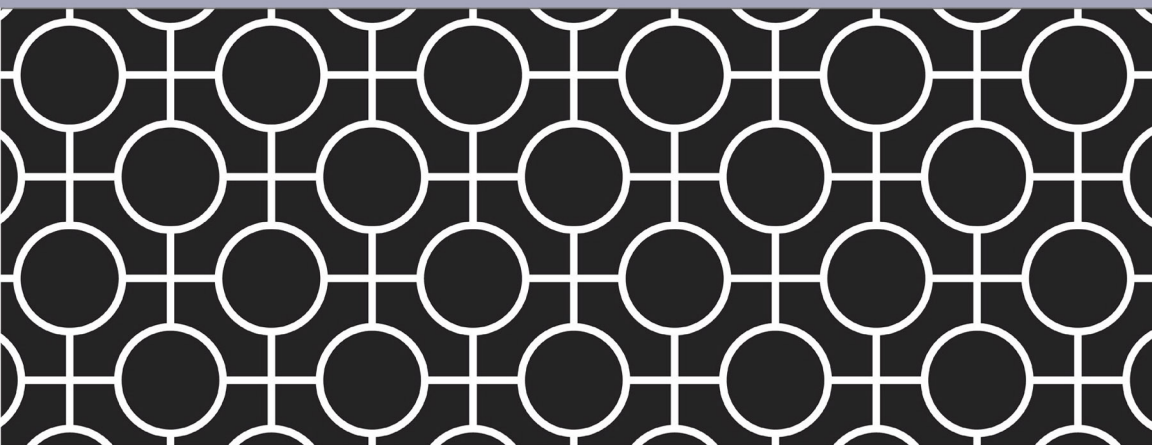


Doing Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching

120 Activities for Effective Classroom Management,
Lesson Planning, and Professional Development



Thomas S. C. Farrell

ESL & APPLIED LINGUISTICS PROFESSIONAL SERIES

Doing Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching

This practical and engaging book introduces readers to reflective practice in English language teaching. Assuming no background knowledge, Thomas S. C. Farrell clearly and accessibly walks through ways that teachers can integrate and implement reflective practice in the classroom and in other contexts to benefit their teaching and their own professional development. Each chapter covers an important dimension of reflective practice and features many ready-to-use activities that are designed to empower teachers and allow them to overcome challenges they'll face throughout their careers. Covering many types of reflection and the many purposes it serves, this book addresses written reflection, lesson planning, classroom observation, classroom management, group communication and more. This resource is ideal for preservice and early career language teachers and is an important supplement to courses in language education and applied linguistics programs.

Thomas S. C. Farrell is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Brock University, Canada.

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*120 Activities for Effective
Classroom Management,
Lesson Planning, and
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Thomas S. C. Farrell

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Preface

Doing Reflective Practice: 120 Reflection Activities for English Language Teachers is a practical, activity-focused book that shows learner language teachers, early career language teachers and experienced language teachers how to engage with reflective practice. The book is not a theoretically focused book about reflective practice nor is it a research focused book about reflective practice. Rather, this book engages language teachers in the process of *doing* reflection as they examine all facets of their practice through the 120 reflection activities placed throughout the book. Reflective practice generally means that language teachers at all levels explore their philosophy, principles, theory, practice and critical reflection beyond practice so that they can grow professionally throughout their careers.

Doing Reflective Practice: 120 Reflection Activities for English Language Teachers is written deliberately in a relatively informal style, which follows the stated aim of making it more accessible—and less intimidating—for learner language teachers as well as novice, early career language teachers who might be daunted by the prospect of a more overtly theoretical approach to reflective practice. This also makes it easier for more experienced language teachers and/or teacher educators/trainers to dip in and out of the reflection activities depending on their levels of interest in a particular topic. In addition, I deliberately do not include many references in each chapter except, when necessary, as interested readers can consult the other books (see later) if they want to engage in theoretical or research related discussions about reflective practice. Thus, this book is practicable and assessable to all language teachers and, as a result, purposefully different to other more conceptual-focused books, but at the same time is complementary to these books. In fact, not many publications on language

teacher reflections exist that offer practical guidance for language teachers wishing to *do* reflective practice.

The book consists of thirteen chapters. Each chapter presents an important dimension of reflective practice related to language teaching and begins by listing activities that are covered, followed by a brief introduction and different reflection activities that form the basis for reflection. Each chapter ends with a conclusion. The reflection activities in each chapter follow a logical progress within the chapter and address specific issues related to the chapter heading and as explained in the brief introduction.

Chapter 1, *Invitation*, outlines how reflective practice in this book encompasses a holistic approach that not only focuses on the intellectual, cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of practice to which many other approaches are limited, but also the spiritual, moral and emotional non-cognitive aspects of reflection that acknowledges the inner life of teachers. The chapter also outlines a case study of a language teacher 'doing' reflection to showcase the power of the process for language teachers. The chapter includes one reflection activity.

