] *Journal für LehrerInnenbildung*, 16(2), 40–48.
- Satir, V. (2010). *Kommunikation, Selbstwert, Kongruenz: Konzepte und Perspektiven familientherapeutischer Praxis* (8th ed.). [Communication, self-esteem, congruence: concepts and perspectives of family therapy practice.] Junfermann.
- Segal, L. (2001). *The dream of reality: Heinz von Foerster’s constructivism*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Senge, P. M. (2014). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization*. Crown Currency.
- Simon, F. B. (2023). *Einführung in Systemtheorie und Konstruktivismus*. [Introduction to systems theory and constructivism] Carl-Auer.
- Tomm, K. (1994). *Die Fragen des Beobachters: Schritte zu einer Kybernetik zweiter Ordnung in der systemischen Therapie*. [The observer's questions: steps towards a second-order cybernetics in systemic therapy.] Carl-Auer.

Von Glasersfeld, E. (1995). Aspekte einer konstruktivistischen Didaktik. [Aspects of constructivist didactics.] In Regional Institute for School and Secondary Education (Ed.), *Lehren und Lernen als konstruktive Tätigkeit*. [Teaching and learning as a constructive activity.] Soest.

Contact emails: astrid@dobmeier.solutions
mail@sweetandpartners.com