

Reflective Practice: Who Is the Self That Teaches?

By Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

I am honored to be asked to write a regular column in TEC for Korea TESOL, as Korea and Korea TESOL are always close to my heart. I lived and worked in Seoul for 18 years until 1997 when I moved to Singapore. I then moved to Canada, where I have lived for the past 11 years, teaching at Brock University, which is near Niagara Falls. I would like the column to focus on Korea, but of course, I am not there now, so I would welcome readers and members of Korea TESOL to send me questions and/or comments on what you would like me to talk about.

Getting Started

I will start the reflective process on getting to know the “who” behind the teacher because we seem to forget that teaching is not a mechanical act and that teachers matter. Some may say that it is selfish or even narcissistic to look at yourself too closely. However, I am a strong believer in that who I am is how I teach. In other words, it is impossible to separate the act of teaching from the person who teaches. As Palmer (1998, p. 3) suggests, “The work required to ‘know thyself’ is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge; it is a secret hidden in plain sight.”

After years of doing the same thing, teachers may not be aware of how the “who” is influencing the “what” of their practice. We can all remember those teachers in grade school who were not interested in their profession: teachers yawning during lessons or taking it out on students by smacking them or giving them extra homework. Whatever punishments were dished out, we all knew these teachers had lost their integrity, but what we did not know, at that time, was that this was probably a cry for help.

Palmer (1998, p. 2) has a kinder perspective of this type of teacher than I have. He has observed that some teachers can lose heart over the years

because teaching becomes a “daily exercise in vulnerability” for them. Because teachers are constantly in the public eye, they often try hard to keep their private identity hidden to reduce this vulnerability. As such, Palmer maintains that over the years, teachers build up a wall between their inner selves and outer performances, so he suggests that it is important for all teachers to “attend to the inner teacher to cultivate a sense of identity and integrity” (p. 2).

Through this first article, I would like readers to attempt to break down any inner wall that may have been inadvertently constructed over the years with a request to step back and ask, “Who is the self that teaches?”

Getting to Know the “Who”

The term *reflection* comes from the Latin word *reflectere*, which means “to bend back,” and includes exploring who we are as teachers. To reflect is common sense to most teachers, but to reflect on the self as a teacher is not so common. Why would a teacher want to reflect on the self? Why not just reflect on how to teach writing or the other skills, as these are what happen in the classroom? Besides, it will help the student more. Yes, all are valid comments, but to me, they are short-sighted because the delivery of such methods is by a human being to other human beings. The delivery is not mechanical and is not received in a mechanical way because each student is an individual and learns at his or her own pace. For many years in TESOL, we have tried to eliminate the “who” of the self that teaches by producing more teacher-proof books, materials, activities, and assessments to the point where teachers are no longer teachers – they are “coffee machines”: Put in 100 won and get your lesson! The result has led to a financially driven industry that has nothing to do with learning a second or subsequent language.

Conclusion

I believe that when teachers focus on themselves rather than their teaching, they will begin to

see through this fake industry as they penetrate it to the soul of who they are. From that self-knowledge, they can begin to really “teach.” As Palmer has aptly noted, “Knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject” (p. 2). Such self-knowledge can not only restore your integrity as a teacher by helping you decide what is important for you personally and professionally, but also help you decide who you want to be as a teacher in the future. In the next column, I will outline the various ways teachers can get to know themselves, but meanwhile, feel free to send any comments to tfarrell@brocku.ca.

Reference

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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Contemplative Practice: From *Letting Go* To *Letting Come*

By Thomas S.C. Farrell

In my first column for TEC, I wrote about the importance of reflecting on self-knowledge for language teachers, and I mentioned that I would outline various ways teachers can get to know themselves professionally and personally so that they can understand the “self as teacher.” This is an important aspect of reflective practice that seems to be missing in the latest moves in TESOL to encourage teachers to engage in research, cognition, or action research projects. While all of these moves are very important parts of teacher reflection, they focus on the behavioral aspects of teaching in the classroom and seem to be divorced from the main person responsible for these actions: the teacher.

Recent focus on teacher cognition studies, language teacher research engagement, and action research can all be summarized as research ON teachers, BY academics, FOR academics. This focus should be changed to research WITH teachers, BY teachers, FOR teachers.

In addition, calls for teachers to engage in research, action research, or cognition awareness all seem to be for the benefit of academics and not the teachers who are undergoing the study. In fact, the recent focus on teacher cognition studies, language teacher research engagement, and action research can all be summarized as research *ON* teachers, *BY* academics, *FOR* academics.

This focus should be changed to research *WITH* teachers, *BY* teachers, *FOR* teachers. In other words, we should be more focused on looking at what language teachers think about what they do, which is the core of reflective practice. In this column, I will outline the various ways teachers can get to know themselves (for more details, see Farrell, 2015).

Contemplative Practice

In order to gain more self-knowledge, I combined the concepts of contemplation, where teachers can reflect on the self (more as a prerequisite to more systematic reflections on practice), and reflection, where teachers engage in more systematic reflections on practice (which will be the focus of future columns). In order to “see” and gain self-knowledge, Anthony De Mello (1992; cited in Farrell, 2015) urged people to just observe and not interfere with whatever may appear:

Watch everything inside of you and outside, and when there is something happening to you, to see it as if it were happening to someone else, with no comment, no judgment, no attitude, no interference, no attempt to change, only to understand. (p. 25)

This is a powerful meditation to try because it means not trying. I realize this may sound contradictory, but by not trying to interfere with what is happening around and in us, we reduce the power of the influence. Try this meditation and see what you discover as you contemplate your inner world. Conduct this meditation as you teach, and you will become more aware of what is happening in your mind as you teach. Just “listen” to your mind as you teach. When you begin to listen to yourself as you teach, you may feel a sense of calmness of the mind because we are beginning to reach higher levels of awareness of our inner world, which will ultimately help

us better understand our outer teaching world.

However, in order to enter such a contemplative state, you must “let go” of your desire to control what you see and just let it happen. Trust yourself as you are most likely doing a good job as a teacher, but have never



taken the time before to look at yourself as you teach. In other words, we must let whatever will happen in our contemplations happen without any interference by anything. We just observe ourselves and allow whatever thoughts appear to enter our state of consciousness. The ultimate aim of letting go in such a contemplative state is to become more *mindful* of who we are as humans when we teach. Contemplation can help us reach this state of *mindfulness*, where we can experience an enhanced awareness of our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perceptions. I will talk in more detail about *mindfulness* in my next column.

Conclusion

In TESOL, we must be careful of encouraging teacher research, action research, and teacher cognition research solely as a one-dimensional, intellectual exercise, while overlooking the inner life of teachers, where such reflections are able to not only lead to awareness of teaching practices, but also to increased levels of self-awareness. We must remember that teachers are whole

persons and teaching is multidimensional (including the moral, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic). In order to tap into the whole person as a teacher and the multidimensional aspects of teaching, I have suggested in this article that teachers can engage in contemplative practice, a precursor to more systematic and evidence-based reflective

practice, because it can help teachers become more aware of themselves as human beings first. This is because contemplative practice places individuals at the center of the contemplative process, without trying to take any control or intervening with the contemplations so that we can become more aware of our surroundings in a more mindful way. Thus, engaging in contemplative practice means being able to consciously observe the self in the present moment simply by paying quiet attention to the “here and now,” without any intervention (“letting go”) so that we can become more aware of who we are as human beings (“letting come”). We can thus move from “letting go” to “letting come.” Try it!

Reference

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“Who I Am Is How I Teach”: The Mindful Teacher

By Thomas S.C. Farrell

The general purpose of engaging in reflection for all teachers is to get some kind of awareness of who we are as teachers, what we do, and why we do it. Becoming more aware of who we are as teachers means exploring our own inner-worlds through contemplation. In my previous article, I suggested that engaging in contemplative practice means consciously observing yourself in the present moment without any intervention (“letting go”) so that we can become more aware of who we are as human beings (“letting come”). I asked you to try it. In this article, I will give some detailed ideas about how teachers can bring this one step further by practicing mindfulness through four meditative techniques: insight meditation, mantra, visualization, and movement meditation. All these can be practiced alone or in combination as they are all very much

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connected. Research has indicated that when teachers contemplate while teaching, they not only became more mindful of their own attitudes towards their classroom practices, but also became more mindful of their students’ emotions and experiences.

Mindfulness

Contemplation can help us reach this state of mindfulness where we can experience an enhanced awareness of our thoughts,

feelings, emotions, and perceptions. It is important for us to become aware of our perceptual experiences as a detached observer so that we can also begin to examine them in light of our conscious experiences as teachers. I now present four meditative techniques: insight meditation, mantra, visualization, and movement meditation for the mindful teacher.

Insight meditation (or vipassanā, which means to “see” things as they really are) allows us to focus on what happens in each moment as it happens. We can accomplish this by just focusing on our breathing: when we breathe in and out, we just concentrate on this act and nothing else. Then, as we focus on our breathing, we can gain insight into the “self” as we watch various thoughts and emotions come and go because we do not react to any of them. Eventually, these thoughts and emotions get weaker and finally disappear. In this way, we are practicing insight meditation.

Mantra means “word” and the meditative activity is to use a “word” repeatedly (out loud or internally), either while sitting or in motion, as we continue with our normal daily activities. Singing out loud could also be a form of mantra meditation as the act of singing can lead to an inner calmness and also be a way of relaxing the mind (and even the body before teaching a class). Sing your favorite song out loud ten minutes before entering your next class. After you sing the song, note any physical or mental changes before and after singing. You could even get your students to sing out loud as well and see if their disposition towards learning has changed.

Visualization is a meditative technique where the practitioner visualizes a place (new or old) or a task, and remains in a general

state of openness while using this place as a type of sanctuary where you feel safe because this sanctuary is unique to you. As you see yourself inside this sanctuary, you become calm and just sit there and totally relax. Because this sanctuary is unique to you, it reflects who you are as a person as you “see” yourself relax, and then you begin to notice your personal visualization. We gain knowledge of the self as a result of meditating on our visualizations because these, too, are unique to the person who is meditating. You can try this before class and see if your attitudes (to your teaching, your students, and learning) change. You could also get your students to try it through English as it is all learning.



Movement meditation includes any body movement as meditation. The most popular types of movement meditation include yoga and its many different forms, tai-chi, but even a simple routine such as walking or jogging can also be considered movement meditation. My own preference for movement meditation is my practice of the discipline of *taekwondo*, a Korean martial art. I studied this wonderful art when I was in Korea for 18 years, and for me, the calming nature of the pre-stretching routine, along with the practice of kicking and other body movements and postures, allows for enhanced awareness of self through attention to mind, body, and spirit while in action. Apart from the physical benefits of feeling “high” after intense movement (the effect increased endorphins in the brain), I also have noticed that any negative pre-practice thoughts and energy have been fully transformed into positive thoughts and

energy as I go through the movements. Teachers can do simple stretching exercises or whatever body movements that relaxes the body and mind before they enter a class, or they can take a walk/jog during lunch hour and experience meditation through movement. Try some movement activities before you enter your next class, and note any physical and mental changes before and after your movements. You can also have your students move during class as a way to get them focused, and this is especially useful for teachers of young learners.

Conclusion

Mindfulness is the opposite of mindlessness, and unfortunately, much of our world gives us too many examples of the latter rather than the former. Mindful teachers have a different attitude than mindless teachers, and in this article, I have outlined and discussed four different meditative techniques that can help you be a mindful teacher. I hope at least one (if not more) of these appeals to you and helps you contemplate on who you are as a teacher. My favorite is movement meditation and my mantra is “Who I am is how I teach” (Farrell, 2015).