Chapter 2, *Why Reflect?* outlines and discusses the importance of reflection and offers eight reflection activities for language teachers to reflect on: *Taking Stock*, *Life History*, *Personal Critical Incidents*, *Feelings About Teaching*, *Teacher Burnout*, *Ten Questions*, *Reflective Dispositions* and *Recognizing a Reflective Teacher*.

Chapter 3, *What is Reflective Practice?* provides specific details about what reflective practice is along with some cautions. This chapter provides nineteen different reflection activities for language teachers to consider that include *Routines*, *Bandwagons*, *Reflection as Process*, *Reflection as Action*, *Reflection as Product*, *Reflection as Community*, *Reflection as Moral Agency*, *Reflectivity*, *Dimensions of Reflection*, *Levels of Reflection*, *Spirals of Reflection*, *Typologies of Reflection*, *Reflecting on Philosophy*, *Reflecting on Principles*, *Reflecting on Theory*, *Reflecting on Practice*, *Reflecting on Beyond Practice*, *Tailoring Reflection* and *Some Cautions*.

Chapter 4, *Written Reflections*, provides details about how language teachers can engage in written reflections and includes nine reflection activities such as *Writing*, *Why Write a Teaching Journal?*, *Starting a Teaching Journal*, *Types of Teaching Journals*, *Audience*, *Using Teaching Journals Effectively*, *Teacher Narrative Writing*, *Teacher Research Writing* and *Technology and Writing*.

Chapter 5, *Reflecting in Groups*, provides details about how language teachers can engage in dialogic reflection and includes twelve reflection activities such as *Dialogue, Group Reflections, Type of Group, Setting up Group, Roles and Responsibilities, Modes of Reflection, Communicating and Interacting in Groups, Trust, Time, Sustaining the Group, Evaluating the Group and Resisting Plateauing with Groups*.

Chapter 6, *Classroom Observations*, outlines and discusses how language teachers can engage in classroom observations to facilitate their reflections and includes twelve reflection activities such as *Delight or Despair?, Purpose, Qualitative Observations, Self-Observation, Critical Friends, Recording, Category Instruments, Focus, Teacher Action Zone, Bumpy Moments, Classroom Critical Incidents and Etiquette*.

Chapter 7, *Lesson Planning*, outlines and discusses lesson planning for language teachers and includes six reflection activities such as *Why Plan?, Approaches, Creating A Plan, Planning and Textbooks, Implementing the Plan and Evaluating the Plan*.

Chapter 8, *Teaching and Assessing the Skills*, outlines and discusses how language teachers can reflect on their teaching and assessment of five main skill areas related to language learning and has ten reflection activities such as *Reflecting on Teaching Writing, Reflecting on Assessing Writing, Reflecting on Teaching Speaking, Reflecting on Assessing Speaking, Reflecting on Teaching Reading, Reflecting on Assessing Reading, Reflecting on Teaching Listening, Reflecting on Assessing Listening, Reflecting on Teaching Grammar and Reflecting on Assessing Grammar*.

Chapter 9, *Classroom Management*, outlines and discusses different facets of classroom management for language teachers and includes twelve reflection activities such as *Manager or Conductor?, Organizing the Class, Space and Time, Diversity, Mixed Abilities, Learning Styles, Classroom Climate, Maintaining Order, Back-Row Distracter, Nonparticipant, Overexuberant Student and Expect the Unexpected*.

Chapter 10, *Classroom Communication*, outlines and discusses how language teachers can reflect on different aspects of their classroom communications and interactions and includes eight reflection activities such as *Classroom Communication, Classroom Interaction, Teacher Questions, Feedback, Grouping, Non-Verbal Communication, Classroom Communicative and Interactional Competence and Collecting Data*.

Chapter 11, *Teaching Portfolios*, outlines and discusses how language teachers can reflect with the use of teaching portfolios and includes seven

reflection activities such as Reflection and Direction; Types; Contents; Subject-Matter Knowledge; Planning, Delivery, Assessing Instruction; Professionalism and Reflection.

Chapter 12, Practice Teaching, outlines and discusses how language teachers can reflect during their initial teaching practice and includes seven reflection activities such as Microteaching, Field Placement, Context, Cooperating Teachers, Identity Development, Discourse Development and Evaluation.

The final chapter, Chapter 13, First Years, outlines and discusses how language teachers can reflect as they transition from their teacher education programs to their first years of teaching. It includes nine reflection activities such as Transition, Your Classroom, Your Colleagues, The 'Shock', Overcoming the Imposter Syndrome, Developmental Stages, Getting Support, Professional Roles and Reflection as Way of Life.

The book is written in a clear and accessible style and assumes no previous background in language teacher education or reflection. Thus, introductory courses as well as graduate courses will be able to use the book with ease. Native-speaker language teachers and non-native-speaker language teachers alike will be able to interact with the contents of the book because of its accessible writing style and comprehensible vocabulary. The first six chapters that introduce various important activities directly related to the topic of reflection and how it can be implemented. The remaining chapters can be considered self-contained discussions of important aspects related to language teaching, learning and assessment and can be used in different ways depending on the focus of the particular course learner language teachers and/or early career language teachers' levels of interest.

