

**DEVELOPING REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS ONLINE:
HOW CAN ANTICIPATORY REFLECTION
SUPPORT AN INTERNSHIP?**

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

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Abstract

This thesis explores students' experiences with the online reflective tool Competence Pass (CP) during an internship abroad. Students' perceptions of CP are important for gaining understanding about how online anticipatory reflection facilitates students' learning from experience and their competence development during the internship. Adopting a constructivist world view, a qualitative case study design with mixed methods of analysis was utilised. Data was gathered from three sources: interviews, forum posts and journals. The uniqueness of the study comes from: 1) it not being subject-bound, 2) studying a neglected form of reflective practice: reflection-in-anticipation, 3) its focus on the online journaling, and 4) the context being German higher education.

The study indicates that the online environment is an accepted space for keeping reflective thoughts and that a structured approach to reflective journaling is appreciated. Engaging in anticipatory reflection can lead to students making progress on critical engagement with their internship and to co-creating their learning experience more consciously. By setting goals and a plan to achieve them, students feel more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as well as better prepared for the new situations that they might face during the internship.

The proposed framework for reflection-in-anticipation for the further development of CP and its core arguments are of relevance to academics designing online reflective tools for internships in various fields. To be effective, online reflective journals should be co-created by educators and learners alike, assist learners with structured reflection, allow the user to personalise their design and content, and encourage social reflection at work. Including anticipatory reflection in the reflective practice during an internship facilitates pondering, enhances (self-)awareness, enables students to set individual goals, and to bridge the gap between their study environment and their internship.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CP	Competence Pass
ELT	Experiential learning theory
HOL	Hands-on-learning course
I	Interviewee
I-Ed	Educator interviewee
KOLA	Kompetenzorientiertes Lernen im Arbeitsprozess mit digitalen Medien (in English: competence oriented learning in working process with digital media)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
P-DE	Pilot interview in German
P-EN	Pilot interview in English
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
VLE	Virtual learning environment

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Over the last 40 years interest in fostering the personal and intellectual development of learners through reflection and reflective learning has been constantly growing internationally (Osterman, 1998; Boud, 2001; Moon, 2006; Ehlers, Adelsberger and Teschler, 2009; O’Connell and Dymont, 2011; Thompson and Pascal, 2012; Threlfall, 2014).

When students complete an internship during their higher education studies, they learn to put theoretical knowledge into practice and develop different competences (Sweitzer and King, 2009). In this context, individuals learn from their own professional experience building on learning from formal teaching. The literature suggests that including reflective practice in higher education and in work-related environments (e.g. internships) may be beneficial for bridging university and working life (Osterman, 1998; Beatson and Larkin, 2010; Threlfall, 2014). Reflection is believed to be equally valuable for all professions (Loughran, 2002; Hobbs, 2007) and to lead to better knowledge integration and deeper learning (Moon, 2004; Kori *et al.*, 2014) as it is “a form of response of the learner to experience” (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999, p. 18). Moreover, reflection in practice settings “can enhance knowledge, self-assessment and lifelong learning” (Trede and Smith, 2012, p. 615). Hence, reflection is “a responsibility that would-be professionals cannot ignore” (Ross, 2011b, p. 147).

But to what extent do university students embrace reflective practice? And how can technology facilitate the reflective practice process? While universities have been adopting reflective practice and digital technology learning environments for some time, little is known about how students experience those. Does providing an online reflective tool for students on an internship enhance learning? Online learning environments have been mentioned in many publications as having a positive impact on learners and teachers in the field of self-assessment and reflection (Chen *et al.*, 2009; Ehlers, Adelsberger and Teschler, 2009; Kori *et al.*, 2014). Yet, it seems that there is not much systematic research on “how to concretely apply reflection strategies in an online learning environment” (Chen *et al.*, 2009, p. 283).

Since the practice of reflection is of multifactorial nature and the purpose and context of reflection affect its perceived value (Dalley-Hewer, 2017), educators are still looking for the best way to promote and assess it. Threlfall (2014) argues that many practitioners and

students talk about reflection without understanding the complexity and the many processes of reflection. Furthermore, some researchers warn “against promoting reflective learning as a panacea” (Fowler and Chevannes, 1998 cited in Thorpe, 2004, p. 331), noting that some learners find reflection unhelpful (Fowler and Chevannes, 1998 cited in Thorpe, 2004).

As an online tutor and educator with a constructivist world view, I am particularly interested in developing online reflective spaces that support students’ learning from experience and that are appreciated by users in Germany, where reflective practice is on the way to establish itself as a common approach in higher education. Hence, this thesis seeks to contribute to the current discussion on the use of online reflective practice in the context of internships carried out by higher education students. In particular, I decided to study online reflective practice in depth from the students’ point of view. As educators, we need to know what reflection means to students and what their attitude towards online reflective practice is, in order to create online tools which could enhance students’ reflective and autonomous learning from experience.

1.2 Context of the research

The context of the study is the online course *Hands-on-learning* (HOL) designed for university students from Hessen (Germany) who are completing an internship abroad with a European Union (EU) grant. An internship is used here to describe a period of time which can range from several weeks to several months during which students work in a company or institution in order to gain experience of a particular job related to their field of education. Internships can be paid or unpaid. During the internship, the exposure to the working environment helps students clarify and assess their career goals (Walker, 2012). As a form of experiential learning, internships offer students “valuable opportunities to discover the professional world first hand and to apply classroom knowledge to practice” (Liu and Weitz, 2011, p. 94). Interns can also work on their interpersonal and communication skills (Liu and Weitz, 2011).

HOL aims at developing students’ intercultural awareness and entrepreneurial skills, and covers topics relevant for interns in a foreign country. Some examples of topics are: dealing with difficulties in the work placement, culture shock and European identity. There are five course modules, each lasting for ten days. Students answer questions, comment on other students’ posts and engage in online forum discussions on the module topic.

The focus of this research is the Competence Pass (CP): an online tool for self-assessment and reflection which is a non-compulsory element of HOL and can be accessed only during the course. CP falls in the group of technical reflective tools with predefined structure. It takes the form of an online journal with guiding questions in five competence areas: Language; Intercultural; Social and Teamwork; Managerial and Organisational; Creativity and Problem-solving. The concept of competence is discussed in Chapter 2 while here a simple definition of competence is provided: “the ability to meet a complex demand successfully or carry out a complex activity or task” (Rychen and Salganik, 2002, p. 5).

The special feature of CP is that it is future oriented, i.e. its main goal is practising reflection-before-action in order to support students in preparing for and making the most of their internship abroad. This online tool aims to support students to make connections between the academic world and the work environment. Individuals are encouraged to act in a self-directed way and to combine different elements of their knowledge in their particular field. The pedagogical value of CP lies in promoting self-awareness and reflective learning in students so that they can become autonomous and reflective rather than routine professionals.

1.3 Research questions

During a module on my PhD programme at Lancaster University, for the first time in my life I was asked to keep a reflective diary. Awkwardly, I began using reflection in my studies and gradually applied it to my job and research. I experienced reflective practice as a powerful means of using theory and previous experience to inform my current and future practice, as well as to provide a rationale for my actions. It helped me realise that as a course tutor on HOL, my colleagues and I had only a very limited knowledge about how our students perceived and used CP.

Hence, I decided to study students’ use of CP and understanding of reflective practice, and I dedicated a module paper on my PhD programme to studying online reflective practice with CP. The paper provided an overview of how CP was made use of in the first eleven months of use. The findings revealed that an overwhelming majority of students (99%) made use of the online tool for self-assessment and reflection even though it was not compulsory. Students’ journals varied in length, use of language (German/English) and depth of reflection, the last being mainly at the level of a short description. Short texts with bullet points and incomplete sentences prevailed which was similar to previous research on (online) self-assessment reflective tools (e.g. Thorpe, 2004; Gleaves, Walker and Grey, 2007; Beatson and Larkin,

2010; Dymont and O'Connell, 2011). My finding that reflective practice with CP supported students in understanding their new experience triggered me to continue research in the field. With the knowledge gained I wanted to develop CP further in order to better support students' reflective and autonomous learning from experience during their internship.

I decided to focus on investigating students' attitudes, perceptions and understandings of CP as well as the implications for their internship. CP's users (and my study participants) were neither informed that CP aimed at reflective practice nor given instructions on how to produce reflective writing.

Hence, the aim of my thesis became to explore and understand students' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, online reflective practice and anticipatory reflection during an internship. Reflection is widely regarded as central for learning from experience and professional development (Moon, 2004; Coulson and Harvey, 2013) in many professions because it connects the work in the field to the learning (Sweitzer and King, 2009). This illustrates the relevance of examining the concept within the context of internships. Therefore, the objectives of this research were: 1) to examine a contemporary situation in a German educational setting, and 2) to produce recommendations for tailoring an online reflective tool such as CP to better support students' learning from experience during an internship.

Emerging from the context, the research was guided by the following four research questions:

1. How do students perceive CP and its relevance for their internship?
2. In what ways has CP engaged students in reflective practice?
3. What do students perceive to be the benefits and limitations of online reflective practice with CP?
4. How can an online tool such as CP be further tailored to better support students' learning from experience?

A major aspect of this study is devoted to the role of technology in bridging learning between higher education and the work placement, and technology offering an online space for reflective practice. As there are also critical voices in the literature claiming that online reflective practice is used without acknowledging issues related to being online, privacy, authenticity and ownership (Ross, 2011a), this study investigates positive and negative aspects of how students experience and perceive online reflective practice as well as explores the challenging and enabling factors of voluntary online reflective journaling.

1.4 Purpose and impact of the research

The literature shows an ongoing interest in students' perceptions, acceptance and experiences with reflective journals (Thorpe, 2004; Gleaves, Walker and Grey, 2007; Vos and Cowan, 2009; O'Connell and Dymont, 2011; Scholz, Menhard and Bruder, 2011). However, further research is needed in order to understand what types of reflection students find easy as well as what occasions and topics are most effective to reflect on (Vos and Cowan, 2009). Exploring students' experience with CP and their views on the relevance of online reflective practice, the purpose of this research study is twofold:

1. To contribute to educational research on the role of online reflective journals for students during an internship abroad by presenting the students' voice and especially by highlighting the position of anticipatory reflection.
2. To have an impact on future practice by developing ready-to-use materials. A useful output will be to offer a practical framework for the further development of CP, which can be easily transferred and applied by other academic institutions as well.

In particular, the following groups can benefit from the study:

- The study participants – they engage in reflection about the way they used CP and have the chance to influence the future design of the tool and thus to co-construct the framework of the tool as its users.
- The tool provider – this organisation receives an academic evaluation of CP and recommendations for its further development.
- A wide audience of educators – those interested in designing online tools for reflection can adapt and apply the findings to their field, as the study is not discipline-bound.

Although it is a small-scale qualitative case study in the field of German higher education, the findings can inform other educators through insights into how one group of students find online journaling and which specific aspects of online reflective practice they perceive to be especially beneficial for their internship. The impact on practice is discussed in detail in Chapter 6, where other education designers can find a framework for online anticipatory reflection, which can be easily applied or adjusted to create a new online reflective tool or to complement existing reflective journals or e-portfolios.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The present chapter provides an overview of the context, rationale and purpose of the research. Chapter two discusses the current state of research studies into the relationship between reflection and experienced-based learning in relation to the scope of this study. Chapter three reveals the design and methods applied to gather and analyse the data. Chapter four presents the findings from the different data sources: interviews (with students and an educator) and documents (online forum posts and students' CP journals). Chapter five discusses the findings in relation to the reviewed literature, and proposes a framework for online anticipatory reflection which can be applied for CP's further development as well as in other contexts. In the concluding chapter, Chapter six, the project's contribution to knowledge and implications in the broader debate on the role of online reflective practice and especially of anticipatory reflection during an internship are reviewed. Finally, limitations of this thesis are also identified, and recommendations for future research to build upon this body of work are proposed.

1.5 Conclusion

Chapter one serves as an introduction to this thesis and to the issues addressed, analysed and discussed in the chapters that follow. Relevant literature about the concept of reflection in the field of experience-based learning is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Bearing in mind the peculiarities of the studied phenomenon and the research questions, I selected and analysed the literature, identifying many practice-based case studies and discussions on the effectiveness of reflection in the context of experience-based learning. The reviewed literature revealed a shift in education from knowledge transfer to competence development and many studies focused on the relationship between reflection and learning from experience. While reflective practice is largely positioned “as a professional practice and process that supports students to learn through experience” (Coulson and Harvey, 2013, p. 401), there is little mention about anticipatory (or prospective) reflection (Loughran, 1996; Conway, 2001; Urzúa and Vásquez, 2008) and a noticeable gap in application and research of anticipatory reflection which became the focus of this thesis.

Following an extensive computerised literature search, this chapter explores and presents an overview of the understandings of reflection found in publications from different disciplines and countries. It relied on Lancaster University’s e-library, EBSCO, Wiley Online Library, Web of Science, JSTOR and Google scholar to find research on the development of reflective skills before, during and after a work placement.

The boundaries of the literature review were defined by the research questions and context (university students during an internship) as well as the target academic audience (higher education institutions). I concentrated on studies of reflective practice in higher education and internships. As a result, the following key words were used in different combinations to electronically search titles and abstracts. For instance: internship (or placement, or experienced-based learning, or work-integrated) + reflective practice (or reflection, or reflective journal, or reflective learning) + online (or weblogs, or online journal, or online diary, or e-portfolio). Within this review and the research project, the terms reflection and reflective practice are used interchangeably.

Books on reflective practice, primary research articles as well as literature reviews in English and German were reviewed (see References). To have a wider field for comparison, literature on both reflective practice on paper as well as reflective practice supported by technology were examined. Many of the articles came from the journal *Reflective Practice*, but other peer

and non-peer-reviewed publications (institutions' and researchers' own web pages) were also considered. Excluded was literature on reflective practice as a research method and reflection as applied to counselling jobs.

To set the scene, I explore the use of reflective practice in Germany (see Section 2.2) and then discuss the concept of reflection in the field of experience-based learning from a constructivist perspective (see Section 2.3). After that, I critically discuss the concept of reflection, the choice of the theoretical lenses and consolidate examples of the use of reflective (online) journals internationally (see Section 2.4) to summarise the trends.

The chapter ends with me addressing the identified gaps in the literature and positioning my research (see Sections 2.5 and 2.6) as expanding the understanding of the role of anticipatory reflection in learning from experience during an internship and enriching the scarce publications on evidence-based research in the field of online reflective practice during an internship in the German context. I address those gaps with a small group of students using the example of CP.

2.2 Use of reflective practice in Germany

This section offers an overview of the use of reflective practice in German higher education, because the research participants were students at German universities and the studied online reflective tool was developed and used in Germany. This is considered necessary in order to outline the German context within which the research takes place.

In recent years, the expectations on German universities have been changing in so far that universities are required to offer not only academic theoretical knowledge but also to develop learners' competences for lifelong learning and soft skills (Teichler, 2009). Slowly and steadily, e-portfolios, learning journals and weblogs have been gaining popularity as a measure of the above requirement. Especially e-portfolios seem to have been in fashion in pedagogical discussions (Egloffstein, Baierlein and Frötschl, 2010) and in pedagogical research (Gläser-Zikuda and Hascher, 2007). They have increasingly been considered appropriate and useful practice for reflective learning (Hilzensauer, 2008) and competence development.

However, according to the E-Portfolio German Chapter, founded in Berlin in 2014 with the aim of creating a community of e-portfolio experts and practitioners, there was until recently

no overview of existing e-portfolio projects in Germany. In 2016 the visibility of existing e-portfolio projects in German education was low and the visible projects were all small-scale.

At the beginning of my thesis writing, there were only sporadic examples of the use of learning journals/blogs to encourage student reflection by individual professors on their courses (at the universities in Freiburg, Muenster, Potsdam, Augsburg and Duisburg) and only a small body of published qualitative or quantitative research on the use of weblogs for teaching and learning (Pulich, 2007). Stratmann and colleagues (2009) observed that German universities were struggling with general challenges of creating the necessary infrastructure for e-portfolios as well as of finding ways to modify the examination rules in such a way as to make the assessment of portfolio activities possible. The lack of clear criteria for assessing personal learning portfolios is believed to be one of the main reasons for the slow and sporadic use of e-portfolios in German higher education (Fendler, 2012; Vogler-Lipp and Schwarz, 2017).

Some publications also report about individual professors who use reflection on their courses explicitly to foster competence development of students through reflection, e.g. competence-oriented teaching at the University of Duisburg-Essen (Ehlers, Adelsberger and Teschler, 2009). Generally though, the research mostly represents the perspective of the educators (Scholz, Menhard and Bruder, 2011).

While promoting student reflection with the help of online learning journals/weblogs is still not broadly incorporated across universities, when completing the thesis I was able to find a growing number of reports which showcase the implementation of e-portfolios and their use as a reflection tool, for example at the European University Viadrina (Vogler-Lipp and Schwarz, 2017), University of Passau (Hansen and Rachbauer, 2018), Technical University of Dresden (Gumpert, 2016) and Technical University Darmstadt (Scholz, Menhard and Bruder, 2011).

More and more courses or study programmes incorporate reflection to make students' reflective processes visible to other people and to provide evidence of lifelong learning (Hilzensauer, 2008; Fendler and Gläser-Zikuda, 2011). Reflective practice is used to encourage students to reflect on their learning, knowledge building and understanding of the course material, as well as to encourage self-organised learning (e.g. European University Viadrina, University of Augsburg and University of Muenster). The European University Viadrina uses the Mahara e-portfolio system for their e-portfolio, and the Viadrina PeerTutoring Course for reflection (Vogler-Lipp and Schwarz, 2017). The University of

Muenster chose weblogs to support their students' reflection on both seminar content and the students' personal learning path.

Especially in teacher education, there is a growing body of research showing an ongoing controversial discussion on the importance of reflection in becoming a professional as well as about the many forms of reflective practice (Poel and Heinrich, 2020). In teacher education e-portfolios are mostly used to accompany the learning process on specific courses or during the teaching practice semester at school. For instance, at the University of Darmstadt, the e-portfolio "dikopost" (a digital competence portfolio for students) is used by in-service teachers to prepare for their first teaching practice semester, to accompany the work placement and to evaluate it. The goal is to assist students in becoming aware of their competence development through reflection in a digital form. Students are supported by academic staff through Mahara and they learn how to write reflectively in order to be able to develop professionally and to document development processes.

A very comprehensive example of the use of e-portfolios during an internship with the goal of reflecting on the personal learning processes and competences can be found on the web page of the University of Heidelberg (Universität Heidelberg, 2020). An innovative concept is the so called Portfolio for the Internship Semester (ILIAS platform) at the University of Cologne which has been used "as an accompanying instrument for reflection on all practical phases in teacher training" (Bonsack *et al.*, 2020, p. 277). Students are offered questions to guide their reflective practice before, during and after the internship.

To support competence development, educational institutions seem to rely on and experiment with technology by adopting not only weblogs and e-portfolios. A project cooperation between the University of Cologne and the Technical University of Kaiserslautern used podcasts as an instrument for reflection and tested how this can contribute to the development of media competence in teachers' education (Reder and Lukács, 2018). It is also worth mentioning that in Germany vocational education virtual learning environments and reflection are also used to support the dialogue between educators, interns and employers, and to bridge the gap between the education system and the work placement in a similar way to CP.

The research project KOLA (in English: competence oriented learning in working process with digital media) employed constructivist and pragmatic approaches to promote cooperation between learning sites through an app and a browser-based platform, which was tested in several electrician training companies during an evaluation period from October 2014 to September 2017. Students' on-the-job experiences were used as a source of reflection, with

guiding questions, and they were visible for discussion purposes to the educators and employers (Hellriegel, 2017). However, examples such as these are still rare and show that reflection is not used consistently (Häcker, 2017).

I will now discuss the role of reflective practice in experience-based learning from a constructivist point of view and in the context of the tool, CP, and then deal in detail with key issues regarding reflective journals and reflection-in-anticipation.

2.3 Experience-based learning and constructivism

As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, CP supports a learner-centred practice that assists students studying at different universities in Hessen on internship abroad in reflecting on their experience and co-constructing their learning. The internship experience represents a transitional period for students, as they test theory, rules, and personal and company expectations, develop new values and understanding, search for roles and identities, and develop new competences. During an internship, students can practise reflection on their work as well as on their learning and competence development during that period.

CP relies on the assumption that students learn from experience and encourages the development of different competences. Hence, this study discusses students' perceptions of CP relying on the following lenses: constructivism as a practice in education, experiential learning and reflective practice. I chose those perspectives because constructivism mirrors my understanding of learning as an active and contextualised process where people create their knowledge based on previous experience and their environment. Moreover, reflective practice can be viewed as rooted in constructivism.

Constructivism acknowledges that people develop concepts and ideas through experience and prior knowledge (Osterman, 1998; Moon, 1999). As a learning theory, constructivism has commonalities with the frameworks for reflection in the context of professional development and experience-based learning. For instance, both recognise that learning is constructed through experience and that action is integral to the learning process, and both strive to integrate theory into practice. The constructivists see the learner as actively constructing new knowledge in the learning process (Moon, 1999), and they consider his/her identity and experience to be “culturally and personally sculpted rather than existing in some kind of objectively discoverable limbo” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 214).

The educational literature on constructivism offers examples of many different perspectives which have coexisted for many years (Fenwick, 2001). Phillips (1995), for instance, identifies six views of constructivism depending on the role of the individual in the process of knowledge construction and the extent to which knowledge is believed to be made or discovered. The common premise in all views is that learners construct, through reflection, “a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 10) derived from interaction in their environment.

Experiential learning theory (ELT) emphasises the central role of experience in the learning process and that is what distinguishes it from other learning theories. It has its origins in the works of Dewey (1933), Piaget (1976) and Kolb (1984). ELT describes learning as a cycle “driven by the resolution of the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction” (Kolb and Kolb, 2008, p. 43). ELT is identified in many areas of life as it is a holistic and constructivist theory of learning. Kolb (1984) defines learning as:

“The process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (p. 41).

But what is experience? The literature does not provide a coherent picture and lacks “clarity about the nature of experience” (Moon, 1999, p. 22). Boud, Keogh and Walker (1999) refer to experience in a broad sense and define it as consisting:

“Of the total response of a person to a situation or event: what he or she thinks, feels, does and concludes at the time and immediately thereafter” (p. 18).

Boud and colleagues (1999) further describe experience as consisting of many smaller elements (experiences), being formal or informal and having the form of a field trip, a workshop, a lecture, a study project, etc. The processed experience “has to be experienced by the individual” (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002, p. 36). However, it is difficult to locate experience in time or space as it is always connected with other experiences (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993).

ELT is based on the assumption that learning leads to action, and that this in turn leads to further experience and reflection. Hence, reflective practice is nowadays widely adopted in those higher education programmes which include work-related experiences such as work placements or internships (Sweitzer and King, 2009; Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016).

The importance of reflection in the learning process was explored much earlier by the father of reflection in learning, John Dewey, whose quote has become famous:

“We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience” (Dewey, 1933, p. 78).

Years later, James and Brookfield (2014) also share the belief that experience constitutes “the vital raw material for reflection” (p. 12) but that it is not sufficient for learning. Rather:

“It is what we do with that experience — how we convert its complex constituent elements into knowledge or understanding — that constitutes learning” (p. 12).

Hence, learners need to be exposed to reflective activities as intentional or conscious working with experience as this contributes to the learning process as well as to one’s personal and competence development (Dewey, 1933; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999; Moon, 1999). To the “classical approaches” of reflection belong the ones by Dewey (1933), Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983). Their works and those of Mezirow (1991) and of Boud and colleagues (since 1991) have significantly influenced the development of numerous frameworks of reflective practice.

Schön (1983) coined the term “reflective practice” to describe the notion that reflection is important in professional development and his model has been one of the most influential. Schön focused on reflection as a mechanism for professional development and believed that skilled practitioners need to be reflective practitioners. The underpinning idea was that, while being reflective, learners build up an expertise from their practice and put the theory into use. Schön believed that novices should step back, take some time and think through situations from a distance.

Similarly, Kolb (1984) maintained that not everyone learns from their experience, as learning is more likely to take place when a person actively makes sense of the experience and links previous to current experiences through reflective thought. Kolb’s experiential learning model is still widely cited in educational and professional development research. The cycle, which consists of planning, action, evaluation and reflection, allows the learner to learn from experience and to create new experience. In Kolb’s model, reflection on specific experiences is seen as part of learning, but it is not explicitly explained and developed.

Boud, Keogh and Walker (1999) offered a model of experiential learning which enriches Kolb’s model with two elements: specific context and the role that individual characteristics (previous knowledge and learning strategies and emotions) play in the reflective process.

Boud, Keogh and Walter (1999) identify three major elements of the reflective process: “returning to experience, attending to feelings and re-evaluating the experience” (p. 21). The three elements should be regarded as related and the process may involve many cycles as well as repetition or omission of some stages.

The model of Boud and colleagues (1999) seems to offer one of the most comprehensive accounts of reflective practice in professional development (Moon, 1999), including reflection-before-action. Boud (2001) explores reflection “from the point of view of someone who is trying to learn from his normal complex and unruly experience” (p. 11) and this assumption is incorporated in the concept of CP. After reviewing their model of reflection from 1985, Boud and Walker (1998) emphasise that the learner determines which experience he/she chooses to notice and process. The authors suggest that reflection results in a wider intellectual development, a point which is supported by CP through the variety of five predefined competence areas.

Constructivism and reflective practice “share basic assumptions about knowledge and learning” (Osterman, 1998, p. 1). Generally, within the reflective practice frameworks, the practitioner/learner is viewed as central to the learning process and as a creator of new knowledge (Osterman, 1998; O’Connell and Dymont, 2011). In other words, reflecting on one’s personal experience is believed to be “a major factor for developing a higher-level learning” (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993, p. 4) or metacognition (Moon, 2006). This belief is also inherent in the Competence Pass as a tool for developing students’ competences through reflection (see Section 4.1).

In more recent publications, Boud (2010, p. 26) criticises the concept of reflective practice for “being too individualistic” in the sense that reflection is predominantly viewed as individualistic practice. Boud (2010) emphasises the collective nature of reflection in workplaces and calls it “productive reflection” (p. 32). The focus here is on the organisational rather than individual intent, on the involvement of multiple stakeholders and on the contextual and developmental character of reflection. Emphasis is also placed on the changing nature of the context of professional practice, which in today’s professional collaboration projects is often multidisciplinary and co-produced with other people rather than individual (Boud, 2010).

In today’s global, complex and rapidly changing world, there has been a growing consensus that students need education for global citizenship and global competence. Global competence is defined as:

“The capacity to examine local, global, and intercultural issues; to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others; to engage in open, appropriate, and effective interactions with people from different cultures; and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development” (Asia Society and OECD, 2018, p. 5).

Recently, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed and launched a new PISA framework for global competence, because education should prepare students to “live and succeed in today’s global economy and multicultural societies” (Asia Society and OECD, 2018, p. 4). Students should actively engage in their learning, be given the time and possibility to reflect, and learn to conceptualise possible solutions for a sustainable future. Globally competent students are expected to:

“Assess options and plan actions based on evidence and the potential for impact, taking into account previous approaches, varied perspectives, and potential consequences...

Reflect on their capacity to advocate for and contribute to improvement locally, regionally, or globally.” (Boix Mansilla and Bughin, 2011, p. 45)

Similarly, Harvey and colleagues (2016) claim that coupling reflection and experiential learning requires a more holistic approach to acknowledge “that experiential learning occurs across complex environments constituting interdependencies between the learner, the university and the host organisation, and often the people for whom services are provided” (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016, p. 3). Practising reflection in experiential learning is complicated by the fact that it “often occurs in a context beyond the traditional classroom” (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016, p. 3) and that context remains unknown to the educators.

In order to make sense of the internship, students need to understand the experiential nature of learning in the field and themselves (Sweitzer and King, 2009). For instance, in a study of pre-service teachers, Eutsler and Curcio (2019) reported that students’ reflective blogs on authentic experiences enabled pre-service teachers to connect the reading course with their field placement, to make inquiries and to explore “future teaching ideas, which contributed to their teaching philosophy and formation of teacher identity” (p. 262).

To sum up, there seems to be an agreement in the literature that the majority of the competences needed today require the development of reflective practice by the individual (Brookfield, 1995; Rychen and Salganik, 2002). Reflection is believed to be “an essential component for both study and practice” (Brown and McCartney, 1999, p. 29), since it can:

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- be an effective strategy to bridge theoretical knowledge (e.g. from the classroom) with students' experience (e.g. internship) (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016);
 - support skills/competence development (Brown and McCartney, 1999) and lifelong learning (Trede and Smith, 2012; Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016);
 - be a skill which enhances graduates' employability (Kinash and Crane, 2015);
 - help identify personal learning needs (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999).

Brookfield (1995) points out that without a reflective habit in professional practice, “we run the continual risk of making poor decisions and bad judgements” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 3). It is not surprising then, that nowadays reflection is no longer seen as a luxury but as an essential component in most personal and professional practices and “a responsibility that would-be professionals cannot ignore” (Ross, 2011b, p. 147).

2.4 The concept of reflection

Reflecting is important because when:

“We become more aware of our theories-in-use, we become more aware of the contradictions between what we do and what we hope to do; as a result we can shape new directions” (Osterman, 1990, p. 137).

While the concept of reflective practice is widely used in research on teaching and learning, in professional development, higher education and in practice, there seems to be no explicit consensus of what exactly reflective practice and reflective learning journals are (Thorpe, 2004; Moon, 2006).

Some researchers speak of “reflective learning” (Moon, 2004); others of “reflective thinking” (Dewey, 1933; Kember *et al.*, 2000), “reflective writing” (Cowan, 2014), “reflective practice” (Schön, 1983) or “critical reflection” (Brookfield, 1995), though I do not consider this latter term as I believe that reflection is not by definition critical and I agree with Brookfield (1995) that not being critical “does not mean it is unimportant or unnecessary” (p. 8). Reflection does not need to be critical “in the sense that the individual is mulling over something in order to question or re-evaluate it” (Brown and McCartney, 1999, p. 24) and it is not necessarily connected with “fault-finding elements” (Brown and McCartney, 1999, p. 24).