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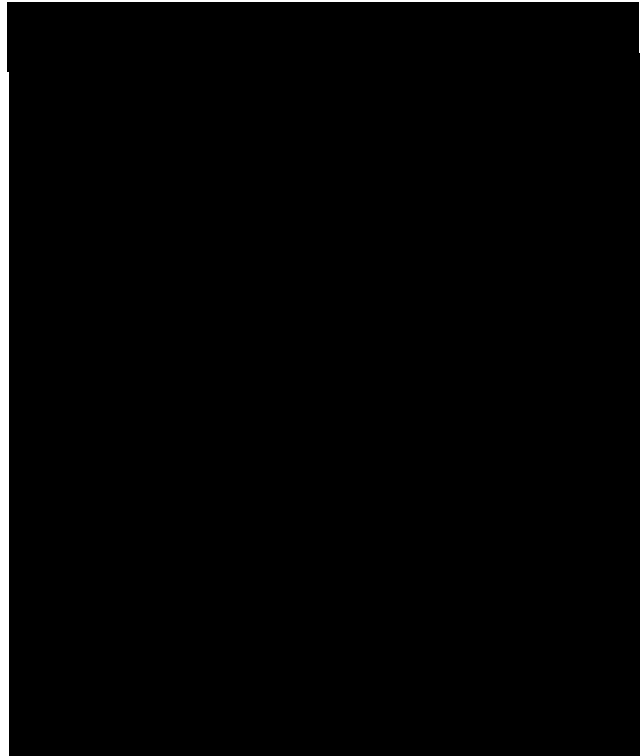
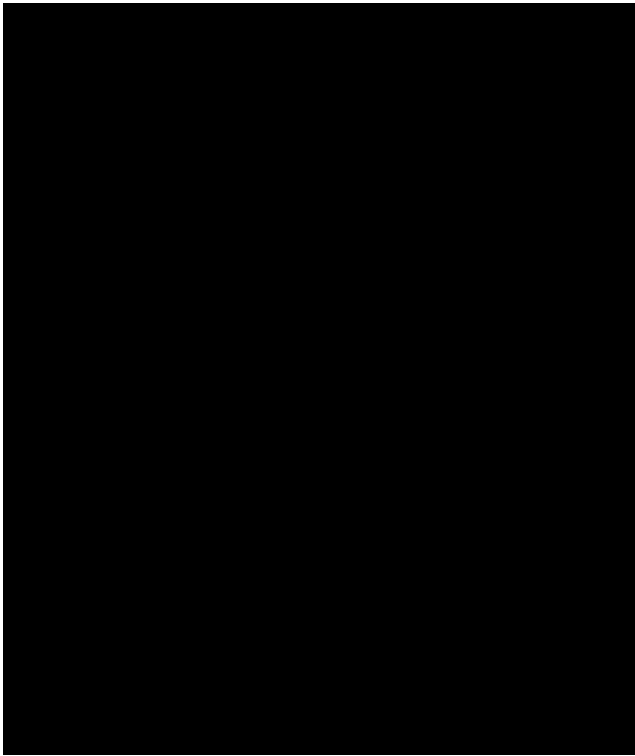
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Teacher Stories Through the “Tree of Life”

By Thomas S.C. Farrell

Editor’s Note: Our regular columnist Thomas Farrell will also be presenting at the KOTESOL International Conference this year, so be sure to go along and speak to him in person regarding ways to reflect on and boost your teaching career. He will deliver the opening plenary session on Saturday, October 15th at 11:30 am.

Introduction

In the previous three articles, I focused on the “teacher-as-person” lens for reflecting with the idea that the more self-knowledge we gain from such explorations, the better teachers we can become. As Palmer (1998, p. 3) noted, “Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well.” Teachers can gain more self-knowledge about the “who” of teachers through autobiographical sketches called the Tree of Life, which map out our personal history from our early experiences growing up to the present, either as a teacher or as a teacher-in-training.

Teacher Stories

People are experts when it comes to their own selves, so teachers can make better sense of seemingly random experiences in their own lives, especially when it comes to personal intuitive knowledge, and the expertise and experience that comes from their accumulated years as language educators. At the same time, teachers also have a safe and relatively non-judgmental environment where they can share any emotional stress they may have built up over the years, along with the isolating feeling of being in a classroom for many years without much reflection (Farrell, 2015). As Elbaz (1991, p. 3) succinctly put it, “Story is

the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense." I now outline and discuss one way teachers can establish their story chronologically using the Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life

The Tree of Life is divided into three parts: the roots, trunk, and limbs.

Roots

The roots of the tree provide the foundation of what has shaped our early years, such as our family values, heritage, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic background – anything that has shaped us in any way. I will use a real example from a teacher in Japan for each section of the tree:

Born Tokyo, Japan to Japanese mother and American (Caucasian) father. Japanese was my L1 until move to US age 4. No Japanese in my US community so had to speak English only. In school bullied because kept Japanese first name. I consciously rejected Japanese language and culture at this time because of these experiences.

Trunk

As we move from our early experiences at home, we move our storytelling to capturing experiences from early school years all the way up to our high school years, and we also focus on any experiences that may have led to developing our perspectives on teaching and teachers, such as a teacher you admired or did not admire:

Family trip to Japan at age 10. Partial reincorporation of my Japanese identity.

Limbs

This represents all of our experiences beyond high school and includes all our most recent experiences and influences. For example, each limb can represent an adult experience and/or action that has influenced or shaped our teaching selves:

After US university education returned to Japan to teach English in the JET Program. Reconnect with my Japanese grandparents and as a result adopted a new cultural identity with a positive

view of Japan and Japanese, but a negative view of English Education/TESOL. After a few years studying TESOL, got a "real" teaching job in Japan and began to see TESOL teaching as a viable career for the first time.

Conclusion

Reconstructing one's life experiences is to simply tell or write an in-depth biography that can offer insight into the past to uncover a philosophy of practice. This can be done by mapping out various past experiences on the Tree of Life and examining how these may have been impacted by one's culture, family upbringing, education, religion, community, and the various experiences that have helped shape someone as an individual and as a teacher. When teachers have reflected on their story, they can then consider how these past experiences have shaped or may have shaped their philosophy of practice. By reflecting on our chronological story, we can gain some insight into who we are as teachers, which is the essential foundation of our philosophy of practice.

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Language Teacher Research: Enlightenment or Academic Terrorism?

By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

In previous issues of TEC, I have written a lot about the importance of self-reflection where language teachers reflect not only on what they do but also *who* they are as human beings. In this issue, I want to address the growing popularity of “language teacher research,” which has been encouraged by many academics; I really wonder if this is truly for the benefit of teachers or if they are being manipulated to concentrate on what the academics want to research.

Language Teacher Research

For a long time, teachers – regardless of what subject they are teaching – have often felt a lack of ownership of what and how they teach. Teachers have been told what to do by so-called experts, and this has been the tradition in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). In the field of TESOL, we have had to endure many years of publishers dominating conferences, selling (supposedly teacher-proof) textbooks that all teachers should follow without question. Some teachers have followed these books and the methods within without question, but others have begun to question some of these approaches because they feel a lack of self-worth in the whole process.

So now, language teachers are being encouraged (mostly by academics, but also supported by some administrators) to engage in “teacher research” in order to gain more ownership of what they do. However, there are so many different terms used to identify teacher research (e.g., teacher research, practitioner-research, action research, collaborative action research, exploratory practice) that we do not really know what (or who) we are referring

to. Indeed, the presence of all these terms and how they are often used interchangeably is probably an indication that the “research” is being directed by academics who are interested in developing their own academic empires.

Academic Terrorism

When the word “research” is used in a publication, readers have particular expectations about what they will read in terms of the language that is used and how the research is presented. In most cases, research publications in education are written with a particular audience in mind: academics. Academics usually author these publications for many reasons, including their own academic advancement and the dissemination of their research results.

Many of these academic publications related to teaching contain papers that explain why language teachers teach in the way they do. This is research *on* teachers *by* academics *for* academic audiences. Such papers may be fine in themselves because they may advance both the knowledge base of the profession and (of course) the career of the author. However, there is an uneasiness in the relationship between academics and teachers; Elliott (1991, p. 52) has gone so far as to say that “academics tend to behave like terrorists” when they play the “role of theoretical handmaiden of practitioners” because

academics have hijacked the research process by reinterpreting it for their needs and to fit the theories they are formulating. In other words, the focus of the research is placed on what academics regard as important rather than the teacher. So what is really missing from the literature is the teacher’s perspective

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on what they consider important about what *they* do, or research *with* teachers, *by* teachers, and *for* teachers so that they can become enlightened about *their* practice.

Enlightenment

One of the main problems I have with the new push to encourage language teachers to engage in teacher research is that very issue of teacher perspective; the person at the center of *all* of the research seems to have been omitted in favor of what academics perceive as important, such as “fixing” some perceived problem in practice. I believe that it matters *who* the teacher is and that reflection is grounded in the beliefs that teachers are whole persons and teaching is not simply one-dimensional problem-solving, but is multi-dimensional and includes the *moral, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic* aspects of our practice (Farrell, 2015).

When we teachers are encouraged to research our practice by academics, we are asked to examine our lessons and teaching techniques with the idea of improving our teaching mainly to achieve educational objectives that have been designed by others. Teacher researchers busily go about gathering data from classroom observations and the like so that they can examine their teaching from a technical perspective. However, the moral, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects of what we do must also be taken into account if we are to transform our practice. I believe we cannot separate the teacher (person) from teaching (practice) because the teacher teaches in light of his or her life values or what he or she thinks is morally right. The only way that a teacher can “research” his or her practice from such a perspective is to engage in self-reflection (in the manner I have outlined in previous articles). We must be cautious of this recent call by academics for teachers to act as researchers because what may be efficient (and even effective) from a technical or methodological perspective may not be morally right for an individual teacher in a way that the teacher can maintain personal integrity (yes, we may

also wonder about an academic’s personal integrity). I believe the process of self-reflection can facilitate language teachers in becoming who they want to be as a second language teacher more so than language teacher research can.

Conclusion

When teachers engage in teacher research (with or without academics) on what they consider important, classrooms become places where teacher learning flourishes because they have become enlightened (rather than manipulated) by the results of their research and reflection. From a TESOL perspective, I should point out that I am firmly planted on the side of the “T” (teaching and teacher) and as such have spent my whole career (both as an ESL teacher and teacher educator) reflecting *with* teachers, *for* teachers – not for academics.

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“[The problem] with reflective practice is that it often ends up in the teacher’s head, not shared”: Reflecting on TESOL Twitter Bytes

by Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

Recently a friend was alerted to a Twitter comment that one of the main speakers at a major conference made (which is also the title of this article, although I added full words); the comment that was widely shared is: “[The problem] with reflective practice is that it often ends up in the teacher’s head, not shared.” The friend asked me what my reaction to this comment was. Of course, I realize that this is but one sentence and decontextualized, and so I wondered what the context was that the sentence was plucked from. When thus prompted, my friend then gave me further background that the speaker provided in the talk but not in the Twitter comment, that a “problem” with reflective practice is the problems of teacher isolation and that the discoveries in reflective practice

be a powerful social media networking mechanism and, for that reason alone, is very useful in instantly connecting language teachers from around the globe. It also seems to be an excellent form of self-promotion and many businesses are successfully using it in such a manner to promote their products. There are many more advantages of using Twitter for language teachers, I am sure, but from my (limited) observations the limitation of 140 characters leads to my main worry about this new form of “communication” for language teachers, which is that the comments, by their nature, are decontextualized. Thus, there often seems to be a need to come up with sensational one-liners about teaching and learning such as the tweet I am addressing in this article. However, those who have been involved with teaching and learning a second or



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seldom go beyond the individual teacher; according to my friend, the speaker’s main presentation centered on teacher learning communities. I have several reactions, including recognizing the danger of the Twitter bytes of information that emanate from conferences, but this is subordinate to my main reaction, which is more detailed as it concerns some of the ignorance that surrounds what reflective practice is and what it can do for language teachers.