Each chapter has practical reflection activities in appropriate places where readers can pause to reflect themselves on what the research has revealed and where they stand on the particular issue. These practical activities synthesises the research on reflective practice generated in the previous books so that language teachers (I use the term 'language teachers' throughout the book to refer to all kinds of second and foreign language teachers of English) can explore their practice at whatever level they choose. Thus, the primary audience for this book consists of those taking courses in Applied Linguistics/TESOL who are going to become or becoming language teachers. Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA), Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (DELTA),

Master Degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL) students who study the contents of this book will be better prepared for the realities of what they will face in real classrooms and real schools. I see this book as being a component to all language teacher education programs, be they introductory cert courses or other graduate and post-graduate courses and, especially (and as noted previously), as a companion book to my previous Routledge books: *Research on Reflective Practice in TESOL*¹ and *Promoting Teacher Reflection in Second Language Education: A Framework for TESOL Professionals*,² as well as a companion to Mann and Walsh's (2017) book with Routledge, *Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching Research-Based Principles and Practices*. Program administrators, cooperative teachers and supervisors who are responsible for training and educating teachers will find this book very useful when it comes to encouraging teachers to reflect, as the research results are overwhelmingly positive, and each chapter provides a guide how teachers (novice and experienced) can implement such reflections. In addition, experienced language teachers can use this book as a refresher for their professional development as they look at the various problems of practice that are presented and compare them to their own contexts.

Thomas S. C. Farrell

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

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

1

Invitation

Introduction

The capacity of being able to reflect is now seen as an important part of a language teacher's education and training. Indeed, in one extensive review of the literature on second language teacher education Wright (2010: 267) points out that the goal is to produce "reflective teachers, in a process which involves socio-cognitive demands to introspect and collaborate with others, and which acknowledges previous learning and life experience as a starting point for new learning." A flurry of different typologies and approaches of encouraging teachers to reflect on their practice developed in the field of general education and many have been embraced by the field of TESOL. However, I believe that most of these existing approaches are very narrow, and a more holistic approach to reflection should be adopted in teacher education courses and by novice teachers in their early career years. This can be achieved through the implementation of the reflection activities in *Doing Reflective Practice: 120 Reflection Activities for English Language Teachers*.

Implementing Reflective Practice in Language Education

Reflection is now widely acknowledged as an essential component of many second language teacher education programs worldwide because, as Freeman (2016: 208) maintains, reflection offers a way into the less "accessible aspects of teacher's work." Over the years, many different approaches and methods have been proposed as to how teachers can reflect, yet most of these see restrict reflection to a retrospective role focusing on what works or does

not work in the classroom while all the time overlooking the inner lives of teachers. Although these approaches may offer a structured way into reflection especially for some novice teachers, I believe there is a danger that we are confining reflection in a bubble to a 'fix-it' approach or a repairing of some perceived deficit in teaching that separates the teacher from the act of teaching. As Freeman (2016: 217) recently pointed out, SLTE needs to move away from such an emphasis on 'post-mortem reflect' and 'reflection-as-repair' that confines reflection to problem solving and only the technical competencies of teaching that ignores the inner lives of teachers. If we continue to ignore the inner life of teachers as we always have in the field of TESOL with the push to follow mandated curriculum and the like, we will not be able to counteract teacher burnout, which is why reflective practice was originally developed and reinstated in the 1980s. Pre-service (and in-service) teachers need to be encouraged to think about themselves and their teaching in a way that includes activation of their feelings, emotions or the affective side of reflection, so that they can develop the inner resources to meet future challenges in the profession. Implementing a holistic approach to teacher reflection produces more integrated second-language teachers with self-awareness and understanding to be able to interpret, shape and reshape their practice.

Doing Reflective Practice: 120 Reflection Activities for English Language Teachers encompasses a holistic approach to reflection that not only focuses on the intellectual, cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of practice that many other approaches are limited to, but also the spiritual, moral and emotional non-cognitive aspects of reflection that acknowledges the inner life of teachers (Farrell, 2015; 2018). Teacher educators can encourage preservice (and in-service) teachers to take such a holistic approach to reflective practice so they can view their professional (and even personal) worlds and what has shaped their professional lives as they become more aware of their philosophy, principles, theories, practices and how these impact issues inside and beyond practice as teachers in training and throughout their early career years and beyond.

Doing Reflective Practice: A Case Study

The following outlines the reflections of one novice English as a second language (ESL) teacher in his first year of teaching as he attempted to incorporate strategy training when teaching English reading classes to ESL students in a high school (from Farrell, 2015). The teacher attempted to teach reading

strategy training in his classes from the start of the semester because he said they were “taught this idea in my teacher preparation program.” He was especially interested in teaching his students the learning strategies of questioning, clarifying and predicting as well as vocabulary recognition techniques to less-proficient ESL students, many of whom were struggling with their reading comprehension and as a result did not like to read in English.