This study regards reflection as “both a tool for praxis-based learning and a professional practice that is fostered through experience-based learning in higher education” (Harvey *et al.*, 2010, p. 138). It is sufficient if reflection as mediation enables us “to find connections between knowledge, learning and action, and to move forward” (Brown and McCartney, 1999, p. 24).

The meaning of reflection is further mystified and blurred by the various conceptual and methodological lenses, worldviews and researchers’ personal experiences (Ruth-Sahd, 2003). For example, Dewey (1933) believes that reflective thought occurs when a person experiences a transformation from “obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious” (p. 100). He defines reflection as:

“Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (p. 9).

Moon (2004) describes reflection as being:

“A simple mental process that is apparently complicated by the different frameworks of meaning that have been imposed on it in its different applications in practice and in the academic and professional literature” (p. 93).

Moon (1999) suggests that the various approaches largely depend on the focus of reflection, which could be on the process of reflection, its purpose or its outcomes. For Pavlovich (2007) reflection is:

“As much a state of mind as it is a set of activities, with the end process being not so much resolution of an experience but rather a better understanding of it” (pp. 283–284).

Boud and colleagues (1999) understand reflective practice as:

“Intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations” (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999, p. 19).

They maintain that the goal of reflection is to prepare people for new experience and the outcome of reflection could be “a new way of doing something, the clarification of an issue, the development of a skill or the resolution of a problem” (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002, p. 50) where emotions are believed to facilitate or block the process of reflection.

Similarly, for Ryan (2013), reflection includes two key elements:

“(1) Making sense of experience in relation to self, others and contextual conditions; and importantly, (2) reimagining and/or planning future experience for personal and social benefit” (p. 146).

Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh (2016) offer a definition by adopting a holistic approach to build a theory specifically about reflection for learning through experience:

“Reflection is a deliberate and conscientious process that employs a person’s cognitive, emotional and somatic capacities to mindfully contemplate on past, present or future (intended or planned) actions in order to learn, better understand and potentially improve future action” (p. 9).

That definition is broad and mentions explicitly reflective practice in anticipation of an event, which is important for this study as its focus is on anticipatory reflection. This definition resonates with CP because it both defines the purpose of reflection as being the better understanding and potential improvement of future action.

Based on the available definitions in the literature, reflection appears to be a multifaceted concept: it is further described as being hierarchical, vertical (Dewey, 1933; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Moon, 1999), iterative (Schön, 1987; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999), introspective (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999; Finlay, 2008), retrospective (Schön, 1987), practical, technical, transformational and emancipatory (Mezirow, 1991).

It has been studied in different sciences, such as psychology, sociology and philosophy, which makes comparison even more difficult. The meaning attributed to reflection ranges from it being a method, a process, or a learning or teaching tool, to it being considered a philosophy or an outcome.

Despite the reported diversity in the definitions, as exemplified above, the concepts of reflection share common elements: an analysis of a (troublesome) situation; a process of examining assumptions; considering possible solutions; and reworking of practice and concepts (Brookfield, 1995; Fook, White and Gardner, 2006). Moon (1999) concludes that the actual differences lie “in the framework of use or of guidance of reflection rather than in the process itself” (p. 10).

Reflection is regarded as a mental process (Moon, 1999) or a cognitive process of thinking about and learning from experience (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999), as well as an intentional action linked with making judgements (Dewey, 1933; Boud, Keogh and Walker,

1999) as the learners' response to experience (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999). Further on, within the reflective practice frameworks, problems are viewed as "opportunities for dialog, learning and change" (Osterman, 1990, p. 138) and thus help students improve.

Boud (2010) also outlines the generative rather than instrumental focus of reflection and its developmental, open, unpredictable, dynamic character. In this context, Moon (1999) warns that external actors can inspire or order experiential learning and can only guide the learner in the process of reflection and its outcome. It is the practitioner/learner who is viewed as central to the learning process and as a creator of new knowledge (Osterman, 1998; O'Connell and Dymont, 2011).

The literature also shows that not all students are reflective or willing to reflect. Often educators expect that students can learn to reflect (Moon, 2006). Coulson and Harvey (2013) suggest that structured activities for "reflection before, during and after the experience will enable learners to navigate the inherent complexities of learning through experience" (p. 403). Coulson and Harvey (2013) propose a framework for scaffolding reflection for learning from experience which consist of four learning phases: learning to reflect, reflection for action, reflection in action, and reflection on action.

However, others (Brown and McCartney, 1999) doubt that reflection can be learnt. They explain that it can be developed rather than learnt and compare learning to reflect with learning to ride a bicycle: "we can often remember the moment when balance 'just came' and we became not learners-to-ride but riders, and we cannot say exactly how we know to keep our balance" (Brown and McCartney, 1999, p. 28). The person teaching someone to ride a bicycle becomes a helper.

Most commonly, reflection is regarded as being "retrospective or prospective" (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012, p. 3013) and three main types of reflection are widely accepted in the literature (though different authors use slightly different names¹):

1. Reflection-in-anticipation (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Brown and McCartney, 1999; Boud, 2001), anticipatory reflection (Van Manen, 2016, Conway, 2001), reflection-before-action (Edwards, 2017), prospective reflection (Conway, 2001) or reflection-for-action (Cowan and Stroud, 2016) all refer generally to planning an event.
2. Reflection-in-action (Schön, 1987) happens during an action, when something unexpected happens and needs one's attention.

¹ I use these expressions interchangeably in the thesis to avoid redundancy in the text.

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3. Reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983; Moon, 1999; Cowan and Stroud, 2016) or after an event (Boud, 2001) occurs after an event and is retrospective.

Schön (1987) distinguished two types of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Although his model has been very influential in education and professional training (Finlay, 2008), it has also been criticised “for lack of precision and clarity” (Finlay, 2008, p. 4) and lack of prospective dimension (Urzúa and Vásquez, 2008).

Another not yet so popular form of reflection is reflection-beyond-action (Edwards, 2017), which can enhance reflection-before-action in order to be able to define the personal learning and development needs in general. Reflection-beyond-action is:

“A process whereby students can be encouraged to make links between their past and present experiences, using these to inform future experiences. The past and present become accessible to actions in the future, making the links between them more explicit and less tacit” (Edwards, 2017, p. 9).

Reflection-beyond-action can contribute to finding “meaning in and from practice” (Edwards, 2017, p. 11) and support “a broader interpretation of students’ experiences” (Edwards, 2017, p. 11) in a lifelong learning context. The concepts of developing self-awareness and informing future professional practice touch upon the educational goals of Competence Pass and thus it is mentioned here in the belief that it may become useful in the analysis of the project data.

In conclusion, reflective practice can take place in preparation of an event, during the event or after the event, all with the purpose of making sense of it. The reviewed literature revealed that most research is on reflection after an event, i.e. describing learners’ attempts to reflect on a past problematic event and to extract new knowledge, and eventually to prepare strategies for the future.

2.4.1 Reflection-in-anticipation

Although retrospective reflection still dominates over prospective reflection in the literature, it seems that anticipatory reflection has been gradually gaining attention (Urzúa and Vásquez, 2008; Edwards, 2017). As CP focuses mainly on reflection in anticipation of internship events and its emphasis “is on what we can do to make the most of future events” (Boud, 2001, p. 12), the thesis is devoted in particular to the study of reflection-in-anticipation. For the

purposes of this thesis I chose to use the terms anticipatory reflection and reflection-in-anticipation interchangeably. CP encourages students to practice self-determined learning and reflection to prepare consciously about an action that they can soon test out during the internship (Loughran, 1996). This type of reflection helps learners “examine previous knowledge and experience, understand what is being asked of them and relieve any anxieties” (Edwards, 2017, p. 4). Additionally, anticipatory reflection “enables us to deliberate about possible alternatives, decide on courses of action... and anticipate the experiences we and others may have as a result of expected events or of our planned actions” (Van Manen, 2016, p. 101).

Anticipatory reflection is “a means of accessing or framing a problem situation before it occurs” (Loughran, 1996, p. 19) and a possibility to prepare consciously for an action which will be tested (Loughran, 1996). Edwards (2017) considers that reflecting in advance of a learning event “can allow analysis of the situation prior to its taking place with the potential to enrich learning and practice development” (p. 4). Mann and colleagues add that it “appears to occur most often in novel or challenging situations” (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009, p. 601) where “past experience informs planning” (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009, p. 601). In anticipatory reflection, the “looking back” is “turning inward, examining one’s own remembered experiences and/or anticipated experiences, not exclusively looking back in time” (Conway, 2001, p. 90).

This explanation is important, as otherwise the term anticipatory reflection may appear contradictory, since anticipatory “denotes looking forward in time and reflection looking back in time” (Conway, 2001, p. 90). He further explains that:

“Reflection is not only about taking the long view backward in time, but also, and this is borne out in experience, about looking forward toward the horizon... with knowledge of the past from the viewpoint of the present” (Conway, 2001, p. 90).

Finally, reflection-in-anticipation is considered valuable for problem identification, evaluation and planning (Urzúa and Vásquez, 2008). Urzúa and Vásquez (2008) consider future orientation to be also important in identity construction during field placements, with identity being used to “refer to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (Norton, 1997, p. 410). It resembles also a great opportunity for students to develop their individual reflective skills through an exploration of different approaches (Coulson and Harvey, 2013).

Future oriented reflective practice has received attention at international level and is core in the OECD learning framework called Learning Compass 2030, where anticipation is described as “involving projecting the consequences and potential impact of doing one thing over another, or of doing nothing at all” (OECD, no date). This emphasis on a goal-oriented type of future oriented reflection is relevant for the users of CP on their internship as well.

2.4.2 Online journals as tools for capturing reflective practice

In the context of this research, reflective practice involves the use of technology. Hence this section explores aspects of reflective practice and online journaling which are relevant for the study: the online environment as a space for reflection, supporting and hindering factors of reflective journaling, as well as the need for feedback and guidance.

Given the growing importance of technologies and the Web in education today, the relationship between technologies and pedagogy and their interdependence enjoy exploration from different perspectives and need further discussion (Cousin, 2005; Thorpe and Edmunds, 2011) because “digital technology access should be at an individual level to achieve personalisation supporting most appropriate use” (Passey, 2013, p. 33).

Technology is seen in this study as bridging the contexts of study and work in a constructive way and increasing learners’ awareness of the relevance of reflection for internship activities. It can enhance students’ reflective skills (Kori *et al.*, 2014) as it offers “many new opportunities for reinforcing reflection by prompting learners about their own learning” (Verpoorten, Westera and Specht, 2011, p. 2).

The current study uses the term online reflective journal to refer to online:

“Written documents that students create as they think about various concepts, events, or interactions over a period of time for the purposes of gaining insights into self-awareness and learning” (Thorpe, 2004, p. 328).

The literature suggests that, internationally, online reflective journals are regularly in use in higher education and increasingly in work placement (Boud, 2001; Moon, 2004; Gläser-Zikuda, 2012; Egger, 2017). Various forms of reflective practice are gaining in popularity: open, structured, unstructured, written, oral, and using learning journals, weblogs or e-portfolios (Moon, 1999; Gläser-Zikuda and Hascher, 2007). Most common are written forms (Beatson and Larkin, 2010) such as written diaries, journals, logs or e-portfolios (Roberts,

2009; Gläser-Zikuda, 2012) and less widespread is the use of spoken digital journals (Villamizar and Mejía, 2019) and podcasts (Reder and Lukács, 2018).

Although various online or technology-based tools such as podcasts, audio and video diaries, and social media blogs offer different modes of expression and can be used to encourage reflective practice, the literature shows that “the dominant mode of expression is writing” (James and Brookfield, 2014, p. 19) and that often the reflective practice activities are designed for specific academic or professional sectors (James and Brookfield, 2014).

Technology seems to influence the journaling style. Reflective journals can be completely open and unstructured or structured with prompts and/or questions, as is the case with CP. In a comparative study with a group of undergraduates, online journals had more digital entries which were “often brief and incomplete” (Gleaves, Walker and Grey, 2007, p. 631) whilst the paper entries were fewer, but “longer and more discursive in nature” (Gleaves, Walker and Grey, 2007, p. 631).

In a review of 33 papers on reflection in the context of technology-enhanced learning in the period 2007–2012, Kori and colleagues (2014) distinguish three support types: “technical tools, technical tools with predefined guidance, and technical tools with human interaction guidance” (p. 45). Moon (1999) argues that reflective journals can serve many purposes such as: recording experience, facilitating learning from experience, developing critical thinking, increasing active involvement in the learning and the ability to reflect, enhancing problem-solving skills and encouraging metacognition, among others.

While there is much trust in the belief that journals in any form allow students to reflect in a deep and authentic way and promote active learning, their effectiveness is not unquestioned (Dyment and O’Connell, 2011; Threlfall, 2014). Kori and colleagues (2014) conclude that while the three types of support could be beneficial for reflection, not all of the studies revealed a positive effect. The literature reveals that reflective journals (sometimes as part of e-portfolios) are troublesome means for processing experience (O’Connell and Dyment, 2004) and have both advantages and disadvantages which are discussed below.

Through a constructivist lens, writing “may be understood as thinking and learning tool” and a “problem-solving process” (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012, p. 3013). Journaling in advance of an event, in particular, is useful for several reasons (Boud, 2001). First, it can help learners prepare for what will happen, as they can focus on their role as a learner, and thus they can explore what they want to gain from their involvement in an activity.

Second, journal writing in this case helps learners think about what they need to know in order to make the event productive. Third, learners are invited to practise imaginary scenarios and ask themselves “what-if” questions (Boud, 2001; Conway, 2001). They plan what they “need to take to the event” (Boud, 2001, p. 13) and “can move from a stage of undifferentiated awareness to conscious appreciation of potential situations about to be experienced” (Edwards, 2017, p. 4).

On the one hand, it is believed that writing journals helps learners question their values, experiences and beliefs, and engage in critical thinking (Moon, 1999; Boud, 2001; Thorpe, 2004). Also, journals enable students to think about their learning or about professional processes (O’Connell and Dymont, 2011). On the other hand, some students feel bored by the activity or write for the teacher/assignment (Dymont and O’Connell, 2010) and some may resist engaging in reflective writing (James and Brookfield, 2014). Not all learners consider reflection helpful (Brookfield, 1995) and some find reflective thinking narcissistic and even pointless (James and Brookfield, 2014). They would rather complete traditional academic assignments where they are expected to reproduce experts’ knowledge than reflect on their learning and experiences and do self-appraisal (James and Brookfield, 2014).

A further concern, often discussed in the literature, relates to the question of how reliable written resources are when used as evidence of reflection (Hatton and Smith, 1995). It seems unclear what relationship exists “between the ability and willingness to be reflective about one’s professional development and one’s ability and willingness to write reflectively is, therefore, unclear” (Sumsion and Fleet, 1996, p. 124). Hobbs (2007), for instance, concluded that instead of producing genuine reflections, teacher students composed the journal entries with the intention of pleasing their tutors. Similar results are reported by Cox (2005), whose study participants consciously chose experiences to reflect on, which they believed would meet the course requirements. Students may also be concerned about disclosing private issues, especially when their reflection is being assessed (James and Brookfield, 2014).

Threlfall (2014) adds to the list of challenges lack of time, students’ motivation and the structure of programmes. James and Brookfield (2014) also question whether writing is really the best form for reflective practice. It may be helpful to give students freedom to use alternative formats, for instance, poetry, videos, collage, dance, etc. as a means of “communicating what meanings they have drawn from content, or what skills they are developing” (James and Brookfield, 2014, p. 17). Boud and Walker (1998) identify as problematic the over intellectualising of reflection and sometimes uncritical acceptance of learners’ experience as well as reflection without learning. Thus, Fowler and Chevannes

(1998 cited in Thorpe, 2004, p. 331) warn “against promoting reflective learning as a panacea”.

Much research has discussed the role of the teacher/tutor in the reflective process as a facilitator and an assessor. Some previous research suggests that the facilitation of feedback and guidance may be beneficial for the reflective process (Moon, 1999; Cox, 2005). A teacher can facilitate the reflective process and encourage students to go through the different stages of the reflective process (Osterman, 1998; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002). Beatson and Larkin (2010) also conclude that when students receive ongoing feedback from academic staff, they tend to move “from the descriptive levels of reflection to more meaningful and critical reflection” (p. 2).

Indeed, in the literature it remains questionable “whether attempts should be made to assess the degree of reflection demonstrated by the developing professional” (Sumsion and Fleet, 1996, p. 122). Not assessing reflective assignments may lead to students not taking it seriously and not completing it, as they are used to constant assessment in their higher education (James and Brookfield, 2014).

Those who assess reflective writing are not consistent in the specific ways of assessing the levels of reflection in student journals. There are different frameworks which incorporate the idea of depth/level of reflection (Van Manen, 1977; Mezirow, 1991; Hatton and Smith, 1995). Moon (2006) summarises that they are all developed in practical work with learners and seem to be consistent in their understanding about deep and superficial reflection (Moon, 2006).

In a literature review of 11 published articles that examine the level of reflection in student journals in higher education, Dymont and O’Connell (2011) conclude that “the quality of reflection found in student journals varies considerably across studies” (p. 81), that some journals lacked critical reflection or clear structure and that students felt bored by the activity or wrote for the teacher/assignment.

While most assessment frameworks are hierarchical (Van Manen, 1977; Mezirow, 1991; Hatton and Smith, 1995), Wellington and Austin (Wellington and Austin, 1996) propose five reflective orientations which are not hierarchical. They are: immediate which is essentially non-reflective and characterised by simple description; technical which focuses on improving one’s efficiency; deliberative which emphasises the personal meaning within learning; dialectic which advocates political liberation and personal empowerment; and transpersonal which focuses on introspective self-development. Wellington and Austin (1996) were

interested to discover whether practitioners engage in reflective practice and whether they are conscious about using reflection in their work as well as whether they see education as domesticating or liberating.

Less studied is the role and perception of peer feedback. In a recent study of the use of weblogs by 74 pre-service teacher students during an internship in Switzerland, Egger (2017) concludes that students who received peer feedback on their blogs found the activity more valuable and felt more positive and motivated to engage with it compared to those who received and gave no peer feedback. No difference was found in the length of the blog posts and the time for writing in both groups.

In a quantitative study of reflective e-portfolios of students (n=140 participants) of business lecturers in Germany, Egloffstein and colleagues (2010) measured mainly (68%) superficial reflections, mostly about course content and tasks. They confessed that the students' reflection were mostly superficial and seldom covered students' personal goals, attitudes and perceptions. Deeper reflections were found when the reflective texts were assessed and when the reflective process was supported by open questions.

In a small-scale case study with 13 students of a further education master's programme in Germany, Pullich (2007) discussed types of reflection revealed by the journals and students' accounts of advantages and difficulties of writing weblogs. The students used semi-public learning journals as part of their master's thesis on a distance learning course. Many students experienced the weblogs as helpful for monitoring the development of their projects, to clarify thoughts and to overcome emotional crisis and problems in the working process. The author stressed that it took students time to discover those benefits of reflective practice.

Students had to get used to the software as well as to integrating this activity into their work. At the beginning they also experienced weblogging as a compulsory task and extra workload. He further suggested that novices to reflective learning, in particular, need an introduction to the activity and enough time to reflect. He therefore questioned the sense of using weblogs for single university courses for a semester. Instead, he believed that weblogs should be placed in a system independent from a single institution and could be accessed and taken after graduation.

In one of the few quantitative studies, Petko and colleagues (2017) examined the use of weblogs in teacher education internships in Austria. During a four-week internship, 176 student teachers were randomly divided into five groups. Four groups had to use daily

weblogs with problem-focused or emotion-focused writing assignments. Some students received feedback. There was a control group which wrote a final reflection paper instead. The authors measured the impact of weblogs on students' stress level, self-efficacy and reflective abilities. They concluded that none of the groups showed a difference in the stress levels or in the ability to reflect. However, the groups with problem-focused weblog assignments and feedback seemed to have improved their self-reported self-efficacy during the internship more than the other groups.

Similarly, Hartung-Beck and Schlag (2020) compared the usage of two different learning journal concepts at the University of Wuppertal (Germany) with teacher students on a work placement. The analysis of the two groups (N1 = 69 and N2 = 126) showed that "through clearer instructions and reducing diary entries, more expedient reflections seem to take place" (Hartung-Beck and Schlag, 2020, p. 90) and that students need support (prompts) to successfully fill in the learning journals.

To close, the literature suggests a growing interest in students' perceptions, acceptance and experiences with reflective journals (Thorpe, 2004; Gleaves, Walker and Grey, 2007; Vos and Cowan, 2009; O'Connell and Dymont, 2011), which "presents an unclear picture of the qualities of reflection found within them" (Threlfall, 2014, p. 329), and the effectiveness of reflective practice does not remain unquestioned (Dymont and O'Connell, 2011; Threlfall, 2014).

As the tool under study is a voluntary and non-assessed assignment, reflective practice assessment models are not further discussed. Since the scope of this research does not include measuring the depth or level of students' reflections, the various models for levels of reflection are also not the subject of discussion. Rather, this study focuses on the role which students give to reflective practice in experience-based learning settings and especially on the role of anticipatory reflection.

2.5 Gap in the literature

It appears to me that the main challenges which arise in studying reflective practice are connected with the understanding of the concept of reflection and with the quality and effectiveness of the reflective practice.

It is important that the reasonable body of research on promoting reflective practice shows evidence for growing interest in the promotion of (online) reflective practice internationally. However, the literature is still “dispersed across several fields, and it is unclear which approaches may have efficacy or impact” (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009, p. 595).

Examples from English speaking countries (United Kingdom, Australia, United States of America) dominate the list of publications and the majority of the studies found are qualitative and small-scale and hence mostly case studies from the fields of health, social care and teacher education (e.g., those in the journal *Reflective Practice*). The studies are often produced by the academic staff from their own experience and their students and many of those studies do not build on the work of other researchers (Fook, White and Gardner, 2006). In order to ensure that reflective journals become meaningful experiences for students, more research is needed to further clarify the construct of reflection (Thorpe, 2004).

In a review on the use of reflection in professional learning, Boud (2010) warns that some popular activities “go under the guise of ‘reflection’ but cannot be justified in terms of any articulated view of the concept” (p. 26). Similarly, Threlfall (2014) argues that although many practitioners and students talk about reflection, they do not understand the complexity of reflective practice and the many processes of reflection. Finally, journals seem to be often implemented without consideration of students’ individual needs and of their acceptance of reflective practice (Hascher and Hofmann, 2014).

Thus, further investigation is required to understand students’ experience with reflective practice, and what implications there might be for educators. I second Vos and Cowan (2009) that we need to understand what types of reflection students find easy, as well as what occasions and topics are most effective to reflect upon.

As the interest in reflection and reflective practice in professional development matures, there is “a need for studies with rigorous designs that will allow us to evaluate the effect of different educational strategies to promote its development” (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009, p. 615). Also, the existing perceptions of the advantages and limitations of learning journals should be expanded with examples of diverse learner groups, domains, and organisations (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012).

Hence, my research fills in a gap in German publications on evidence-based research in the field of online reflective practice in a specific situation: higher education students from Germany doing an internship abroad. It aims to study whether particular students in Germany

experience reflective practice as important for the transition between university and the work placement, as is suggested in the literature, and whether they view their internships as providing a valuable opportunity for them to develop their skills in reflective practice (Beatson and Larkin, 2010).

The thesis also addresses a gap between the available strategies for reflection and what really happens on courses (Boud, 2010). It critically examines whether CP justifies its goal as a reflective tool or whether, as Boud (2010) warns, it has been used as an activity synonymous with writing about practical situations.

Finally, this thesis considers Boud's (2010) suggestion to move beyond older concepts and look for new approaches to reflective practice that serve the needs of the current professional world. The results are discussed in the light of previous international research in order to identify similarities and differences in the way students experience the phenomenon as well as to offer suggestions for the further development of the concept of reflective practice.

The findings are expected to complement previous research and advance current understanding by providing a perspective on and understanding of online reflective practice of German students.

2.6 Conclusion

The review of the literature in this chapter has demonstrated the complex nature of reflection in learning from experience. Many words are used as synonyms of, or interchangeably with, “reflection”, for example, reflective thinking and critical reflection. However, these have different connotations, which makes comparison difficult (Moon, 1999).

Earlier studies view reflection as an individualised process depending on various personal, structural and contextual factors which lead to learners approaching reflection in different ways (Wellington and Austin, 1996). Later publications claim that more attention should be paid to reflection in groups, as often happens in today’s professional collaboration projects (Boud, 2010).

The literature also highlights different aspects of reflective practice: development of models for reflection (Kolb, 1984; Gibbs, 1988; Johns, 1995; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002), levels of reflective thinking (Mezirow, 1991; Hatton and Smith, 1995; O’Connell and Dymont, 2004; Thorpe, 2004), and the use of reflective journals (Langer, 2002; Moon, 2006; Hübner, Nückles and Renkl, 2010) to name a few.

This thesis responds to the calls from literature to look for further clarity of the construct and complexity of reflective practice (Thorpe, 2004; Vos and Cowan, 2009; Threlfall, 2014) from the students’ perspective, to discuss an underrepresented form of reflection – anticipatory reflection (Conway, 2001; Edwards, 2017) – and to evaluate the usefulness, advantages and limitations of a particular online reflective tool, advancing existing understanding with further examples (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009; Boud, 2010; Gläser-Zikuda, 2012) from German higher education.

As described above, anticipatory reflection is a missing component in many models of reflection (Conway, 2001; Edwards, 2017) and is hence underrepresented in practice and research. This study’s purpose is to enrich the literature and to contribute to understanding the role and value of anticipatory reflection in the context of an internship from the point of view of the students.

I couple my findings with the identified key learnings from the literature to develop a framework for online anticipatory reflection. This study is informed by the frameworks of Boud (2001, 2010), Boud and colleagues (2002), Coulson and Harvey (2013) and Edwards (2017) as they describe and study reflection-in-anticipation. In addition, they offer

comprehensive accounts of reflective practice in professional development or/and focus on learning from experience.

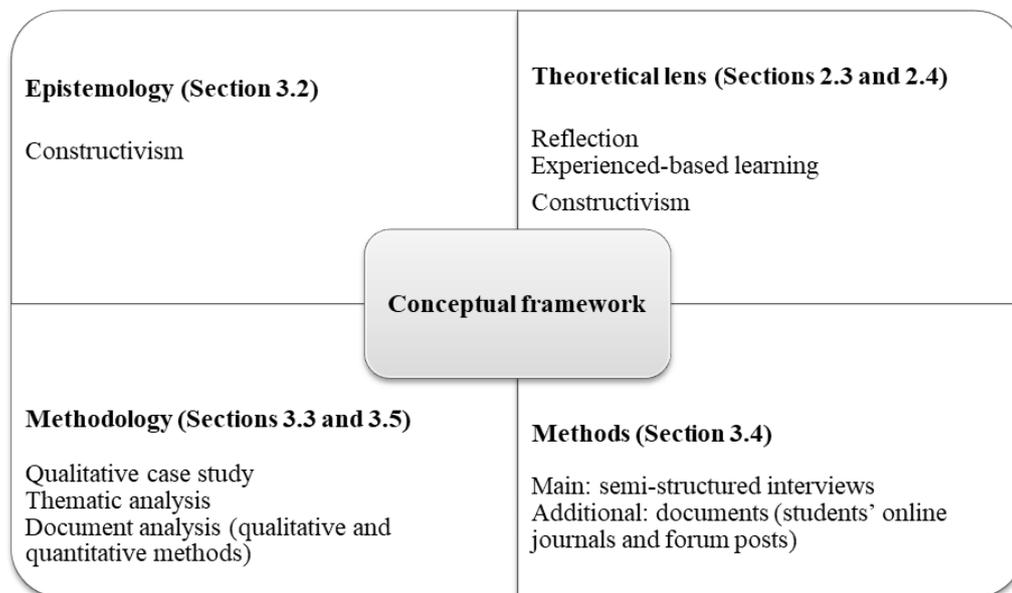
As the study is not bound to a single university field, the findings and recommendations may have implications for a wider educational audience involved in supporting students' reflective practice on a work placement. The next step, however, is the research design, which is presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the epistemological beliefs of the researcher and the resulting research design, which encompasses the methodology and the data collection methods and analysis. It also discusses my role and that of the participants as well as the ethical considerations.

This research was carried out adopting a constructivist worldview, which framed the research design, as is shown in Graph 3.1 and discussed in the subsequent sections.



Graph 3.1: Conceptual framework of the study

3.2 Epistemology

Constructivism was chosen as appropriate for this research for several reasons. First, it mirrors my understanding of learning as an active and contextualised process, where learners create their knowledge based on previous experience and their environment. As an online tutor and researcher, I share the assumption within the reflective practice frameworks that the practitioner (learner) is viewed as central to the learning process and as a creator of new knowledge (Osterman, 1998; O'Connell and Dyment, 2011). Second, CP has a similar concept, in that it encourages and assists the users to actively learn from their experience

through reflection. Third, the literature suggests that reflective practice can be viewed as rooted in constructivism, as reflective practice and constructivism “share basic assumptions about knowledge and learning” (Osterman, 1998, p. 17).

During the 20th and 21st century many forms of constructivism evolved, such as social, psychological, and radical constructivism (Constantino, 2008). Constructivism objected to the positivist approach according to which “knowledge of the social world can be obtained objectively through observation and experimentation” (Constantino 2008, p. 3). Cognitive constructivism emerged from Piaget’s work (Piaget, 1929) and social constructivism from Vygotsky’s research (1978). According to constructivism, knowledge is produced and interpreted by individuals and truth “is dependent on one’s perspective” (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 545). The developed meanings are subjective and multiple and the researcher relies “as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8).