Twitter

First, let me confess that I do not use Twitter and only occasionally read the bytes of information that appear there (usually in one or two sentences with a maximum of 140 characters in a tweet). It seems to

foreign language know how complex this is in terms of teaching and learning, and I believe they do not do justice to all the research that is ongoing that proves there are no simple cause-effect solutions nor answers to complicated issues such as teachers reflecting on their practice.

The Tweet: “...it often ends up in the teacher’s head”

Looking at this tweet bite (and not the context that was provided as it was not provided in the original tweet I was shown), one reads immediately that reflective practice has a big problem: “it often ends up in the teacher’s head” and is not shared. I am not sure if the speaker really understands why engaging in reflective

“We in the TESOL profession must be careful of always looking for sensational one-liners (encouraged by the limit of 140 characters) that are decontextualized and may be misleading to others reading them.”

practice is important for individual teachers, but it (i.e., self-reflection) *should* end up in the teacher’s head. Teachers engage in self-reflection with the idea of gaining self-understanding and self-knowledge, which is in *itself* a valid means of knowledge generation because the resulting self-awareness will provide such knowledge (Farrell, 2015). Some may say that such self-reflection is self-indulgent (as the tweet perhaps may be alluding to?), but as Palmer (1998, p. 3) correctly notes, “The work required to ‘know thyself’ is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge; it is a secret hidden in plain sight.” Which brings me to my final point about the importance of such self-reflection: it never really just stays in a teacher’s head because it goes beyond the teacher to his/her *students*, and who better to benefit than our students? I think in all the discussions related to encouraging TESOL teachers to engage in reflecting on their practice, we have somehow forgotten that the main reason for this is that our students will benefit as we become more aware of our practice so we can provide more learning opportunities for our students. Yes, we can share our reflections with other teachers, but what we share now as a result of self-reflection is the strong sense of personal identity that infuses our work.

Conclusion

In this article, I have cautioned that although Twitter

may be a wonderful means of networking and promotion among teachers worldwide, we in the TESOL profession must be careful of always looking for sensational one-liners (because of the limit of 140 characters – of course, there is a lot more I could have said in this article, but I too am restricted by space) that are decontextualized and may be misleading to others reading them. I used one particular recent tweet that was brought to my attention because it was related to a perceived “problem” with reflective practice in that it ends up in a teacher’s head and thus may not be useful. However, I have attempted to point out that the result of such self-reflection will not just stay in a teacher’s head because his or her students will be the ultimate beneficiaries of such engagement in reflective practice. As Palmer (1998, p. 2) relays, “Knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.”

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▲ <https://conference.iatefl.org/2018>

Day of Reflection

by Thomas S.C. Farrell

I will be in Seoul for the KOTESOL Day of Reflection 2017 workshops (Sept. 30, 2017), and so my column this issue is my interview with David Shaffer on questions related to this event and other issues pertinent to reflective practice.

Question: Would you mind telling us a little bit about yourself, your connections to Korea, and why you are so generous with your time to Korea TESOL?

Dr. Farrell: I arrived in Seoul, Korea, in May 1979 to teach English. I had just qualified as a teacher in Ireland in 1978, and after teaching one year there, I yearned to travel, and so I decided to travel across Europe, into Asia. I loved the place on arrival and stayed in Seoul for 18 years, and got married and had two daughters there. At that time, it was not so usual for a “foreigner,” as



I was called, to marry a local, so that was “exciting.” I started teaching in Yonsei University Foreign Language Institute immediately, and in 1980, I believe, I was sitting in the teacher’s room when four other teachers (including Dwight Strawn and Barbara Mintz) informed me that I was a founding member of Korea TESOL [then known as AETK] – yes, there was a Korea TESOL long before some in the current organization realize! From that time on, I have been in the background with Korea TESOL (I became the first editor of the Korea TESOL Journal, so I guess I moved a bit forward) and have always taken interest to this current day. I have discovered over the years that Korea TESOL has been very lucky to have had some really great people looking after its interests (rather than their own as is the case with many teacher organizations), people such as Dwight and Barbara from the early years as well as Carl Dusthimer, Rob Dickey, and Dave Shaffer. I have always kept interest with ELT developments in Korea since those early years and have always tried to give back to Korea because I spent my formative teaching years in EFL and language teacher education

in Korea. In fact, I started my first teacher reflection group in the early 1980s in Korea.

Q: How did you get involved in Reflective Practice in ELT?

As I mentioned, I really began reflecting while teaching in Korea in the early 1980s as I had reached a plateau of sorts in my professional development. I had been interested in how teachers see their world of practice from their point of view since I qualified as a teacher in Ireland in 1978 but was not sure how to go about it until I began readings in a new but complex concept called “Reflective Practice.” My readings led me onto a PhD in the early 1990s when not many in TESOL had yet heard about this concept. I did my dissertation on a teacher reflection group (what a wonderful group of teachers from Korea and Australia in the group) while in Korea, and it changed my professional life, really. Since I left Korea nearly 20 years ago, I have continued with this research.

Q: What do you think Reflective Practice is best at doing for us as language teachers?

When teachers engage in reflective practice, they systematically examine their practice in light of its impact on their students’ learning, and they use the evidence they obtain from this examination to make informed decisions about their teaching. In such a manner, they can become what I now call an integrated teacher because they have knowledge of who they are (their philosophy), why they do what they do (their principles), what they want to do (their theory), how they do it (their practice), and what it all means to them within their community (beyond practice).

Q: What advice would you give to teachers just starting out with Reflective Practice?

Beginning reflection can be a daunting task because it is similar to looking in the mirror and wondering “what do I look at”: my hair, eyebrows, clothes, etc., etc. Also you are seeing “you,” and some may not like what they see. So I would start gently by looking at the self and asking who you are as a person and what identity you want to have as a teacher. Then move onto asking what your assumptions, beliefs, and

conceptions are about teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language and where these come from? Then examine your theory of practice – how and why you plan the way you do and use the activities you use in lessons. Then examine your actual teaching. This can be done by recording your class and/or asking a colleague to observe particular aspects of your practice, such as your questioning during lessons, or your instructions, or your students' time on task (this list is endless and best made by each teacher). After this, you can examine how your teaching and the school you teach in reflect all your values (many of which you will have answered in the previous questions) and if you need to change any as a result. Although you have asked all these questions about what seems to be separate items, they are all linked closely together. This, of course, represents my new framework for reflecting on practice for TESOL teachers that has five stages/levels of reflection: Philosophy, Principles, Theory, Practice, and Beyond Practice (see Farrell, 2015, for more).

Q: You have worked with – written a book with – Jack Richards. Can you tell us about that experience and how it came about?

Actually, we have written two books together: the first was *Language Teacher Development* (Richards & Farrell, 2005) and the other is on teaching practice (Richards & Farrell, 2011). I have known Jack for many years, and especially in the early years in Korea, where he would come to the conferences in his yellow jacket, and I would introduce him for Korea TESOL. When I moved to Singapore, he and his partner were based at RELC for six months out of each year (for six years, I think), and we got together to write the first book. Then, when I moved to Canada, we wrote the second book. As everyone knows, he is at the top of our field in language teacher education, and so it was a great experience working with him. He is very intensive when writing, as I am myself. He has a great knowledge of the field and has made some wonderful contributions to language teacher education to bring the "T" (teacher and teaching) back into focus in TESOL. Without his contributions to the field, along with those of David Nunan and Donald Freeman, I believe that we would still be in a grammar/translation mode. Jack was great to work with, and I learned a lot from that experience in more ways than I could imagine.

Q: You are such a prolific writer in our field – 17 or 18 books at last count. How do you find the time to write with all your other endeavors: university teaching, worldwide conference appearances, writing journal papers, etc.?

Actually, I now have 31 books if counting single-authored, co-authored, edited, and translated – with two more about to appear in the next few weeks and another at the end of the year. My topic is reflective practice, and so I write as my reflection – how do I

know what I think until I see what I say!

Q: What are your plans for this short trip to Korea?

Actually, I will be on my way back from China, where I am invited to a language teacher education conference at Northeast Normal University, and whenever I am near Korea, I always want to return as I love the place. I am always ready and willing to contribute to Korea TESOL when I am around, so I am so grateful you are allowing me to reflect with you during this trip to Seoul.

Q: Do you have any words for Korea TESOL and the Reflective Practice SIG?

When I was in Korea last year at the annual conference, I met the current members of the RP-SIG, and I must say that it is in safe hands as they are all wonderful. I am sure their students are benefitting a lot from their teaching as well. I know that the SIG is benefitting a lot from their selfless work to help teachers be all that they can be. I am also at your service.

“Beginning reflection can be a daunting task because it is similar to looking in the mirror and wondering ‘what do I look at’: my hair, eyebrows, clothes...?”

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Note. For more information on the presenters and presentations at the all-day Day of Reflection 2017 workshops on September 30, go to the Reflective Practice SIG website: <https://koreatesol.org/content/day-reflection-2017>

Classroom-Oriented Research: Why Teachers Matter

by Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

Recently I was invited to give a plenary at a conference in Poland that was titled “Classroom-Oriented Research” and most, if not all, of the other invited presenters from overseas institutions were from the second language acquisition (SLA) field. Why I mention this is that not one paper considered teachers in these classrooms where the so-called research took place. In this article, I want to highlight why teachers should be included in any classroom-oriented research because they will be the ones that truly matter when it comes to putting or not putting the results of any research into practice.

Classroom-Oriented Research

Diane Larsen-Freeman pointed out at an earlier conference in Poland some years before on this very theme that classroom-oriented research is important, especially when it is explicitly directed towards understanding effective learning *and teaching*. I put the latter two words in italics on purpose because, although she includes teaching, many scholars who

“Teachers are not mechanical robots who should implement research results because some isolated study in a completely different context suggests that a particular method will work.”

conduct research in classrooms do not. The conference I was at in Poland on classroom-oriented research suggested that such a conference can provide a forum for disseminating latest research findings in this area, which is critical for foreign and second language pedagogy and, as such, will be relevant to language teachers wishing to enhance their instructional practices.

However, a closer look at most of the papers that were presented revealed that the main focus of the

“classroom” research was on the learner; the teacher was not highlighted in any manner, with the idea being that research on the learner is more important than that on the teacher who conducts the lesson. When the teacher is included (rarely) in any discussion of SLA research, the emphasis is on his or her technical competency in putting into practice whatever results this research unearths (although from my knowledge, SLA research continues to unearth inconclusive research results!).

Teachers Matter

So I would argue that it is time that such research (SLA, classroom-oriented research) considered the teacher as well – teachers matter to learners of English as an additional language while they are learning in the classroom. Some SLA classroom-oriented research has begun to notice that teachers do exist (this is sometimes called *instructed SLA research*); however, the teacher is still considered in terms of technical competencies in the target areas of instruction (i.e., how he or she can implement SLA research results), classroom management (i.e., the control of learners), assessment (i.e., how he or she can assess if the target learning has taken place), and other professional responsibilities imposed by others.

In the above scenario, I believe that although instructed SLA research does include teachers, it does so reluctantly because the teachers are needed in a practical sense, but the researchers want the teachers to mechanically implement the results of *their* research without any consultation with the teacher. Many researchers seem to think that learners would learn more efficiently if only the teacher would implement this in the way research suggests! Or teachers do not really matter because SLA research will simply *tell* them what to do.

It is apparent that a great deal of SLA research (including instructed SLA) ignores teachers as individuals and teaching as a complex act that requires the teacher to be a reflective practitioner who is striving to provide learning opportunities for his or her students based on their needs and not the needs of the academic or researcher. The above approach views teachers as being incapable of being responsive, creative, and integrated practitioners who are responsible for their students’ learning. Many in SLA

research would take away this responsibility and let the research results direct the focus of the lesson (e.g., the usual SLA call for “focus on form”).