We started with a discussion of his philosophy of practice, and the novice teacher stated: “I have a definite philosophy of teaching: I think that all students always come first. If a particular program of course of action will benefit them, I will try to carry it out. If it’s not going to benefit the students, I will try to scrap it or play it down.” He said that much of his approach to practice will have this philosophy as an underlying influence although he also realized that he had no real teaching experience and his practicum experience was only him observing others teach, so he said that he did not really get any ideas from that experience.

He was especially interested in teaching reading to struggling ESL students because he said that he felt this was his ‘calling,’ or vocation as a teacher. He said that he was not really interested in teaching students who were excellent, as he said that they would probably not benefit much from his knowledge, and that was not why he got into teaching. So, he asked me to observe his teaching of reading rather than any other language skill. He said that his beliefs about learning and teaching reading centered around learner strategy training that he studied about in his teacher education program, and he believed that if you teach ESL struggling readers how to use strategies such as prediction, questioning and clarifying, they would become better readers. I observed five of his reading classes: two at the start of the second semester, two in the middle of the semester and one near the end of the semester. Each observation covered two double periods of forty minutes for each period except for the final observation, which was one forty-minute class. Excerpts from each of the lessons are provided. These excerpts (in the form of episodes) show how the teacher attempted to incorporate strategy training into his teaching of English reading. The teacher authenticated the episodes and the interpretations that follow.

Observed Lessons: Start of Semester

These lessons were conducted at the start of the second week of the semester. The first lesson started with the teacher stating that he was going to

review reading comprehension methods. In this lesson, the teacher tried to get his students to think and reflect about how they usually read and how they answer reading comprehension questions after reading a text. First, the teacher took the students through what he called ‘the traditional steps for answering ten reading comprehension questions’ because he noted his students were used to this and how the students seemed to not be able to answer most of the questions. Then he attempted to introduce the learning strategy of prediction (that he learned in his teacher education program) while they were reading.

The following dialogue, as outlined in Episode 1, shows how the teacher tried to introduce the strategy of prediction and how the class responded. The teacher makes a reference to ‘this usual way on comprehension’ in the first line, indicating that, in traditional English reading classes in his context, the students are asked to read a passage, underline and words they do not understand and then answer the comprehension questions that follow the passage. The teacher then checks the answers and informs the students whether they are correct or not. He was trying to break this cycle.

Episode 1

- T: *Which students don't follow this usual way of comprehension?*
[Most hands go up]
- T: *Today another method . . . try and guess what is going to happen in a story.*
[The teacher writes the title of the story ‘The Last Dance’ on board]
- T: *What is the first thing that comes to mind?* [No answers]
- T: *What will the story be about?* [No answers]
- T: *Read the first paragraph.*
- T: *Now what do you think the story is or will be about?*
[Teacher asks more questions about the first paragraph; no student able to answer]
[The teacher then asks the students about their metacognitive skills]
- T: *What happens in your mind? Thinking, predicting.*
[No reaction from any student]
- T: *What is the next paragraph going to be about? Read like this.*
[Students read]

Key: T=teacher

This short exchange in Episode 1 shows how the teacher was trying to get his students to think about their reading strategies and to consider using the strategy of prediction that he had learned during his teacher education program. However, the reality of the classroom and students he was teaching quickly made him realize that it was not going to be easy to introduce this strategy. Indeed, after this class, he told me that he felt frustrated that his students were not responding to the idea of predicting while reading in the way he had hoped and that this was different to what he expected from his theory classes while he was training.

Nonetheless, he said that he saw some hope, as the students had told him that they had never been asked about how they read (their reading strategies) before. They said they were usually told to read the passage silently (or aloud) and answer the comprehension questions. Thus, the teacher said that at least he got some response and that some of the students were becoming curious about what the teacher was trying to do. Consequently, he said that he would continue with strategy training, as the students needed a new approach because they had failed to comprehend passages so often before in classes he had observed while he was on teaching practice and during his first year of teaching.

Observed Lessons: Mid-Semester

These lessons took place in the middle of the second semester. The teacher told me before this class that he had continued with strategy training since my last visit, especially the strategy of prediction for reading lessons. However, he said that he did not incorporate it into every reading lesson, since the first set of lessons because he noticed the students were not responding. The class started with the teacher asking the students to read a passage silently. After ten minutes of silent reading, he asked the students to reflect on their learning as outlined in the following dialogue in Episode 2.