Constructivists see the learner as actively constructing new knowledge in the learning process (Moon, 1999) and knowledge as constructed by individuals and social groups. The inquirers inductively develop a pattern of meaning, and the interpretation of what they find is shaped by their own experience and background (Creswell, 2014). Different perspectives coexist and vary in the degree to which the construction of knowledge is viewed as constructed by individuals or by social and/or political groups (Philips, 1995; Constantino, 2008). Hence, its aim is to understand and elicit how the participants construct individual and shared meanings of the studied phenomenon.

Constructivism can be not only an epistemology but also a learning theory. As a learning theory it has commonalities with the frameworks for reflection in the context of professional development and experience-based learning. For instance, constructivism and reflective practice recognise that learning is constructed through experience and that action is integral to the learning process, and both strive to integrate theory into practice. Constructivism acknowledges that people develop concepts and ideas through experience and prior knowledge (Osterman, 1998; Moon, 1999).

Another commonality is that the teacher is seen as a facilitator who supports the learner, not just by didactic but also by providing resources and useful feedback (Osterman, 1998). Similarly, the studied phenomenon strives to promote student autonomy and the development of reflective processes: the learner is active and the teaching methods encourage learners’ reflection on their knowledge and capabilities (Burr, 2004). Constructivism emphasises the

“essential role of the constructive process” (Confrey, 1990, p. 109) as well as the idea that people “are at least partially able to be aware of those constructions and then to modify them through (our) conscious reflection on that constructive process” (Confrey, 1990, p. 109).

The implications of the constructivist approach are further discussed in the following sections.

3.3 Methodology

The aim of this research was to explore and understand students’ perceptions of, and attitudes towards, online reflective practice using CP and anticipatory reflection during an internship. Adopting a constructivist perspective enabled the exploration of the use of CP from multiple perspectives and from a range of sources, including somewhat different contextual information.

Different approaches (action research, phenomenography and qualitative case study) were considered, before case study was chosen as the most appropriate one. Case studies work well within a constructivist research paradigm and, as Stake (1994) suggests, case studies are built upon a constructivist paradigm which recognises the importance of subjective creation of meaning without totally denying the notion of objectivity.

Although action research is a “powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), it did not seem appropriate for this study. The main reason was that action research presupposes that the researcher is a participant in the research and wants to change their own practice. This research studied a phenomenon which is used only by students (and not by me as a tutor), and thus it was important to understand students’ experiences with CP.

A phenomenographic approach could have been appropriate since phenomenography “seeks to understand variation in people’s experiences of different phenomena” (Yates, Patridge and Bruce, 2012, p. 97). It aims to “identify the various ways in which people see and experience things in order to support learning and teaching activities” (Cousin, 2009, p. 184). However, phenomenography is interested in the variations of human experience, while in the current project I was more interested in revealing common themes in the students’ experiences. Also, while I was going to use interviews as common in phenomenography, my study also relied on the qualitative and quantitative analyses of documents.

Hence, case study was chosen as a suitable methodology as it allows researchers to study “a case” that occurs naturally, that already exists and will exist after completion of the study (Denscombe, 2007). The researcher is allowed to apply a variety of sources and to collect and analyse different data, as well as to combine research methods depending on the situation (Denscombe, 2007). It also allows for quantitative survey data to be included (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Case study is largely used in qualitative and in educational research when researchers focus on one instance (or more) “of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 35). Stake (1994) believes that case studies represent “both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning” (p. 236). This research explored a particular tool and a group using it while attempting not to generalise, which “is akin to case study research” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 161).

The case study approach also offered the opportunity not only to find out certain results but more importantly to disclose “why certain outcomes might happen” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 36). The prime focus of my investigation was to answer “how” and “why” questions, which are “more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies” (Yin, 2003, p. 6).

Finally, case studies are appropriate for examining a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). The boundaries of the case are not very straightforward in this study, because all the participants were enrolled on HOL and used CP, but at the same time they did their internship in different places in Europe and their particular internship context influenced the way they used the tool. As students used CP in an online environment to reflect on life situations outside the online environment, the boundaries of the context are blurred.

3.3.1 Types of case study

Qualitative case studies can be defined in terms of the process of investigation, the unit of analysis or the end product (Merriam, 2009). For instance, case studies can be discovery-led or theory-led and can have a single case or a multiple case design (Denscombe, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Stake (1994) calls them intrinsic and instrumental, while Yin (2003) categorises them as explanatory and exploratory. Regardless of the type, researchers agree

that each case needs to be a bounded, integrated system (Stake, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Case studies also involve multiple sources of information in order to provide in-depth understanding of a phenomenon as well as to increase the credibility of the data (Stake, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

This study has a single case design (Yin, 2003) and two units of analysis: the people and the documents involved. The rationale for the choice of a single case was that CP is used only on HOL and represents a single unit of analysis. Here the components of the case included participants (learners and educator), documents (students' online reflective journals and forum posts) and technology (virtual learning environment). The virtual learning environment (VLE) offered access to students' journals and forum posts.

As the case study was approached from a constructivist perspective, the case developed in the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Stake, 1994) and focused not on the uniqueness of the case itself, but rather on what could be learnt from it. The choice of a case study enabled me to get multiple sources of evidence through four channels: learners, educator, journals and forum posts. The multiple perspectives I gained were equally valid from a constructivist approach perspective and added to the trustworthiness of the results.

Finally, this study was constructed as a qualitative case study, which is descriptive – it provides narrative accounts (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 2009) – and at the same time reflective (interpretive), as the case study researcher not only codes the data but also continuously interprets it (Stake, 1994). Particular to constructivism is that the researcher's interpretation of the phenomenon is itself a construction (Charmaz, 2006) because constructivism assumes that the meaning of experiences and events are constructed by individuals, and therefore people construct the realities in which they participate (Charmaz, 2006).

3.3.2 Trustworthiness

Naturally, the question emerges here: to what extent can the conclusions of my research be trusted? The acknowledged constructivist perspective demanded that I conduct the thesis as a reflective and transparent process.

To ensure the rigour and quality of this study, I complied with the trustworthiness criteria recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Trustworthiness is referred to as describing “the

ways in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability are evident in their research” (Given and Saumure, 2008, p. 896).

Transferability means that the researcher needs to describe the scope of their study in a way which makes it possible for the reader to decide whether the findings can be applied to broader contexts (Given and Saumure, 2008). Credibility is reached if the researcher manages to present the data accurately and to offer a rich description of the phenomenon. As it is difficult to replicate exactly the same context and procedures in qualitative research, dependability ensures that the research procedures are described in a logical and traceable way so that others can apply them in similar conditions expecting a similar explanation of the phenomenon (Given and Saumure, 2008).

In an attempt to solve the problem of quality criteria in a constructivist research paradigm, Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed a second set of criteria complementing trustworthiness criteria: the authenticity criteria – fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity and catalytic authenticity. However, they claimed even years later that the techniques for ensuring the authenticity criteria “largely remain to be devised” (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007, p. 24).

To ensure credibility in the present study, I found it appropriate to proceed as described below:

- Prolonged engagement – I had lengthy and intensive contact with the studied phenomenon and my respondents.
- Triangulation – the different sources of data served to strengthen the credibility of the findings, which is regarded as more important than generalisability (Bassey, 1981).
- Peer debriefing – a colleague PhD student, my supervisor and the interviewed educator were involved in decoding the data and interpreting it.

I took the following measures to ensure trustworthiness, to provide the reader with a detailed account of the research process and to allow comparison with other studies:

- I viewed and studied the phenomenon from different perspectives;
- I invited current and former HOL students to participate and interviewed those who agreed to participate;
- I collected and analysed the data systematically;
- I included reflexive commentary on my work;
- I included peer examination on part of the data.

To establish dependability and confirmability, I applied an audit trail. Audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) describes the relationship of the researcher to their study, lessons learnt, decisions about sampling, considerations of alternative paths and ethical concerns. Those, and further challenges, are addressed in particular in Sections 3.3.3 and 3.4.4. To ensure transferability, the context of the research is described in detail (see Chapters 1 and 3) so that the reader can make judgements about the degree of similarity (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007).

I took great pains to comply with the concept of fairness, used here to refer to “a balanced view that presents all constructions and the values that undergird them” (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007, p. 20). The findings and their interpretations are supported by the research data and the connection between data and findings is made visible to the reader (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Given and Saumure, 2008).

Finally, the main challenge of the case study approach was to put together the information from the different sources into one narrative grouped around my research questions and grounded in the existing literature. This process is extensively described in the “Analysis” section of this chapter and “Findings” (Chapter 4). Together they provide the so-called “chain of evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 36), which enables the reader to track back to every step in the research and to understand interconnections.

3.3.3 Researcher’s role and reflections

I was aware that my roles as course tutor and researcher could influence the project and do not believe that absolute researcher neutrality can be achieved. This fits well with my epistemological view that knowledge is constructed by individuals. From a constructivist perspective the researcher does not mechanically retrieve objective knowledge from the external world (as in positivism); rather he/she focuses on narrowing the gap between concrete observations and abstract meanings applying interpretive techniques (Constantino, 2008).

As previously discussed, within the constructivist tradition, researchers tend to rely on participants’ viewpoints on the investigated phenomenon and construct their beliefs within the framework of a social, historical and cultural context. Knowledge is “created in interaction among investigator and respondents” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 111) and the phenomenon is described through the meanings which the study participants assigned to it.

My understating was co-constructed with that of the study participants through mutual dialogic interaction and document analysis as I aimed to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the students experiencing it. As a tutor on the online course, I had the role of an insider and was aware that my previous experience and tutor position could influence the gathering and analysis of the data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

As the research topic was not of a personal or sensitive nature, it did not affect my researcher identity. In the project, my professional and educational background could somewhat affect the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Denscombe, 2007), and power imbalance could influence the way the interviewee perceives the interviewer and their willingness to disclose information (Cousin, 2009; Denscombe, 2007). Conducting interviews via the internet and telephone (as in my case) allowed me to disguise my “self” to a certain extent (Denscombe, 2007).

In this research the power imbalance between the students and me as their tutor interviewing them is not believed to significantly impede students’ honesty for several reasons:

- CP is not a compulsory part of the course;
- Students receive no grades on the modules, only pass/fail;
- Students have several tutors on the course;
- Most interviewees had already finished the course;
- There was no face-to-face contact during the interview in most cases.

To achieve the best results in the interviews, I followed Denscombe’s (2007) advice and was polite, encouraging and sensitive to the participants’ feelings. I aimed to create a pleasant interview atmosphere and to make the interviewees feel comfortable. For instance, I was always punctual, called the interviewees by their name and used small talk to break the ice. Being aware that my personal identity affects the interview process, I adopted a neutral and rather passive stance: I listened to the participants and did not judge their statements.

However, I was aware that certain interviewer’s personal attributes “cannot be altered on a whim to suit the needs of the research interview” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 184). Those attributes include gender, accent and professional position.

As an interviewer, I performed several tasks simultaneously: taking notes, using prompts and checking the recorder. Paying attention to nonverbal clues, and being tolerant to silence were challenging activities as most interviews were conducted online using Skype and some on the

telephone. In most cases, no camera was used on Skype, as the internet connection was slow or the participants did not have a camera.

To sum up, it was important for me to be reflective about my position. Hence, my work as a researcher involved critical self-scrutiny, also called active reflexivity (Mason, 2002), in the process of data gathering and analysis. Reflexivity included asking myself critical questions about my role in the research process, exploring my perspectives in the process of data gathering and interpretation, and making those explicit to the reader. Hence, my reflections on my own role, ethics and personal attitudes are made visible to the reader in several thesis chapters.

3.4 Data collection methods

The study applied triangulation to the data collection and used the following methods:

- Main instrument: one-to-one semi-structured interviews;
- Additional instruments: documents (students' CP journals and forum posts).

In order to conduct the study in the allotted timescale, there was one cycle of data gathering. For reference purposes, the forum questions as well as the CP questions can be found in this chapter (see Section 3.4.2), while the interview questions are available in the Appendices.

3.4.1 Interviews

3.4.1.1 Interviews as a data collection method

Interviews are viewed as an appropriate data collection method when researchers need to explore and gain insights into people's opinions and experiences (Denscombe, 2007). Data was gathered in semi-structured interviews. On the whole, the semi-structured interview allowed me to be flexible in the order of discussed topics, and on the other hand enabled interviewees to elaborate points of interest (Denscombe, 2007).

I used open-ended questions and prompts from the conversation in order to investigate students' experience with CP more deeply. This strategy enabled me to link my next question to the words of the interviewee and thus not only to create a feeling of dialogue and linkage, but also to gain "understandings from this linkage" (Cousin, 2009, p. 74).

As suggested by Cousin (2009), the semi-structured interview was conceptualised as “‘a third space’ where interviewer and interviewee work together to develop understanding” (p. 73) and conduct a reflective journey. In this case, the “third space” was online via Skype or on the telephone, and this brought several challenges. I never had any face-to-face contact with the interviewees before the interviews, and even during the interviews I was often the only participant with a camera. I suppose that the absence of face-to-face contact during an online/telephone interview helped the interviewees feel less uncomfortable when answering my questions and could allow time for reflection (Denscombe, 2007). The non-linguistic factors which were present in the interviews were tone of voice and use of pauses.

To reduce the risk of different interpretations of the questions, I discussed the interview schedule with several lecturers at Lancaster University and with a PhD peer who helped me to reorganise the questions and reduce their number. Initially, I intended to start the interview asking students to define reflection and later to ask them about the advantages and disadvantages of the reflective journal they used.

As a result of the discussions with the lecturers, I constructed the interview schedule in the opposite order: I started by asking students to describe how they had used CP so far and then during the interview I moved from the concrete experience to the more abstract notion of reflective practice and its role on the course and on the internship. I narrowed down the number of questions to 10 and added prompts under each question to be able to ask additional questions in order to go deeper in the discussion, if necessary.

This proved to be an appropriate strategy, as it allowed students to gain confidence in talking about something they had used and which most of them had in front of them on the screen during the interview. Also, this strategy allowed me to pick up words which the interviewees used and thus discover whether the interviewees associated CP with reflection without telling them explicitly from the very beginning that I was interested in talking about reflection.

Two pilot interviews (one in English and one in German) were conducted in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the interview schedule. This enabled me to check the clarity of the questions in both languages, to practise interviewing and to check how much time the interview took (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). All participants were given the choice of language (English/German) so they could select the one they could talk easily in and in more detail. The issues arising from the use of two languages are explained in “Limitations” (Section 3.4.3) and the challenges I experienced during the interviews are discussed in the next section.

3.4.1.2 Challenges with recruitment and interviews

As the research aimed to explore and reveal students' attitudes and experience with CP (as introduced in Section 1.1), the students and educators on HOL were the population for the study. My goal was to interview as many students as possible who had experience with the phenomenon. The study targeted a particular group which does not represent the wider population: those HOL students who completed the course after the introduction of CP on the course in November 2013. In the period July 2015–March 2016, a total number of 300 students (who had finished HOL as well as all current students) were invited to participate via e-mail. Participation in this project was on a voluntary basis and multiple recruiting strategies needed to be tested, which took a long time but brightened my horizon and I gained valuable experience.

I faced several challenges during the recruitment process and interviews. The recruitment period lasted longer than planned because I encountered problems finding students for a pilot interview, and had altogether a low response rate from students and educators.

First, all current students received an invitation to participate in my study, but this proved fruitless. After a discussion with the course director and the course administrator (both responsible for the administrative tasks of signing up students for the modules, issuing certificates of participation and the financing of the course) on the lack of responses, the following measures were taken:

- To invite former course participants as well.
- To shorten the invitation letter text.
- To stress that participation is not just for my thesis but also for the future development of CP.
- To send the invitation in German and further information in English only to students who showed an interest.
- To send the e-mail invitations from the account of the course administrator.

Hence, former and current students were invited by the course administrator to take part in a project for the further development of CP in the context of my thesis with Lancaster University. In particular, students were asked to share their experience and their suggestions for improvement in a short interview with me, as the person responsible for the project.

This e-mail was followed up by a reminder a week later and the response rate was higher: seven former students showed an interest in the project and contacted me. I sent them the full text invitation and consent form in English. Some of the interviewees were very excited about me doing a PhD, as they themselves were doing an undergraduate or master's level dissertation or had an interest in educational research. In most of the cases, I needed to remind students to name a date for the interview. One participant withdrew on the day of the interview.

As a further recruitment strategy, I asked three students to encourage HOL peers to share their experience with CP with me. However, this snowball sampling strategy did not give any positive results. Even though I offered an incentive for participation as discussed in "Ethical Issues" (3.4.4), I was contacted only sporadically by students and extended the data gathering period from originally June–September 2015 to June 2015–March 2016.

In a further recruitment action, all current students were reminded about the project in my tutor's posts during the course modules and thus I gained two more participants. In addition, I asked my two tutor colleagues to include information about my project in the posts to their groups. The course administrator sent a very brief invitation for participation in my research to everyone finishing the course at the end of September/beginning of October to remind them that they could still take part in my project, and short information about the study was inserted in the Welcome module on the course to attract the attention of the new students. The suggestion of the course director and course administrator to contact former students did in fact turn out to be very helpful, as the majority of the interviewees had already finished the course when they talked to me.

Staff members (two tutors on the course and the director of inter.research²) were also invited for an interview. However, only one colleague agreed to participate and then withdrew on the day of the interview for family reasons and the other one did not respond at all. The director (from now on referred to as "educator") was interviewed in person in December 2015. He was one of the main people responsible for the idea, content and layout of HOL and CP. His voice enhanced the richness of the data and set the scene with details about the goal of CP and the pedagogical expectations of the students.

Finally, despite the many challenges in finding participants, 14 students and one educator were interviewed so I was able to conduct the research with a credible group of participants

² The organisation inter.research e.V. is the provider of HOL.

who provided in-depth data. The final number of 15 participants was considered sufficient for an exploratory case study to gain an understanding of issues arising from students' experience with the phenomenon.

As HOL is completely online and the students lived and studied in different places, telephone and internet calls were the only way to conduct the interviews. As a result, some interviews were challenging as, for instance, the quality of the connection was sometimes poor, I could not hear the interviewee well and we sometimes had to repeat what we said. In another case, an interviewee was in a hurry, which led to ending the interview before covering all the questions and the remaining questions were answered later by e-mail. Each time, attempts were made not to interrupt the interviewees and to ask for clarification.

Sometimes, while trying to identify the main points and to look for inconsistencies in the participant's position, I found myself evaluating the data instead of just listening to the interviewee. To minimise this distraction, I started taking notes while listening to the interviewee, which proved helpful in keeping my thoughts on the interview. I also realised that it was not possible to sum up the conversation at the end of the interview and ask for verification (as intended), since the gathered data was extremely rich. Hence, I summarised smaller bits of information after the main questions before moving on to the next topic.

3.4.2 Documents

This section presents the documents which were used for triangulation purposes. The term "documents" here, refers to the students' CP journals and the forum posts which were gathered on the VLE on the course module "Dare to change".

As mentioned before, Competence Pass is a voluntary part of the online course and it is not directly connected with the modules on the course except on one module. CP encompasses five areas, each asking students to write down their concrete goals for each competence area and to answer four questions which are the same in all areas (see Figure 3.1).

back

1. Language competence

Your internship abroad enables you to work in the area of competence 1 „Language competence“. Your self-assessment (see "Ready to go! Welcome to the course") can show you how you can improve your skills in the area.

Therefore, chose (at least) one concrete goal in the area of "Language competence" which you wish to improve during your internship abroad. Answer the following questions in a written form.

My concrete goal:

I will know that I will have reached my goal by the following:

1. Which tasks / activities will help me reach my goal during my internship?

Please add any new tasks to the list "Performed tasks" below in order to be able to compare them with the planned tasks and to keep track for the future.

2. Which tasks / experience outside the working environment will help me achieve my goal?

My Stay Abroad

3. Whom can I chose as an important person to support me in achieving my goal and how can I get in contact with them? What can I offer them in return?

4. Which particular steps will I take to achieve my goal and to ensure a long term success?

Figure 3.1: Screenshot showing the questions in Competence Pass – Language Competence (December, 2014)

Students' CP journals were extracted in two Microsoft (MS) Excel files. First, the data from all Competence Passes (total number = 524) was extracted in an MS Excel document in March 2016 to be analysed quantitatively for statistical information about students' use of CP. Second, 37 CPs were selected for a qualitative and quantitative analysis. I used here 25 CP journals which were already extracted and prepared for analysis for the university assignment in November 2014. For that assignment, every tenth CP with entries (from all available in November 2014) was selected.

The CP journals of the interviewees (14) were identified with the help of the course administrator and students' agreement and were included in the analysis. It turned out that the

CP journals of two of the interviewees were already among the 25 selected files. Hence, I did not need to add them and analysed 37 CP journals in total.

The next source of data was students' forum posts in task 3 on the module "Dare to change". Task 3 on the module "Dare to change" was introduced in August 2014. The goal of this task was to encourage the students to engage with CP and to share their experience with the journal (see Figure 3.2). Students were not required to provide evidence that they used CP though. It could be that some students filled out an area of CP only when they had to complete that task 3. As a result, the study cannot state how many students used Competence Pass only because it was a compulsory module element and how many used it on a voluntary basis. However, this is not considered a drawback, as this study is interested in students' perceptions and experiences of CP overall.

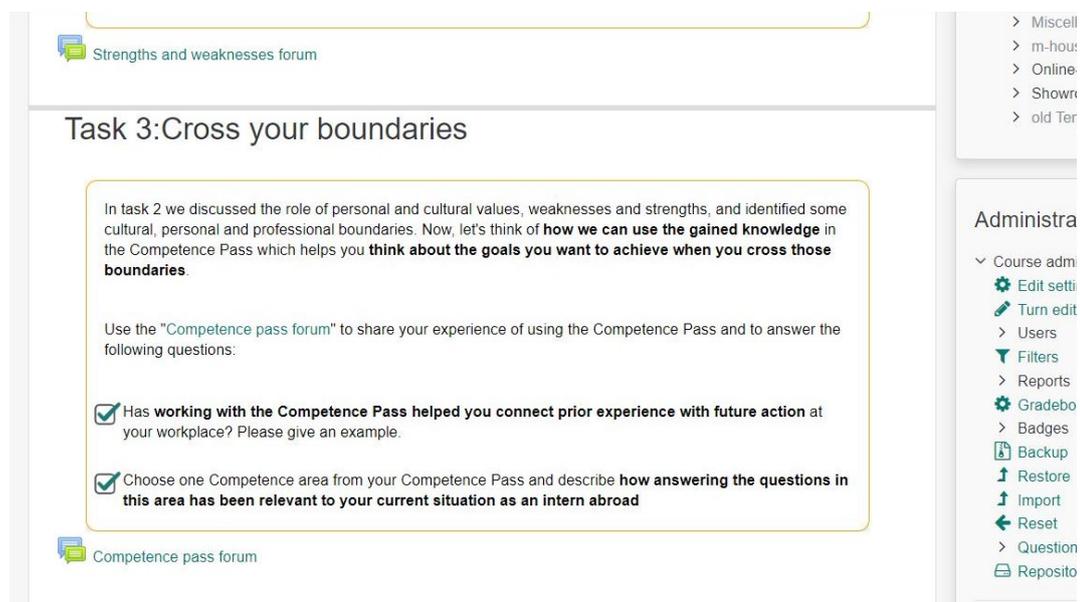


Figure 3.2: Task 3 on the module "Dare to change" (June 2019)

While students wrote in the CP journal for themselves and could choose the language, their forum posts were written for the classroom/tutor and were in English. Those factors might have influenced the length and choice of words. The documents were a valuable source for triangulation and contributed to creating a more complete picture of the studied phenomenon.

As the module runs approximately every four months, the forum posts, which are used in this study, were derived from four groups, between October 2015 and March 2016. Those posts were extracted in an MS Word file. Then all user names and names used in the posts were

removed. Each post received a letter and a number attached, as is explained in detail in “Analysis of documents” (Section 3.5.2).

3.4.3 Limitations

In this section I elaborate on the limitations which I became aware of during the data collection period. Those concerned: one cycle of data collection; use of different languages (German and English); and evidencing the outcome of reflective practice.

It would have been advantageous if the study had included two cycles of data gathering. If I could have interviewed each participant at the beginning and at the end of the course, I might have been able to find differences in students’ understanding, attitude and experience with reflective practice. However, that was not possible, mainly because the willingness to participate in the project was very low and most interviewees had already finished the course when they were interviewed (see Section 3.4.1.1).

As some CP entries and some interviews were in German, translation into English was necessary. As I possess excellent language knowledge in German and English and have experience in translating, I acted as translator of the German texts in this project. I acknowledge that some nuances in the meaning could get lost in translation. The translated texts are available only in English in the thesis and a separate document with all citations in German and in English can be made accessible to the reader, if required. Keeping citations in German and in English would have made the text very long and impeded the reading.

Another challenge concerned evidencing the relationship between reflective practice and learning outcomes since “there is a lack of clear casual pathways and solutions” in researching the efficacy of this relationship (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016, p. 3). Although many students supported their stories with specific examples of personal achievements and professional development, we have to acknowledge here that those examples represent only the students’ personal subjective points of view and we have no evidence from outside (e.g. from supervisors, colleagues) to check the information.

However, this is not viewed as a limitation diminishing the quality of this study, as the purpose of the study was to study personal perceptions and experiences of the students and I, as a researcher, am fully aware of it, inform the reader about this and do not make generalisations based on the data.

As the research is exploratory, it is not considered a limitation that the study did not consider students' broader educational, social, economic and political contexts, nor their age and gender.

Finally, the interpretation of the data was informed by existing theoretical underpinnings and discussions with professional colleagues, but also shaped by the researcher's emerging conceptualisation of this phenomenon. Limitations arose from the fact that the data extracted was analysed solely by the researcher, and other researchers might have interpreted some qualitative data differently.

3.4.4 Ethical issues

The study was considered low risk as it was not sponsored, did not touch on any sensitive topics and did not include vulnerable people. I had written permission to perform the study as part of my job as a tutor. My project received ethical approval by inter.research e. V. and Lancaster University. In an e-mail invitation, all contacted students and educators were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary aspect of participation, their right to withdraw, and the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

Interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent, which was gathered through a consent form sent in advance by e-mail as well as at the beginning of the interview. The interview transcripts and translations were encrypted and processed confidentially. Participants were also informed in the consent form and information sheet that some interview transcripts might be carried out by an external company, which was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement with me according to Lancaster University's requirements.

All CP journals and forum posts were used in the study according to an agreement which all students sign at the beginning of HOL. In it, students agree that the course provider and the tutors may use their anonymised contributions for evaluation and research purposes. To comply with ethics rules, all user names and names used in the posts were removed.

Being aware of the fact that participation in my project was additional work for the students, on the one hand, and striving to conduct the study in the allotted time according to the ethical rules at Lancaster University, on the other hand, I sponsored three Amazon vouchers (of 20 euros each) for a draw. Students were informed in the invitation e-mails about the draw and in

January 2016 three participants were selected and received a voucher by e-mail. I extended the data analysis period to March 2016 and did not offer further incentives, as my impression was that the incentive did not really motivate students to participate in the project.

3.5 Data analysis

All data was coded manually and the interviews were further coded in NVivo. In both cases, thematic units were used to derive codes and categories, which were compared and backtracked, and the information was put in a table on the computer. Since the forum questions were the same for all students, many familiar themes emerged. Similarly, the interviewees were asked mostly the same questions. Later, findings from both sources were compared and put together to avoid redundancy and to create a coherent story.

Before I illustrate the process of data analysis, I would like to begin with some personal reflections.

3.5.1 Introduction and personal reflections

Studying reflective practice was challenging in many ways mainly because, as previous research warns, there are no universally applicable criteria and it is difficult to find a model of reflective practice which is relevant across disciplinary boundaries (Fook, White and Gardner, 2006). As was mentioned in Chapter 2, the literature provides evidence about the existence of different approaches to promoting reflective thinking and practice, which vary from “adopting a thinking approach to practice” to “carefully structured and crafted approaches towards being reflective about one’s experiences in practice” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2).

In the analysis, I was aware and critical of the widespread assumption that reflective practice brings positive outcomes for the learning and the learners; as Boud (2010) warned, those assumptions have been largely unquestioned. For instance, Boud and Walker (1998) identified as problematic the fact that there is sometimes missing evidence that reflection leads to learning as well as examples of uncritical acceptance of the learners’ experiences.

Thus, my analysis included also examples of failed reflective practice which were studied with the same rigour as the examples of success, as the resistance “needs to be respected and understood” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 261). This was intended to contribute not only to a better

understanding of why some students resist the reflective process and have difficulties in the development of reflective skills (Cox, 2005) but also to an ability to undertake adequate measures to reduce that resistance (Brookfield, 1995) and to further develop CP.

At the beginning, I was tempted to complete the data analysis in one block, as I was curious to see my findings emerge and the thesis progress to completion. However, family constraints made me take breaks during the analysis, and I came to see this as an opportunity to let thoughts and findings mature over time as well as to view them from another perspective.

When I was not able to engage in writing-up, I found myself reflecting on my objectivity, on my research questions and on the connection between the research questions and the emerging themes. Additionally, I sent small pieces of my work iteratively to my supervisor, and the reflections on her comments and our discussions allowed me to reflect on my own perspectives on the data. This proved to be a great way to reduce personal bias and to allow more themes to arise in the analysis process.

For example, reading the texts again and again after a break proved to be useful in finding more contradictions and examples of negative perceptions and experiences with CP. Rereading and comparing forum posts and interview transcripts provided a much more nuanced picture. Another strategy to view the data from another perspective was to discuss the categories which emerged with the educator. This also helped me refine the names of the categories to make them sound clearer to the reader.