Implementing this SLA research approach in TESOL teaching has been the driving force of our profession for far too long and to ignore the teacher as a person will continue to lead to teacher burnout and attrition because teachers are considered cogs in a research machine. This SLA approach will continue to result in teachers being provided with more methods (derived from SLA research) and more strategies (that result in more rubrics and checklists) that continue to tell the teacher that he or she does not really matter, a mindset that publishers have also contributed to over the years with the addition of teacher manuals so that they can follow the dots!

From my most recent travels this year in places such as the Middle East, Asia, North America, and Europe, I believe that TESOL teachers are more sophisticated and aware of trends in the field as well as the results of SLA research (mostly inconclusive), and they are not buying it anymore, regardless of what they are being presented in teacher education programs by scholars who have no real clue about what actually happens in an EFL/ESL classroom. In fact, a few years ago, I was invited to Korea TESOL, and one of the other plenary speakers said in his opening that he had no experience as a language teacher, and he wondered why he has had such a long career as a professor training teachers! Well, yes, I agree and wonder why we as a profession still allow this.

A Way Forward

I believe that teachers do matter, and the success or failure of a lesson will rest with how the teacher approaches that lesson as a human being. Teachers are not mechanical robots who should implement research results because some isolated study in a completely different context suggests that a particular method will work. I believe that the teacher is the method! Teachers can ask questions and think creatively, reflectively, and imaginatively about teaching and learning as they visualize their classrooms. Teachers cannot, and should not, shut off their emotions, feelings, or senses as they attempt to implement some other person’s method; rather they should pay attention to their inner lives, as well as the lives of their students. This approach points towards the development of an integrated teacher who is self-aware, aware of his or her students’ needs, and aware of the learning context, and who interprets his or her professional practice to be of an emotional rather than a mechanical nature.

Conclusion

Classroom-oriented research does have a place in our profession, but it should be put in its place and not

be allowed to dominate as it has for the past 20 years or more. We can listen to and read the results of SLA research (and I believe that many teachers do), but we should refuse to be blown off our feet by any of their results because there is more to teaching than implementing the results of others’ research, especially if we believe that the teacher is the method. Teachers do matter, and classroom-oriented research should

“The main focus of the ‘classroom’ research was on the learner; the teacher was not highlighted in any manner, with the idea being that research on the learner is more important than that on the teacher who conducts the lesson.”

not forget that teaching is multidimensional (not just cause and effect or input to output) in that it has moral, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions that are important and complex. Remember, the first letter of the acronym of TESOL is “teaching” and “teachers.” Such an acknowledgement requires teachers to be reflective practitioners who are integrated and responsive to their students’ needs (Farrell, 2015).

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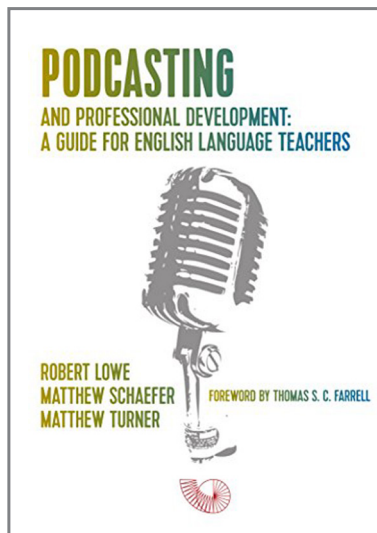


Online Reflective Practice for TESOL Teachers

by Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

With the constant advances in technology, TESOL teachers are increasingly participating in online reflective communities for their professional development, especially in Korea. These online communities are said to provide teachers with supportive and collaborative reflective discussions in which they can share teaching techniques, explore new ways of teaching, and pursue their individual interests related to their own professional development. This article explores the issue of how language teachers can communicate online as a means of facilitating their reflections on practice.



Online Reflection

Advances in technology have allowed teachers to become members of online communities that really signify the advent of second-generation uses (or Web 2.0) of the Internet rather than the “old” first-generation users (or Web 1.0 – such as this author). Whereas Web 1.0 was mostly one-way communication, Web 2.0 encourages more engaging two-way communication and has allowed any teacher with a computer to set up communication modes such as blogs, social networking sites, and wikis without much knowledge of technology. These types of communication offer more opportunities for teachers to connect with each other regardless of where they live in the world and, in such a manner, can offer support, mentorship, and the chance to engage in endless professional dialogue. There are now many online format methods (too many to cover in this article) that language teachers have at their disposal when looking to facilitate their reflections on practice such as blogs, social media (Twitter), and podcasts. In fact, research on language teachers’ use of online formats to facilitate their engagement in reflective practice has revealed the following about such online formats (Farrell, 2018a):

- It combats teacher isolation.

- Teachers can discuss identity, beliefs, theory, practice and beyond practice.
- Teachers can get new ideas for practice.
- Teachers can share emotions as it allows for the socio-emotional dimension of a learning community.
- Users can experience a sense of camaraderie.
- It promotes collaborative learning.

Blogs

Blogs are probably the easiest to set up by language teachers who have little expertise in the technological skills needed for more complicated formats and are a way for teachers to express and share their thoughts, emotions, opinions, and reflections online with other professionals. Blogs can be easily updated when the teacher wants to add further thoughts, opinions, and reflections. Some teachers can read other, more established blogs to help them in their reflections, such as in Korea, with Michael Griffin’s wonderful blog, *ELT Rants, Reviews, and Reflections*. Michael states in his blog that he is “hoping to share and develop my thoughts about ELT and teacher development” and after reading some of his entries, I think he has more than accomplished this. Language teacher educators are also now using blogs in teacher education courses more often to help student teachers to reflect on theory and practice, and report that the results of blogging are largely positive as blogs provide powerful organizational forums for online expression and most pre-service teachers are willing to continue blogging when they

“Twitter has brought many language teachers from all over the globe together and can be a positive means of pursuing professional development for teachers, but I believe it is not without its problems.”

begin their teaching careers. Although blogs have begun to wane somewhat in ELT since the early 2000s, they are nevertheless still used by teachers and teacher educators as a means of self-discovery and reflection, and are still an important means of pursuing and continuing professional development.

Twitter

Social media has taken the world by storm, as well as the ELT world, with many language teachers in different countries having their own Twitter accounts. Twitter is fast becoming very popular as a form of communication and interaction for language teachers in many different contexts. Teachers also use Twitter when seeking advice about a particular way to teach one of the skills, to undertake research, or to find out if others had similar experiences with a particular method of teaching. Twitter has brought many language teachers from all over the globe together and can be a positive means of pursuing professional development for teachers, but I believe it is not without its problems as I outlined in my previous TEC article "[The Problem] with Reflective Practice Is That It Often Ends Up in the Teacher's Head, not Shared": Reflecting on TESOL Twitter Bites" (Farrell, 2017).



Podcasts

In their recent book, *Podcasting and Professional Development: A Guide for English Language Teachers*, Rob Lowe, Matthew Schaefer, and Matthew Turner (2017) have written extensively about the use of podcasts as an important means for language teachers to engage in personal reflections and, if they want, to share these reflections with a worldwide audience. I was honored to be asked to write the forward to this book, and I learned a lot from reading it. They suggest that teachers can individually, or in collaboration with what they call co-podcasters, record their thoughts online as a means of promoting self-reflection and professional development. Most importantly, they suggested that teachers can use podcasting for the purposes of professional development, some of which are improving teaching ability, improving teacher talk, and developing reflective learners. They have created their own podcast called *TEFLology*, and I was honored to have been interviewed by the authors when I was in Tokyo recently. This interview is available at <https://teflology-podcast.com/2015/08/19/tefl->

[interviews-13-thomas-farrell-on-reflective-practice-in-tesol/](#)

Conclusion

This article has outlined and discussed the use of online tools to facilitate and promote reflective practice for language teachers, such as blogs, chats, Twitter from social media, and podcasts, to name but a few (from Farrell, 2018b). Many of these can be used in conjunction with other modes of reflection such as online journals, online communities of practice with teacher group discussions to share, discuss, evaluate, reflect, and promote the professional development of language

"[Web 2.0] types of communication offers more opportunities for teachers to connect with each other regardless of where they live in the world and can offer them support, mentorship, and the chance to engage in endless professional dialogue."

teachers. Such an online community of teachers can extend reflective practice beyond the normal face-to-face interactions and trigger reflection within a wider community of practice that has a global reach.

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Encouraging Teachers to Engage in Reflective Practice: An Asian Focus

By Dr. Thomas S. C. Farrell



Dr. Thomas Farrell

Introduction

In a very early article in TEC, Donald Freeman (1998) reminded us that language teachers are best suited to carry out research in their own classrooms because they are “more insiders to their settings than researchers whose work lives are elsewhere” (p. 6).

In one of my recent TEC articles last year, I suggested that teachers matter when conducting research because they will be the ones that truly matter when it comes to putting or not putting the results of any research into practice (Farrell, 2017). Now as a follow up, in this article I want to outline some topics that teachers in Korea can consider reflecting on in terms of

classroom-oriented research. These topics come from a book I edited on language teacher research in Asia (Farrell, 2006), and I believe that teachers in Korea can replicate many or all of these studies in their own contexts and thus “get their feet wet” when reflecting on their practice.

Reflecting on Practice

I am the editor of TESOL’s Language Teacher Research series that reported studies outlining how language teachers systematically reflected on their own practice on six different continents (68 different chapters in total), including Asia. *Language Teacher Research in Asia* (Farrell, 2006) presented research that was conducted by language teachers at all levels, with countries representing both north and south Asia. Table 1 summarizes some the Asian topics, their methods of research, the results, and the author(s) reflections.

Table 1: Language Teacher Research in Asia

| Topic / Issue | Method | Results | Reflections |
|---|--|---|---|
| Improve writing | Teach genre | Students’ writing improved | Continue using genre |
| Expert and non-expert teachers differences | Diaries, lesson plans, observations, interviews | Non-expert teachers used surface approaches; experts applied concepts beyond the course | Teachers need regular opportunities to reflect |
| Learner autonomously | Observations, interviews | Independent work does not always mean independent learning | Teachers should “step back” during independent work |
| What student teachers learn | Pre-course and post-course concept maps | Students showed more detail in answers, but lack complexity | Reflection with concept maps useful |
| Impact of self-access language learning centers | Questionnaires, implementation of self-access center | Hours spent voluntarily at center indication of usefulness of program | Diverse learning preferences and needs served in centers |
| Improve students’ listening | Questionnaires | Used more cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies | Students developed greater self-awareness as learners |
| Balance language learning and testing | Student survey | Students wanted more TOEFL test instruction | Importance of curriculum review; consult stakeholders |
| Student impressions of lessons | Learning logs, course evaluations | Students focused on process and content | Teacher learned impressions students develop on lessons |
| Implementing Project-Based Learning | PBL program, class discussions, observations | Success dependent on appropriate planning, implementation, and assessment | Use materials appropriate to linguistic abilities & interests of students |
| Increase willingness to communicate in L2 | Teaching journal, audio-recorded lessons, peer observation | Comprehension and participation better when content familiar | Need to increase student extrinsic motivation |

A common theme revealed in Table 1 is how teachers can improve student performance in various aspects of language learning with the majority of researchers using some kind of qualitative research method as their preferred mode of data collection. More specifically, the topics tended to focus on the learner, learning, how learning can become more autonomous, creating a self-access language learning center in a high school, and developing project-based learning, to name but a few. The reflecting teachers tended to use interviews, observations, and questionnaires as their preferred modes of data collection, and this seems to be common for many teachers in other contexts as well.