Episode 2

- T: How many used predicting?* [Three students raise their hands]
T: The rest of you . . . how many read each word? [All students raise their hands]

T: *I advise you to try the new methods. I can't force you but you will find it easier to answer comprehension questions. I know it works. Try it and you have a choice.*

Key: T=teacher

Again, this short example in Episode 2 shows how difficult it was for the teacher, as he said, 'to break the old habits of traditional reading approaches,' especially for less proficient ESL readers. After class, the teacher said he was disappointed again that the students had not used the 'new' technique, but he would keep trying. He said that he noticed a degree of resistance and he said, 'Old habits die hard.' He continued: 'It may be that weak readers tend to lock themselves into a pattern or cycle of self-doubt about their inability to read and that they cannot easily break from this.' The teacher noticed that the students were using their fingers to guide their eyes across the page, and he interpreted this physical act as further evidence that they were reading word for word. He also said that the students gave up easily if they encountered vocabulary they did not understand, if they did not understand the first sentence of a passage or paragraph or if they could not answer the first comprehension question. In fact, they equated failure (and mental pain) with the act of reading. The teacher remarked that the students in his class had always 'groaned loudly' when he had told them that they were about to do a reading in English class.

So, at the mid-semester point, the teacher began to question the validity of his beliefs about strategy training for struggling ESL readers, as he said he wondered now whether these strategies would in fact be useful or not for his students. He also worried that his classes may now have become boring for his students because he was trying to teach these new strategies. Up to this mid-semester point, he said that he had attempted strategy training in questioning, clarifying (however, he did not give me any examples of how he taught these two strategies, and I do not know how much time he spent on this strategy training) and predicting strategies with little success. He said that from this mid-semester on he would slow down and try to reinforce strategies already introduced. By this, he said he would try to develop activities and exercises that would reinforce the strategies.

Observed Lesson: End of Semester

I then observed a class near the end of the semester. Before the class, the teacher said he was a bit frustrated with the slow uptake of any of the

reading strategies he had tried to teach the class because he said that the students had resisted many of them, even though they could still not answer any of the ten or so comprehension questions that he sometimes asked in the usual 'traditional way.' However, he pointed out that he was beginning to get them to predict 'a bit when reading' but that it very slow and hard work for him to keep pushing then to try to predict while they were reading. Episode 3 that follows outlines part of transcript of his attempts to get his students to predict once at the beginning of his lesson and again in the middle of the lesson.

Episode 3

T: Today we will try to predict again . . . Not reading. Here is the title. What do you think the story will be about? [Nearly all students raise hands. Teacher then chooses some students to answer, and they give opinion]

[Fifteen minutes later, students read first paragraph of story]

T: Don't worry about what kinds of words you don't know yet . . . only what type of passage it is. How many bothered about difficult words? [Four hands raise; class of forty]

T: Are all the details important?

Ss: [Most shout] No!

T: What is important then?

Ss: [Most shout] Guess what story is about.

T: Yes, to predict.

Key: **T**=teacher; **Ss**=students

Episode 3 shows how the teacher had to continually remind his students to try to predict what a reading would be about as they read and how this was always trying to remind them how important it was to have some strategy when reading. The teacher realized that it would take time to get his students to implement any reading strategies, so at the end of the semester he noted that he would have to spend time the following semester 'pushing reading strategies but that it would not be easy.'

This 'theory-driven' approach to reflecting on practice, in which philosophy and theory have an initial influence on instructional practice, is probably a natural sequence of development for pre-service and novice teachers in their early career years because they do not have much

teaching experience. When their early practices are observed, it is most likely that theory can be detected in their practice; however, over time, and with reflection, it is possible that their everyday practice will begin to inform and even change their philosophy and theory and they may come up with new principles of practice. Thus, continued reflection can nourish both practice and theory of practice.

Are You a Reflective Teacher?

At this very early stage, I begin the reflection activities with a set of pointed questions related to your current perceptions about reflection and if you think you are already a reflective teacher. It will be interesting to compare your answers to these questions again when you come to the end of Chapter 13 to see if there are any differences to your findings.

Reflection 1

- This reflection asks you to consider if you are a reflective teacher at this moment in time.
 - Are you a reflective teacher? How would you know if you are or are not?
 - If you consider yourself to be a reflective teacher, how do you reflect?
 - Can you outline any recent examples of your reflections on your teaching?
 - What topics were important for you during your reflections?
 - If you do not consider yourself to be a reflective teacher at this moment in time, what future plans do you have (if any) to become a more reflective teacher?
 - Do you think reflecting on your teaching is worth doing? Why or why not?
 - What benefits do you think you might gain as a result of reflecting on your work?
 - What would be difficult about reflecting on your work?
 - As you moved to online teaching because of the COVID-19 pandemic, how do you reflect on your practice?
 - Do you find it easier or more difficult to engage in reflective practice while teaching on online platforms?

The Invitation

Doing Reflective Practice: 120 Reflection Activities for English Language Teachers encourages pre-service English language teachers and novice English language teachers in their early career years to reflect not only the ‘what do I teach?’ and the ‘how do I do it?’ in terms of what methods and techniques used to teach, but also the deeper, more personal reflections, such as ‘why I do what I do,’ or reflecting on the purpose and ends of our practices and even deeper into the ‘who’ of teaching. Or, as Palmer (1998: 5) notes, “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.”