Finally, as previously discussed in Chapter 2, the opinions in the literature vary from regarding assessment and reflection as incompatible (Hargreaves, 2004) to seeing it as unproblematic and desired (Moon, 2006; James and Brookfield, 2014). Brookfield (1995) also warns that “our enthusiasm for reflection can be converted exclusively into a concern for technique” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 216). Hence, the purpose of the analysis was to gain understanding of students’ use and perceptions of CP, and based on those to discuss what implications arise for encouraging reflective practice in students on an internship without measuring the level or depth of reflection in students’ journals.

3.5.2 Qualitative analysis of interviews

The analysis of the data was a carefully prepared and long process which started with the main source of data: the interviews. The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed

verbatim so that they became the focus of the analysis. This relied mainly on the researcher with the help of the software programme NVivo.

The two pilot interviews were included in the analysis as they were rich in data. A number between 1 and 12 was assigned to each interviewee according to the date of the interview.

The following abbreviations were adopted:

- I = Interviewee
- P-EN = Pilot interview in English
- P-DE = Pilot interview in German
- I-Ed = Educator interviewee.

I transcribed four interviews and the rest were transcribed by a third party. Transcribing myself allowed me to “feel” the data, to be confident that there was useful data and to become more experienced in posing questions differently in the following interviews.

All interview transcripts (students and educator) were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research; it is flexible because it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is “a process of encoding qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. vii) and of “discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Themes were identified at the semantic/explicit level (Boyatzis, 1998), neither looking beyond what participants reported nor relying on preconceived themes.

However, I was aware of my active role in this process as a researcher identifying the themes which arose from the data, selecting which were of interest and finally reporting them to the reader. The NVivo software sped up the process of thematic analysis, and it allowed me to explore more connections and new aspects in the texts which may have remained hidden.

The analysis followed Braun and Clark’s (2006) six phases. First, I read the interview transcripts as a story trying not to make any judgements. Second, I read the transcripts again and started manual coding to identify interesting and repeating patterns. Codes refer to “the most basic segment, or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63).

Third, for every question or pair of questions on my interview schedule, I used mind-maps to group the codes around emerging themes. Themes were regarded as a means to “describe an

integrating, relational statement derived from the data that identifies both content and meaning” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 190). Sometimes a code was used in different themes. Then I identified some more general themes and sub-themes across the questions. My supervisor checked my coding of an interview. As the educator was available locally, he was asked to review my summary of the interview with him to enhance the trustworthiness of the text.

Fourth, I left the transcripts aside for a month, and when returning to them I imported all the data in NVivo to explore, code and reflect on it as a whole and to create one thematic map for all students’ interviews and another one for the educator’s interview. I checked for overlapping themes and did some regrouping. NVivo offered a quick and reliable link to all sources and references, which facilitated easy navigation through the data and rearrangement of the emerging themes and sub-themes. The advantages of the software were easy reorganisation and visualisation of the created map of themes, sub-themes and categories, with instant access to assigned units from each interview.

Fifth, I refined the themes in order to “identify the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about” and to determine “what aspect of the data each theme captures” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 92). I determined how the derived themes related to each other and let the voice of the interviewees tell the story of their experiences and perceptions of Competence Pass.

Once identified, the categories and themes from the single interviews were compared and a final map was constructed applying NVivo. As a result, five qualitatively different themes emerged, which represented the students’ ways of experiencing the phenomenon of interest:

- Ways of engaging with CP.
- CP as a helpful activity.
- CP as a burden.
- Design issues.
- Suggestions for improvement.

While some experiences were shared among many students, others were rather rare, but these were also included as they contributed to the richness of students’ experiences and perceptions. Examples of the transcript coding process in students’ interviews are provided in the next chapter.

3.5.3 Analysis of documents

The case study methodology allows researchers to choose from a plethora of techniques for the data analysis (Baxter and Jack, 2008) which I made use of. The interviews and the forum posts were analysed qualitatively only, while the students' journals were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.5.3.1 Mixed-methods analysis of students' CPs

A mixed-methods approach was regarded as suitable for analysing the CP journals, since it provides statistical data about the use of the reflective tool and text analysis about the quality of the journal entries. Combined, they helped to better understand the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

In particular, in the quantitative analysis of the students' Competence Passes, I used the formulae in MS Excel (e.g. counting) to reveal the following details:

- Number of students with contributions in all CP competence areas;
- Preference of competence areas;
- Number of students with contributions to only one competence area.

The number of students with contributions to only one area was significant because this could give information on the number of students who may have completed an area only because this was connected to a compulsory task on one of the modules (mentioned earlier in "Limitations"). Next, knowing which areas were used more often than others offered information about students' preferences, which in turn can influence the future design of the tool.

The qualitative analysis of the selected 37 CPs enabled me to provide evidence for the actual use of CP as a tool as well as to gain a better understanding of the following aspects:

- Relevance of the students' texts to each particular competence area;
- Evidence of students' engagement with reflective writing;
- Style and language of students' texts.

The relevance of students' texts to the particular area was expected to provide information on whether the questions/instructions in Competence Pass were clear to students. The entries were used to find evidence of students' engagement with reflective writing. I looked at

whether the following criteria/aspects were present in students' texts: description and thoughts about the particular context, personal feelings, plan for change, link between previous experience and future practice, and examples of learning taking place. Finally, students' journal entries informed me about the ways students preferred to express themselves in an online environment: narrative or bullet point style, and choice of language.

Students' journals are cited with the following abbreviation: CP and a number (e.g. CP 778). Journals receive an automatically generated number when a student starts working with it and those numbers were kept and used here.

3.5.3.2 Qualitative analysis of forum posts

The forum posts of each group were coded manually applying thematic analysis, as described above. Each forum post received a letter and a number. The letter (A, B, C or D) indicates the course group. The number depended on the number of students in the group. For instance, A1 means that this is a post belonging to a student from group A and it was the first post in the forum based on the time of publishing. If a student posted more than once, all his/her posts received the same label, e.g. A1. Relevant phrases and sentences (codes) were underlined manually and then I looked for an appropriate name for the category. A table with themes, categories and quotations incorporating all posts was produced. Thus, the history of a theme was created with words of the students and the origin of the code could be traced back easily for reference purposes. The codes were compared, regrouped and often used in several categories to keep nuances and to facilitate the data interpretation.

The development of the themes in the forum posts was assisted by various procedural decisions. For instance, in order for the themes to be understood, I sometimes had to use long sentences in a quotation to retain the context and at the same time tried to avoid redundancy. Hence, the units of analysis ranged in length. Also, some text units were first put into several categories, as shown in Table 3.1.

This strategy proved to be helpful in keeping the richness of themes and at the same time in minimising the risk of misinterpretation of the themes. After six stages of analysis, the initial categories and themes were reduced and collapsed, although it was very difficult to tease aspects apart without having a lot of repetition. Indeed, the single themes and sub-themes need to be understood as one whole as they interrelate to one another.

Category	Text sample/unit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads to reflection Encourages setting goals and developing action plans Leads to further action 	<p>“Working with the Competence Pass has so far helped me connecting prior experience with future actions at my workplace. I have only completed the section language skills, but that has already helped me to reflect about my current language and what I actually wanted to achieve. It felt good to set some goals and to try to operationalize them in the everyday working world. I will try to work on my professional language skills and achieve them by asking more questions if I don’t understand something and being more bold to speak up in team meeting etc.” C3</p>

Table 3.1: Example of the use of one text unit in several categories

As the research questions (see Section 1.3) were about students’ experiences and perceptions of CP, I decided to set the boundaries of the themes and sub-themes in a way as to be able to identify the emerging story and to answer the research questions. Working through the forum posts in that way, the analysis convincingly resulted in two main themes:

- Positive experience and perceptions: CP as a helpful activity;
- Negative experience and perceptions: CP as an unhelpful activity.

The findings from the interviews and the forum posts are put together into a final overall thematic map to encompass all aspects of the students’ use and perceptions of CP in Chapter 4.

3.6 Conclusion

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to provide an overview of the methodological design of this study and to establish its appropriateness. The qualitative case study approach was selected to examine the participants’ perceptions and attitudes of reflective practice with the online tool Competence Pass. The methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the encountered challenges in data collection and in studying reflective practice, were discussed.

This chapter discussed the epistemological beliefs of the researcher, my role, the ethical considerations, the trustworthiness criteria applied and the procedures followed to ensure the quality of the research. The chapter explained how the themes in the interviews and forum posts were derived as well as how the journals were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively.

The next chapter presents the findings from all data sources: interviews, forum posts and students' journals in one narrative in order to give a greater understanding of the overall case (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Chapter 5 then provides the answers to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of students' perceptions of online reflective journaling derived from all the sources of research data. The textual data sourced from students' journals was triangulated with the interview and forum data. To answer the research questions, this study critically discussed the issue of whether students' experience CP as leading to reflection and as contributing to their learning, as well as how adequate CP's format is for those purposes. It also addressed students' willingness to reflect, as well as their preferences of how and with whom.

For a better understanding of the project as a single story, the presentation of the data analysis also includes the qualitative analysis of the educator's interview at the relevant points. As the educator was the main creator of this tool, his story allowed a comparison between what was intended with CP and what students made of it. In particular, the educator provided insights about CP's structure and goals.

4.1.1 Setting the scene

According to the interviewed educator, CP was designed with the intention of raising the student interns' awareness of the fact that merely accomplishing the tasks on HOL is not sufficient to develop their competences. In his opinion, what the interns needed was a further step: to use CP to become aware of how they can use their individual internship situation as a learning environment, by taking advantage of and reflecting on learning opportunities during the internship abroad and thus developing the competences each person needs.

If students acquired the habit of reflecting on their own learning and competence development, they would develop a learning to learn competence and would be able to continue reflecting and thus practise lifelong learning after HOL (I-Ed). The educator assumed that an internship abroad can be a perfect learning environment, as each individual is taken out of their comfort zone and has a certain period of time to cope with the new challenges and to reflect on their learning and progress.

Hence, the main educational reason behind CP was the desire to create a space “where students can add their personal learning goals” (I-Ed) and reflect on them on their own. CP was intended to enable students to “undertake self-defined learning” (“selbstbestimmtes Lernen”, I-Ed) with the support of guiding questions.

However, the data (interviews, forum posts and students’ journals) showed that not everyone who used CP engaged in reflection and reflective writing. The students’ experiences were heterogeneous and indicative that the writing process (filling in CP) was sometimes mechanical, not necessarily reflective and sometimes a burden for the busy interns. Hence, it was necessary to make a distinction between students’ perceptions of CP and their perceptions of reflection as illustrated in Figures 4.1 and 4.2.



Figure 4.1: Students’ perceptions of CP

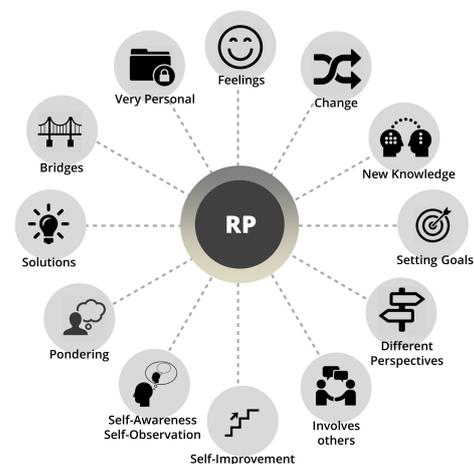


Figure 4.2: Students’ perceptions of reflection

The figures show that often, the examples of students’ perceptions of CP were simultaneously examples of reflective practice. Engaging with CP, students perceived a different way of thinking about their internship and themselves: thinking that was critical, deep and sometimes reflective. The figures depict that both CP and reflection were connected with thinking (stop and think, ponder, set goals, find solutions, different perspectives, new knowledge). The concept of pondering is grounded in, and derived from, students’ narratives to refer to a process of quiet, deep or careful thinking about something. The interviews also revealed that CP was perceived for personal use only while reflection was described as an individual and sometimes as a social process. The interviews, forum posts and students’ journals showed that when reflecting students observed themselves and became aware of emotions, and/or different perspectives and/or their knowledge.

4.1.2 Creating the final project thematic map

The themes and sub-themes derived from the data analysis as presented in Chapter 3 are featured here in Tables 4.1 and 4.2. The thematic map from the forum posts data (Table 4.1) identifies two themes and four sub-themes. As students were asked in the forum to give examples of how engaging with CP was useful for them, the themes “*CP as a helpful activity*” and “*CP as an unhelpful activity*” naturally emerged.

Themes of the forum posts	Sub-themes of the forum posts	Categories
CP as a helpful activity	Leads to reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases self-awareness Brightens one’s horizon (supports new knowledge acquisition) Makes one’s thoughts visible
	Supports learning from experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant for students’ current life context Encourages goal setting Leads to future action Helps connect prior to future experience
CP as an unhelpful activity	Burden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming Setting goals under pressure
	Useless tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No personal gain No relevance to the current personal and professional situation Surveillance device Technical inhibitors and privacy concerns

Table 4.1: Final themes and sub-themes from forum posts

The analysis of the students’ interviews identifies five themes and nine sub-themes. Those partly cover the themes from the forum posts (CP and reflection perceived as helpful or unhelpful) and add insights about structure- and content-related issues as well as suggestions for improvement.

Themes of the interviews with students	Sub-themes of the interviews with students	Categories
Ways of engaging with CP	Individual preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language preference • Competence preference • Regularity of engagement
	Relationship between CP and HOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant addition to the course • Personal space as opposed to the collaborative forums
CP as a helpful activity	Leads to reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances self-confidence • Not as useful as reflection on the work place • Makes one's thoughts visible • Personal understanding of reflection
	Supports learning from experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant for the internship • Encourages goal setting • Leads to future action • Increases self-awareness
CP as a burden	Useless tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • No personal gain
Design issues	Structure-related issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English and German version • Layout • Online environment • Personal space
	Content-related issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on reflective practice • Overlap • Feedback • Relevance of competence areas
Suggestions for improvement	Personalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on request • Free reflections
	Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various questions • Technical adjustments

Table 4.2: Final themes and sub-themes from student interviews

The final themes from the interviews and forum posts were integrated into an overarching project thematic map with two main themes to acknowledge the difference in students'

perceptions as presented in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Overlaps exist, and are welcome, as they support the interconnectedness of the themes and sub-themes. Students' perceptions relating to the practicality of the tool are introduced under the heading "*Perceptions of CP as a special personal online organiser*", while the categories and examples which relate to reflective practice with CP and reflection in general are presented under "*Perceptions and use of CP as a reflective journal*":

Theme 1: Perceptions of CP as a special personal online organiser

Sub-themes:

- CP's role in learning from experience
- CP's structure and design
- CP as an online tool

Theme 2: Perceptions and use of CP as a reflective journal

Sub-themes:

- CP as enabling reflection
- Perceived personal benefits of reflection

Theme one is directly connected with answering research question 1. Theme two reveals the answers to research question 2. Both themes contribute to answering research questions 3 and 4, and are relevant for defining the implications of the study.

The two main themes, their corresponding sub-themes, and the connection between the final themes and the themes from the interviews and forum posts data will now be considered in turn.

4.2 Perceptions of CP as a special personal online organiser

Setting goals in the different competence areas, coming up with strategies how to achieve those and checking one's progress seemed to remind students of an organiser:

"It is useful just to write your thoughts and ideas down to keep your goals in mind."

(A1)

"The CP helps me to express goals I want to achieve during my internship... It feels good to put those goals in CP." (B6)

This section elaborates on how students perceived the relationship between CP, the course and the internship, as well as CP's structure, design and online nature:

Theme 1: Perceptions of CP as a special personal online organiser

Sub-themes:

- **CP's role in learning from experience**
 - CP as helpful and relevant for the internship
 - CP as a personal space to summarise and make thoughts visible
 - CP as a space to set goals, to link theory (the course) with practice (the internship) and to make links between students' past, present and future.
 - CP as a burden
- **CP's structure and design**
 - Perceiving CP's guiding questions as adequate and helpful prompts, and their repetition as annoying
 - CP as lacking personalised feedback and guidance
- **CP as an online tool**
 - The online environment as an accepted space for personal thoughts
 - The bilingual format as advantageous
 - The design as lacking personalisation

The sub-theme "*CP's role in learning from experience*" depicts how the students perceived CP as helpful and relevant for their internship; as a personal space to summarise and make their thoughts visible; as a space to set goals, link theory with practice, link their past and present with their future; and finally as a burden. It encompasses the sub-themes "*Supports learning from experience*" and "*Burden*" (Table 4.1), and the themes "*Ways of engaging with CP*", "*CP as a helpful activity*" and "*Burden*" (Table 4.2). The sub-theme "*CP's structure and design*" includes the sub-themes in themes "*Design issues*" and "*Suggestions for improvement*" as presented in Table 4.2 as well as the theme "*CP as an unhelpful activity*" (Table 4.1). It summarises students' attitudes towards CP's guiding questions in each section and lack of adjustment to personal needs. The sub-theme "*CP as an online tool*" discusses the aspects of the reflective journal being online: space for personal thoughts, bilingual form and lack of personalisation based on the sub-theme "*Useless tool*" (Table 4.1) and sub-themes "*Individual preferences*", "*Structure-related issues*", "*Personalisation*" and "*Flexibility*" (Table 4.2).

The qualitative and quantitative findings relating to the students' preferences of CP's five competence areas (Language Competence; Intercultural Competence; Social Competence and

Teamwork; Managerial and Organisational Competence; and Creativity and Problem-solving Competence – see Chapter 3), their use of the English and German language, as well as the findings from the educator’s interview enrich the narrative.

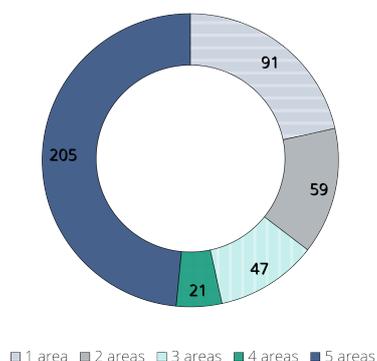
4.2.1 Perceptions and attitudes towards CP’s role in learning from experience

Students expressed a general satisfaction with CP and shared similar perceptions. Most interviewees explicitly mentioned that CP is a helpful tool related to their internship situation abroad (I 1, I 2, I 3, I 4, I 5, I 6, I P-EN, I 9, I 10). They experienced it mainly as *“helpful and relevant for the internship”* for two main reasons: CP served as a stimulus to see the internship from different perspectives; and it resembled an organiser. Less prevalent but closely related to those was the perception of CP as *“a space to set goals and link theory (the course) with practice (the internship)”* and finally CP was partly perceived as *“a burden”*.

4.2.1.1 CP as helpful and relevant for the internship

As the use of CP is voluntary and interns could choose which competence areas to work on, the study could identify students’ preferences in relation to the competence areas. Although all competence areas were perceived as *“helpful and relevant for the internship”* (I P-EN, I 12, D3, D4) because those *“5 are the main things you need”* (I P-EN) and because they cover *“all aspects which play a role in your stay abroad”* (C8), the choice of competence areas varied.

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of students’ journals revealed that students preferred some competences more than others and not everyone worked on all CP competence areas. Of 524 students’ CPs, 423 had entries. As is shown in Graph 4.1 below, almost half of those (205) had all five competence areas completed. While most students completed several competence areas, 91 students engaged with only one competence area.



Graph 4.1: Students’ engagement with CP

To compare, of the 14 interviewees, six students completed all areas, which is similar to the proportion of the entire student population who completed all areas as depicted in Graph 4.1. Two of the interviewed students did three, two students did two, one student did one and three students worked on no competence areas which may be interpreted as a sign of the different ways the students engaged with the tool.

Table 4.3 offers a detailed look at students' engagement with the respective competence areas and shows that the preferences of the interviewees are comparable with those of all students. Language Competence turned out to be the preferred competence area with 381 students working on it, closely followed by Intercultural Competence (295) and Social Competence and Teamwork (289). The Creativity and Problem-solving Competence followed closely Managerial Competence (257) and had the fewest contributions (237).

Competence area	Total number of students	Number of interviewees
Language competence	381	11
Intercultural competence	295	7
Social competence and teamwork	289	7
Managerial and organisational competence	257	8
Creativity and problem-solving competence	237	8

Table 4.3: Students' preference of competence areas

On the one hand, it was surprising that students who did not really use CP wished to be interviewed and to discuss the tool and reflection. On the other hand, this was encouraging, because it showed that those students nevertheless seemed to be intrigued by the tool in some way, and insights could be gained on those reluctant to carry out online reflective practice.

When students posted about the benefits of using CP for their internship, they usually gave an example with one or two competence areas rather than with CP in general. Being in a foreign environment (a different country, a new job, foreign language of communication) seemed to most strongly influence students' preferences of competence areas. As interviewees were in a foreign country and most of them communicated in a foreign language, they often started with the Language Competence and described it as "important" (I 2, I 4, I 6, I 10, I 12, I P-EN, I P-DE).

For example, the language area was helpful, since it made students think about strategies for improving their language skills (A3, A4, A15, B12, B14, C11), name “concrete steps on my way of learning Italian” (B9) and reflect on their mistakes in the foreign language (D10).

In the forums, many students mentioned the Language Competence area as most relevant for their current situation as interns abroad:

“Answering these questions has helped me a lot concerning the fact of teaching French in France. Due to the answers I realized in a more profound way how important e.g. the preparation phase is.” (B17)

“I knew the language would create a boundary for me before I came so I ingeniously put focus on improving my Turkish. This focus helped me to enhance the communication with colleagues, suppliers and even my family.” (C8)

The Language Competence area was often cited as helping students to become aware of “more options to improve” (B12) their foreign language knowledge, “all the possibilities that exist to learn” (A2), and ways to “train and improve” (A2) their language skills. It also made them think, and:

“Realise where I can start and which situations or which people can help me cross my boundaries and reach my goal.” (B3)

Consequently, one interviewee reported that the competence area he improved the most was his language competence (I 10). One student found the Language Competence “useful” (I 9) but she found explaining his/her language competence boring as she had a degree in foreign languages which points to students’ individual needs.

Students felt that Intercultural Competence is closely connected to their language and social competences and very important for them (I 2, I 5, I 6, I 7, I 8, I 9, I P-EN) as well. The language and the intercultural competences were perceived as similarly interesting, as they helped students to communicate and adapt as foreigners (I P-EN) and “to get along with the different culture, habits and language (C12)”. However, the Intercultural Competence was not as relevant for those students who were in a foreign country with a culture very similar to their own (e.g. a German in the Netherlands) (I 2, I 3).

Social Competence was a “great help” (I 6) and its inclusion in CP was perceived as good (I 9), because interns could reflect on their situation and track the development of their social skills (I 6, I 10), especially when they had problems in this area at work (I 9). Social skills

were described as important, not only at work but also in everyday life (I 3, I P-EN). Working on one's social competence was perceived as important, since "depending on national habits, it is important to behave appropriately" (B15) and it helped improve the communication skills: "ability to get in contact with other people (A8)" or "try to interact more in Italian, which for sure will be very useful for my internship" (B9). CP provided one interviewee with the opportunity to ask oneself:

"How are my social competences?... How was I able to cope in difficult situations you know, with seniors? That was actually one of my faults for example." (I 9)

The fact that communication is important in every internship and happens in a foreign language in a new environment most probably explains why Intercultural Competence and Social Competence received almost the same attention from students.

The attitude towards the Managerial Competence was less homogeneous. Depending on students' personal situation, interns perceived it as:

- "The hardest one" (I 12) because "it's not so much related to my internship" (I 12);
- Interesting:
"You normally don't think about such things, you just do it and here you have the chance to write it for yourself now and make yourself clear and there I have to improve." (I P-EN)
- Very useful because:
"To work on the management and organisation tasks at the Competence Pass helped me to find a solution to organise myself at work better." (B14)

Creativity and Problem-solving Competence was not discussed much in the forums and only two interviewees explicitly mentioned it (I P-EN, I 9). The reason for the low popularity may be that "there are people who do not think about creativity as a competence or as a skill" (I 9). In the forum posts, that competence area was perceived as relevant for the current situation as an intern abroad (A17) and as providing the student "with an opportunity for reflection" (A17). Another one used that competence area to get more structured on the current job (A7). However, since the competence areas are not defined in the context of CP, it is not clear what each CP user has understood under each area.

While HOL was described as a "more or less public space that you can have feedback and you can discuss with people about things" (I 4) on the course modules, CP was predominantly perceived as a "personal space... for me, personally" (I 4), as an important part of HOL (I 5, I 9), as helpful to complete the modules (I 12), as complementing the course topics (I 4, I 10),

but occasionally also as “a separated, isolated instrument” (I 1) or “something separate from the Hands-on-learning course” (I 3).

4.2.1.2 CP as a personal space to summarise and make thoughts visible

The perception of CP as “*a personal space to summarise and make thoughts visible*” was a dominant one. The perception of CP as “*a personal space*” was so strong that the majority of the interviewees were not interested and willing to make their CP journal entries public to peers or tutor. It was important for the students to have their personal space visible only to them. They did not want feedback from their peers, as they experienced CP as a space for writing down something personal (I P-DE, I 1, I 4, I 5, I 6, I 8, I 10, I 11) and “you completely do it for yourself” (I 4) or write about personal weaknesses not intended to be discussed with others (I 5). As one student put it:

“I think it’s a bit inconvenient or a bit strange when someone is commenting on something I write for me. You know, like, if you want to, someone wants to, like a button or something like ‘permit my writing to tutor’ you get in touch on this. For me, I think it’s written for myself and it’s... like privacy.” (I P-EN)

CP was compared to a “compass” (I 4) which helps them “to keep track on things you want to reach or make better by just writing down” (I 4). In the interviews and in the forum posts, the students highly praised the experience of writing down their thoughts, as they made their thoughts visible and kept their “abstract ideas onto the sheet” (I 2), in a written form in front of their eyes (I 2, I 4, I 8). Interviewees reported that making their thoughts visible allowed them to remember and check, for instance, whether their performed internship tasks deviated from the agreed tasks at the beginning of the internship (I 3) and how their personal competences developed (I 4, I 10). Seeing their strategy in a written form seemed to facilitate organising their thoughts in an appropriate manner (A13, A15, A16) and checking whether the goals were achieved (I P-DE, I P-EN, I 2, I 12). For instance, putting his goals in a written form enabled one student to see:

“How you develop during the internship and how you change ... maybe your language becomes better and your intercultural skills become better.” (I 4)

Also, writing things down made some students “think about the topic in a more active way” (B14), “always remember where and who you are and where you wanna go” (A8), or sometimes “especially to reflect on yourself” (D10).

It can be argued that the CP users perceived the journal the way it was intended by the creator: a personal space to keep one's thoughts visible and to set themselves goals.

According to the educator, the CP user "has the chance to set oneself goals and to think about how one could reach those using one's learning environment during the internship abroad" (I-Ed).

4.2.1.3 CP as a space to set goals, to link theory (the course) with practice (the internship) and to make links between students' past, present and future

Using CP as an organiser brought important benefits to students. There was evidence in the interviews and forum data that CP helped students not merely to define main goals, but especially to find specific steps to achieve them (possibly with the help of other people) and hence to make links between theory and internship, their past and present experiences and future expectation.

The forum posts revealed that most students did not complete CP as an isolated online activity, but rather managed to bridge the learning environment with the real world: the real world being their internship job abroad. As one interviewee summed it up:

"For the internships you have to work and to think. You have to get used to analyse your experience." (I 2)

"(With CP) you are thinking about small parts and then you can do bigger conclusions or bigger results." (I P-EN)

"It is a nice tool to see where you stay at the moment to continue your improvement" (D3)

The students were enabled to see their internship situation from different perspectives with the help of the competence areas and their questions. For instance:

"Finding the answers to the questions about the specific tasks and people was really helpful to the effect that I now have a clear concept of how I can work on it." (B4)

"Also defining a certain goal and how you seek to measure its success was a nice task to do. It helped me to keep my focus and encouraged me on not getting lost in smaller daily distractions." (B8)

“So it helped me to structurize my ideas and then it worked for me as a reminder. So, reminder, organiser and it pushed me to come up with some ideas and to develop them in each section.” (I 2)

CP encouraged them to think about aspects of their internship and the personal situation and to ask themselves (I 4, I 5, I 6) especially about “all the things that you have difficulties with” (I 12). In particular, the students reported that CP encouraged them to think deeply and/or about things they may not have done without the tool:

“I wouldn’t think about any managing or organisation competence, because you normally don’t think about such things”. (I P-EN)

“Working with the Competence Pass helped me in sight of my language skills to that effect that I try to do some conversations with the farmers in order to improve my ability to understand their broad Caithness accent better.” (B7)

“So, setting oneself concrete goals and having to come up with concrete measures to reach the goals, one really has to think a lot about it.” (I 5)

Further examples confirm that the students perceived the task of setting themselves personal goals as important and helpful in their situation as interns abroad:

“Name my concrete aims and outline category groups I have work on. I think this knowledge will help me in my daily job routine.” (B5)

“It’s helpful to write yourself kind of feedback and get yourself clear what your goals are and how you can reach them and who is helping you and how you can help others. It’s really good that you have the chance to do this.” (I P-EN)

“Now I don’t have just one big aim, but intermediate steps, which make it easier for me to begin and continue with my language practicing. Most important for me was to think about, who can help me achieving my goal, as language is something, which is practiced best by talking to other people. I will try to interact more in Italian, which for sure will be very useful for my internship.” (B9)

Interviewees obviously appreciated that with CP they had not only the opportunity to “actually ask myself what am I up to” (I 9) but also to “make a list of what you want to do” (I 12), i.e. to set oneself concrete goals and make plans for the future regarding how to achieve those goals (I 2, I 5, I 12, I P-EN).