Conclusion

Many teachers think that they have nothing to say or reflect on concerning their practice. However, as the results of the research previously conducted in Asian settings confirm, teachers have plenty to say, and the topics of over ten years ago remain today. Teachers who reflect on their practice can generate new understandings and knowledge of their own workplace, and thus become generators rather than consumers of others' research. More often than not,

the results of such research generated by others (i.e., teacher cognition research) rarely gets back to the teachers or to the institutions that hosted the outside researchers in the first place. Of course, teachers in Korea and elsewhere can reflect on different topics than those summarized above. But if teachers want to experience reflection by replicating the studies outlined above in their own context and by following the same methods, they can experience the reflecting process in a less stressful manner while at the same time learning how to reflect on their own practice

“Teachers ... truly matter when it comes to putting or not putting the results of any research into practice.”

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Teacher Evaluation Through Reflective Practice

By Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

Recently, I designed a framework for reflecting on practice that operationalizes reflective practice for TESOL teachers (Farrell, 2015). This holistic framework has five stages – *philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice* – where TESOL teachers collect information about themselves and their practices at each of these stages. I believe that the information collected by such detailed reflections on each of the five stages together can be used for teacher evaluation because reflection and assessment are deeply connected: the ability to reflect effectively requires that teachers self-access their philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice, and of course, this is circular as the ability to self-access also depends on the ability to reflect effectively. In this paper, I discuss how teachers can use the contents of their reflections for the purposes of teacher evaluation.

Teacher Evaluation

It is a fact of life that for most TESOL teachers, they will be evaluated in some capacity over their careers. Although each teacher evaluation may vary, the evaluation process invariably involves observations of some kind of the teacher in action in the classroom by someone who “visits” or drops-in on the class on one or more days to appraise “features” of the teacher’s teaching behaviors. These “features” (usually in terms of behaviors) are often pre-determined by others (inside or outside the school) and presented as checkmarks on what is commonly called a teacher evaluation form. Such approaches to teacher evaluations have many shortcomings that include the following: no agreement

“good” is based on preconceived opinions that may (or may not) be based on the most up-to-date developments in research associated with the latest methods and approaches. For example, I have had the opportunity to observe teachers in schools worldwide that still favor behaviorism and teacher-centered/controlled lessons; however, these same teachers are being trained in up-to-date developments that include more learner-centered approaches that are not considered “good” by their supervisors.

This leads to another flaw with the usual approach to teacher evaluation: the rating scales that are used to rate specific activities teachers engage in. Many of these rating scales consist of some type of single (dichotomous) measure such as “satisfactory” or “needs improvement” or a rating scale that is numbered from “1” to “4” with one of these numbers more desirable than the other. Other popular scales have supervisors/observers rate teaching items as “low,” “medium,” or “high,” or they are asked if they “strongly agree,” “agree,” “uncertain,” “disagree,” “strongly disagree,” and so on. The problem here is that such rating lacks any precision (what is the difference between “strongly agree” and “agree” anyway?). This rating system leads to a lack of trust on the teachers’ part because they tend not to trust administrators/supervisors’ ability to rate them, or worse, because of perceptions of favoritism for teachers who are more “cooperative” in the school than others, regardless of their ability to teach. Indeed, some teachers have suggested that they believe that real purpose of such evaluations is to find fault – what you are doing wrong in a “gotcha” moment – rather than fair evaluations.

Such approaches are conducted by a supervisor in a top-down, hierarchical process with the only evidence of teaching performance collected by the supervisor in the form of “feedback.” Indeed, for the most part, the supervisor is the only one who takes notes, writes them up, and provides feedback on performance that produces one-way communication as the teacher is rarely asked to provide feedback about the process. The resulting one-way conversation about the evaluation is not really illuminating for the teacher, and I also suspect, for the supervisor: the teacher does not find the process professionally rewarding, and the supervisor does not really learn anything about the teacher.

So there is something of a standoff between the teacher who is being evaluated and the supervisor who is evaluating, resulting in a culture of passivity and protection where many times teachers perform “canned” lessons (i.e., pre-prepared for evaluations and students coached) that try to reproduce many of the items on the checklist rather than teach the students at hand. In

“A teaching portfolio is not a one-time snapshot of where the teacher is at present; rather, it is an evolving collection of carefully selected professional experiences, thoughts, and goals.”

on what “good” teaching is, rating of teaching behaviors is ambiguous, and the process is top-down. I will outline some of the shortcomings of such usual teacher evaluations and outline how reflection can be a more collaborative and beneficial method to both the teacher who is being evaluated and the supervisor doing the evaluation (and the school) because both discuss a teacher’s development over time.

One immediate problem with evaluating teachers on “good teaching” is that there is still no agreement on what “good” means in all situations. Many times then,

fact, many teachers have confided in me that they have used the *same* lesson for years with different supervisors when they know the day and time of the evaluation. Thus, we can say with certainty that many current teacher evaluation systems have deficiencies. Thus, the teacher who is teaching is separated from the act of teaching because the teacher is being evaluated in terms of what he or she does rather than on whom he or she is.

In order to rectify this standoff, we must consider two sides/views of the evaluation process: the teacher's side and the supervisor's side. Many teachers maintain that evaluations are biased because they are conducted through a supervisor's subjective lens that rarely produces lasting professional effects for them as they continue their teaching. On the other side, many supervisors maintain that they are required to evaluate their teachers and that they feel this is somewhat of a burden for them because they realize that "drop-in" classroom observations that require them to fill out a predetermined checklist may not reveal the overall true ability of the teacher being evaluated. Thus, teacher evaluation is considered onerous by both teachers who do not find them helpful to improve any aspects of their practice and for supervisors who find the process not very helpful when trying to gauge a teacher's overall performance.

Teacher evaluations can be more collaborative, however, if both sides share the burden of evaluation, and this can be encouraged if teachers are given more responsibility in the evaluation process. In other words, we can shift the burden of evaluation from being solely on the shoulders of administrators and supervisors to more of a sharing process where each teacher is required to compile a teaching portfolio that includes their philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice reflections.

Teacher Portfolios

Teacher portfolios for reflective and teacher evaluation purposes can act as a "mirror" and a "map." The portfolio as a "mirror" allows teachers to "see" their development in terms of their philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice over time. The portfolio as a "map" symbolizes creating a plan and setting goals for where teachers want to go in the future. Both of these metaphors are an excellent means for providing structure for teachers who want to engage in self-reflection and self-assessment. A teaching portfolio is not a one-time snapshot of where the teacher is at present; rather, it is an evolving collection of carefully selected professional experiences, thoughts, and goals.

This teaching portfolio (either paper-based or electronic) can thus be used for evaluation purposes because it will reflect the teacher's philosophy, principles, theory, practice examples, and critical reflection. In such a manner, teaching portfolios can provide teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and collaboration with colleagues, in addition to opportunities to collaborate with the school for the purpose of teacher evaluation as well as planning individual professional development

paths. If teachers are evaluated with the use of a teaching portfolio that showcases the contents of their teaching philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond-practice critical reflection where teachers and supervisors engage in collaborative discussions, then the school and institution will benefit. Such a process encourages a culture of self-reflection and self-evaluation in the school while at the same time it eases some of the burden supervisors feel when evaluating teachers. Supervisors (and the school/institution) in collaboration with the teachers can then establish criteria that will be used to assess the contents of the portfolio. Both must decide if each stage of the assembled items will be assessed or if the portfolio will be assessed as a whole.

I believe that each institution together with its teachers must negotiate such details rather than have some outsider decide. That said, if the portfolio is to be assessed as a whole, then each teacher should express the meaning of the contents for them. In other words, each teacher can conclude their teaching portfolio with a reflective essay or commentary in which he or she reviews the meaning of the portfolio for himself or herself and perhaps how each stage links and is interconnected with other stages. In this manner, we can see that the portfolio is not simply a set of unrelated documents; rather, it is supported by each teacher's explanation of the goals, contents, and meaning of the portfolio as a whole and of the different items within it.

Conclusion

Teaching portfolios can provide teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and collaboration with colleagues. Teaching portfolios can provide teachers with opportunities to plan their own professional development journey. When teachers create their own teaching portfolios and compile information gathered at each stage of the framework, they can explain to supervisors how and why they teach the way they do. Teacher portfolios can also be used for evaluation in an institution and such an approach to teacher evaluation encourages collaboration between supervisors and teachers.

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Professional Development for Language Teachers: More Higher Education?

By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell

I travel a lot to give talks to practicing teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), and increasingly these days, I am getting the same question from many of the teachers who attend my talks: Should I do a PhD or any equivalent doctoral work? Well, this is definitely a time for some serious, self-initiated, self-directed self-reflection. In this short article, I will attempt to point out some of my thoughts on this issue, with the hope of providing some ideas for those teachers considering such a move into even higher education.

More Higher Education?

So you have a job in a university language school or a university department teaching English to speakers of other languages. Some teachers do not like to say they teach English conversation, but instead say the courses are on cross-cultural communication or the like. Regardless of what you call your courses, you have settled into a nice lifestyle in that particular country. You are in an educational environment, where perhaps people call you “professor” because you teach in a

also, you have secured your master’s degree (be it online or on campus, and you feel even more settled and qualified to teach English to speakers of other languages.

Some years pass, and you have even more experience beyond your master’s degree, but you notice some changes on the horizon. Perhaps you are in a country where your contract lasts five years, and then you must move to another university for another five-year contract and so on. Perhaps you feel then that if you do an even higher degree (e.g., a PhD or an EdD) you will be able to apply for “real” university professor jobs that were ruled out before because you did not have that higher degree. Then you begin to think more and more about “doing” a PhD (doctor of philosophy) or EdD (doctor of education) because you think you “need” it to stay competitive in your current context.

Herein lies the dilemma: You are feeling insecure as most of the other younger teachers who have entered the country/context you have been in for the past five to ten years already have master degrees and you are feeling the pressure from them, too. You begin to wonder what the future is, as you get older in your present context, and what lies ahead in an increasingly competitive environment where working conditions may be getting worse in terms of pay, contract security and length, and overall working conditions. Then you really begin to consider doing a PhD or EdD.

Danger or Opportunity?

The Chinese characters for *change* (更改) mean “danger” and “opportunity,” and I feel this is really applicable to our present discussion: If a TESOL teacher who has a master’s degree wants to “do” a PhD, there is the “danger” that he or she will be overqualified for their present position, but there is also an “opportunity” to not only learn about something in detail but also the “opportunity” to move on or up.

First of all, let’s examine the sentences: “I want to do a PhD” and “I must do a PhD”! The first sentence is problematic in that one does not “do” a PhD because it is just an end in itself; one studies a particular topic that holds a lot of interest, and this study will lead to a PhD. The second sentence is also problematic because “must do” means that you are doing it in response to some outside pressure (such as those discussed above), not really because you “want” to!

“To consider studying for a doctor’s degree is an important decision for a TESOL teacher given the availability of jobs at the end of this journey, as well as the need to really ‘do’ a PhD.”

university setting, and you are becoming influenced more and more from the constant discussions you may be having with students about their plans to study in a Western university setting, and by some of the professors who may be going on sabbatical or to conferences in these Western settings, too. Perhaps

Secondly, one must consider the commitment it takes to “do” a PhD (or EdD) in terms of time and money. It will be six years or so, part-time, and this will be “done” in the prime of your life, when you may also be raising a family and have other obligations to consider a bit later. In addition, if a PhD is “done” part-time, one must consider whether there is value for money (and time) given that most of it will be “done” on the internet, and candidates will not receive the same socialization benefits that students receive if they “do” a PhD on campus full time. This socialization process includes going to conferences with your supervisor, meeting other professors with your supervisor, talking regularly with your supervisor face-to-face, asking questions, picking up things you see while interacting with your supervisor, and above all, networking with your supervisor and his/her networks, and much more.

Thirdly, and most importantly I am guessing, one must consider what one will do with the PhD once conferred. Will it mean that you can join another line, equally as long as the master’s degree line you just left, in the hope of getting that tenure-track job that may not even exist? Remember that PhD programs are churning out students every year from full-time programs that have full networks already in existence in the home country, and the line for these jobs is already long. Or will it be a case of degree inflation, where you now will be called “professor” or “doctor” to continue doing the job you were already doing with your master’s degree?