Research findings related to encouraging language teachers to reflect are very promising (Farrell, 2018). For example, the findings suggest that when language teachers are encouraged to reflect on their philosophy, language teachers can better understand their sense of professional identity and especially its origins, formation and development. When language teachers are encouraged to reflect on principles, language teachers become more aware of their previously tacitly held assumptions, values and beliefs about teaching and learning, and as a result, they are better able to make re-evaluate them in light of their new knowledge. When language teachers are encouraged to reflect on theory, they are able to build repertoires and knowledge of instruction. When language teachers are encouraged to reflect on their practice and theory, the research reports an overall positive impact of classroom observations because they lead to enhanced awareness of theory and practice connections. When language teachers are encouraged to reflect beyond practice in combination with philosophy, principles, theory and practice, language teachers are able to reflect well beyond their classroom teaching practices on such issues as social justice, teacher roles and power differentials. In his review of the research, Farrell (2018) concludes that the language teaching profession has, for the most part, embraced the concept of reflective practice, but at the same time it must be on guard against others (e.g., administrators, supervisors and teachers) using it solely as a tool to ‘fix’ problems rather than as a means for overall professional development.

Thus, I invite all learner language teachers (ESL, EFL and all related second language teachers, really), novice language teachers in their early career years, language teacher educators, administrators and all other interested stakeholders to engage in reflective practice by building on the theory and integrating the synthesized research on reflective practice in

language teaching that were generated in my previous Routledge books (e.g., Farrell, 2018; 2015) as well as research conducted in many other related books (e.g., Mann & Walsh, 2017), papers and online platforms. The book and activities are designed to help learner language teachers and novice language teachers embark on their teaching careers armed with the tools of reflection so that they can face any future challenges throughout their teaching careers.

Conclusion

Although reflective practice has, as Mann and Walsh (2013: 292) have noted, “achieved a status of orthodoxy” in the field of English language teaching, not many practical suggestions have been proposed that move beyond just looking at classroom activities, but also to include reflection on the inner lives of language teachers. I believe that *Doing Reflective Practice: 120 Reflection Activities for English Language Teachers* is such a book because it presents such a holistic approach to reflective practice that not only focuses on the intellectual, cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of reflection, but also includes reflection on the spiritual, moral and emotional non-cognitive aspects of a language teacher’s professional practice. In this way, teachers can use that *Doing Reflective Practice: 120 Reflection Activities for English Language Teachers* as a lens through which they can view their professional (and personal) worlds—what has shaped their professional lives—as they become more aware of *who* they are, *what* they do, *how* they do it, *why* they do it and *where* they do it. I hope you accept my invitation to explore the 120 different reflection activities outlined and discussed in this book, and I believe that if you do, you can become a more informed decision-maker, with more self-awareness and understanding to be able to interpret, shape and reshape your practice throughout your career.

2

Why Reflect?

Activities Covered

- Taking Stock
- Life History
- Personal Critical Incidents
- Feelings About Teaching
- Teacher Burnout
- Ten Questions
- Reflective Dispositions
- Recognizing a Reflective Teacher

Introduction

Most educators agree that a teacher's day begins long before the teacher enters the classroom and ends well after the teacher leaves the classroom, with endless planning and grading before and after actual classroom lessons. In fact, teaching often is listed as one of the most stressful professions as teachers must endure a severe hectic pace throughout each day of each term. York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere and Montie (2006: 2) refer to this context and hectic pace as "hot action" and maintain in such circumstances "it is not unusual for teachers to put aside carefully constructed lessons because of unanticipated events, circumstances, or responses." It is not surprising, then, given such a hectic pace at which language teachers must juggle various multiple tasks while making thousands of different on-the-spot decisions each day, that the risk of burnout because of emotional and physical exhaustion is very real. This chapter outlines and discusses why language teachers should engage in reflective practice by taking stock of

their current teaching situations, considering where they have come from and what they have experienced as well as their feelings about teaching, whether they currently consider themselves as reflective teachers, teacher burnout and what kind of attitudes are important when engaging in reflective practice.

Taking Stock

In many counties today there seems to be growing demands being placed on teachers to standardize education programs so that students will be able to pass standardized tests. These educational reforms, however, have been implemented (some would say imposed), for the most part, without input from practicing teachers who must implement them. This is also true for many English language teachers; however, in 2020 and 2021 the stress levels of language teachers have become even more difficult because of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Language teachers had to suddenly switch from face-to-face instruction to delivering their lessons on online platforms, with many teachers (and their students) having little or no prior training using such platforms. The impact on language teachers, language students and language schools has been enormous because most language courses, initially designed for face-to-face instruction, were suddenly ‘forced’ move to online platforms. This sudden move meant that language schools, language teachers and their students needed to adapt fast to a new virtual world that, for many, was an unknown teaching world. Consequently, many teachers may feel alienated and isolated because they have been asked to implement changes that they have had no part in influencing and more especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (at the time I write this book). Language teachers may feel to be like technicians (or may be seen as such) who implement programs that have been pre-packaged and prescribed by others in ways and on platforms they have not been trained to use. Language teachers may thus feel a sense of helplessness about their situations and roles in a perceived impersonal education system. So, it even becomes more important for language teachers (indeed teachers of all subjects) to step back and reflect on their practice because of such burdens with so many new demands on their time both inside the classroom be it face-to-face instruction or on online platforms, as well as outside their lessons.