Many students wrote in their CP journal very critically about their knowledge of the foreign language and set themselves the goal to improve their language skills by talking to colleagues, the landlord, friends and using the local media (CP 623, CP 840, CP 789, CP 921 to name a few). CP 648, CP 647 and CP 741 wanted to improve their fluency of Swiss German. The student with CP 741 wanted to use the international working environment in the company in Switzerland to practise his/her school French, to get better Business English and to learn to understand Swiss German when spoken quickly so that at the end of the internship no one would think that that student was German.

That intern wrote a specific criterion in order to check his/her foreign language progress: notice how often he/she changes from French to English in order to make himself/herself understood. To achieve the desired standard of Swiss German, the student would listen to local radio, watch TV and talk to colleagues. Compared to most entries, the entry in CP 741 was lengthy and detailed and elaborated on how the student planned to achieve the goal. However, the student had completed only the Language Competence area.

Most students used succinct phrases such as “understand Swiss German” (CP 648) or just writing “my colleagues” (CP 1050) or “my supervisor, my colleagues, my friends” (CP 1116) as the people who could support them in achieving the set goals. Here is a further relevant example taken from the Language Competence area:

“Ask for tasks that will require the use of German... Always speak German if an opportunity arises (even if the person I am talking to can speak English)... Do vocabulary exercises and grammar drills at home. This will help me feel more confident in real-time situations.” (CP 572)

Further on, CP turned out to be perceived as “*a space to link theory with practice and to make links between the interns’ past, present and future experiences*”. The data strongly suggests that by using CP, students had a space where they could build bridges between their individual past experiences and their current and future life as interns and in general. As some interviewees described it:

“It made you to think what you are doing on your working place, outside your working place and you’re thinking like about where you can look for a help, and what are the concrete steps in achievement of your goals.” (I 12)

“To criticize yourself in a way and then to push your imagination and creativity ‘what could be, if’. If I do this or if I didn’t do this mistake. It helps, yes, it helps you

develop your frame. If you are a scientist, it pushes you to think. It is very useful.” (I 2)

Similarly, in the forum a few students explicitly mentioned that the online journal helped them connect prior to future experience. For instance:

“Working with the Competence Pass has so far helped me connecting prior experience with future actions at my workplace. I have only completed the section language skills, but that has already helped me to reflect about my current language and what I actually wanted to achieve.” (C3)

The analysed CP journals also evidenced those perceptions. For instance CP 572, CP 588 and CP 1018 disclosed that the students were aware of their previous experience, of difficulties they had in the current moment, of their feelings, as well as of the opportunities their internship context offered. CP 572 and CP 588 offered explicit examples of why the students intended to do something: do more vocabulary exercises to become more confident in real life.

As the students on HOL had access to CP for several weeks and they were free to decide whether and when to access it, some journal entries show that anticipatory reflection led to reflection on the current internship situation. For instance:

“My vocabulary grew much during the internship. I learn new words every day which will help me later on the job. Moreover, I make negotiations with suppliers on the phone. This was quite difficult for me at the beginning because a face-to-face conversation is easier than a telephone conversation but in the meantime I got used to it.” (CP 588)

“Tasks which I can combine with personal interests/matters – for example working together in a team as a socialising aspect; doing research towards contents of health because I am interested in health and like to gain knowledge about it in context of my leisure time; also tasks which enable me to apply creative approaches (in team work) playing theatre – act on an experimental base. Referring to all my tasks I am aware of developing empathy towards/for the issues of my colleagues and host company’s clients. I can share my cultural experiences from home with my colleagues and clients. Together we could discuss about it or compare German and Scottish etc.... traditions for emphasizing the added value gained by a combination of both cultures.” (CP 840)

Working through each CP competence area, an interviewee felt invited to see herself from another perspective and thus to become aware not only about their internship situation but also of certain personal issues, for example:

“I learnt to see my entire stay here in one complete picture, so to say to observe it more from above and this was helpful. To get such a view on my internship from outside, I learnt this through the Competence Pass.” (I 8)

Another student (CP 1018) wrote that he/she relied a lot on the help of the colleagues who he/she asked for advice, or he/she copied what they did. He/she did not have much work experience but could occasionally use experience from previous internships and private life, such as booking a trip.

Those examples revealed that students used CP as a space to think about their current life and to make plans for acquiring new knowledge and skills, using their current internship context. This preparation for different internship aspects also led some students to more self-awareness and competence development (see Section 4.3).

4.2.1.4 CP as a burden

While in the interviews students reported largely positive experiences with CP and positive attitudes towards reflection, in the forum posts some students questioned CP's usefulness and others considered it to be of no use at all (A17, D9). Some students acknowledged CP generally as an opportunity (A14) with some annoying features, but for others CP was nothing but a burden. The perception of CP as “*a burden*” can be explained with the internal and external constraining factors the students mentioned in the interviews and forum posts:

- External factors: time-consuming or/and activity, voluntary task demanding setting goals under pressure, rigid structure and lack of personalisation.
- Internal factors: perceived lack of personal gain and motivation to engage with CP, and negative attitude towards reflection.

CP was experienced as a burden mostly because it was a time-consuming activity, since CP required time to think and to reflect, which was really difficult for some people (I 3, I 9).

Many students complained that they were very busy with their work and free-time activities (I P-DE, I 3, I 6, I 7, I 8, I 9). Some interns (A14, D1, D8, D12) were disturbed by the fact that “it needs a lot of time to fill all in” (D1). This resulted in feeling under time pressure (I 8) and overwhelmed by the internship, the course work and CP:

“Oh my God! I am not going to make it. I have no time.” (I 9)

Occasionally, that perception changed during the course:

“That was a bit stressful at the beginning. But I got used to it.” (I 3)

Some interns preferred to spend their time on free-time activities, social media, conversations with locals (friends) or on learning the grammar and vocabulary of the foreign language instead of having to sit the whole evening at the computer (A14, D1, D8, D12). Not only lack of time but also lack of motivation to do the extra tasks after work (I 3, I 4, I 11) were factors which prevented students from engaging with CP.

As reflection was perceived as an individually specific and mostly personal process, it seems unsurprising that some students felt uncomfortable with being asked to write reflectively in a certain predefined way as is the case with CP. Some interviewees, who were used to reflection from their educational background (I 6, I 8, I 9), were unwilling to reflect on demand. Interviewee 9 added one more reason: she experienced reflection on oneself as frightening and leading to the wish to “run away when I know that I have to evaluate myself or reflect upon myself” (I 9). Hence, against my expectations, Interviewee 9 did not really engage with CP even though she discussed reflection in detail during the interview. She filled in only the agreed internship tasks because she pondered on the goal of the tool and came to the conclusion that reflecting on what one learns is important but at the same time “very subjective” and “not easy at all” (I 9). Another interviewee believed that one had to learn to reflect (I 8) because reflecting is not an everyday activity.

It seemed that for some students the goal of CP remained unclear (I 10, I 11) and this also led to them regarding CP as “*a burden*”: “what exactly you kind of want from us to see in this CP” (I 12). Some interviewees did not engage with the tool because they did not grasp its value and goals (I P-DE, I 7, I 10, I 11, I 12) or did not feel convinced that answering the questions in CP could bring any advantages to their current situation (I 11).

“I did not see the added value of filling that Competence Pass and investing time in it.” (I 4)

“That was just a further burden, and I didn’t see how it contributes to my personal development.” (I 7)

Some students, for different reasons, felt uneasy about setting their own goals and thinking about how to achieve them (A5, D9, D11). One questioned the advantage of the “approach to

come up with a goal only for the sake of having one” (A5). Another student felt sceptical about the usefulness of the expected “strategic thinking or engagement with oneself” (D11) and criticised CP for being very instrumental:

“It is all about aims, and how to achieve them best and efficiently, and about success or lack of such in achieving these so-called aims.” (D11)

This uncertainty was shared in a small number of forum posts, which were partly controversial. For instance, D9 found the idea of listing one’s internship tasks “not a bad idea in principle” but he/she used a laboratory journal for this purpose and did not see any advantage of also using CP. Some students acknowledged that “the Competence Pass helps to realise what aims I have” (D12) and “it is most important to use it to set you clear aims, to make them visible by writing them down and especially to reflect on yourself”.

However, they found CP unhelpful, either because they had already set goals before the beginning of the internship (D10, D12) or because they did “not believe it has been very relevant for my particular situation” (A5) despite being able to “see the general benefits of doing the exercise” (A5). While Interviewee 10 recognised that reflective practice itself is important, he lacked the self-discipline and motivation to do it and completed only the obligatory course tasks on HOL.

Lack of motivation to do the extra tasks after work (I 3, I 4, I 11) and perceived lack of personal gain from using CP were further constraining factors. When students perceived no relevance to their current personal and professional situation (A10, C13) or recognised no benefits (D9), they expressed critical views and experiences of CP as a useless tool. For instance:

“I don’t felt better prepared through the Competence Pass and also I don’t know how it could help me if I would have a problem at work.” (D8)

“A Competence Pass is not required to be reminded of the improvements I make, because I can feel the progress first-hand.” (D13)

Some interviewees admitted that they did not engage with CP (I 7, I 11) because they did not see the point of completing a voluntary task, a task which is not relevant for passing the course (I 11), or they only filled in the agreed internship tasks (I 7, I 9, I 11). One student saw no personal gain because there was no “concrete thing I want to change” (A10) and another one “would not have done things differently without CP” (C13). One interviewee (I 7) described HOL and CP as a time burden and she did not understand why the course should be

done. It seems that the individual situation (context) of each student during the internship played an important role in students' perceptions of CP as something helpful and useful or as a burden.

This section has revealed the dominating perception of CP as supporting learning from experience. This perception was closely related to the perceptions of CP as a personal space to think and to start challenging their behaviour in order to consider new perspectives and to change something (I P-EN, I 1). CP offered the interns a special personal space to think about and link previous experiences with current ones, and a place to keep their goals and plans visible to them. It was also revealed that some students experienced the online journal as a burden, mainly because it is a time-intensive activity and they saw no personal benefits of using CP.

Further examples are provided in the discussion of Theme 2. I now move on to discussing the perceptions and attitudes towards CP's structure and online design.

4.2.2 Perceptions of CP's structure and design

In the interviews I discussed students' perceptions of CP's structure and design in order to gain insights about their engagement with CP and ideas on how to further develop the journal. Three categories of students' perceptions and attitudes towards the structure and design of the online reflective journal emerged: perceiving "*the guiding questions as adequate and helpful prompts*", "*the repetitive questions as annoying*" and "*CP as lacking personalised feedback and guidance*".

4.2.2.1 Perceiving CP's guiding questions as adequate and helpful prompts, and their repetition as annoying

CP was created to implement self-coaching through guiding questions in several competence areas (I-Ed). As mentioned in Section 4.2.1, students found the existence of competence areas very helpful and the specific areas as relevant for their internship abroad. The predefined questions were perceived as necessary and helpful since they enabled students to view the internship from different perspectives, and they offered direction which aided their thinking:

“They [the questions] helped me because at the beginning I had no idea what it was all about.” (I 6)

“I needed them, I liked it having them.” (I 8)

This perception confirmed the educator’s concerns that it would be an overwhelming task for the students to be asked to set goals and to reflect completely freely without any support or guidance (I-Ed). Hence, CP was designed as a voluntary online activity and guiding questions were offered to help students to develop reflective practice and autonomous learning (I-Ed). The educator and most students shared the belief that the repetition of the questions was helpful because those are “the most important questions” (I 3) and “they can be applied to each area” (I 6).

On the other hand, there was also a shared perception among a few interviewees of the “*repetition in the questions as annoying*”. Having the same questions caused boredom or repetition in the answers:

“Because when you see the same question, you say: Okay, it is always the same!” (I 9)

“I got the impression that I was somehow repeating stuff I have noted down beforehand in the context of another competence.” (I 1)

“It is difficult for me to answer [those questions] because there are many identical answers.” (I 10)

Some interviewees (I 1, I 5, I 9) suggested that a variation in the questions in each CP area could enhance the scope of thinking. For instance:

“One could adjust the questions a bit. I mean, that they are changed a bit so that one can think in a different direction.” (I 5)

Summing up, having question prompts was perceived as a necessary and helpful feature but the attitude towards having the same guiding questions in each CP area varied between satisfaction (I 1, I 3, I 6, I 8, I 12) and annoyance (I 5, I 9, I 10). Having the same questions in each competence area was sometimes perceived as a drawback, leading to repetitive answers and/boredom.

4.2.2.2 CP as lacking personalised feedback and guidance

Currently, CP provides neither guidance on reflection nor any feedback on students’ journal entries from the course tutor or peers mainly due to the lack of financial means and staff (I-

Ed). The educator admitted in the interview that, ideally, each student would have had a coach on HOL with whom they could have discussed problems and goals and received support in their reflective process. He assumed that feedback from the tutor could endanger students' writing for the tutor or what they believed the tutor would like to read, instead of what they really thought and wanted.

The interviews and forum posts revealed that the students engaged with CP, influenced by their individual expectations and experience with reflective practice on the work placement. Some interns disclosed that their individual preferences and needs are not met by the current version of CP and they perceived CP as "*lacking personalised feedback and guidance*". Interestingly, the interviewees disclosed that they did not expect and need feedback from the course tutor or peers; rather they desired feedback only from people they work with.

Some students would have liked to have some feedback from the course tutor and less likely from peers, whereas others did not miss it (I 1, I 5, I 9, I 12). Feedback from the tutor was expected to relate either to the way the students wrote reflectively (I 3, I 12) or to the way they dealt with a particular problem (I 1). Some interviewees proposed the idea of receiving tutor feedback upon request, for example in the case that a student had questions on CP and/or a particular issue. A button "I wish feedback from the tutor (and/or peers)" could be used by those who would like to discuss their CP posts with the tutor (I P-DE, I 2, I 3, I 5, I 9, I 11).

Several interviewees believed that having a second opinion from a competent person was an advantage and they were aware that for someone outside their internship situation (e.g. the online course tutor), it is difficult to judge and give adequate feedback (I 1, I 3, I 11, I 12) "because that person may not predict as well what the upcoming intern is going through" (I 1).

Interestingly, those interviewees (I 1, I 2, I 6, I 11) shared the attitude that feedback should preferably come from a supervisor or colleagues. They experienced reflection with another person in their environment as more powerful and helpful because, contrary to CP, they received feedback from someone who was well familiar with their situation:

"She, my supervisor, really gave me regular detailed feedback closely connected or coupled with the work situation." (I 1)

As a result, the students who were exposed to reflective practice with their supervisor or colleagues on a regular basis (I 1, I 2, I 11) preferred it and did not integrate CP into their internship.

Moreover, those interviewees preferred feedback in a face-to-face form rather than in a written form. They emphasised that the journal was only a tool to aid reflection and the importance of talking through difficult or troublesome issues appeared to be more valuable than writing. For instance, a colleague mentor/supervisor helps one get:

“A mirror held in front of you with examples, showing what one has done well and what was not so good, where one’s weaknesses are and the good thing was that those were one-to-one conversations where one’s personal development was shown.” (I 11)

Feedback from a person (not only writing in a journal) was also described as desirable in general when one had problems (I 7), because talking to a mentor/tutor could be more helpful than filling in a reflective journal. One interviewee would have preferred to discuss the questions in CP in a conversation with another person instead of writing online. However, she acknowledged that, as there was no other choice except online, she used CP and dared to write personal thoughts honestly (I 8).

The opinions were divided as to whether there should be feedback on the journal entries and from whom and whether there should be guidance on reflection and in which form. Most interviewees (except I 6 and I 10) did not miss guidance on reflection in CP, but at the same time they believed that having written guidance on how to reflect was generally a good idea (I P-EN, I 2, I 4, I 5, I 8, I 10) or could be helpful (I P-DE, I P-EN, I 3, I 10, I 11, I 12) for peers who are not familiar with reflective activities (I 2, I 4, I 8, I 10), in order “to ensure that the people really understand what it is about” (I 4).

Interviewee 10 and Interviewee 11 admitted that they may have engaged more with it if there had been an introductory page explaining the goals and benefits of using the tool convincingly. Interviewee 7 supposed that she could have worked with CP if it were explicitly described how and why CP is connected with one’s internship and if she had had time to learn to use it.

On the other hand, some students expressed concerns that if there were a long introduction with many examples, people would not read it, and it may limit their creativity (I 5). One student even stressed that students might run away from the activity if it were made too explicit that they had to reflect on themselves, because self-reflection can be difficult and frightening (I 9). As an alternative to long guidance on how to reflect, one interviewee suggested adding more activities which require reflection on the course modules so that students get used to it and could practise it on their own using CP (I P-EN).

It seemed that the subjective insights and reflection when using CP were not enough for some students. For example, Interviewee 1 described CP as not being able to “give you a particular feedback on reflection” but as helping to:

“Activate you to give feedback to yourself, but it never reflects anything apart from personal insights you can gain.” (I 1)

Summing up, some guidance on how to reflect and information about personal benefits using the journal as well as feedback on the reflected issues were highlighted as valuable and helpful, especially if the feedback came from an intern’s colleague/supervisor.

4.2.3 Attitudes towards CP as an online tool

The different data sources allowed me to gain valuable insights into students’ experience and attitude to online reflective practice. This section reveals in particular the three categories which emerged in relation to the perception of CP as an online tool:

- The online environment as an accepted space for personal thoughts.
- The bilingual format as advantageous.
- The design as lacking personalisation.

4.2.3.1 The online environment as an accepted space for personal thoughts

While the goal of this research was not to measure the depth of reflective writing in the CP journals, it was considered important to gain insights into how students wrote online in respect to choice of language and writing style. Hence, I include here examples from students’ CP journals to show the reader that most students did not feel reluctant to write online, were not concerned about confidentiality and predominantly wrote short answers to the journal questions.

To refresh the reader’s memory, HOL and CP are available only online (I-Ed). Most interviewees felt completely fine that CP was available in an online environment (I 1, I 2, I 3, I 4, I 6, I 9, I P-EN, I 12) and acknowledged it as “*an accepted space for personal thoughts*”. This perception supported the educator’s assumption that students would have no problems answering the CP questions in an online environment because he presumed that nowadays the young generation were used to writing on mobile devices.

The interviewees confirmed that they did not experience problems writing their thoughts online as they were “growing up in this generation that is online” (I P-EN). Also:

“It is easier to write it down in the computer or online because I think it comes with the digital age that makes it very comfortable to just switch on the laptop or personal computer and to just write it down.” (I 4)

Consequently, confidentiality in the online environment seemed not to be a concern for interviewees (I P-EN, I 1, I 2, I 4, I 6, I 12). They were used to putting personal information online, for example on Facebook (I P-EN, I 12) and just “didn’t bother about these kinds of things” (I 12). Only one interviewee deliberately omitted mentioning names of colleagues and company in the posts but generally did not view the online environment as an obstacle to writing personal thoughts (I 5). Three interviewees supposed that they would work more intensively with the tool on paper as they did not need a computer and internet (I P-DE, I 3, I 5) or because one person was “a fan of paper and pen” and for her “writing on a tablet is very tedious” (I P-DE).

Generally, the reviewed CP journal entries were relevant to the respective questions. It seemed that students’ writing was influenced by individual preferences and today’s many online forms of communication (Facebook, Twitter, Evernote etc.) where short texts, incomplete sentences and a mix of styles are common. In particular, the CP journals evidenced that students slightly preferred to express themselves in bullet points and in incomplete sentences, rather than in long whole sentences and the writing style was informal.

There were also some students who used key words in some parts and whole sentences in other parts. Key words prevailed in the section “My goals”. For example:

“Hands-on experience in project and programme administration (in public, non-profit sector) – Development and practical application of (online) marketing knowledge and skills – Introduction and gaining practical experience in design of online learning”
(CP 728) – Agreed tasks

“My goal in intercultural competence = to learn a lot about England and the English people.” (CP 623)

Most students used succinct texts to answer the question about who could support them in achieving their goals, such as:

“My colleagues” (CP 1050)

“My supervisor, my colleagues, my friends” (CP 1116)

If we use the entries in CP 648 and CP 771 as further examples, we find no information about the student's context, feelings, or previous and current experience:

“Question: Which tasks/activities will help me reach my goal during my internship?

Answer: Communication with colleagues and patients.” (CP 648)

“Meeting colleagues privately and having fun with them, discussing private topics, information about my land and culture, good team spirit, fun.” (CP 771)

Although there was a certain goal, the plan to achieve that goal was very vague. The students thought about their social competence but the narrative was too short, especially in the case of CP 648, who presented insufficient evidence of a link between learning and experience as well as about how the intended actions contribute to personal or professional development.

Other students were more precise, for example:

“I will offer help to my colleagues in different situations and will meet them privately.” (CP 771)

- “- Hard work in the laboratory
- Meeting with supervisor
- Exchanging ideas with my co-workers
- Participating in weekly laboratory and institute seminars
- Reading additional information about the topic to become an expert
- Analyse and discuss frequently my results in order to better track my progress
- Complete hands-on course ‘Discover business ethics!’” (CP 1116, Social Competence)

Some students, such as the one with CP 741 (see Section 4.2.1.3), had one long and detailed entry elaborating on how the student planned to achieve the set goal but he/she completed only this area.

Next, the revised journals evidenced something which would not have worked if CP were on paper. Surprisingly, some journals included text which was obviously copied from work contracts or work reports. For example:

“The work may also include supervision of other staff in the office.” (CP 793)

Copying text from other sources resulted also in a third person singular narrative when referring to oneself, as in:

“M. also help our team when we had staffing issues and completed 2 sleep over shifts that required responsibilities...” (CP 798)

Based on the interviews and forum posts, one could assume that accepting the online environment for reflection does not necessarily lead to reflective writing. Perceiving CP as an organiser coupled with time deficit, writing just to complete the task or making use of time-saving writing strategies typical for online social media, were the common reasons for students’ writing style preferences.

4.2.3.2 Experiencing the bilingual format as advantageous

The data suggested that the flexibility of an English and German version of CP was appreciated, experienced as advantageous and made use of. Those who wrote in English did it, for instance, because neither German nor English was their mother tongue (I 12) or they did not see that they could switch to a German version. Quite often, students mixed up German and English. It turned out that some interviewees were not aware that they could switch between the two languages (I P-EN, I 5, I 6).

For instance, two interviewees used English to describe their agreed and performed internship tasks and then answered the other questions in German (I 8, I 10). Another student answered a question in Managerial and Organisational Competence with key words: “Being in the operation theatre frequently” (CP 621), while he/she answered question 4 in Social Competence with whole sentences in German (here translated):

“I will try to stay constantly informed about what happens on the ward and operations. Also, I want to ask more professional questions. Instead of having lunch only with other interns, I will try to have lunch with my doctor colleagues in order to get to know them better.” (CP 621)

While students’ journals showed that both English and German were used, the interviews revealed a preference to German when this was the mother tongue (I 3, I 6) and it felt natural:

“Because my thoughts are like in German and I just wrote it down in German and I did not really think about it.” (I 4)

For those students who were completing the internship in a language different from those two, it would be more useful and more beneficial (I 7) to have the questions in the language of the internship country to practise thinking and writing in the target language, which in the case of Interviewee 7 was Spanish, for example.

Although most interviewees were satisfied with the choice of English and German, it also became obvious that the tool could be more personalised if it offered more languages.

4.2.3.3 Lack of personalisation

It became evident that the students approached the online tool with certain expectations and were disappointed at not having them. In the previous sections I already described that some students experienced lack of personalisation concerning the issues of guidance and feedback as well as language. This section reveals further areas of perceived *lack of personalisation* concerning the layout and technical features of CP.

Explicitly asked about the design of the tool, many interviewees praised CP's simplicity and clarity (I 1, I 4, I 5, I 6, I 11) because it is about writing down a text and one does not need special animations (I 5), and "if it were more colourful and shiny and sparkling, it may distract the user from the content" (I 1). However, some interviewees criticised the current layout because they felt that in the layout there "is something missing, or... that it's a bit too easy, too boring looking" (I P-EN). Others felt that the layout should be changed somehow but did not know exactly how (I P-EN, I 8). While some students wished to have an extra empty space without guiding questions where they could write down further thoughts (I P-DE, I 1, I 4, I 6, I 10), others preferred to add further areas (I P-DE, I 4, I 5) according to their personal needs, like this interviewee:

"Create an empty template, a space where each participant could add their own competence, which matches the respective internship (in my case that would be Teaching Competence)." (I P-DE)

Interviewee 4 wished to have a problem-solving area in the Language Competence area "where one could describe the problems one had with the communication and how one solved them".

It also seemed that navigating through CP was not clear and straightforward for everyone. Engaging with CP, few students experienced technical issues which had a negative impact on their perception of the usefulness of the tool. For example, some students missed a "print" button to create a PDF file with all CP pages (I P-DE) and the possibility to extract the data from CP and use it elsewhere to show "all set tasks and goals and those you achieved or not" (I 2). One student was not able to navigate through the different competence areas and managed "to only open a sheet with information about team work and the improving of social

skills” (B16). Another one felt disturbed that CP opens in “just a small window of which you can’t even adjust the horizontal size and you can’t even create checkpoints” (D9).

Summing up, theme one disclosed that not every CP user associated the journal with reflection and signposted that many study participants perceived CP as a special personal online organiser. Many students felt encouraged to think about their current life, to set themselves goals and make their own plans for acquiring new knowledge and developing their competences in the context of their current internship. Generally, students used CP and wrote short texts or key words as common for an organiser and online social media spaces.

In the next section I elaborate on students’ perceptions of CP as a reflective journal and on their attitudes towards reflection during an internship.

4.3 Perceptions and use of CP as a reflective journal

The findings indicate that CP users associated reflection with thinking rather than with writing. The qualitative analysis of the reviewed CP journals revealed that very few journal entries provided evidence of reflective writing, which is defined in this context as description and thoughts about the particular context, personal feelings, plan for change, and clear link between learning from experience and future practice.

This section introduces the second theme and its two sub-themes:

Theme 2: Perceptions and use of CP as a reflective journal

Sub-themes:

- CP as enabling reflection
- Perceived personal benefits of reflection
 - Enhancing self-confidence and self-awareness
 - Supporting learning from experience

This section reveals the perception of CP as “*enabling reflection*” based on the sub-theme “*Leads to reflection*”(Tables 4.1 and 4.2) and then highlights the perceived “*personal benefits of reflection*”, these being enhancing self-confidence and self-awareness, and supporting learning from experience. The latter sub-theme includes the sub-theme “*Supports learning from experience*” (Table 4.1), as well as the themes “*CP as a helpful activity*”, “*Design issues*” and “*Suggestions for improvement*” (Table 4.2).

4.3.1 CP as enabling reflection

During the interviews I generally waited for students to mention the words “reflect” or “reflection” themselves before I asked them to elaborate on their perceptions of reflective practice with the online tool. Most students described aspects of reflective practice without explicitly calling it such. Rather, they spoke of deeper thinking and enhanced awareness about certain issues.

Almost all interviewees described their experience with CP using the words “thinking”, “self-evaluation” and “nachdenken” (German = thinking over/about something, reflecting, pondering), “Selbstbeobachtung” (self-observation) (I 6), “kritisch bewerten” (critical evaluation) (I 3) or reflection (I P-EN, I 1, I 2, I 3, I 4, I 5, I 7, I 8, I 9).

Answering the questions in CP was perceived as requiring a thinking process which was different from the usual thinking or felt “strange” (C12) as CP made some students “think of the area from a different point of view” (C12), think in a different way about the tasks (B14) and in more detail than usual (C8), “reflect yourself in a very intensive way” (A8) and “evaluate everything” (C11). Although it was not deliberately asked in the forum, some interns wrote that CP in general or single competence areas provided them “with an opportunity for reflection” (A17).

It is worth mentioning here that the perceived deep thinking was intended by CP’s creators. The interviewed educator explained that people think every day about different things, but that the thinking which is practised with CP is intended to be different. It requires formulating one’s thoughts and emotions in a written form, reflecting on them and developing oneself further (I-Ed).

So what exactly was reflective thinking about for CP’s users: an awareness of one’s knowledge, or the effective application of knowledge into practice, or an analysis of one’s actions? Indeed, the students in this research experienced reflective practice as a combination of all of the above ideas.

When asked to define reflection, the interviewees gave either a definition in their own words or examples of reflection. Reflection was defined as critically asking oneself, evaluating and questioning one’s experiences (I 3, I 6). It also included pondering and coming to grips with things without just accepting them (I 3). Hence, for some students it seemed to be “something

more than just thinking, thinking” (I 9); rather, it is a way “to come back to myself” (I 9) and “rather a process of self-observation” (I 6).

A comparison of the interviewees’ understanding of reflection with the definitions of reflection presented in Chapter 2 demonstrates that the experience of the study participants could indeed be named reflection (Table 4.4).

Definitions of reflection	
Students’ understanding	Literature
Thinking and pondering	<p>“A deliberate and conscious process... to mindfully contemplate...” (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016, p. 9)</p> <p>“A simple mental process... complicated by different frameworks of meaning.” (Moon, 2004, p. 93)</p>
Questioning one’s situation and enhancing (self-) awareness	<p>“Intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences.”(Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999, p. 19)</p> <p>“As much a state of mind as it is a set of activities, with the end process being not so much resolution of an experience but rather a better understanding of it.” (Pavlovich, 2007, pp. 283–284)</p> <p>“We become more aware of our theories-in-use, we become more aware of the contradictions between what we do and what we hope to do; as a result we can shape new directions.” (Osterman, 1990, p. 137)</p>
Change / development / learning and setting goals	<p>“Transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious.” (Dewey, 1933, p. 100)</p> <p>“Explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations.” (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999, p. 19)</p> <p>“Mindfully contemplate on past, present or future (intended or planned) actions in order to learn, better understand and potentially improve future action.” (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016, p. 9)</p>

Table 4.4: Comparison of definitions

Based on the interviews, it appears that students generally perceived reflection during an internship as:

A deliberate thinking process for examining and becoming aware of one's knowledge and personal development by recognising past and current experiences in planning future activities. The outcome is developing a better understanding of oneself or a situation and a new plan/perspective for personal and/or professional development. Reflective practice encompasses deeper individual thinking and can be enhanced by discussion with colleagues.