Conclusion

I wrote this article in response to the many questions I get from TESOL teachers who already have a master’s degree and wonder what comes next. Teaching is a “front-loaded” job in that we receive all the professional privileges on entry, and there is no real improvement throughout a teacher’s career. To consider studying for a doctor’s degree is an important decision for a TESOL teacher, given the availability of jobs at the end of this journey, as well as the need to really “do” a PhD. Such a decision will involve some serious self-initiated, self-directed self-reflection. I hope this article helps teachers begin this self-reflection.

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Eight Essential Characteristics of “Student-Centered” Instruction

By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

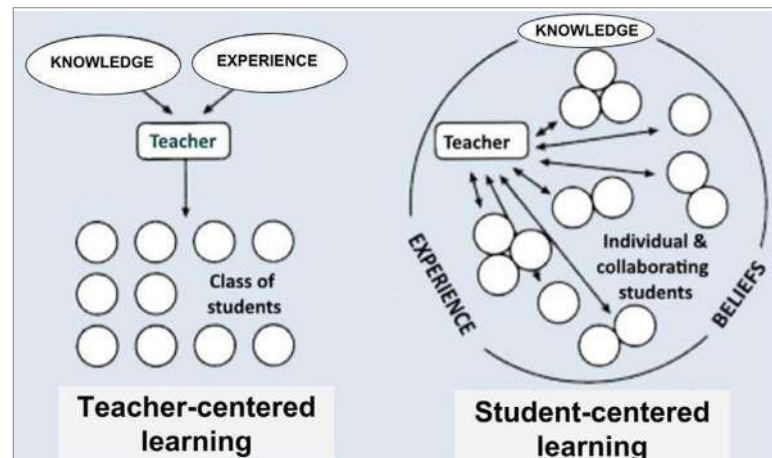
I have heard from many TESOL (teachers of English to speakers of other languages) that they are “student-centered” in their approach to instruction. When pushed to define what this means, many respond that this is “opposite” to a “teacher-centered” approach where the teacher speaks most of the time or more than the students. The main point many teachers want to make is that both “student-centered” and “teacher-centered” sit on opposite ends of a continuum and are thus very different ways of instructing second language students. Is this a correct interpretation of what it means to be “student-centered” (or “teacher-centered”)? I believe that it is not so easy to define each and that there has been, over the years, a lot of disagreement about what so-called “student-centered” learning and teaching actually is. In this article, I would like to reflect on what I think these approaches to instruction mean.

Eight Essential Characteristics of Student-Centered Instruction

Since the development of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the 1970s, learners have been encouraged to produce the second language they are learning with more of a focus on fluency and where errors are seen as being as part of development. Before this, in “traditional” second language classes, teachers were seen as the knowledge providers and sole controller of the class. In the communicative language teaching approach, English language teachers were encouraged to share this control and “facilitate” learning rather than just dispensing knowledge. Of course, I want to acknowledge that this interpretation of CLT is somewhat general, and today there still exists as many diverse interpretations of CLT as there are language teachers and second language educators. The point I want to make, however, is that it sets the scene for the acknowledging of a shift in the role of the teacher in second language learning and teaching from knowledge transmission expert to where they share learning (Farrell & Jacobs, forthcoming).

It would be clear if that were, in fact, the meaning of “student-centered” teaching, where the teacher gives up more control to the students with the idea that this will promote more learning. However, there is a lot more involved when interpreting student-centered teaching, so I suggest the following eight characteristics as key essentials for the successful implementation of a student-centered approach to language teaching. These eight essentials are (a)

encourage learner autonomy, (b) emphasize the social nature of learning, (c) develop curricular integration, (d) focus on meaning, (e) celebrate diversity, (f) expand thinking skills, (g) utilize alternative assessment methods, and (h) promote English language teachers as co-learners (from Farrell & Jacobs, forthcoming)



Learner Autonomy

When implementing a CLT approach to instruction, teachers focus more on the role of learners for instruction to be considered “student-centered.” In other words, the center of attention in learning English as a second/foreign language has shifted from the teacher to the student, or from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. Learner autonomy is a key concept here: learners have an important share of the responsibility for and control over their own learning.

Social Nature of Learning

To be social in learning, some form of interaction and cooperation is necessary within a CLT approach to instruction. Greater attention is placed on the social nature of learning English as a second/foreign language rather than on students as separate, decontextualized individuals. To understand and promote learning, student-centered teachers look not only at individuals but also at the people who make up their world and the connections among them to include not only teachers but also peers, administrators, and people in the outside community. Cooperation is valued over but not exclusively in place of competition or working alone.

Curricular Integration

Curricular integration refers to a second language pedagogical approach that fuses knowledge from

different disciplines to create more meaningful contexts for overall learning. With a communicative language teaching approach to instruction, the integrated approach purposefully and systematically guides second language students toward discovering these connections and processes, connections and processes that help ESL/EFL students better understand themselves and the world around them. In its highest form, this student-centered approach uses real-life issues and varied resources to bring students as close to the “real thing” as possible. Furthermore, integration can also include integrating the various language skills as well as integrating the academic with the social and emotional.

Focus on Meaning

For this essential, student-centered teachers focus instruction for their students on learning English as a second/foreign language for purposes other than just passing exams. Education is not just preparation for life; it is also participation *in* life. Students understand the purposes of learning and develop their own purposes for learning regardless of the subject. Within learning English as a second/foreign language, student-centered teachers suggest that understanding also involves their students’ comprehension of what they are learning rather than learning by rote learning methods, such as drills, so that they can be educated as complete human beings.

Diversity

Student-centered teachers celebrate diversity among second language learners and see this diversity as a plus in their English as a second/foreign language classes. Student-centered teachers focus on discerning, taking into account, and appreciating differences among second language learners and consider all second language students to be unique. This uniqueness includes differences not only in first language backgrounds but also in intelligence profile, personality, and such other background factors as race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sex, and sexual preference.

Thinking Skills

For this essential, student-centered teachers focus on how students learn, rather than looking only at what they produce, through a process of expanding their thinking skills. This emphasis on process rather than just on end product encourages second language students and teachers to promote reflection on one’s thinking, to encourage deeper critical thinking and more varied ways of solving problems, and to gain a clearer sense of how to approach questioning how things are done. With an appreciation of the complexity, uncertainty, non-linearity, and instability of knowledge in learning a second language, students not only come to see change as a constant but also recognize that learning a second language is a lifelong process.

Alternative Assessment

Student-centered teachers recognize that within a CLT approach to second language education, while standardized, objective-item tests do provide relevant information, sole reliance on such measures blinds us to a great deal of what is important in education. Student-centered teachers maintain that more alternative assessments connect closely with real-world purposes. Furthermore, this type of assessment is done not mainly by outsiders but, more importantly, by those actually in the classroom (peers), who grasp the particular context in all its complexity. Thus, alternative assessment includes students assessing themselves, peers, and the “how” and “what” of their English as a second/foreign language learning.

Teachers as Co-learners

Student-centered teachers recognize that language teachers do not principally possess knowledge that is to be passed on to students; instead, student-centered teachers learn along with second language students because knowledge is dynamic and learning is a lifelong process. Student-centered teachers learn with their students, and they learn along with their fellow teachers. Based on this learning, teachers join students in playing a greater role in such matters as materials design and institutional governance.

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to make the case that in order to be considered a “student-centered teacher,” eight related and connected essential characteristics of being a student-centered teacher need to be implemented for successful English language teaching. The eight essentials are encourage learner autonomy, emphasize the social nature of learning, develop curricular integration, focus on meaning, celebrate diversity, expand thinking skills, utilize alternative assessment methods, and promote English language teachers as co-learners.

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“I Don’t Teach Language; I Teach Physics”: Reflecting on English-Medium Instruction

By Dr. Thomas S. C. Farrell

Introduction

Two of the most common forms of bilingual education delivery modes in vogue today are content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and English-medium instruction (EMI). Although some teachers may perceive that these two approaches are the same and only have different names, or that CLIL is mainly for the primary and secondary education sectors, while EMI is mainly preferred at the tertiary level, this is not a correct perception. In fact, they are very different; whereas CLIL has the dual objectives of language and content learning, EMI is mainly content driven, although some language learning is probably expected (but as a by-product) because we cannot equate EMI courses alone to automatic improvement in English proficiency. As one teacher of physics who was asked to teach the content of his course using English in an EMI-type program in Sweden remarked, “I don’t teach language, I teach physics” because “there is nothing about language skills in the syllabus” (Airey, 2012, p. 74). Indeed, many EMI instructors have complained about the lack of clear guidelines available to effectively implement what has become a popular approach in many countries at the tertiary level, including South Korea.

One of the problems with the implementation of both CLIL and EMI programs is that they are newish approaches within the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) community. We are most familiar with their predecessors, Teaching of English for Special Purposes (ESP), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), rather than CLIL and EMI, and in fact, ESP and EAP are still in vogue within TESOL, and both, to a certain extent, provide a tradition of effective practices for CLIL and EMI. Thus, this article focuses on EMI and will briefly outline some of the unresolved issues related to implementing EMI courses. It proposes that it is important for EMI instructors to engage in reflective practice to help overcome some of their insecurities associated with its implementation.

EMI: The Issues

The first issue related to EMI is the problem of defining what exactly it is. Although EMI is said to be a growing global phenomenon, in fact, there is still no universally accepted definition of what the term actually means to everyone, mainly because EMI has no specific contextual origin. CLIL is contextually situated with origins in the European ideal of plurilingual competence for EU citizens. Indeed, Dearden’s (2015) explanation of EMI reflects this

conceptual difference between EMI and CLIL, where she defines EMI as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (p. 4). As Dearden points out, for EMI programs, the language of education is English, but for CLIL programs, there is no mention of which second language academic subjects will use. In addition, EMI programs do not have as clear an objective of furthering both content and language as CLIL programs do. Simply put, the best available definition of EMI seems to be a more general one that Dearden (2015) suggests, as “the practice of teaching an academic subject through English, which is not the first language of the majority population” (p. 8).

Another major unresolved issue regarding EMI programs is a lack of clear guidelines for instructors as to how they should teach such courses. In a British Council study by Dearden (2015), teachers from 55 countries noted that there were no clear teaching guidelines and reported major concerns regarding what language they should use while teaching, with particular confusion over whether English exclusively or a mixture of English and their L1 might be permitted or advised. In addition, some EMI teachers insisted that teaching English was not their job (see the title of this paper), and others wondered if they or others had sufficient proficiency levels in English

“Reflection is a key competency for teachers, as it allows them to analyze and adapt their teaching to EMI students in specific social, cultural, and political contexts.”

to be able to deliver such courses. This of course begs the question of what, if any, standard(s) level of English should be required for EMI teachers? Should EMI teachers be, for example, asked or required to improve their students’ knowledge of the academic subject and English, or just the academic subject? Indeed, Dearden (2015) posed an interesting question related to this uneasy relationship: “If subject teachers do not consider it their job to improve the students’ English, whose job is it?” (p. 29). In fact, some studies have noted that many EMI teachers have not considered EMI instruction beyond the idea that EMI was simply a matter of translating course material from L1 into English. As EMI programs expand worldwide, policymakers and EMI teachers will need to critically reflect on the role of these EMI programs as well as the role(s) of EMI teachers in these programs.