As mentioned earlier, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly increased language teachers' stress/stressors and heightened levels of emotions because of their sudden conversion to online platforms that have shattered all the usual classroom teaching boundaries: physically, temporally and psychologically (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). Thus, there is an even greater need for teachers (and students and administrators) to engage in reflective practice so that all stakeholders can better examine and reflect on and evaluate the real experiences and emotions of this sudden upheaval related to teaching language in the age of COVID-19. For language teachers, engaging in reflective practice generally means that they take the responsibility of looking at all aspects of their practice that includes their philosophy, beliefs and theories that shape that practice both inside or outside the classroom, face-to-face and online, so that they get a clearer understanding of their practice. Engaging in such reflective practice during the global pandemic can also help language teachers reflect on their adjustments and related emotions that enables them to better recognize and understand any adjustment challenges and emotional impacts that occur so that they can begin to initiate necessary changes.

Along with the dynamics of a lesson (see also Chapter 10 on classroom communication) and the demands on a teacher's time to prepare for his/her classes, institutional constraints further limit teachers' hours in the day to reflect on their work. These institutions do not normally give teachers time to reflect because there is continued pressure to get through the curriculum. This all makes for a stressful existence for teachers. Is it any wonder that some teachers feel isolated and frustrated and entertain thoughts of leaving the profession? These teachers are ideal candidates for teacher burnout (see Reflection 6). Some of these feelings of frustration can be avoided, however, if teachers embrace opportunities to reflect (however informally) on their teaching before and after (and even during) classes (face-to-face and online). It really all depends on how much time teachers are willing to invest in their own professional development. If teachers can become more aware of what happens in their classroom and can monitor accurately both their own behavior and that of their students, they can function as more effective teachers. This can be achieved by having teachers engage in personal reflection, as well as reflective conversation with others. Such a reflective process begins with teachers assessing where they are now in terms of their practice, or 'taking stock' of their practice.

Reflection 2

- Reflect on yourself as a teacher (take stock) as a starting point on for your reflective journey using this book.
 - Do you find teaching (face-to-face and/or online) exciting and challenging?
 - Do you think language teaching is a job or a profession?
 - What is the best aspect of your life as a language teacher?
 - What is the worst aspect of your life as a language teacher?
 - Do you spend much time thinking about new ideas for teaching your classes?
 - Do you ever discuss teaching with your peers/colleagues?
 - Do you ever ask your peers/colleagues to observe you teach and later provide feedback on your lessons?
 - Are there any things you think you would like to change about your teaching? If so, can you change these?
 - How has COVID-19 impacted your life as a language teacher?
 - What have you learned about yourself as a language teacher so far?
- Now you have your starting point. Continue your reflective journey through the various chapters and the 120 reflection activities/prompts you see.

Life History

It is nearly impossible to separate the human self from the professional self because our actions as teachers in classrooms are inevitably shaped by our past experiences growing up as children, our experiences in grade school and whatever experiences we have had up to the present moment. Within the field of education studies, 'life history' has been used to capture an individual's story. These stories can contain depictions of critical persons, personal critical incidents (see next section) and other critical phases in the stories that make up teachers' lives. Life history presents each language teacher from his or her own perspective and in such a manner, a teacher can reflect on their individual involvement and commitment to teaching and students. When analyzing the story, a teacher can look for events, people or phases that really stand out as meaningful situations for *him* or *her* as well as how they felt at that particular time. For example, teachers can talk about their childhood experiences and the people and events that

had a major impact on them as they grew up. They can also articulate their experience in grade school: how they were taught, the teachers they remember (for good or bad) and the various positive and negative experiences they had during their school years. Teachers can then consider why they became a teacher and what influenced this decision, such as experiences described before, that include influential teachers as role models and the like.

Reflection 3

- Life history reflection enables us to reflect on the various influences we have had during our elementary school years, high school, university and our training to be a teacher in a TESOL certificate course and/or an MA program. Read the following life history related to how a novice ESL teacher outlined her significant experiences from grade school to her MA degree.

- *Elementary school*

I had a teacher in grade 6 who took the time to make sure I understood the difference between grammar points I was having trouble with. He encouraged me in my schoolwork even though I was not a very academic student, pushed me and another student to submit work for something that I wouldn't have done on my own and then took some personal time to reward us with dinner out with his wife. For a kid that didn't have much or many opportunities, that really made me feel special and helped me think that I could do well in school. I also happened to have a French teacher that took the opportunity to talk to her students inside and outside of class. She was excited to teach the language and that showed in her teaching. She made opportunities for us to use the language by arranging an exchange trip to practice French.