Reflective practice was seen as a personal issue which mostly happens before or after a difficult situation and “everyone has a different way or approach” (I 1) to it. While some students recognised that reflection can be done in order to prepare themselves for future situations, for example “to avoid errors in future lessons and to improve the teaching skills” (B17), others defined it as a process which happens during and after an event (I 1). The interns experienced CP as helping them reflect on different times and on different occasions. Mostly, students seemed to reflect on their current situation, for example “reflecting on the culture I live in now” (D10).

Some found it useful to reflect on previous situations in order to determine in which way they should change certain behaviour (I 5, C2). Generally, the interviewees experienced reflection as encompassing past, current and future experiences. Hence, it does not sound surprising that Interviewee 1 criticised that CP prepares students only in advance of an event and is not designed to “support you through the whole process” (I 1).

Mostly, interviewees mentioned different occasions for reflection and believed that one reflects in difficult situations or when there is a problem or something new and unexpected, such as a new job or project (I P-EN) as well as on one's weaknesses (I P-EN). One interviewee perceived reflection as reviewing a difficult situation by taking into consideration all circumstances and oneself (I 8) and finding ways to change and improve a situation. In the forum the students discussed other occasions for reflection as well: the necessity to set goals (C2, C14, C3, C11) and to be clear about “what I actually wanted to achieve” (C3), as well as to reflect on their behaviour and skills (D6, D10) plus to “reflect the own progress, especially in the language skills” (D1). Thinking about ways to improve their foreign language skills enjoyed high priority and was mentioned by several interns (B14, C3, C11, D10) as an example of their reflection.

Next, students felt that with reflection one starts challenging one's habits and way of behaving in order to consider other perspectives and to change something (I P-EN, I 1). Reflection includes thinking about experiences, comparing them with previous experiences or with experiences made by others and some theory (I 7). Hence, reflection with CP was experienced as "the first step to change" (I 4) and that it "somehow leads you to additional insights, knowledge" (I 1). It can also help one to find ways to get better (I 6). Similar to the educator, one interviewee compared reflection with a mirror, through which, with honesty, "you have to look at yourself like you were a different person and understand what you really want to change" (I 4).

While students seemed to share a similar understanding of what reflection is, they had a different attitude to how and with whom it should happen. For some interviewees, reflective practice was a natural process which one does not need to prepare for, but for others, it was a process that needs to be learnt. For instance, one student felt that reflection happened almost naturally when you discussed something with friends or colleagues (I 6). Additionally, as mentioned in the section on "*CP as a burden*", for some students reflective practice should happen on a personal wish and not as a requirement.

Summing up, the students perceived reflection as a very personal process involving deep thinking about themselves and/or external issues (mainly difficult or troublesome situations), which can be enhanced by feedback from someone acquainted with the situation. An interesting finding indeed was that without CP some students would not have reflected on themselves and their internship at all or at least not in a written form (I 1, I 3).

The next section elaborates on the personal benefits which the students perceived when reflecting with CP.

4.3.2 Perceived personal benefits of reflection

The data revealed that those students who engaged in reflection using CP perceived as personal benefits: enhanced self-confidence and self-awareness, as well as support for learning from experience. They reflected on their personal and professional development during the internship and brightened their horizon.

4.3.2.1 CP as leading to enhanced self-confidence and self-awareness

In the interviews as well as in the forum posts, the students reported about increasing their awareness about themselves, their strengths and weaknesses (I 4, I 6, I P-EN) and their learning during the internship (I P-DE). As one interviewee expressed it, CP enables one:

“To pause for a while and to think about what it happening right now, how I am changing and how I react.” (I 8)

Reflection was sometimes depicted as strenuous but as bringing satisfaction, self-confidence and competence development to the reflecting person. For example:

“Sometimes when you reflect you see, you do some things in a good way and you are satisfied by how you do it. Yes, it’s like it is building up confidence and maybe also a little bit of happiness because you are glad that you can deal of situations your way and you think this way is good.” (I 4)

In a forum post, one student described that CP was helpful to “think about and formulate my weaknesses and then to transform them to strengths” (B15). Similarly, one interviewee stated that CP “showed ... to myself that I have this weakness and I could solve this somehow or more or less” (I 4). The students worked on their weaknesses because they recognised them and came up with specific ideas about how to work on them. As mentioned earlier, it became evident that in using CP most commonly students became aware of how they communicate with others in a foreign language and in an intercultural environment.

For instance, in one forum post one student shared how with CP he/she managed to “get a new view on intercultural, social and team building aspect” (B8) of the internship and a peer reflected “on the culture and on the situation I am in” (D10). Interviewee 12 spoke about perceived change in her competence development:

“So in the end, I felt like, yes, I actually manage to reach these goals.
And it makes me feel good like, “Yey. I managed to be a more communicative person.”

In a CP journal one student wrote that being a foreigner made her/him more open to people coming from different countries (CP 588). By filling in the Social Competence area one student became aware of “how much I like working in a team, sharing tasks and reviewing it together with others” (B2). In a forum post, a student described:

“I did the linguistic competence part. It was interesting and helpful because I realized that I have already made a lot of progress.” (A11)

Also, reflection could help “you to open up different perspectives, e.g. a new point of view you may not have considered in advance” (I 1). Interviewee 4 “recognised what is really the problem” (I 4) only “by writing down what I think about my management and organisation competence” (I 4). Another student became aware of an issue only because she used CP and so realised that she could not work on her problem-solving competence in the internship place because of the particular situation in the institution (I 6).

As a result, the interns often perceived enhanced self-confidence (I P-DE, I 1, I 4, I 5, I 8, I 12) as they felt among others “a feeling of security” (I 5) as well as better prepared for future (new) situations (I 1).

4.3.2.2 CP as supporting learning from experience

It seems that the online reflective journal managed to support some students not only to increase their self-awareness, but also to perceive skills development and some learning progress (I P-EN, I 1, I 2, I 4, I 6, I 8, I 9, A11). Using CP and thinking about their situation made those students more aware of their learning experience on the internship, for example:

“Working with the Competence Pass had an effect on my personal attitude towards my internship. I guess without the Pass most of the aspects would come to my mind rather unconsciously but using the Pass I was more aware of what I was learning.”
(C8)

Especially those interns who did not enjoy mentoring or reflective conversations in the work placement experienced CP as helping them feel supported and not left alone with their internship experience. For instance:

“My mentor did not have much time for me and it was good in that case that there was an opportunity to stop and think about what is happening right now, how am I changing, how do I react. Actually it is extremely important to reflect and this is the only way to further develop oneself.” (I 8)

The students seemed to become aware that they could use the internship situation for learning and that they could choose what and how to improve in their private and professional life. The interns primarily expressed internally oriented contemplation (personal needs, problems and development) and there was very little evidence of externally oriented reflection (e.g. culture of the host country or company, political issues). Triggered by CP, some interviewees noticed that they were actually learning while trying to achieve their goals (I 2, I 6, I 8). One interviewee described her perception of learning from experience as follows:

“When you think of your experience, you, let’s say, re-experience your experience. I think that you learn more, like, you are overviewing everything you have done with all outcomes, pros and cons and think of other possibilities which could happen if you change something and it helps you learn a lot.” (I 2)

The forum posts also offered such evidence:

“Answering the Competence Pass structured my thinking about my stay abroad in some useful foci. Most relevant was the domain of “Social Competence and Teamwork” where I could identify that I yet lack self-assurance in the “more open” academic field. At the beginning of my internship it was kind of hard for me to make up my mind or bring my ideas in and also see that others seem to have more skills in creative scientific thinking. Although I was aware of it, I didn’t manage to deal with it. Therefore finding the answers to the questions about the specific tasks and people was really helpful to the effect that I now have a clear concept of how I can work on it.” (B4)

Another post discloses that CP helped students make connections between private and professional life experiences:

“The Competence Pass helped me to realise that not everything is my fault, and that I did try a lot to interact. Now I start focusing to trust myself more but still need to get a little more organised. In addition, I started to visit a yoga course in the city to get less stressed, more focused and well organised. Also I make new friends there.” (B16)

It became obvious that reflection helped the students consider their internship situation as comprising of different aspects: job, private life, learning and competence development. Those aspects were often interrelated and went hand in hand. For instance, one interviewee reported that CP helped her to think about “what I can do in order to get involved into the new environment” (I 12).

The online tool CP enabled students to use their internship experience to learn more about the job as well as about themselves as personalities as exemplified by a further forum post:

“Working with the Competence Pass made me realize how fast and easy it was for me to integrate in the working team and my social area. It is relevant for my current situation because I think it made me to a more self-confident person. Furthermore, I realized that my prior fears or doubts often are unfounded.” (D4)

The revised CP journals offered additional evidence of that perception. Some students discussed their management competence development in the context of their private life and on the job:

“As it is the first time for me living alone, I have to arrange when I do my cooking and when I buy things and do my wash. At work there are some people helping me and help me when I have some questions or don’t know what to do. I will organize my upcoming Tasks better and not start to do something at the very last time.” (CP 921)

“For me personally, it is very helpful that being abroad I am alone responsible for myself and organised, planned and achieved almost everything alone. For instance, looking for an apartment, moving homes, arrival and so on.” (CP 1018)

Another intern described briefly the core of his/her daily work, what he/she wanted to improve and how he/she plans to do this. The student also wanted to work on the level of feelings (empathy and understanding towards others). Here is the entry in the Social Competence area:

“During the counselling I have to empathize with the adolescents and innerly take the role of them as the opposite part. While working on common research project I have to accept/tolerate the adolescents’ work approach, ideas and attitudes and discuss with them about doubtful approaches on an equal level.

While talking to people of my surrounding or in context of voluntary work I can practise to develop empathy and understanding towards their issues. Furthermore, I ensure equal basic conditions when working/dealing with other people.

In context of achieving the aim I can identify adolescents/clients, my colleagues and tutor as well as friends/people of other contexts (flatmates, voluntary work) as important persons – simply everyone I am talking to/want to have a good relationship/friendship to or I am working with – this ensures/guarantees a successful transfer of skills across various areas.

As mentioned above: I want to undertake tasks where I can empathize with adolescents/clients (counselling, common research/social projects).

I want to talk to many people of various contexts to understand their issues and gain an insight towards different perspectives.

I want to secure basic conditions which allow a common work approach on an equal level. I respect/tolerate/integrate (as much as possible) the opinion of my working colleagues while solving tasks/problems.” (CP 840)

CP 840 also provided evidence of a rich text describing the student’s goals and action plan and showing how he/she took into consideration his/her working context and feelings. Additionally, the person viewed the goals as belonging not only to a particular temporary situation, but rather as a milestone which “ensures/guarantees a successful transfer of skills across various areas” (CP 840).

One can argue that this is a great example of self-determined learning and that the link between real life experience and learning was stated very confidently and clearly. Interestingly, CP 840 revealed also that the student reflected not only on himself/herself but also on the relationship between him/her and his/her colleagues in order to ensure equal working conditions.

The following examples taken from the Language Competence and Managerial and Organisational Competence areas also offer evidence of reflective writing, because they include a description of the personal environment, wishes, plans and feelings:

“I could share my intercultural insights with them (my colleagues); teach them something interesting about my own culture. My boss who can give me more tasks that would require German. I would do my best to deliver a high level of work in return. Ask for tasks that will require the use of German. Always speak German if an opportunity arises (even if the person I am talking to can speak English). Do vocabulary exercises and grammar drills at home. This will help me feel more confident in real-time situations.” (CP 572)

“The meetings and conversations with colleagues help me a lot to improve my Spanish. They always correct my grammar mistakes, which is very helpful for me. My vocabulary grew much during the internship. I learn new words every day which will help me later on the job. Moreover, I make negotiations with suppliers on the phone. This was quite difficult for me at the beginning because a face-to-face conversation is easier than a telephone conversation but in the meantime I got used to it.” (CP 588)

Similarly, CP 1018 offered evidence that the student reflected not only on how and where he/she could get help (from colleagues), but also that he/she wanted to compare the different

ways people deal with a certain situation and then to find his/her own suitable way. That person was also aware that he/she could not offer the colleagues much in return:

“My colleagues are a great help for me in this case because I learn a lot about work organisation and can ‘copy’ them. It is very helpful to see how differently colleagues organise their work so that I manage to find my way. I cannot offer much in return as I do not have much work experience. But occasionally I use experience from private life, previous internships and jobs. I will ask my colleagues how they structure their work and why they do it in the particular way. I will write down neatly the tasks I get including deadlines. That way I can plan my time better.” (CP 1018, Managerial and Organisational Competence)

That student’s entry in another competence area was also of great interest, as it is one of the rare examples in which a student touches upon political issues:

“Concerning Italy [where the student does the internship] the refugees’ politics in Europe is a very emotional topic. I have already spoken to many Italians... Although I mostly shared their points of view, I was touched how emotionally charged/occupied that topic is in Italy.” (CP 1018, Intercultural Competence)

To sum up, students who experienced CP “as an instrument to reflect on yourself” (I 1) and on one’s experience (I 1, I 4) in “all areas” (I 5) of an internship reported the following perceived benefits of using the reflective journal:

- Being motivated to reflect (I P-EN, I 3, I 8, I 4, B14, D10).
- Acquiring more self-confidence and self-awareness about themselves, personal strengths and weaknesses (I P-DE, I 1, I 4, I 5, I 8, I 12).
- Perceiving competence development (I P-DE, I 9, I 12).
- Feeling supported to learn from experience (I 8).

The interviewed educator believed that the ability to reflect on oneself is extremely helpful in an intercultural context such as an internship abroad, since being able to reflect on one’s learning pathways is an important condition to develop one’s competences:

“Look, you are now abroad in a completely new environment which also means in a new learning environment. How can you make the best out of it? The time is limited. This is also an advantage, and if you want to make the best of it, you should reflect.” (I-Ed)

The data indicated that reflection during an internship is perceived as helpful and that support in the form of a reflective journal and/or reflective conversations with a mentor are experienced as necessary to trigger and assist the reflective process. Also, the examples above revealed that online reflective practice during an internship abroad can successfully assist students' learning from experience.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted how students experienced and perceived different aspects of CP and reflective practice in their internship context. The different data sources (interviews, forum posts and CP journals) and the mixed methods of analysis have provided a rich description of the role of the reflective journal that would have been impossible to achieve through the use of a single data source. Even experiences mentioned by few/only one student were included in this analysis in order to enhance understanding of the studied phenomenon, since having a variety of perceptions was considered vital for discussing the implications of online reflective practice for interns. Many students were convinced of CP's usefulness for learning in and from the internship situation as well as of CP's relevance for their professional and personal development during the internship.

Two main themes (CP as a personal online organiser and CP as leading to reflection) emerged in the interviews and the forum posts and reinforced each other. CP was perceived mostly as a special personal online space similar to an organiser and not so often used for reflective writing. Most students experienced CP as an accepted and secure online space to make and keep their thoughts visible, set goals relevant to the individual situation and to draw pathways for how to achieve those goals during the internship.

The interviews and CP journals revealed that the students made use of the freedom to choose between the English and German language and of the freedom to choose which competence areas to work on. The interviews and the forum posts confirmed the quantitative results, according to which the Language Competence area was preferred by the majority of the students. There was only a small difference in the number of users of the other competence areas (Intercultural Competence, and Social Competence and Teamwork). Managerial and Organisational Competence, and Creativity and Problem-solving Competence were least engaged with, because the students seldom thought about their managerial skills and creativity. Those results suggest that the study participants preferred to engage with topics

relevant to their current life situation (e.g. communicating in a foreign language during an internship abroad).

The data confirmed the educator's expectation that when students are invited to think and set their own goals and to think about how to accomplish those, they work on their learning to learn competence and observe themselves. Most of the interviewees believed that a reflective tool with predefined competence areas offered them valuable support and urged them to consider different perspectives on their internship. The students praised the existence of different competence areas and guiding questions, although the repetition of the same questions was sometimes experienced as annoying and leading to repetitive answers. The journals showed that students used diverse forms of expression (short or long sentences, key words or phrases, a mix of English and German in a single journal).

Although the general attitude towards reflection and its role during an internship was positive, the findings suggested that, in its current form, CP was able to engage many students in reflective thinking and few in reflective writing. Those students perceived enhanced self-confidence and self-awareness as well as competence development during their internship.

Finally, some students spoke about CP as a burden: time consuming, requiring goal setting on demand and as lacking features for personalisation in the design and structure. Those perceptions confirmed the educator's concern that CP needed further development in order to offer better training in reflective practice and to be better tailored to students' individual needs.

Having presented the findings in this chapter, the next chapter will now discuss these findings in more detail, including in relation to the research questions and the literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

5.1 Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this research was to explore the meanings which some German students attributed to their experience with online (anticipatory) reflective practice. Student voice was important for two major reasons.

Firstly, it furthered understanding of how students think about, use, benefit from and struggle with online reflective journaling during an internship. The thesis adds new insights to the variety of students' concepts of online reflective journals: the use of a journal as a special personal online organiser. The positive perceptions of the online reflective tool as a special personal online organiser, which is helpful and useful for the internship, dominated over the perception of it being a reflective journal. The thesis revealed that the students approached online reflective practice in different ways as they came from different subject fields, had different previous knowledge and varying experience, all of which shaped "what is apprehended and what is attended to" (Loughran, 1996, p. 19).

Secondly, it was helpful for identifying ways in which interns may be better supported to engage in and profit from online reflective practice, namely through greater personalisation and flexibility of the online reflective practice.

This chapter discusses the findings described in Chapter 4 through the lens of the research questions (see Chapter 1) and in light of the literature reviewed (see Chapter 2). It also reveals the role and importance of anticipatory reflection during an internship and offers recommendations for tailoring online reflective practice to students' individual needs.

5.2 Research question 1: How do students perceive CP and its relevance to their internship?

A major aspect of the project was to reveal how the students perceived CP and its relation to learning from experience during an internship. The findings demonstrated that the majority of students experienced CP as relevant and useful for their internship. A key benefit highlighted by many of the students was that they felt supported to identify areas where they personally

wished/needed to improve, not only in the internship but also in their private life (see Chapter 4).

The private nature of the journal offered interns a space to make connections between their university and their field experiences (Eutsler and Curcio, 2019) and to prepare for the new future. They perceived the reflective journal predominantly as a special personal online organiser: an organiser where they could set personal goals and plans, and used it less often for reflective journaling. Occasionally, CP was perceived as a burden and of no use.

Students' perception of the journal and the guiding questions as relevant and useful for their current life emerged as key enabling factors which supported the reflective process. All data sources confirmed that the existence of different competence areas and the guiding questions enabled students to pause and think, and the guiding questions were appreciated for defining a certain scope of thinking. CP invited students to think of, to describe and to plan their current situation and near future by identifying personal areas for further development.

In particular, CP was described as a useful personal online space allowing a zone of privacy where the users could write down weaknesses, strengths and goals and keep their thoughts and plans for the internship visible. The predefined areas and questions created an impulse to set individual goals, to find ways for achieving them during the internship and to start tracking one's progress.

Next, by thinking deeply, students felt enabled to analyse their expectations from the internship, their doubts, goals and learning needs. The users' preferences of competence areas signalled clearly that the students worked and reflected mostly on issues relevant to their current life situation as young people on an internship abroad such as their foreign language and intercultural competences. On the other hand, some students appreciated that they were triggered to think of less "common" or less "obvious" areas such as creativity and problem-solving (see Section 4.2.1).

Hence, some students perceived CP as inspiring them to direct their thoughts in a different direction and thus to leave the comfort zone of what is known (language and intercultural foci) and to concentrate on less obvious issues (organisational competence and creativity). This perception seemed to be determined by the nature of the internship itself and by students' attitudes towards creativity as something other than a competence. This finding can be interpreted as a hint that the choice of topics to reflect on is very personal and context

specific. On the other hand, it implies that structured reflective tools need to offer diverse areas for reflection in order to make the tool appealing for many users.

Although the reflective focus of CP is set on anticipatory reflection and competence development at work, it became obvious that some students broadened it to encompass more than the examination of future professional development. Engaging with CP, some students comprehended their internship situation as comprising of different aspects: job, private life, learning and competence development, and they identified connections between these aspects. CP users could test their plans immediately and thus reflection felt relevant and useful for their current life situation and seemed to encourage reflection on what was happening on the internship.

It seems that students generally appreciated the opportunity to explore their imagined selves in the context of various future areas of their internship. This insight confirms that “reflection is not only about taking the long view backward in time, but also, and this is borne out in experience, about looking forward towards the horizon... with knowledge of the past from the viewpoint of the present” (Conway, 2001, p. 90).

Few interviewees perceived anticipatory reflection using CP to be a significant activity in their development as professional practitioners. They became aware of what they already knew and of what they were learning during the internship which they experienced as supporting them on the internship. In this latter step they realised that they were able to change the situation and thought about strategies which could help them further develop their competences. As Boud and colleagues (1999) have emphasised, an important outcome of reflection is developing a new perspective and affective and cognitive changes, which may or may not lead to changes in behaviour.

Similar to the study of Harvey and colleagues (2016), some students noticed their own competence development as they became better in the foreign language on the telephone or in communicating with colleagues. In addition, some of them reported perceived change in their current situation and felt confident that new practice was possible and something they could achieve.

It appeared that previous and current experience with reflection also influenced students' attitudes towards CP strongly. As the study participants came from different study fields, some were acquainted with reflective practice and others were novices. For instance, some

internships included reflective practice, and those who had to reflect on the job saw CP as redundant or unnecessary extra work.

The study revealed that mentoring opportunities on the internship, lack of time and perceived benefits from the activity (Roberts, 2009), and the voluntary nature of the activity caused CP to appear irrelevant in the eyes of a minority of students. Those interns categorised the tool as a waste of time because they did not grasp the purpose of CP and as a result, they did not feel motivated to engage with it.

A small number of students argued that they had no time for this extra activity because “learning and development occurred through experience and face-to-face discussion, rather than through reflection” (Roberts, 2009, p. 636). They were more interested in getting experience rather than in learning from experience and considered spending time with locals and watching local television as more important and meaningful for their learning and competence development than filling in CP.

Similarly, another occasional theme that emerged here was dislike for doing unassessed work. While previous research has suggested that the compulsory character of the reflective practice can be a possible reason for the negative attitude towards weblogging (Hobbs, 2007; Egger, 2017), this study revealed that voluntary reflective practice can also be a reason for negative attitude towards reflective journaling. Similar to the findings of James and Brookfield (2014), some students preferred to complete only activities which counted, e.g. for a grade or in order to pass a course. As CP was voluntary and not assessed, those students were not motivated to engage with the journal and perceived no personal benefits from reflective journaling.

To summarise, CP was mostly experienced as an online tool related to and relevant for the students’ current life situation. It seems that CP enabled a majority of users to bridge the gap between the learning environment (university and HOL) and the real world (their internship abroad), and to make connections between their prior experience and the new situation. The study also suggests that a structured reflective journal like CP can be useful for showing students multiple aspects of an internship abroad in one picture.

CP managed to engage most users in an analysis of a current and near future (troublesome) situation, in a process of examining their assumptions, of considering possible solutions, and of reworking practice and concepts (Brookfield, 1995; Fook, White and Gardner, 2006). Similar to a private online organiser, CP offered space where the students set themselves individual goals and plans. They became aware of differences, anticipated problems,

identified personal learning needs (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999), set individual goals and planned how to achieve those during the internship.

It can be concluded that the majority of the study participants (70%) voiced appreciation of a structured reflective tool which supports them in the analysis of their individual needs and goals as well as in planning their competence development during the internship. However, some interns (30%) argued that online reflective practice was a burden as it was time consuming, its purpose and personal benefits of accomplishing it were not clear or they did not need it as they had reflective dialogue with colleagues.

5.3 Research question 2: In what ways has CP engaged students in reflective practice?

The findings indicate that not every user realised that CP was a reflective journal, and even the students who associated the tool with reflection and appreciated reflection during the internship did not necessarily use it for reflective writing. Rather, CP engaged its users in a reflective thinking process.

Thus, the data analysis raised the question of whether CP counted as reflective practice or was instead an activity to write about practical situations disguised as reflective practice (see Section 2.5). At first glance, it may appear that CP is synonymous with writing a plan about the internship. However, I do believe that the study can claim to be studying a form of reflective activity and that CP could engage students in reflection, as the interviews, the forum posts as well as some journal entries indicate that CP justifies its goal as a reflective tool (see Chapter 4).

While one could easily put many students (based on their CP journal entries) in the category of recorders and non-users (as used in Pearson and Heywood's study (2004)), the findings of the interviews suggested that non-users can have a positive attitude towards reflection, value it and even do reflective practice in other contexts (on the internship). However, the often stated appreciation of reflection alone was not enough to guarantee the engagement in reflective writing with the online reflective journal (see Section 4.3.2).

Similar to Trager's (2012) findings, there was a striking discrepancy between the expressed positive, and even very positive, attitude towards reflection (in the interviews and forum posts) and the real written reflective engagement with the journal. The content of the analysed CP journals demonstrated a diverse quality (Chirema, 2003; Roberts, 2009; Dymont and

O’Connell, 2011; Threlfall, 2014) with prevailing examples of mechanical and recipe following practice (Boud, 2010) and description with little evidence of analysis (Chirema, 2003).

Another major insight from this research is that an online reflective journal which does not provide feedback has problems in engaging especially interns who experience reflective practice with colleagues. As discussed in Chapter 4, my research confirms that facilitation of feedback and guidance are beneficial for the reflective process (Osterman, 1998; Moon, 1999; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002; Cox, 2005) and highlights the importance of productive reflection on the work placement (Boud, 2010).

Those interviewees who were used to reflective practice from their university (e.g. teacher education) or reflected with their internship supervisor recognised more easily that CP is intended for reflection and felt more enthusiastic about reflection and the usefulness of CP compared to the interviewees who had no previous experience with reflective practice as an educational activity. Yet, despite the reported value of reflection, CP could not engage those students in reflection because they had and valued more highly the reflective practice with their internship supervisors.

It appeared that CP triggered a special process which the study participants described as consisting of a deliberate mental process (Moon, 1999), supporting the sense making of experience in relation to (gaining new insights of) self and the contextual conditions (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999; Ryan, 2013). The findings revealed that this process consisted of three main components: awareness, self-assessment and plan, as presented in Figure 5.1. The three components go hand-in-hand and may happen in any order.

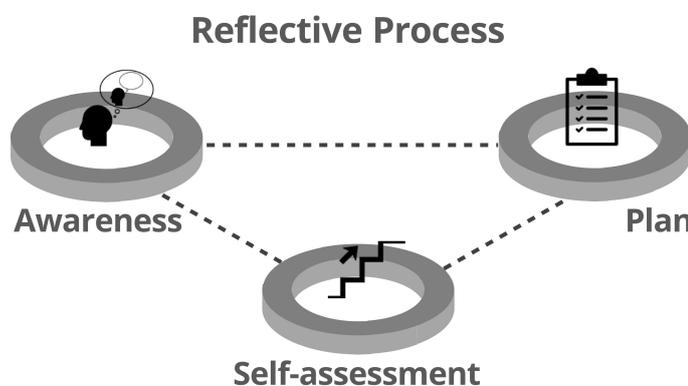


Figure 5.1: Reflective process components

The reflective process was experienced as a mental process of planning future experience for personal, and sometimes for social, benefit (Ryan, 2013), of analysing a (troublesome) situation (Dewey, 1933; Brookfield, 1995), and of examining assumptions, considering possible solutions and reworking practice and concepts (Brookfield, 1995; Fook, White and Gardner, 2006).

In anticipatory reflection, the interns were “turning inward, examining one's own remembered experiences and/or anticipated experiences, not exclusively looking back in time” (Conway, 2001, p. 90). By practising self-assessment, the students enhanced their self-awareness of strengths, weaknesses, their own learning progress and their competence development and they set a plan for change (further development).

On the one hand, the students' awareness of themselves, of their competences and/or the internship situation as a whole was raised. On the other hand, CP enabled students to identify those areas where they personally wanted to improve (Roberts, 2009). As mentioned above, they identified personal learning needs (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999), set individual goals and planned how to achieve those during the internship. Interns were asked to plan what they “need to take to the event” (Boud, 2001, p. 13), and could “move from a stage of undifferentiated awareness, to conscious appreciation of potential situations about to be experienced” (Edwards, 2017, p. 4).

They were then invited to make their personal goals for (competence) development and steps for how to achieve those visible to themselves by writing them down in the journal. In doing so, some students even committed to action which infers that, during an internship, reflective practice can be action-oriented (Kemmis, 1985). This approach is sometimes criticised, because such frameworks “do not encourage reflection that is intuitive and emerges from the self” (Leigh and Bailey, 2013, p. 168).

However, this study demonstrates that, for the interns, anticipatory reflection was more than thinking about oneself and problems or events. It was also action-oriented and supported competence development (Brown and McCartney, 1999), most probably because anticipatory reflection triggered students to self-assess their needs for further development, as well as asked them to plan their future by setting goals for the internship.

Similar to the findings of Gleves et al. (2007), the journal entries revealed that students primarily expressed internally oriented contemplation (personal needs, problems and development) and that there was very little evidence of externally oriented reflection (e.g.

culture of the host country or company, or political issues). Several students reflected on their private life (e.g. finding an apartment, organising a trip, meeting friends), personality (e.g. beliefs and worries) and more rarely on ethical and social dimensions (company culture, feeling compassion for customers in a difficult situation). Very seldomly, the reflections contributed to understanding or changes at the internship institutions as a whole (see Section 4.3.2). Those differences in the focus of reflection can be explained with the influence of the context and students' individual expectations and needs as previously discussed (see Sections 4.2.1.1 and 4.3.2).