Yes, EMI programs have exploded in popularity worldwide, mostly pushed by policymakers in a top-down manner (some would say in order to attract more foreign students and improve university rankings), but without seriously considering how EMI teachers can effectively implement these programs. Major concerns still exist among EMI teachers, or its bottom-up implementation, about what effective EMI teaching approaches should be incorporated as well as the lack of specific pedagogical EMI guidelines to follow. As a result, many EMI teachers have become insecure about their teaching and disempowered about what their exact role is when delivering such courses (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2018). In addition, there is still no real EMI content in pre-service language teacher education or in-service professional development programs. Thus, a serious gap exists between the top-down pressure to incorporate EMI programs in many countries and the reality of the bottom-up EMI teacher implementation of these programs where teachers find themselves often experimenting informally as they look for best practices in their individual contexts. So what can EMI teachers do to overcome the constraints and demands of the top-down imposition of EMI programs? Farrell (in press) suggests that they should engage in reflective practice so that they can make more formal adjustments based on their own reflections when implementing EMI courses.

EMI: Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is now considered a mark of professional competence in many professions, including in the field of TESOL (Farrell, 2015, 2019). However, it has not been utilized much within the EMI community (Farrell, in press). Reflective practice generally means that EMI teachers subject their philosophy, principles, theories, and practices to critical analysis so that they can take more responsibility for their actions (Farrell, 2015). Reflection is a key competency for teachers, as it allows them to analyze and adapt their teaching to EMI students in specific social, cultural, and political contexts. Engaging in reflective practice can help EMI teachers to unravel these tacitly held, hidden dimensions of practice (philosophy, principles, and theory) and compare them to their classroom practices (Farrell, 2015, 2019).

EMI teachers have various tools available to help facilitate their reflection, including dialogue, writing, classroom observations, action research, and team-teaching (Farrell, in press). EMI teachers can come together either physically or virtually to engage in reflective discussions about their practice. They can also write about their reflections and share them with other EMI teachers. For EMI teachers, such reflective writing can include written accounts of their philosophy, principles, theory, and their teaching, as well as any critical reflections they may have (Farrell, 2013). EMI teachers can also systematically reflect on their practice through classroom observations of what they do while they teach or after they teach. When EMI teachers engage in classroom observations to reflect on their teaching, they can compare what they say they do with what they actually do, and examine if these tend to convergence or diverge (Farrell, 2018a). Action research is another reflective tool that EMI teachers can

use to reflect on their practice (Farrell, 2015). Engaging in action research generally involves teachers entering a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on a problem in order to improve practice (Farrell, 2018b). For EMI programs, team-teaching is also an effective reflective tool where a content lecturer and a language lecturer can collaborate and complement each other's strengths to provide learning opportunities for their students.

Conclusion

EMI programs seem to be preferred by many policymakers as the way forward in bilingual education, yet they have not provided sufficient guidelines about how EMI teachers can effectively implement such programs. Thus, it is important that EMI teachers themselves engage in reflective practice so that they can discover their own effective teaching approaches. In addition, I have discussed various reflective tools EMI teachers can use to facilitate their reflections so that they closely examine their classroom practices. Given the rapid expansion of EMI globally and the ever-changing roles of EMI teachers, it becomes even more crucial for EMI teachers to engage in reflective practice so that they can continue to develop the resourcefulness and resilience needed to face inevitable future challenges and changes in English-medium instruction.

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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. Professor Farrell has published widely and has spoken at major conferences worldwide on these topics. A selection of his work can be found on his webpage: www.reflectiveinquiry.ca



Interview with Thomas S.C. Farrell

Conducted by Dr. David Shaffer

Dr. Farrell, our regular reflective practice columnist, is a featured speaker at the 2019 KOTESOL International Conference. Rather than ask him for an article this issue, we asked him for an interview. – Ed.

TEC: Dr. Farrell, you spent a fair amount of your early career teaching in Korea, could you tell us about what brought you to Korea and your work here?

Dr. Farrell: I was on my world tour after finishing my degree and teaching qualification in Ireland, and I landed in Korea and loved the place immediately. That was over 40 years ago.

TEC: How did you get involved in reflective practice? I don't believe it was much of a thing in Korea while you were here.

Dr. Farrell: I became interested in reflection while on my travels, especially during my wonderful months touring India, and brought this concept to my teaching while in Korea. However, I was not aware that this was a concept that was developing worldwide (remember, we had no internet during this time!) until I began my PhD in the US and started reading formally about it. Before beginning my PhD, however, I started my first teacher reflection group in Korea, which really changed my life, as it showed me the power of collaborative and reflective conversations about teaching.



TEC: Could you give us a snapshot of what ELT was like in Korea when you were first teaching here – 40 years ago when you first set foot in the Land of the Morning Calm?

Dr. Farrell: This question will give more details to my earlier answer related to reflective practice, too. ELT in Korea 40 years ago was a lot different. I think I was one of four or five qualified teachers on the go (no disrespect to the others who were wonderful teachers, too) beyond some Peace Corps teachers (but many in Peace Corps at that time were not connected to teaching, as you know – they moved into teaching when the Peace Corps left in the early 80s, I believe). I would say that the concept of ELT from a local perspective was “if you can speak it, you can teach it!” Indeed, the TESOL profession had not

really taken off at that time. That said, luminaries like the wonderful Dwight Strawn and Horace Underwood were very much supporters of having “qualified” ELT professionals, but supply and demand was the order of the day (with demand more than supply, given the location of Korea). One great aspect of the ELT community at that time was that we all knew each other and helped each other in our daily lives, and that was wonderful. I loved living and teaching in Korea at that time, and of course, I met my wife in Seoul...

TEC: Let's talk about the future for a bit. You will be doing a featured session for us at the international conference this October. Could you tell us a little about it and why everyone at the conference should not miss it?

Dr. Farrell: My featured talk is *Advancing ELT by Becoming an Expert Teacher*. We all assume that if we spend lots of years doing something, we can become an expert. Well, this is not so, because without reflecting on what we do, we can only become experienced non-experts. In this talk, I will also discuss what makes an expert TESOL teacher based on research I have undertaken in Canada. The result of all this is that engaging in reflective practice is critical to expertise. I am hoping that all your wonderful teachers can come to this talk and take this reflective journey so that they too can transition smoothly into their rightful roles as expert TESOL teachers.

TEC: You will also be doing an invited workshop for us. What will it be about? Will it be useful to both the early-career teacher and the more-experienced teacher “in the trenches”?

Dr. Farrell: Keeping with my overall theme of reflection, my workshop, *Reflection-As-Action: Implementing Reflective Practice in TESOL*, will show teachers/participants how reflective practice can be implemented. The framework that I have developed not only focuses on the intellectual, cognitive, and meta-cognitive aspects of practice that many other approaches suggest, but also the spiritual, moral, and emotional non-cognitive aspects of reflection that acknowledge the inner life of teachers. The framework has five different stages or levels of reflection: *philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice*. Each of these will be explained in detail, and participants will be able to practice each in

this interactive session. This session is for very beginning teachers with little experience as well as for very experienced teachers who will really value a break from the “trenches,” so that when they return they will even transform those “trenches”!

TEC: You are by far the most prolific ELT or applied linguistics book author that I know of. How do you find the time to do so much writing and still teach and also spend so much time on the ELT conference-speaking circuit? And what publications are in the pipeline for us to look forward to?

Dr. Farrell: I research reflective practice and also practice it in my daily life: writing is part of my process of reflection. I have built writing into my daily routine. Writing is the result of my reflections and the beginning of further reflection. My writing mantra is “How do I know what I think until I see what I say!”

Regarding new publications, I have just published a new book on reflective practice called *Reflective Practice in ELT* (<https://www.equinoxpub.com/home/reflective-practice-language/>). This is an introductory book to a new series on Reflective Practice in Language Education that I am editing for Equinox Publications in the UK (<https://www.equinoxpub.com/home/reflective-practice-language-education/>).

This series covers different issues related to reflective practice in language education and includes an introductory book that introduces these areas. The other books in the series clarify the different approaches that have been taken within reflective practice and outline current themes that have emerged in the research on various topics and methods of reflection that have occurred. This is a very exciting project, and we have four books about to appear in the near future.

I have also published a few papers. All are on my webpage: www.reflectiveinquiry.ca

TEC: You have decided to initiate this year an annual

reflective language teacher award, which KOTESOL is quite grateful for. Could you tell us what motivated you to begin this award at this time?

Dr. Farrell: As I mentioned above, I first arrived in Korea 40 years ago, and Korea launched my ELT career and teacher training career as well as my early work in reflective practice. One critical incident was important also in defining my life in Korea in 1994 when I was the last car to cross Seongsu Bridge before it collapsed at 7:40 a.m., October 21. I crossed one second before. I was collecting data for my PhD dissertation, so I guess I was destined to finish this work, and it made me *really* reflect! Without Korea, I would not have done any of this. I want to give back by encouraging others to engage in formal reflective practice in Korea so that the ELT profession in Korea can be further advanced (the theme of your conference this year!).

TEC: After leaving teaching in Korea so many years ago, you have stayed connected to KOTESOL. What is it that fosters this desire to stay connected to KOTESOL?

Dr. Farrell: Similar to my answer above, I love Korea and always want to come back and to give back. If any university will have me for a short stay, I am willing to come to give talks, workshops, seminars, too – just let me know. In addition, it is people like you who have motivated me to continue to be in contact with Korea TESOL. Although I never held office, I was in the background many years ago – I think I was the first editor of the *Korea TESOL Journal*.

Korea launched me in the TESOL profession, and I am forever grateful. Korea TESOL allows me to continue to encourage reflection for teachers, so I am forever grateful to Korea TESOL and all the wonderful people who selflessly give their time to volunteer to help other teachers reach the highest levels of their expertise.

TEC: Thank you, Dr. Farrell, for making time for this interview. We’re looking forward to seeing you at the international conference in October.



By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell

I was lucky enough to be invited to the 27th Annual Korea TESOL International Conference October 12–13 in Seoul on the theme of “Advancing ELT.” This was an especially important moment for me and my relationship with Korea and Korea TESOL because it was my 40th (yes, fortieth) anniversary since I first stepped on Korean soil as a young Irish lad/teacher. I was awarded the title of “Patron of Korea TESOL” during the conference, of which I am so honored and delighted, and this is also such a significant moment in my career.

Speaking of my career, I think I am best noted for my interest in reflective practice and its use for TESOL teachers. During the conference someone asked me an interesting question, which I will devote this article to: How can we develop a school culture of reflection? What an interesting question; it made me step back and think for a moment because I had so many different ways I could have answered. I am afraid I muddled my answer though, so here are my thoughts on paper, and hopefully a bit clearer.

When considering the school or institution, we must first realize that each has its own unique culture that must also be taken into consideration when trying to develop a philosophy of reflection throughout that school or institution. Each school or institution has its own culture that is noticeable to every new teacher and student, although much of this may not be documented or even talked about. For example, schools and institutions have their own set of rituals unique to a particular school or institution that reflect its values and also shape the behavior and relationships of the people who work and study there. In more general terms, schools or institutions can have cultures that exist on a continuum from a highly individualistic school culture to a collaborative culture where all the teachers are willing to help one another.

Schools or institutions that, for example, have a culture of individualism can be seen as a place where colleagues have relationships characterized by a non-committal type of existence in a “live and let live, and help only when asked” mode of existence. In this type of school culture, teachers have peers but no real colleagues. If such a school pursues such a culture of individualism, it can damage the long-term interests of that school because nobody takes pride in their work, as they remain on individual paths that can pull from the center. On the other end of the continuum, in schools or institutions that pursue a culture of collaboration, colleagues can be considered of major importance for the development of one another, rather than as individualists. Such collaborations result in a shared sense of values and beliefs about teaching and learning, and a sense that they are all there together working for their students’ collective success.

However, what is a more realistic picture of school culture,

I suspect, is that several different “teacher cultures” exist in one school, and that teachers are usually faced with a dilemma of which one to join. It is also a fact (that many experienced teachers will attest to) that whatever culture of the school exists, it dictates the energy of that school very strongly (be it negative or positive energy), and so it is important that when encouraging teachers to engage in reflective practice, the school’s culture should be behind this encouragement, or it will not take on a school-wide ownership. It is up to the administration and school leaders to build such a culture because of the competing cultures that may exist in the school.



