



Reflective Practice in Language Education

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Reflective practice has become popular in most teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) teacher education and development programs; the general consensus is that teachers who are encouraged to engage in reflective practice can gain new insight of their practice and become even better teachers (Richards & Lockhard, 1994). With this popularity however, several issues need to be addressed such as what is reflective practice and what frameworks best facilitate reflection?

Most of the definitions can be contained within two main stances to reflective teaching, one that emphasizes reflection only on classroom actions, while the other also includes reflections on matters outside the classroom. Concerning the former approach, reflection happens when a teacher thinks about what happened in a lesson, and why it happened and what he or she has learned as a result of reflection, while the other stance also links reflection on teaching to the larger community and this is called critical reflection (Farrell, 2018a, b). Farrell (2015: 123) defines reflective practice to include both stances: “A cognitive process accompanied by a set of attitudes in which teachers systematically collect data about their practice, and while engaging in dialogue with others use the data to make informed decisions about their practice both inside and outside the classroom.”

In addition to the definitions of reflective practice above, teachers must consider how they will reflect. Again, two different stances have emerged, one that suggests that teachers can informally evaluate various aspects of their teaching, or common-sense reflection. The other suggests that teachers systematically reflect on their teaching by collecting data, or data-driven reflections (Mann & Walsh, 2017) and use the information gained to make informed decisions about their teaching (Farrell, 2015). In a review of such data-driven approaches to reflective practice in

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TESOL, Farrell (2018a, b) discovered that most studies focused on case studies and non-qualitative methods with very few focused on quantitative methods.

Many different frameworks, and tools have been used to promote reflection, but most have been adopted from different professions. While most models and frameworks have admirably provided different types of structured reflection for practitioners by offering probing questions that stimulate reflection, they have mostly guided teachers on how to tackle technical issues without looking at the person who is reflecting. Within the field of TESOL, however, Farrell (2015) has recently developed a framework for reflective practice for language teachers that includes the person who is reflecting as well as what the person is reflecting on. Thus Farrell (2015) has attempted to move the concept of reflective practice to this more holistic approach by providing an overall framework for teachers to reflect on their philosophy, beliefs, values, theories, principles, classroom practices and beyond the classroom. Different tools have also been suggested that can promote reflective practice such as dialogue, writing, classroom observations, cases, portfolios, team teaching, peer coaching, and critical friends (Mann & Walsh, 2017). Overall, the research indicates that both preservice and in-service TESOL teachers are interested in, and feel they benefit from, reflecting on various aspects of their practice both inside and outside the classroom (Edge, 2011).

The Research Questions

1. How should reflective practice be defined in the field of TESOL?
2. Do you think mere participation in a study group, or keeping a journal, for example, qualify as reflection?
3. If a teacher wants to think reflectively about or inquire into her practice, what does she do first? How does she know if she is getting better at it? To what should she aspire?
4. How would you define data-led research on reflective practice?
5. Should TESOL teachers only reflect on their practice inside the classroom?
6. Should TESOL teachers reflect on practice inside the classroom as well as what they do outside the classroom (critical reflection)?
7. How can reflecting on their philosophy, principles, theory, practice and beyond practice/critical reflection heighten TESOL teachers' awareness more than just reflecting on practice inside and outside the classroom?
8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods when it comes to designing research on the practices that encourage TESOL teachers to reflect on their practice?
9. What is the preferred reflective practice combination of instruments that best facilitates reflective practice?
10. How can we evaluate reflective practice?

Suggested Resources

Farrell, T. S. C. (2015). *Promoting teacher reflection in second language education: A framework for TESOL professionals*. New York: Routledge.

Taking the concept and the practice of reflective teaching forward, this book introduces a well-structured, flexible framework for use by teachers at all levels of development, from pre-service to novice to the most experienced. The framework outlines five levels of reflective practice—Philosophy; Principles; Theory-of-Practice; Practice; Beyond Practice—and provides specific techniques for teachers to implement each level of reflection in their work. Designed to allow readers to take either a deductive approach, moving from theory-into-practice, or an inductive approach where they start from a practice-into-theory position, the framework can be used by teachers alone, in pairs, or in a group.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2018a). *Research on reflective practice in TESOL*. New York: Routledge.

In this comprehensive and detailed analysis of recent research on encouraging reflective practices in TESOL, Farrell demonstrates how this practice has been embraced within TESOL and how it continues to impact the field. Examining a vast array of studies through his own framework for reflecting on practice, Farrell's analysis comprises not only the intellectual and cognitive but also the spiritual, moral, and emotional aspects of reflection. Reflection questions at the end of each chapter provide a jumping-off point for researchers, scholars, and teachers to further consider and reflect on the future of the field. Providing a holistic picture of reflection, this book is an original compendium of essential research on philosophy and principles, instruments used in studies, and theory and practice.

Barnard, R. & Ryan, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Reflective Practice: Voices from the Field*. New York: Routledge.

Barnard and Ryan's (2017) collection contains reflective practice studies of TESOL teachers (preservice and inservice) on topics such as (collaborative) lesson planning, classroom observation, lesson transcripts, post-lesson discussions, journal writing, reflection on action, reflection in action, critical friends, and focus groups. The aim of the book is to explain a range of options for implementing the reflective practice cycle in educational settings in various international contexts. Written by international academics, these studies show how reflection can be interpreted in different cultural contexts.

Mann, S. & Walsh, S. (2017). *Reflective practice in English language teaching*. New York: Routledge.

Mann and Walsh's (2017) book outlines an empirical, data-led approach to reflective practice and uses excellent examples of real data along with reflexive vignettes from a range of contexts in order to help teachers to reflect on their practices. Mann and Walsh also note the importance of dialogue as crucial for

reflection as it allows for clarification, questioning and enhanced understanding. This is by far the best book available on RP.

Watanabe, A. (2016). *Reflective Practice as Professional Development Experiences of Teachers of English in Japan*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Atsuko Watanabe's (2016) book outlines a study of the reflective practices of seven inservice TESOL teachers in a high school setting in Japan. Beginning with a series of uncomfortable teacher training sessions delivered to unwilling participants, the book charts the author's development of new methods of engaging her participants and making use of their own experiences and knowledge. Both an in-depth examination of reflective practice in the context of Japanese cultural conventions and a narrative account of the researcher's reflexivity in her engagement with the study, the book introduces the concept of 'the reflective continuum'—a non-linear journey that mirrors the way reflection develops in unpredictable and individual ways.

References

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Thomas S. C. Farrell is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Brock University, Canada. Professor Farrell's professional interests include Reflective Practice, and Language Teacher Education & Development. Professor Farrell has published widely in academic journals and has presented at major conferences worldwide on these topics. A selection of his books include *Reflective Practice in ESL Teacher Development Groups: From Practices to Principles* (Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2014); *Promoting teacher reflection in language education: a framework for TESOL professionals* (Routledge, 2015), *Reflecting on Critical Incidents in Language Education* (With L. Baecher, Bloomsbury, 2017); *Preservice Teacher Education*. (TESOL publications, 2017); *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*. (TESOL publications, 2017); *Research on Reflective Practice in TESOL* (Routledge, 2018a); *Reflective Language Teaching: Practical Applications for TESOL Teachers* (Bloomsbury, 2018b). His webpage is: www.reflectiveinquiry.ca.