To sum up, the findings disclosed that CP could not engage all students to practise reflection. They emphasise that the way a reflective journal engages its users in reflection is influenced by students' individual and context specific learning needs and thus resonates with research by Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh (2016) and by Boud (2001, 2010), as described in Chapter 2. Those who reflected with CP, perceived enhanced self-awareness (of personal weaknesses and strengths) and examined their assumptions about practical situations in order to gain new understandings of the self and the situation (Thorpe, 2004; Edwards, 2017).

The study suggests that anticipatory reflection helped students to prepare better for a new situation (Boud, 2001), such as an internship, as it supported them to become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and to identify priorities for future development. Anticipatory reflection also helped them to construct new knowledge (plan for action) and some improved their practice as a consequence. Finally, while many students perceived a special deep thinking process, they struggled with producing written reflections.

5.4 Research question 3: What do students perceive to be the benefits and limitations of online reflective practice with CP?

The discussion of the first and second research questions has highlighted that the interns experienced benefits and limitations of online anticipatory reflection. To recap, the majority (70%) of the study participants perceived reflective practice with CP as relevant for their internship, as beneficial for enhancing their self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, as well as supporting their learning progress and competence development on the internship. A small number of study participants perceived the online reflective journal as a burden to their internship because it was time-consuming; they saw no personal benefits or enjoyed reflective dialogue on the work placement.

Based on the interviews and forum posts, this section elaborates in particular on the advantages and limitations which the students associated/experienced with the virtual nature of the reflective journal. The issues which emerged were perceived as factors which in a way both supported and constrained reflection: online access, lack of feedback, technical issues, predefined structure and language.

The online environment appeared to be a space linking theory (university and HOL) with practice (work placement) where students felt comfortable. The online environment was not perceived as an obstacle to reflective practice as young people are used to writing personal data in online social media spaces, which, coupled with the fact CP is not assessed by others, may explain why the interviewees were not influenced by concerns about the privacy and security of their online reflective journals. It seemed that being used to sharing personal information on different social media channels nowadays, the students had a relaxed attitude towards confidentiality in their CP journal.

Easy access to CP as part of HOL and no additional log-in were perceived also as advantageous, because the interns were continuously reminded of CP's existence by CP's logo which was visible at the end of each module. A few students even mistakenly perceived CP as a compulsory task, although it was a voluntary one.

It appears that the study participants valued having ownership of their personal space for reflection with no access for others and no online feedback. They expressed appreciation about being left alone with their thoughts in the journal and perceived CP as a space complementing the collaborative and open discussion forums of HOL.

Feedback from the online course tutor was perceived as less desired and helpful, and peers' feedback was not sought after. The explanation for the last point could be rooted in the fact that students are used to receiving feedback and marks on their work from teachers and not from other students. Students' awareness of the fact that the context of reflection during an internship remains unknown to the educators led to students' wishes for guidance on how to perform the reflective activity from academic staff and for feedback on the content of the reflective practice from colleagues. Those insights strongly support the belief that practising reflection in experiential learning is complicated by the fact that it "often occurs in a context beyond the traditional classroom" (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016, p. 3).

Perhaps the predominating face-to-face educational setting and the oral job appraisals also influence to an extent students' preferences of social and oral feedback. Hence, this study

concur with literature which suggests that online reflective practice should include online discussion with course tutors and peers (Egger, 2017). This is a question which deserves attention in further research as the findings have implications for online learning as well, i.e. if face-to-face communication is so important for students, how could it best complement CP in particular and online reflective practice environments in general.

Reflecting with colleagues or a supervisor was considered more valuable and more useful than online reflective journaling, as those people offered multiple perspectives on difficult or troublesome issues and were acquainted with those issues. Hence, in the life of interns, online reflective practice can be experienced as narrow, in the sense that it offers only the individual perspective while reflection activities with colleagues at work offer different perspectives.

Having a simple design seems to be favourable for a reflective journal, but in the case of CP the design appeared to be too simple. Many students explained that the current design of CP had technical constraints which could be off-putting. The students complained that they had only a limited space to write their entries and could not change the size and font of the text. Some experienced it as a constraining factor that it was not possible to print the journal entries out in a single document, to save it in a file or export it out of the course.

Language was raised as another main issue. The interviewees appreciated the choice of language (German and English) and switched between English and German depending on their preference. However, some interviewees experienced it as a disadvantage that they could not choose a third language, i.e. their mother tongue or the language of their internship country.

This study also provided evidence that students appreciate a structured approach to reflective journaling and confirmed previous research (Trager, 2012) in so far that students consider it difficult to find topics to reflect on in their reflective journals by themselves. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, many students liked to have guiding questions to give them direction in their thinking and planning rather than a blank page. CP's predefined competence areas and questions triggered the students to self-assess and become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, of their existing knowledge as well as of their context/environment (the internship) and to plan further competence development during the internship.

While the predefined competence areas and the guiding questions supported students in their thinking and planning, they led many students to mechanical and formulaic writing, and sometimes to repetitive answers, as documented in the journal entries and mentioned by some

interviewees. Obviously, the rigid and repetitive questions hindered the reflective writing of some users. Hence, the factor “predefined structure” belonged to the group of factors enabling reflective writing while the repetitive questions were partly experienced as limiting reflective writing.

It can be concluded that the students generally appreciated the online nature of the reflective journal, its simple predefined structure in two languages, and personal access. However, they also perceived several limitations such as rigid structure, and lack of personalisation and some technical constraints.

The next section reveals how an online reflective journal like CP can be tailored to meet students’ needs better.

5.5 Research question 4: How can an online tool such as CP be further tailored to better support students’ learning from experience?

In order to tailor an online reflective tool to better support students’ learning from experience on a work placement, the thesis suggests that the reflective practice should start with anticipatory reflection, and the online tool should provide personalisation and flexibility to the user.

As the focus of this study is anticipatory reflection, this section first introduces the concept of a new framework for online anticipatory reflection (see Section 5.5.1) and then elaborates on its structure (see Section 5.5.2). The recommendations for the further development of the online reflective tool are based on the findings, the interviewees’ ideas for improvement, the learnings from the literature reviewed, and my personal understanding and experience of reflection.

5.5.1 Framework concept

The thesis suggests that educators can support interns’ reflective practice and can contribute to their personal and competence development (Dewey, 1933; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999; Moon, 1999; James and Brookfield, 2014) by offering students reflective tools for intentional or conscious working with their experience (Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984; Moon, 1999; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002) which are flexible.

CP and other online reflective tools (e.g. e-portfolios), “provide a limited number of pre-designed templates for displaying content” (Ross, 2011b, p. 179). Even if a wide variety of design templates exist, the use of design templates “has the potential of stereotyping students, forcing them to make their work and their identity fit into a preconceived visual rhetoric of a certain kind of student” (Kimball, 2005, p. 453).

Here I propose a framework for anticipatory reflective activities which is conceptualised for experience-based learning in higher education contexts. I recommend the online environment as appropriate for students’ reflective practice during an internship for several reasons.

The online environment can link the educational institution with the internship which can be especially beneficial when the reflective tool is hosted in the university virtual environment which the students are well used to and most probably continue to access for different reasons during and after the internship. Digital technology can be applied in this case to offer opportunities for increased responsibility for and self-management of learning during the internship. Next, students today are used to using technology for their learning, and technology can stimulate their creativity as it offers different forms for expression of reflective practice. Students’ access to internet, wifi or broadband during the internship is a prerequisite for the use of the framework.

Adopting a constructivist perspective, it sounds reasonable to grant students more freedom to construct the environment and form of their reflections. Hence, the new framework allows for certain co-creation of the reflective online space by educators and students (interns) alike. To engage students to effectively utilise reflective practice during their internship, the framework: 1) recognises students’ agency; 2) encourages both individual and social reflection; 3) supports interns to self-assess their current knowledge and needs; 4) seeks identification of personal strengths and weaknesses; 5) assists students in setting personal goals; and 6) animates them to reflect on their role as global citizens.

The thesis concludes that students going on an internship can profit from a structured online reflective journal which provides personalisation and flexibility to the user. The proposed framework is based on the following aspects:

- *Personalising the journal* (design and content) and
- *Expanding the scope* (to raise awareness of, and encourage, productive reflection (Boud, 2010) and reflection-beyond-action (Edwards, 2017), and to include global competence).

Personalisation of the reflective journal can be achieved by granting students the permission and the possibility to adapt the design and content of the reflective activities to their

individual needs. Anticipatory reflection can be used to create the possibility for structured and unstructured reflections, to train students' global competence, and to prepare them for productive reflection on the work placement as well as for reflection as a lifelong learning skill.

The study implies that the student be empowered to orchestrate the partnership, i.e. the student alone decides how much assistance and/or social interaction he/she desires as part of the reflective practice. Hence, the online reflective practice should be an individual activity and students keep the ownership of their reflections. They can decide whether they want to open their reflections to other people and if so, to whom. Another goal is to encourage students to continue with reflective practice on their own after the course and the internship as a lifelong learning skill (reflection-beyond-action (Edwards, 2017)).

The findings indicate that on the one hand, the VLE is an appropriate space for keeping interns' thoughts, plans and reflections for themselves. On the other hand, some interns valued the social aspects of reflection and liked to have in addition or only productive reflection. A question which may naturally arises, is: how can an online reflective activity offered by an academic institution integrate feedback from the workplace? The framework suggests that the online journal should be designed in such a way as to prompt students to prepare for reflective conversations with their supervisor and/or colleagues.

I interpret the findings as evidence that it is not necessary to make all reflective practice happen virtually. Indeed, the thesis supports the view that "there is clearly now an arguable greater need for individuals to develop and use a wide range of technical and social skills for their future career needs" (Passey, 2013, p. 203). Students should be strongly encouraged to indulge in reflection on the workplace experience, since a reflective dialogue with colleagues or a mentor can offer different perspectives (Brockbank and McGill, 2007; Cowan, 2014). Students can choose what technology (if necessary) to use to keep their reflections.

The goal here is to allow students to contextualise the online reflective activities to their learning needs, personal experience and internship environment, and to raise their awareness of productive reflection (reflective practice as social activity) on their workplace experience (Boud, 2010). This is exemplified in Section 5.5.2.

5.5.2 Framework structure

The thesis proposes a framework for online anticipatory reflection consisting of an initial introductory section (Part 1), a structured reflective space (Part 2) and an unstructured free reflective space (Part 3), as is presented in Figure 5.2.

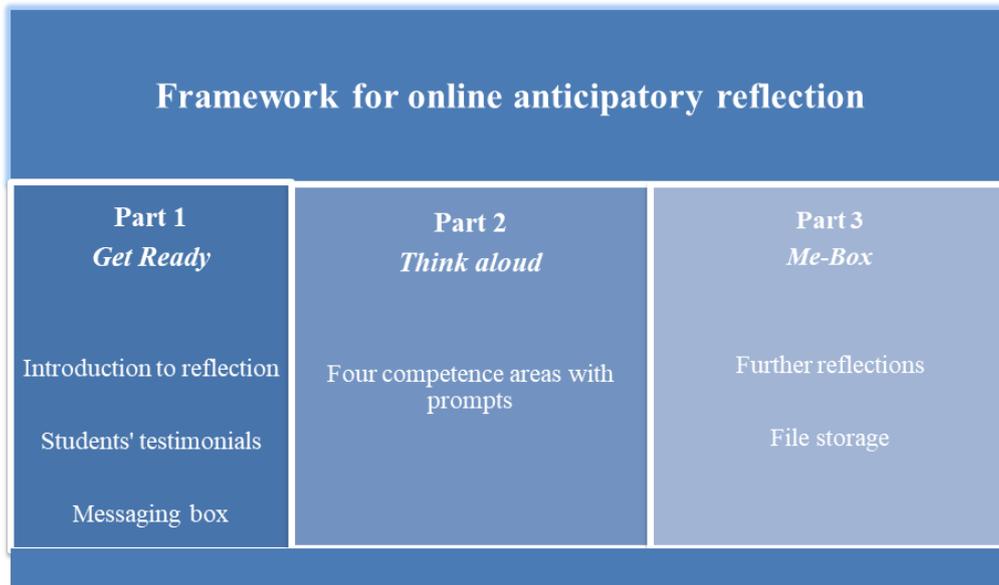


Figure 5.2: Framework for online anticipatory reflection

The study confirms a tendency observed by Ryan (2011): students are often not taught how to reflect and how to reflectively express their disciplinary knowledge. As suggested here and in previous research, reflection needs to be taught and learned (Moon, 1999; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002; Pullich, 2007; Beatson and Larkin, 2010; Coulson and Harvey, 2013) in order to enable and encourage students to consciously reflect on their learning and competence development and to ensure that they become reflective practitioners (Coulson and Harvey, 2013; Gläser-Zikuda *et al.*, 2019).

Hence, Part 1, called *Get Ready*, is devoted to introducing students to reflection, especially novice reflective practitioners, and to making the goals of the particular tool plausible. This part offers reference materials in the form of text and short videos to inform participants about the different types of reflection (before, in, on and beyond an event), to explain what reflection is, how it can be done, and what is special about this type of thinking and writing process.

It also has the goal of motivating and convincing students of their personal benefits of using the online reflective tool. For instance, testimonials of former HOL students can make the

personal benefits of using CP more explicit to its users as the tool is online, voluntary and not reviewed by tutors.

As the study revealed that reflection during an internship is not a solely individual process but that profit can be gained from reflective dialogue with colleagues, Part 1 explains the framework's approach which allows for complementing the completely individual online reflective practice with social reflection on the work placement. This can have both short term and long-term advantages for the students. First, students would learn that "reflection in such settings cannot be an individual act if it is to influence work that takes place with others" (Boud, 2010, p. 32). Second, by acquiring the habit of reflection with colleagues during the internship, students may more easily continue with reflective practice as they later embark on their career (reflection-beyond-action).

The suggested materials aim to set the scene for reflective practice and to prepare students to explore their expectations from the internship (Loughran, 1996; Coulson and Harvey, 2013). As students have different backgrounds and needs, guidance and feedback should be offered by request. Otherwise, there can be a risk of hindering students' creativity and autonomous thinking, if the examples and instructions are too numerous and too explicit. Students can contact a course tutor or administrator quickly and easily if they need further clarification, experience technical problems or have suggestions for additional features by using the last component of Part 1 (a messaging box).

Part 2 is called *Think Aloud* to signal that here students are invited to engage in reflective thinking and make their reflections visible to themselves. Part 2 resembles CP's current structure. It has four (instead of five) predefined competence areas because Managerial and Organisational Competence is deleted as it may be understood as referring to the company rather than to the individuals. The new areas are called: Intercultural Awareness, Language Proficiency, Creativity and Problem-solving, and Global Citizenship (see Table 5.1).

Intercultural awareness describes the ability to become aware of one's cultural perspectives, to develop understanding of the characteristics of other's cultures and to identify how communication differs across cultures. Language proficiency relates to one's competence in a foreign language. In particular, it refers to the ability to use a foreign language in different situations in a way similar to a native speaker. Creativity and problem-solving describes the ability to think critically and to generate new creative ideas for innovative solutions.

<p>Welcome to Part 2 <i>Think Aloud</i></p> <p>Use the questions in each competence area to prepare yourself in the best way by reflecting on different aspects of your internship. Choose a competence area and start shaping your future. Use the questions to guide you.</p>
<p>Intercultural Awareness</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are my concrete goal(s) to enhance my intercultural sensitivity during the internship? 2. Which feelings relate to my goals? 3. Which particular steps will I take to achieve my goal(s)? Which experience(s) outside the working environment can help me to achieve my goal(s)? 4. What obstacles do I expect? What causes my doubts, discomfort or fears? 5. Who can I choose as an important person to support me in achieving my goal(s) and how can I get into contact with them? What can I offer them in return? 6. How do I want other people (colleagues, other interns, flatmates) to perceive me as an interculturally sensitive person?
<p>Language Proficiency</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What would I like to practise and/or improve most during the internship? 2. What will I do to improve my language proficiency? 3. Which situations outside the workplace can I use to practise the foreign language? 4. Who can support me and what can I offer in return? <p>I will know that I have achieved my goal(s) by...</p>
<p>Creativity and Problem-Solving</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can skills like prioritising and managing workload help me solve a problem in the workplace? 2. How can I use creativity to solve problems? 3. What personal weakness(es) can I identify as an area for growth and improvement during the internship? 4. If I get criticised for my work or behaviour during the internship, how will I react?
<p>Global Citizenship</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What can I do to minimise my ecological footprint during my stay abroad? 2. Which experiences outside the workplace can help me socialise in the new environment? 3. How do I relate to the ethical values of my employer? 4. How can I deal with ethically challenging situations at work, e.g. discrimination (e.g. because of gender, nationality, religion) against me or colleagues? 5. Are there any ethical/ecological or wider social issues I want to explore while abroad?
<p>Tip: During the internship you may reflect on your competence development with your colleagues to receive different perspectives on your work. This can help you enhance your understanding of a challenging situation. Think of questions you would like to discuss with those people in advance.</p>

Table 5.1: Guiding questions in Part 2 of the framework

Global citizenship encourages caring and empathy for the increasing complex web of connections and interdependences in today's world, as well as developing an awareness of how the life, work and attitudes of each person have influence at a global level. The global citizenship competence is closely connected with intercultural and social competences, but its distinctive feature is the stress on acting "for collective well-being and sustainable development" (Asia Society and OECD, 2018, p. 5). This area brightens students' horizons to their role as global citizens, which may otherwise remain unnoticed and at the same time it broadens the focus of (CP's current) social competence from a local and individual to a global level.

As a measure to enhance personalisation in relation to the language of expression, I would recommend offering the instructions and the questions in two or more languages (English and German for CP), and allowing students to answer the questions in a third language (mother tongue or the language of the internship) if that feels easier, more natural or more meaningful to them. While offering the instructions and questions in two or more languages is recommended, it could have resource implications for the designers and may be reduced to one language but allowing the students to reflect in the language of their choice. If the reflective journal is not accessed by others and not assessed, this should not be a problem.

Based on the project findings and observations of other researchers that students do not find it easy to reflect (Moon, 2004; Trager, 2012; Vogler-Lipp and Schwarz, 2017), I recommend the use of predefined questions and areas enhanced by unstructured reflection (Part 3). This study echoes the research results of Chen and colleagues (2009) that "the design and development of adequate and strategic prompts" are crucial. Guiding questions and predefined competence areas give students guidance for reflection, encourage them to find new perspectives and ways to solve current and anticipated problems, and foster learning from experience.

The new questions are written in first person singular and based on the assumption that "reflection can be generated by asking the kinds of questions that do not have clear-cut answers" (Moon, 1999, p. 175). They aim at inviting students to consider not only obvious issues (foreign language proficiency and intercultural awareness) but also less common ones (creativity and global citizenship). Asking students to answer self-assessment questions in a journal has also the advantage of developing students' metacognition (Moon, 2004; Harvey *et al.*, 2020).

More importantly, the focus of the structured reflection aims to engage the student not only in reflection on the self but also on global issues. The area “Global Citizenship” can help students become aware of their role in global civic life (Asia Society and OECD, 2018) and anticipatory reflection can help students learn to anticipate (complex) global problems and think of possible solutions.

Moreover, students from all study fields can profit from reflecting on their role as a global citizen. Today it is internationally recognised as important for all people to act as global citizens in order to be able “to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world” (UNESCO, 2018, p. 6).

If students have further ideas or want to reflect on an issue specific to their internship context, they can easily do that in Part 3, called the *Me-Box*. Part 3 is the space where the users can freely co-construct the reflective journal according to their personal preferences. Later, it can also serve as a space to collect evidence to support how they achieve the goals they set themselves in Part 2 (e.g. presentations/assignments which students prepare on HOL).

Adding Part 3 to the current version of CP would enable students to find the best fit between structured and unstructured reflective practice. This e-portfolio-like feature aims to strengthen the connection between reflecting with the online journal and the internship. It is also a measure of personalising the content of a reflective journal to the individual needs of the users.

It also seems important to implement three technical features in a reflective online journal as far as software platforms afford. First, the space for the journal entries should be unrestricted and the users should be able to change the font and text colour. Second, a technological solution should be found to allow easy extracting of the journal entries in order to print all entries or to save them in a file. If students are allowed to take their journal entries with them after the course (i.e. to export CP after HOL), they may feel better motivated to use the journal during the course/internship and to refer to it later when they write their internship report.

Third, the framework relies on features of digital technology to allow personalisation and encourage multimodal forms of reflection: a drawing, and/or an audio or video as an alternative, or in addition to, text entries. In an online environment audio and video journaling can be applied as an alternative to the written format to both parts as “reliance on written

reflection may disadvantage those with limited skills in the language in which they are to report their reflections” (Coulson and Harvey, 2013, pp. 407–408).

Oral reflections (video journals and podcasts) can also be used to enhance other competences such as media competence (Reder and Lukács, 2018) or foreign language competence. They are not only easy to make today but they also represent an eligible alternative to writing. For instance, students can use their smartphone to record their reflective thoughts in the language of their internship and easily upload the file to their reflective journal.

A positive impact on students’ self-reflection on the course content and their learning has, for example, already been found in previous research on reflection using digital video journals in a university foreign language course by Villamizar and Mejía (2019). In their project, video journaling offered the students an opportunity to improve written and oral communication skills and “to engage with language-related cultural knowledge” (Villamizar and Mejía, 2019, p. 176).

For CP’s users, oral reflection can be an extra advantage, as students can practise speaking in a foreign language and thus train and enhance their language competence while reflecting. As was stated in Chapter 4, the users of CP mostly worked on the language competence area and most examples of perceived competence enhancement were found in this area.

In summary, in Part 1, the students get acquainted with reflective practice in general and are encouraged to use their current life situation as a learning opportunity, and to continue reflecting during and after the internship. In Part 2, the interns practise anticipating difficult or problematic situations in order to become aware of individual learning needs, to set goals and to plan possible solutions prior to being faced with the new situation. In Part 3, users can keep further reflections on individual topics and they can later also collect evidence on competence development. Part 3 is the space which students can most strongly personalise at the level of content, design and expression. Ideally, students are allowed to express themselves in the language of their preference and to combine text, audio and video journaling.

Offering students the experience of unstructured reflection and encouraging them to use different digital modes for reflective practice aims to “open spaces for creativity and personal style to emerge” (Ross, 2011b, p. 244). Moreover, allowing students to use creative approaches and choice of language to document their reflections “may better accommodate learners’ diverse communication capacities and preferences” (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016, p. 12).

If students can adapt the journal to their individual preferences, they may feel empowered to take more responsibility for, and be active co-constructors of, their reflective practice.

Simultaneously, the proposed framework enables the academic institution to guide students' learning from experience virtually as well as to enhance the links to work placements as an authentic learning situation.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to answer the research questions and to offer recommendations for the further development of CP. What emerged from this research is a new framework for online activities for anticipatory reflection based on a detailed analysis of students' perceptions of an online reflective tool during an internship abroad and of the factors that limited and enabled their online reflective journaling.

This study found that the students were familiar with the concept of reflection but most lacked experience in applying it to their learning from experience during an internship. Hence, it was not surprising that the students appreciated the existence of competence areas and questions to guide them. The study revealed that the online tool helped students to bridge the learning environment (university and HOL) with the real world (their internship abroad), and that it was perceived as a stimulus to see the internship as a whole, from the outside, and to better prepare for future situations. CP appeared to serve several of the purposes which Moon (1999) (see Section 2.4.2) lists: to facilitate learning from experience, to increase active involvement in the learning, the ability to reflect, and to enhance metacognitive and problem-solving skills.

The majority of study participants voiced appreciation of an online reflective tool which, like a personal organiser, supported them to self-assess and plan their internship. The study discovered that in order to show willingness and ability to reflect, students need concrete stimulus, structure, some guidance and feedback from someone in the working environment rather than from course tutors.

It was revealed that not all students perceived that CP is for reflective journaling. Those who did, experienced a process of deep thinking, awareness and pondering over their current life situation as well as planning for the near future. However, most study participants struggled with written reflections.

The proposed framework for online anticipatory reflection invites educators and learners to manage the reflective process together. Academic staff provide the safe online space with information on reflective practice (Part 1), the predefined competence areas with well-defined guiding questions (Part 2) as well as an open space for additional individual reflections and for collecting evidence of competence development (Part 3). Students are encouraged to choose among and apply multimodal forms of reflection to tailor the online reflective practice to their individual needs and to make the reflective practice more enjoyable.

Concerning CP, the recommendations for its further development foresee that CP remains an online tool, which is a voluntary, not assessed individual activity with a focus on anticipatory reflection. It can profit from allowing personalisation and an enhanced scope which includes global citizenship and raises awareness of, and encourages the described further forms of, reflection.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Introduction

I started this research with the aim to explore students' views of online reflective practice using CP. The study participants came from different academic disciplines in German higher education and used CP as part of their HOL course during their internship abroad. While most studies are subject bound and involve compulsory reflection after and/or during an event, the reflective practice in this case was voluntary and reflection-in-anticipation. I was able to collect and analyse data from different sources and develop a framework for the further development of CP. As a result, the study adds to and enriches the few German publications about reflective journaling during an internship (see Chapters 1 and 2) and contributes to strengthening the position of anticipatory reflection in research. It adds new insights to the variety of students' use of an online reflective tool as a special personal organiser (see Section 4.2).

Having completed the study, I see my aim as achieved, since I was able to explore and better understand the students' experiences and attitudes towards online anticipatory reflection. My findings demonstrate that a voluntary online journal for reflective practice can be a powerful tool leading to increased personal and professional development, enhanced self-awareness and self-confidence, new insights and can enhance learning from experience during an internship.

In particular, this study has revealed that online anticipatory reflection can trigger students on internship to experience a special deep thinking process in which they formulate their own goals and plans, and examine their own knowledge and expectations within the context of their current field placement. The study is in line with previous research (Moon, 2004; Urzúa and Vásquez, 2008; Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016) identifying that anticipatory reflection can lead to metacognition, i.e. students paying attention to their thinking processes and becoming aware of their expectations, assumptions, and of their knowledge which they plan how to enhance during the internship. Recording and reflecting on their internship goals and plans can lead to beneficial outcomes, such as enhanced self-awareness of strengths, weaknesses, of students' own learning progress and competence development.

However, the findings also highlight that the diversity of students and internships requires different ways of practicing and documenting reflection. The study suggests that journal entries as a single data source do not provide sufficient evidence of students' reflective practice, because not everyone who reflected wrote reflectively. On the basis of the discussion of the different reasons for this phenomenon in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the study concludes here that it is difficult to draw conclusions about students' willingness (or propensity) to reflect based only on the written artefact of a reflective journal. Students' engagement with CP resulted in a reflective thinking process and occasionally into reflective writing.

For this reason, the proposed framework for online anticipatory reflection offers prompts and enhanced personalisation, including multimodal forms of reflection, to encourage students to see new and problematic situations as a learning opportunity and to become active co-constructors of their learning and development as well as to engage in reflective dialogue on the work placement. Asking students to consider their internship from different perspectives (competence areas) is a measure to strengthen their metacognitive abilities and also a way to develop students' metacognitive skills from an early stage of their professional practice.

This concluding chapter has the goals: 1) to illustrate in which way this study contributes to knowledge (see Section 6.2) and has implications for practice (see Section 6.3) in the field of technology enhanced reflective practice; 2) to point to strengths and limitations of the study (see Section 6.4) as well as to issues deserving further research (see Section 6.6); and 3) to present my reflections on this research journey (see Section 6.5).

6.2 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis responded to the calls from literature to look for further clarity of the construct and complexity of reflective practice (Thorpe, 2004; Vos and Cowan, 2009; Threlfall, 2014) from the students' perspective, to discuss an underrepresented form of reflection – anticipatory reflection (Conway, 2001; Edwards, 2017) – and to evaluate the usefulness, advantages and limitations of a particular online reflective tool, advancing existing understanding with further examples (Mann, Gordon and MacLeod, 2009; Boud, 2010; Gläser-Zikuda, 2012) from German higher education. As was set out in Sections 1.4 and 2.5, the thesis explored students' experiences with CP and addressed the gap between the available strategies for reflection and what really happens on courses (Boud, 2010).

It advances current understanding by presenting the perspective on, and understanding of, the online reflective practice and anticipatory reflection of German students from different study fields. Providing further empirical evidence on reflective practice during an internship, the thesis highlights the importance of a non-one-size-fits-all approach to online reflective practice and enhances previous research in several ways:

1. It argues that anticipatory reflection is important for an internship as it can stimulate interns' self-assessment and development of personal goals and strategies to achieve those during the internship and can support the development of students' metacognitive skills;
2. It demonstrates that students need prompts to engage in reflection and to develop their reflective practice skills, and that they simultaneously expect personalisation of the reflective journal;
3. It emphasises that, during an internship, reflection can be enhanced when it happens as a social, and not a solely individual, online practice. But, reflective dialogue at work can be a constraining factor to online reflective practice.

Each of these points will now be considered in more detail, in turn.

6.2.1 The importance of anticipatory reflection

The study highlights the importance of an often missing component in many models and practices of reflection (Conway, 2001; Edwards, 2017): anticipatory reflection. My study substantiates that anticipatory or prospective reflection is an important component of the reflective process (Hatton and Smith, 1995; Brown and McCartney, 1999; Boud, 2001; Conway, 2001; Urzúa and Vásquez, 2008; Cowan and Stroud, 2016; Van Manen, 2016; Edwards, 2017) and claims that in an internship situation, it is meaningful and useful to start the reflective process by looking forward.

A common approach with internships is to require students to produce a reflective report on what they learnt and experienced during the internship. The problem with reflection at the end of the internship is that students cannot test their plans for future action until they have a new job and they probably forget their intentions.

While widely used reflective models such as that of Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1988) and Johns (1995) are cyclical and imply a plan for future action, they usually start by looking back at a past event, which becomes the issue of analysis. People reflect on something that has

happened and draw conclusions and a plan of how to do things differently next time. Hence, the impression occurs that prospective reflection follows reflection in and on action. Another criticism is that:

“Reflection-on-action accounts of practice ... are treated as merely ‘after-the-fact’ accounts of experience that make practice accessible to the reader/listener, without any critical consideration of the claims embodied in the account or how the student has developed/improved as a consequence.” (Edwards, 2017, p. 8)

This study argues that this may be changed if students engage in a structured anticipatory reflection.