- *High school*

Definitely there were teachers that I had that I didn't like the way they taught, which made me not want to ever teach like them. One of my French teachers in grade 9 or 10 drilled us on *être* and *avoir* constantly. There was not much opportunity to practice the language verbally, and when there was, we were usually put into the awkward position of giving an unknown answer in front of the whole class. There was also a teacher who came to math class drunk every day

and didn't care about the students, and yet there was no system to evaluate him or get rid of him. I didn't learn much that year. There were teachers that positively influenced me as well. In grade 12 I took a family studies course that allowed me to do a co-op program and try out a job. I wanted to be an interior designer. After working in a paint store for a while I asked to switch and try something different. I started working at a public school with two girls [ESL students] who needed help with their English. My supervisor was a travelling ESL teacher. Up until then, I didn't know that job existed. I enjoyed what I was doing a lot, and my supervisor encouraged me every time we talked and helped me to learn how to teach. It was because of this experience that I found out about the program at a university and pursued ESL.

- *University*

During my time at university, I took a German class, which I didn't do very well in. It made me appreciate the difficulties language learners go through. I also took a certificate in TESOL and, later, received an MA degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages, and I realized that there is a lot of difference between speaking English as a native speaker like I am and actually teaching English to speakers of other languages. I really enjoyed my practicum, and this solidified my desire to become an ESL teacher as a career.

- Reflect on your life history influences.
 - Elementary school
 - High school
 - University
 - TESOL training (include your TESOL qualifications)
 - Other

Personal Critical Incidents

Following the previous section on life history is the specific focus on personal critical incidents. Although we can really subsume in the previous section, I want to focus on incidents that have had an impact on teachers that occurred outside the classroom (see Chapter 6 for teaching critical incidents), because these could have resulted in a significant change in a teacher's personal and professional life. When a personal incident occurs,

it interrupts (or highlights) the taken-for-granted ways of thinking about a situation including teaching and thus becomes *critical*, and by analyzing such critical incidents, teachers can examine the values and beliefs that underpin their perceptions about why they became a teacher, teaching and their perception of students. Such incidents are critical because they can be considered a turning point in a teacher's career and can be captured when the teacher examines episodes from his or her past. These career critical incidents can be represented in the form of a brief autobiographical sketch, either oral or in writing and the incident may have had a lasting impact on why a person decided to become a teacher (or not).

Reflection 4

- Analyze the following personal critical incident of a novice ESL teacher and her reason for becoming a teacher from early in her life:
 - I knew that I wanted to teach when I was in grade 1. I remember very clearly a teacher asking a student a question about colors, and I knew that that student was colorblind, I also knew that he was very shy and embarrassed about it. I advocated on his behalf that day, and I have been doing it ever since. I could not understand how a teacher could be so out of touch with her students (since she was the one who had administered the test in the first place), and I vowed that day that I would always try to understand my students.
- Outline any personal incidents that have occurred in your life that you clearly remember.
 - Explain the incident in terms of its meaning, value or role to you as a teacher—consider how the personal critical incident led to a change in your understanding of teaching.
 - How have your understandings and conceptions (of the classroom, of the language, of the students, of yourself) evolved as a result of this reflection?

Feelings About Teaching

Teaching is a very emotional experience for both teachers and students, and for teachers, emotions constitute a fundamental dimension of teaching and of being a teacher. In fact, Teng (2017: 118) maintains that “emotions are part of the very fabric that constitutes the teacher's self,” especially in

terms of their personal and emotional investment into their practice. In other words, language teachers are human beings first, and as such have human reactions to the different events they experience while they teach, so it is important not to avoid their presence but rather to reflect on them. Such reflection helps language teachers, as Gkonou and Miller (2020: 6) point out, “compare their emotions about practice with colleagues and take action to improve current conditions.” For language teachers, Richards’ (2020) distinguishes positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions, he notes, include such feelings as *confident, curious, engaged, enjoyment, enthusiastic interested, happy, joyful, passionate*. Negative emotions include such feelings as *angry, annoyed, anxious, depressed, dissatisfied, exhausted, frustrated, sad, stressed, tense, uneasy, worried*. As Richards’ (2020: 3) points out, language teachers express their emotions (both positive and negative) in terms of the different feelings they “have about themselves, their colleagues, their learners, classroom activities, their teaching context and teaching resources.”

Reflection 5

- Reflect on the following questions related to your feelings about teaching:
 - Do you ever express positive emotions about teaching? If yes, what are these (from the previous list) and when do you express them?
 - Do you ever express negative emotions about teaching? If yes, what are these (from the previous list) and when do you express them?
 - Do you ever feel helpless about your teaching situation and your role as a teacher? If so, why?
 - Do you think that you are working as a teacher in an impersonal school environment? If so, what can you do about this?
 - Do you think that you are working as a teacher in an impersonal education system? If so, what can you do about this?
 - Do you know why anyone would leave the teaching profession?
 - Do you personally know any teachers who have quit the profession? If so, why did they say they wanted to leave teaching?
 - Do you know how you can take more control of your teaching situation?
 - What advice would you give to a new teacher on how to keep themselves positive as a teacher in their first year(s) teaching?