The thesis points to several benefits which students can experience if they engage in anticipatory reflection. If the reflective cycle starts with reflection-before-action, students look inside themselves to consider previous experiences and self-assess current knowledge in order to plan future events, and so they can experience reflection as a “problem-solving process” (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012, p. 3013). By applying anticipatory reflective practice, students benefit from being supported to look forward and work on their personal and professional development in real life time and develop metacognitive skills. With an online reflective tool they feel assisted and encouraged to commit to action and can work on their reflections and competences during the internship.

Anticipatory reflection has the potential to motivate interns to start reflecting and to integrate reflection as a conscious learning practice during and after the internship. They can get used to reflective practice as a process and to the particular reflective tool before they embark on their workplace experience.

Those findings highlight that practising anticipatory reflection can also be understood as an example of individual knowledge construction and metacognition (Moon, 2004), and as contributing to lifelong learning (Finlay, 2008; Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016) and identity formation (Urzúa and Vásquez, 2008).

6.2.2 The need of prompts and personalisation to engage students in reflection

The uncovered students’ experiences with CP reveal that an online reflective journal offered by an academic institution for the internship should offer structured reflection (prompts). The study asserts that a structured approach with prompts (guiding questions) can assist students

in making sense of the complexity of the coming experience, in getting a direction in which to start pondering and it serves to invite them to consider different areas (Moon, 2004; Vos and Cowan, 2009).

Students are offered guidance in their thinking, are not overwhelmed by the blank page and they are not left alone to look for topics to reflect on (Moon, 2004). Moreover, the findings indicate that students feel supported and not left alone in preparing their internship and in learning from the internship experience. This finding can be viewed as supporting the observation of Coulson and Harvey (2013) that structured activities for reflection before, during and after the experience enable learners to navigate the complexities of learning through experience.

The thesis reveals that reflection with predefined questions has the potential to trigger the user to think of “common” (e.g. language and intercultural issues in CP) as well as of less “obvious” areas (e.g. creativity in CP) and to enable students to see the internship as a whole from outside. It affirms existing knowledge on the importance of prompts as a means to develop students’ metacognition (Coulson and Harvey, 2013) and the potential of reflective journals for encouraging metacognition (Moon, 2004). Further evidence was also found that engaging with a structured online journal helps interns question their beliefs and experiences (Moon, 1999; Rogers, 2001; Thorpe, 2004), and enables students to think about their learning or about professional processes (O’Connell and Dymont, 2011). Some students perceived competence development and learning only because guiding questions showed them multiple aspects of their internship and invited them to reflect on their internship experience in several areas. This is very encouraging, as it suggests that an online reflective journal can encourage students to see new and problematic situations as a learning opportunity, and can lead to constructing personal knowledge – something that is appreciated from a constructivist point of view.

Predefined prompts also help interns develop their reflective skills. My findings are similar to previous literature claiming that not all students know how to write reflectively and that individuals need to learn how to process their experiences, i.e. “they need to bring other knowledge, theoretical principles, and alternative interpretations to bear in an analysis of that experience; in short, they need to learn to be reflective” (LaBoskey, 1993, p. 11).

My research confirms that a structured form of reflective journaling can be supporting but also sometimes constraining for the user (Gläser-Zikuda *et al.*, 2019). First, repetitive prompts, as in CP, may inhibit students’ reflections and lead to repetitive entries or to

aversion to writing. While the predefined prompts (questions) should be relevant to students' life and support them in the reflective process, they should not restrict interns to reflection only on those issues. This is important, since the study illustrates that learning and reflection do not occur in a vacuum (Kemmis, 1985; Brockbank and McGill, 2007), reflection is action-oriented and "ideas stem from a socially constructed world of meanings" (Kemmis, 1985, p. 143).

The study highlights that guidance and support should be personalised and offered by request as students have different previous experiences with and attitudes towards reflection. Similarly, the prioritisation of the foreign language and intercultural competences aligns with the need to address students' individual learning needs. The language and the intercultural competence areas were students' first choice because on an internship abroad most students communicate and work in a foreign language and in an intercultural team. By being asked to set personal goals and think of strategies for how to achieve those during the internship, students felt better prepared for the new situations and more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Hence, personalisation and flexibility of design and content of the online reflective journal appeared to be important for the users.

Hence, this study supports and highlights the importance of a non-one-size-fits-all approach to online reflection and recommends that the online environment and the features of digital technology can, and should, be used wisely to assist and motivate students to engage in reflective journaling that suits their needs.

6.2.3 Reflection as a social, and not a solely individual, practice

The thesis reveals a generally positive attitude towards online reflective journaling during an internship and points to the relevance and usefulness of an online reflective tool as main characteristics needed for its success. The research suggests that interns are likely to engage with a reflective tool if they feel that this practice is related to, and helpful for, their current life situation. It supports the view that lack of perceived benefits of the activity coupled with time pressure and reflection with colleagues can strongly impede students' engagement with an online reflective journal.

While the findings are similar to previous research in that they confirm the need for guidance and feedback on reflective practice (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 2002; Chirema, 2003; Moon, 2004; Cox, 2005), they, simultaneously, concur with literature which suggests that online

reflective practice should include online discussion with tutors and peers (Egger, 2017). Instead, the thesis argues that online anticipatory reflection should remain private and prepare students for social reflection on the work environment.

The thesis reveals that during an internship, reflection is an individually and context specific process which can be enhanced when it happens as a social, and not a solely individual, practice. This is because some study participants perceived reflection as not purely internal, but also as a social practice (Kemmis, 1985; Boud, 2010). In the interviews, the perception emerged that “self-reflection as well as reflection in interaction with other persons is important” (Gläser-Zikuda, 2012, p. 3013).

As a consequence, this study reflects previous research which suggests that online reflective journals should offer students a private space in which to keep thoughts and feelings “away from the eyes of others” (Boud, 2001, p. 16) and to maintain the ownership of their reflections.

The study points to the positive role of feedback in the reflective process when the feedback comes from colleagues (not course tutors and peers) and is preferably oral. It supports previous research that concludes that reflecting alone may create a very subjective and incomplete picture, while reflective dialogue with colleagues or supervisors who are familiar with the situation/problem can prompt fresh thinking (Cowan, 2014) and offer multiple perspectives and a more diverse and complete picture (Brockbank and McGill, 2007).

Those findings contradict partly the results reported by Egger (2017), where pre-service teachers experienced weblogging as unhelpful rather than helpful during the internship, and those who received feedback from peers had a more positive attitude towards the usefulness of the weblogs than the group of interns who received no feedback.

The involvement of the internship supervisor in the learning from experience process affects students’ reflective practice (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016) and can be helpful for the interns’ understanding and personal development (Gläser-Zikuda, 2007; Cowan, 2014). Another reason for including people from the work environment is that the competences which students are asked to reflect on are practised in the work environment and the work colleagues are better acquainted with the internship situation than university academic staff. Moreover, if an online reflective journal encourages students to acquire the habit of reflection with colleagues, it may be easier for the students to reflect when they embark on their careers (reflection-beyond-action).

My research adds new insights to the various factors influencing students' engagement with online reflective practice by uncovering that reflective dialogue at work can be a constraining factor to online reflective practice. Reflective dialogue with colleagues was perceived as more useful and more relevant than online reflective journaling and this experience led to little or no engagement with CP by some students. In the context of the current study, this finding can be explained with two reasons. First, CP was a voluntary task and was not incorporated into the reflective practice on the work placement. Second, reflective feedback from colleagues was perceived as useful for offering a different perspective on a problem and as enriching individual reflections.

These findings make me question, similar to Boud (2010), the overly individualistic perception of reflection. The findings are an indication supporting the assumption that reflection needs to happen in community and in interaction with others (Rogers, 2001; Boud, 2010; Gläser-Zikuda, 2012) and correlates with Boud's (2010) idea of productive reflection: the perception of reflection on the work environment as being a social activity. They lead me to suggest that educators should in the future strongly consider the team-based work orientation of contemporary professional practice in designing reflective practice activities with a holistic approach. However, the use of dialogue for reflection and the role of the mentor in the reflective process were beyond the scope of this project, which concentrates on online reflection, though it is considered to be an important finding which deserves further research.

6.2.4 Summary

To sum up, this research signals that the online environment is an accepted and appreciated space for keeping reflections for today's students in Germany. The study resonates with and builds on previous ones that suggest that students expect technologically enhanced learning opportunities in contemporary higher education (Passey, 2013; Donohoe, 2019). The thesis also builds upon research promoting social reflection on the work environment and reflection which enhances students' "awareness of themselves as learners working in a global context" (Hughes, 2018, p. 164).

This study shows that digital technology (VLE) can enhance the reflective practice during an internship as technology can link university, students and internship. However, digital technology should be cautiously applied to support and enrich interns' individual reflective practice needs and preferences.

While other studies and frameworks advocate the establishment of online communities or forum discussions (Platzer, Blake and Ashford, 2000; Donohoe, 2019) and the positive impact of receiving and giving online feedback on weblogs (Egger, 2017), this study advocates encouraging reflective practice in a social context with colleagues and the internship supervisor rather than providing feedback from, and discussions solely with, online tutors or peers.

Finally, this research suggests that during an internship the reflective cycle should start with anticipatory reflection, which is useful both for learning and for practice. This study seconds Urzúa and Vásquez (2008) and highlights the unique potential of anticipatory reflection to engage novices “in active and meaningful decision-making, problem definition, exploration, and evaluation” (p. 1945) as well as to enable them “to envision the future and to imagine themselves in that future” (p. 1945).

Anticipatory reflection seems to appeal to interns because it encourages them to see new and problematic situations as a learning opportunity and to become active co-constructors of their competence development from the beginning of the internship. Perceived personal benefits and support in the form of guiding questions are revealed to strongly determine students’ engagement with reflective thinking and partly with reflective journaling.

Hence, the thesis recommends that anticipatory reflective practice should allow and encourage the users to try and find out which forms (writing, speaking, and drawings) suit them best to keep their reflections, and should allow students to decide whether they keep their reflections private. It reveals that an online reflective journal should offer space and different modalities for personal reflection and should assist students to prepare and engage in productive reflection on the workplace.

In the end, students are able to create not only an “after-the-fact” account of their internship experience but rather an account of how they developed their competences during the internship. Combining online and face-to-face reflective practice, structured and unstructured reflection, and allowing multiple forms for keeping the reflections is viewed as a possible new approach to move beyond older concepts and to find approaches to reflective practice that better serve interns and the needs of the current professional world (Boud, 2010).

6.3 Implications for practice

Educators from different subject areas using or interested in designing online reflective tools for their students, especially during an internship, may be interested in how this thesis illustrates the value of anticipatory reflection for learning from experience and how technology can support interns' reflective practice.

The proposed framework for online anticipatory reflection is regarded as a contribution to practice as it can be easily applied or adjusted to create a new online reflective tool or to complement existing reflective journals or e-portfolios. It is based on a constructivist approach to learning, which suggests that effective online reflective journals should be learner-orchestrated.

The study strongly encourages educators to integrate reflection-before-action in online reflective journals or e-portfolios as anticipatory reflection can be applied to empower students to take more responsibility for their learning and competence development, to engage in reflection during the whole internship and to develop their metacognitive skills.

Anticipatory reflection during an internship can as well enhance students' awareness as global citizens since it supports students' learning to set short-term and long-term goals, to anticipate challenges and consequences of action, to broaden their own perspectives and to better understand their intentions which are necessary for competence development and for solving complex global problems (OECD, no date).

Building on the findings discussed above, this section proposes three strategies which educators may find useful to guide them when they design online reflective journals: build relevance, include anticipatory reflection; and give students agency. It also points to some issues which may need adaptation when the framework is applied in a different context.

6.3.1 Build relevance

This study argues that students can be better motivated to engage with the reflective tool if they are not only clear about the importance of reflection as an activity but mostly if they are clear about the practical and personal advantages/benefits. We, as educators, need to make the users perceive online reflective activities as something positive, helpful and tailored to their

individual needs and bear in mind that a predefined online reflective tool cannot fit the approaches taken by all users.

The study suggests two measures to build and enhance relevance: supporting students' reflective practice by showing them the personal benefits of reflection in a clear and convincing way as Part 1 of the proposed framework; and adopting a holistic approach when designing prompts to guide students in their reflective journaling as Part 2.

First, the findings imply that educators need to make the nature and goals of reflective journaling more explicit, as students' perception of the effectiveness of the journal determines their engagement with this reflective tool. The thesis reveals that for the success of an online reflective tool, it is not enough that the academic staff is convinced of its usefulness for the students. Also, students' positive attitude towards reflection is advantageous for engaging in reflective activities (Dewey, 1933; Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1999) but not enough.

The study demonstrates that students are more likely to engage with reflective practice if they perceive personal benefits from engaging in reflection. It demonstrates that students who are clear about why they use the reflective tool (personal benefits) are more inclined to invest time and effort in reflecting compared to students who view it just as an additional task to their internship. Especially those students who have no previous experience with reflective journals may regard it just as an unclear activity and burden. Hence, the study recommends that educators explain to students not only what reflection is but much more why and how this reflective practice activity is connected to their current and future life situation in order to convince them to engage with it.

Bearing in mind that "education strategies must be designed to engage students positively with the subject as an important starting point" (Jones, 2008, p. 205), it is important to remind students (again and again) how they benefit from reflection (Vogler-Lipp and Schwarz, 2017). Hence, the proposed framework includes text, audio and video testimonials of former students to help those who are novice to reflective journaling to understand how the reflective tools can support them during their internship and thus feel motivated to engage in reflective practice.

It also recommends that academic staff answers individual queries, if required. As found here and in previous research, some students need more information about the purpose of the reflective journal and the personal advantages of using it (Moon, 1999; Chirema, 2003; Vogler-Lipp and Schwarz, 2017). This has implications for the course tutor/administrator as it

is not possible to foresee how many working hours they should have available and/or they get paid.

Second, the thesis demonstrates that it is important that a reflective tool offers predefined questions which give students guidance in identifying what they personally wish/need to improve upon, not only during the internship but also in relation to personal issues (see Chapter 4). The thesis supports research claiming that an online reflective journal offered by an academic institution for the internship should adopt a more holistic approach (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016) to acknowledge the complexity of the interrelationships of variables such as students' experience, study programme, host organisation and the complex environment in which reflection during experiential learning occurs.

This study indicates that this may be achieved by exposing students to reflection on obvious areas (language competence in CP) of their internship as well as less obvious ones (creativity and global citizenship), which may otherwise remain hidden to the student. If the questions in the reflective journal enable students also to make greater connections to work and personal experiences (e.g. free time activities with colleagues), they can more easily and consciously use experience from their private life for competence development.

Summing up, educators can build relevance by showing students how a particular online reflective journal is useful for their internship, and by supporting students with predefined prompts to engage in reflection. Hence, students can better connect the studied content with their internship and the world in general.

6.3.2 Include anticipatory reflection in the reflective practice

In the context of internships, reflection-in-anticipation can be used as an initial necessary phase to help interns to tune in to the waves of reflection and internship. Becoming aware of why and how one can reflect, students may more easily and willingly continue with reflective practice during and after the internship. Practicing anticipatory reflection, students prepare more consciously for their internship, as they think about their strengths, weaknesses and expectations and set individual goals for the work placement.

The proposed framework for anticipatory reflection is an example of a simple predefined journal design which is easy to personalise, so that students feel comfortable in the online

environment and are encouraged to carry out their reflective practice online and with colleagues.

Engaging interns in anticipatory reflection, educators can more deliberately support the students in the transition from university to work placement, by helping them to look ahead and plan their near future, by motivating them to try out their plan and to trace development immediately, as well as by preparing them for productive reflection on the workplace.

Online anticipatory reflection offers an opportunity for them to ponder over and plan future experience through theoretical knowledge from the university, past individual experiences and the current internship. Asking students to reflect on what they know and what they want to learn on the internship, assists them develop and practice metacognitive skills (Harvey *et al.*, 2020). Thus, online anticipatory reflection can strengthen students' feeling of being supported and not left alone with their internship by the academic institution.

At the same time, it can convey to students the feeling of being co-creators of their learning from experience and reflective process as well as to enable them to see themselves as evolving reflective practitioners. Anticipatory reflection allows students time to get used to reflective practice and to try different forms for keeping their reflections.

Finally, students can later use their anticipatory reflections as a source to evidence competence development and to showcase their learning from experience in the internship reports addressed to the university.

6.3.3 Give students agency

Educators can use technological features to give students agency in various ways, as is exemplified in Section 5.5. First, they can allow the students to personalise their reflective journals and to use different modalities to capture their reflections. However, the language of expression could become an obstacle for the educators if they want to use the journals for assessment or research and are not fluent in the language the students use in the journal.

Second, an online reflective tool should encourage students to find further topics to reflect on and to address problems of personal significance during the internship. As discussed in Section 6.3.1, when educators use the internship as a source of authentic occasions for reflection, they should consider that those occasions are also quite individual to each student.

Educators should allow and encourage students' agency to let students determine their personal needs, goals and strategies for development.

Third, this research strongly recommends that students are given agency to decide whether they want to make their reflections available to tutors or peers. Educators are also advised to encourage and allow interns to decide whether and with whom to engage in reflective dialogue on the work placement. Reflective practice with people on the work placement could help the interns to receive different opinions and to find solutions in accordance with their personal and contextual needs.

From a constructivist perspective, using the framework, educators can encourage and allow students to find the mix of reflective practice forms that best suit them: structured and/or unstructured, written and/or spoken, individual and/or social, in a language the interns prefer.

Before I draw this research to a close, I acknowledge its strengths and limitations (see Section 6.3) and point to study areas needing further attention (see Section 6.5).

6.4 Strengths and limitations of the study

In addition to Section 3.4.3 on the research's limitations, this section looks *post factum* to major strengths and limitations of the research design and the findings. The study provided insights into students' perceived experience with an online tool for reflective practice within the context of a case study. The study has its strengths, but the results should be interpreted cautiously due to a number of limitations.

Strength of the study is that it applied methodological triangulation to enhance the reliability of the findings and deliver a rich story. As the number of interviewees and qualitatively analysed CP journals was small, the findings should be understood in the light of the context in which the research has been undertaken.

One major challenge associated with the qualitative analysis of the data is that of interpretation. The evidence gathered to inform this study relied upon the participants' understanding of what information was being asked of them. Although the questions for the semi-structured interview were assessed for fitness for purpose prior to use, potential limitations associated with interpreting the questions might have occurred.

If I could start the research again now, I would first analyse the forum posts and CP journals before conducting the interviews, in order to discuss issues from the journals in more detail with the interviewees. I would also consider gender differences and academic field as well as personal circumstances of the participants to gain a better understanding of the role of those characteristics in the reflective process.

Another limitation which arose during the analysis of the forum posts was that they provided hints about students' experience with CP, but often lacked deep insights about why students felt that way. A focus group to discuss some Why-questions would have enriched the understanding of the studied phenomenon, but it was not possible to do that as students were dispersed and very busy.

Finally, the study relied only on the subjective account of the participants in the interviews and forum posts and is not verified by external means. In the 29 publications on reflective practice they reviewed, Mann and colleagues (2009) found fault with the fact that "none addressed the effect upon professional practice beyond self-report" (p. 610). I acknowledge that this research is marked by this as well and does not measure and check whether, and to what extent, students managed to develop their competences.

Although this research is limited to the context and learning experiences of a small group of German students, the findings have the potential to inform the design of online reflective tools across a range of higher education programmes involved with internships because the students came from several educational fields and universities.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, a major strength of the study is that its validity was ensured through thorough description of all processes and the researcher's reflections on the whole PhD journey, which constitute a section of this chapter as well.

6.5 Personal reflections on my research journey

Looking back at the findings, I realised that my PhD research journey was strenuous and thought-provoking, and that I had chosen an interesting topic to study.

As an online tutor who values and uses reflection myself, I should admit that I discovered some similarities with the assumptions of the students. It was not until writing this thesis that

I started reflecting on my own perceptions of reflection and my personal reflective style on a regular basis.

While at the beginning I was internally disappointed that I could not find an abundance of deep reflective journal entries, through the interviews and forum posts I learnt to adopt a different perspective on students' journals. I feel glad that I did not attempt to categorise the CP users as reflectors and non-reflectors based only on their writing in the journal, because this study (even though small-scale) pointed to a multitude of complex factors that influence the writing in a reflective journal.

For me as a HOL tutor, it was encouraging to know that many students engaged in a reflective thinking process which would not have happened without CP. A key discovery for me was that reflective journals may trigger reflective thinking and support reflection on the workplace experience, even though this was not necessarily accompanied by reflective writing. Since CP is not a graded activity, that is not a problem. I do understand, however, that it can be a problem for academic situations where journal entries are assessed.

At the end of my PhD journey, I feel that reflection in educational settings can look misleadingly similar to that natural everyday reflective process we all know. Similar to the perceptions of some interviewees, I regarded reflection as a natural process that occurs when one needs it (e.g. pondering over a difficult situation, discussing an event with colleagues or friends). However, looking at the data, I feel much more convinced now that, in educational settings, reflective activities need to be practised in order to become a regular activity for learning from experience.

While writing the recommendations for the further development of CP, I asked myself: how can online reflective practice feel a natural part of the learning from experience happening during the internship? How can structured online reflective practice offer pathways and borders which are clear but also flexible?

On the research journey, I learnt that because of the intensive and different internships, students need prompts to reflect but also some freedom to choose how to give form to their reflections. I have experienced the pain associated with a blank page to be filled with reflections and share the students' desire to have prompts to give direction to one's thoughts.

By developing the recommendations for CP's further development, I also realised that I have been concentrating on the structure of reflection. I had to remind myself that reflection is first

and foremost a process and that the structure is only a means to support the process. Although structured reflection appeared meaningful, I considered it crucial to allow the students to co-create the reflective process by choosing the topic and modality of the reflections.

I personally started reflecting on my thesis by recording my thoughts in an audio file on my smartphone. This felt much easier than writing them down because speaking went quicker, and while listening to my reflections I also noticed in my voice whether I felt excited about an idea or was struggling with it. It seems to me that alternative ways of keeping students' reflective thoughts can stimulate students' thinking and engagement with reflection, and I hope to see this recommendation implemented.

Finally, the most important lesson for me was to discover that I started loving reflective practice when I experienced it as a means of making sense of my personal or professional development. Yes, reflection is time consuming and sometimes strenuous, but it made me act as a curious inquirer and an expert on my own PhD learning experience.

Hence, it appears to me that motivating students to use reflective tools can be considered successful when students manage to find their best way to reflect with as much or as little support and digital technology they need at certain stages of their life. Once they accept and adopt reflective practice as part of their development process and find their individual way, we as educators can be proud to have supported learners to become capable of co-constructing their learning.

I finish my thesis at a time of unprecedented global uncertainty and lockdown, and I find anticipatory reflection as a helpful tool to find hope and gain some certainty about my future in this globalised world. I feel further motivated to pursue professional development in the field of technological tools which support reflective practice as a means to educate global citizens who are able to anticipate and find solutions to global (educational) challenges.

6.6 Suggestions for further research

Having completed the research and considering the above listed limitations, I have several suggestions for further research:

- Follow up research on the implementation of the recommendations for CP's further development should expand the number of participants and the researched period. This would allow the researcher to reveal more individual attitudes and perceptions.

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- This research has tried to create some openings through which to see reflection differently from the students' perspective. Further research is needed to disclose what complexities surround the construction and disclosure of the reflective self in online reflective journals. For instance, the findings show a discrepancy between students' positive attitudes to reflection and belief in its merits, and the often mechanical and superficial use of the reflective journal. Although the study shed light on some of the reasons, such as time pressure and reflection at work, it would be valuable to find out more about the individual circumstances which influence the engagement with online reflective journaling.
 - As the perception of self-awareness and competence development resulting from the use of CP dominated, it would be interesting to focus on the interns' formation of their professional identity and the role of anticipatory reflection in the formation of professional identity.
 - The study suggests that even though reflective practice is offered by an academic institution, it seems more reasonable to engage the internship supervisor in a reflective dialogue rather than the course tutors providing online feedback. Further research is needed to look for ways that this could be achieved and to test them. It could be useful to interview companies providing internships on those issues and to look for solutions together.
 - As technology continues to develop, examining different devices and methods of intervention, such as smartphones and reflecting in a voice or video message, may also be beneficial, in order to reveal how those alternatives to writing influence reflection and how they can contribute to the personalisation of the online reflective tools.
 - As we are living in a rapidly changing world and are facing global crises, nowadays professionals are expected to anticipate challenges and to find solutions, not only on a personal or company level but also at an international and global level. Further research is needed to study the role of anticipatory reflection in developing global competence during an internship.

6.7 Conclusion

Through this research I pursued my personal and professional interest in the use of online reflective tools. Having arrived at an answer to my research questions, I finish this research journey knowing that the presented work is far from complete and perfect.

A case study proved to be an effective methodological framework for revealing students' experiences with, and attitudes towards, the online reflective journal. The three different data sources have provided evidence that CP managed to engage its users in a special thinking process though less in reflective writing and to support their learning from experience.

In producing this thesis, I contributed to new knowledge and practice in several ways:

- My research addressed the gap in German publications on evidence-based research in the field of online reflective practice from the students' point of view. The study was not subject bound and adopted a constructivist lens to focus on a neglected form of reflective practice – anticipatory reflection – in an online context used by students in German higher education.
- The study affirmed the importance of anticipatory reflection in the reflective process during an internship. It suggested that anticipatory reflection can assist/encourage students to develop a culture of reflective practice that persists during and after the internship, as it offers students time to familiarise themselves with the concept of reflection, it facilitates pondering and deep thinking, and it enhances (self-) awareness. It can encourage students to develop a new perspective for the near future (metacognition) and thus supports students' transition from university to work placement.
- The proposed framework for reflection-in-anticipation and its core arguments suggest that, to be effective, online reflective tools should be co-created by educators and learners alike, and that they should assist students with structured reflection, allow users to personalise the design and content, and encourage and prepare them for social reflection at work. As a result, students can make progress on critical engagement with their internship and personalise their learning experience, informed by their individual internship context and supported by digital technology.
- The research has also highlighted the potential of the online environment as an accepted space for reflective practice. It suggests that the relevant technological features should be used to personalise students' reflective practices and allow students to benefit from choosing among multimodal forms of expression. Multimodal reflections – text, and/or drawings, audio or video recordings – give the user more power to co-construct the online reflective space and to develop further competences, e.g. speaking in a foreign language and technical skills.

In conclusion, this thesis contributed to knowledge building in the field by offering space for the voice of the students on their experiences with an online reflective journal and revealing new insights to the variety of students' experiences with reflective journals. Moreover, the

thesis aimed at having impact on future practice and thus recommendations for the further development of CP and online reflective practice were produced. It would be beneficial if educators adopt a holistic approach in order to allow more student agency along with structured reflection. As reflective practice is a complex, multi-dimensional and individually specific process, the results of this study should be applied with caution.

Finally, I encourage colleagues to try out the proposed framework for online anticipatory reflection critically in their context and would be grateful for their feedback in order to further develop the framework and enhance my understanding of reflective practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview schedule for a semi-structured interview with students

- Greet and obtain permission to record the interview.
- 1. Could you please tell me about the way you have used CP so far?
Prompts: CP areas worked on
Language used
- 2. What is your overall experience with CP?
Prompts: Examples of advantages, disadvantages, disappointment
Guiding questions (helpful or not)
or
In what ways was CP helpful for your learning/internship?
Will you have this learning experience if you did not have CP?
- 3. According to you, what is the purpose of CP?
- 4. How do you feel about writing personal thoughts online?
Prompts: Online versus paper
Confidentiality
Honesty
Access by tutor
- 5. If you were given the task to develop CP further, what would the tool look like?
Prompts: Guiding questions
Competence areas
Layout
Feedback from tutor and/or peers
- 6. What does reflection mean to you?
Prompts: Purpose
- 7. Do you think that reflective practice is relevant for you during your internship?
Prompts: In which ways
Advantages and disadvantages
Development of competences
Connection between university & work
- 8. Do you see a connection between CP and reflection?
Prompts: Need for introduction on reflective practice
Training in reflective practice
Any positives in job or private life since working with CP
Any negatives in job or private life since working with CP
- 9. How does CP contribute to your learning on HOL/internship?
Prompts: Autonomous learning
Reflective thinking

Competences
Learning from experience

10. Can you see yourself continuing to practice reflective practice after HOL?

Prompts: Reflective practice in other contexts
Online vs. paper based

11. Is there anything else you would like to add on the topic?

12. Do you have any questions for me?

- Thank and close the conversation.

Appendix 2

Interview schedule for a semi-structured interview with educators

- Greet and obtain permission to record the interview.

- 1. What is the purpose of CP?
 - Prompts: Benefits for students
 - Reflective practice
 - Competence and personal development

- 2. Have you read students' CP journals?
 - Prompts: If yes, what impression of students' entries

- 3. Do you have any feedback from your students on CP?
 - Prompts: Difficulties and/or gain
 - Preferred competence areas

- 4. Do you think that reflective practice is relevant for your students during their internship?
 - Prompts: In which ways
 - If not, why not

- 5. How does CP contribute to students' learning on HOL?
 - Prompts: Autonomous learning
 - Reflective thinking
 - Competences
 - Learning from experience

- 6. What changes are needed (if any) to develop CP further?
 - Prompts: Guiding questions
 - Competence areas
 - Layout
 - Training on reflective practice

- 7. At the moment the students receive no feedback or assessment on their CP journal? How do you see this?
 - Prompts: Add feedback from tutor and/or peers

- 8. Is there anything else you would like to add on the topic?

- 9. Do you have any questions for me?

- Thank and close the conversation.