Schools and institutions can do a lot to develop a culture of reflection in the workplace. Schools can also establish a system of teacher evaluation through self-reflection; they can engage in mentoring to guide less experienced teachers, encourage team teaching for teachers to reflect with each other, as well as conduct peer coaching and form critical friendships for teachers to help each other. They can also sponsor various events within the school and in the community that can foster a culture of reflection, establishing an overall vibrant and healthy working environment. When teachers and supervisors approach teaching evaluation from a collaborative perspective, all sides enter into a win-win situation because they all benefit from such a reflective approach. One way of developing such a culture of collaboration is to encourage teacher evaluation through self-assessment reflective practice and the use of teaching portfolios. Such self-assessment can go a long way towards building a culture of collaboration in a school where everyone is out to help, rather than hurt, each other.

School leaders and administrators can promote reflective

practice as a school culture by not only encouraging teachers to examine and reflect on their practices collectively through teaching portfolios but also by sponsoring specific reflective events. The institution as a result can begin to function as a community of professionals rather than as individuals working in isolation from each other. Developing school-sponsored events creates a culture through developing cohesive and professional relationships between teachers, administrators, and the wider community.

Such events can include brown-bag lunches where teachers share their knowledge with each other. Teachers can also bring in materials they use for teaching the various skills (e.g., speaking, listening, writing, and reading) and discuss them in such brown-bag meetings. The result can lead to the development of materials as a collaborative effort that further connects teachers and administrators. The group can invite outside speakers who are experienced in a particular topic that interests the group. The school administration can provide space and encouragement for such events by allowing time off for the presenter to prepare as well as providing a room and refreshments.

Schools can also develop readings and discussions with teachers by building a professional library and encouraging reflection and collaborative discussions in different study

groups on particular topics that encourage more in-depth reflections on topics of interest. They can also arrange visits to other schools, where appropriate, to find out how reflective and professional development activities are conducted and supported there. By organizing and supporting various events, the school as a whole benefits and will attract more students as well as provide better opportunities to learn.

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The Reflection Connection

Introduction

In recent times, reflective practice has become something of a buzzword in the field of TESOL and is promoted in most teacher education and development programs worldwide, as most educators agree that some form of reflection is desirable for all teachers. Today, one can find many different definitions of this interesting, yet complex, concept and a wide variety of different approaches about how it can be accomplished. I will not discuss all of these definitions or approaches in this article. Rather, I will use my most recent definition of reflective practice as a backdrop to what I think is absent in many approaches to reflective practice today: a critical stance in TESOL. Thus, I define reflective practice as

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. (Farrell, 2015, p.123)

In this article I focus especially on the latter part of the definition and reflecting *outside the classroom* to foster critical reflection.

Critical Reflection

When TESOL teachers are encouraged to reflect outside the classroom, this is called *critical reflection* because it entails exploring and examining the moral, political, and social issues that impact a teacher's practice. Thus such critical reflection takes on a socio-cultural dimension that includes all aspects of a teacher's professional life outside the classroom and links practice more closely to the broader socio-political as well as affective issues that impact a teacher's classroom practice. Teaching ESL/EFL is greatly influenced by social forces and political trends, as there is the possibility of the presence of different types of discrimination inherent in different educational systems. I now focus on two different studies that report the results of encouraging pre-service TESOL teachers (or teachers in training and in-service TESOL teachers) and experienced teachers to reflect critically (from Farrell, 2018).

Pre-service

Deng and Yuen (2011), using blogs to promote critical reflection, reported increased awareness of the socio-emotional dimension in a learning community of pre-service TESOL teachers in Hong Kong. They noted that the blogs enabled the pre-service TESOL teachers to make a shift in their reflections from an initial purely cognitive focus to a later more emotional dimension where the teachers were able to note the impact of practice on their personal lives.

The Importance of Critical Reflective Practice in TESOL

By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell

As Deng and Yuen noted, this emotional dimension of reflection is often downplayed in teacher education programs, but it is very important for pre-service teachers who are on a practicum. They observed that pre-service TESOL teachers are in a very weak and vulnerable position while on teaching practice because they must struggle to cope with many different dilemmas and insecurities while they are forming their roles and lives as English language teachers. Thus, Deng and Yuen suggest that the pre-service TESOL teachers be provided a means of releasing and reflection on their emotions during this very important stage in their formation as teachers. The researchers continue, "Hence a risk-free channel through which one could vent became invaluable in order to cope with one's emotions, wrestle with dilemmas, and come to better terms with classroom reality" (p. 449). The use of blogs, according to Deng and Yuen, not only helped the teachers to express and reflect on their emotions, but were also social oriented as they noted they were not written just for each pre-service TESOL teacher, but also for the reflection and dialogue of others.

In-Service

Feng-ming Chi (2010) examined how writing can stimulate critical reflections in in-service TESOL teachers in Taiwan. Chi reported that the act of reflective writing helped the in-service TESOL teachers reflect on more critical issues related to overall work in their context and especially the impact of social issues on their role as TESOL teachers. They noted that such critical reflections not only helped the in-service TESOL teachers gain more awareness of these important issues, but their learners also benefited from such increased awareness. As Chi observed, the in-service TESOL teachers critically

reflected on “deeper issues beyond practice, such as social issues, inequitable relationships, and generated roles” thus enhancing “their critical thinking as both teachers and learners” (p. 180).

Chi discovered that the in-service teachers first focused on their teaching methods before moving on to more of a questioning mode of critical reflection in their later entries. This shift to a more critical stance came after the teachers became more comfortable asking themselves questions about their underlying assumptions about practice and critical reflection beyond the classroom. In fact, Chi remarked that this reflection could have possibly led to changes in their beliefs and practices as they began to be re-defined. Chi explained that “reflection kept occurring at deeper levels, building upon each discursive engagement toward more personal awareness of the relevant social issues, inequitable relationships and generated roles” (p. 176).

Perhaps one way teacher educators and teacher education programs can expand their TESOL teachers’ reflections to include more critical reflection is to incorporate some kind of community-based service learning project (that integrates classroom instruction with community service activities) into TESOL teacher preparation courses. Such a course can have TESOL teachers reflect on who they are as practitioners as well as what they stand for outside their classrooms. In-service teachers could also be encouraged to examine the textbooks they are

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When TESOL teachers are encouraged to reflect outside the classroom, this is called critical reflection because it entails exploring and examining the moral, political, and social issues that impact a teacher’s practice.

”

asked to use or choose themselves, to see whose ideology is being promoted, as well as the syllabus and curriculum they are given and their working conditions; especially what they are expected to do by the administration rather than what they think their professional roles are. The key critical reflective question is: Whose interests are being served by the way I conduct my practice?

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Conclusion

Indeed, it can be said that every practice promotes some sort of ideology; consequently, reflections outside the classroom can assist TESOL teachers in becoming more aware of the many political agendas and economic interests that can (and do) shape how we define language teaching and learning. They can become more aware of the impact of their lessons on society and the impact of society on their practice by consciously engaging in critical pedagogy. Thus when TESOL teachers engage in critical reflective practice, this reflection is not viewed as a tool to “fix” problems perceived or real in one’s practice, where teachers are kept down as technicians and consumers of research rather than generators of their own research.

TESOL teachers are more than technicians implementing what so-called experts (be they academics or publishers) prescribe how their learning is assessed only by the end products of the tools they use to “fix” problems – a danger within much of the present interest in language teacher research and action research among where such research has been co-opted by academics rather than owned by teachers.

I believe that TESOL teachers will not be able to “improve” their practice unless they are aware of what and who influences that practice beyond their classroom. With increased awareness and clarity about what we do, we can make transformational decisions about our practice in the hope that we provide more optimum learning conditions for our students.

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The Reflection Connection

Introduction

I wake up each morning from an uneasy sleep, but not sure exactly why, because I don't have anything particular on my mind since I am in the house 23 hours of the day – with an hour or less outside to shop or take a walk while at the same time observing my social distancing. By noon, I feel a fatigue building up, and by late afternoon, I have attracted a general malaise of thoughts that some mysterious illness has descended from the mists of the invisible disease that has hit the world.

Perhaps the above paragraph may seem a bit morbid, but contemplation and self-reflection involve reality checking, and this is my reality in the age of COVID-19 (thankfully it is not named after that light beer anymore!) and I suspect that of many readers too. Teaching is an intensely personal individual undertaking, and as such, it is critical to know about the person the teacher is. As Parker J. Palmer (1998, p. 3) has noted, "Good teaching requires self-knowledge.... Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well." So it really is time to look into the subconscious and reflect on who I am, or from a professional perspective, "who is the self that teaches?" (p. 5).

Contemplation in TESOL

The notion of contemplation and its awareness-raising effects has long been a part of the great religions and philosophies of the world, including Buddhism's mindfulness of the "here and now"; existentialism and the inevitable mortality of human beings; and prayer as integral parts of Christianity, Islam, and other faiths.

"Contemplation can help us reach this state of mindfulness where we can experience an enhanced awareness of our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perceptions."

These philosophies and religions engage in contemplation not to solve particular issues but to become more aware of the inner self. Although such contemplation might place individuals at the center of the contemplative process, this does not result in self-judgment but in becoming more aware of their surroundings in a more *mindful* way.



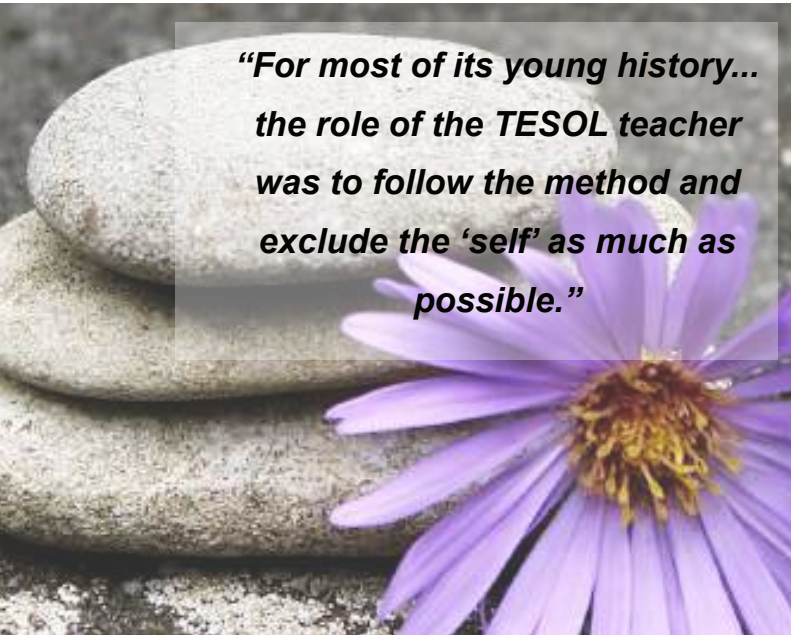
The Importance of Contemplation in the Age of COVID-19

By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell

Indeed, contemplation can help us reach this state of *mindfulness* where we can experience an enhanced awareness of our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perceptions. It is important for us to become aware of our perceptual experiences as a detached observer so we can also begin to examine them in light of our conscious experiences as teachers (Farrell, 2015). As Palmer (1998, p. 11) notes, "The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts – meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self."

Contemplation can help TESOL teachers reach a state of mindfulness or attentiveness in which they can experience an enhanced awareness of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perceptions, a practice that is rarely addressed or acknowledged. TESOL teachers might develop their contemplative abilities by practicing different meditative techniques, such as *insight meditation*, *visualization*, and *movement meditation* (Farrell, 2015).

Insight meditation allows us to focus on what happens in each moment as it happens. We can accomplish this just by focusing on our breathing: When we breathe in and out we concentrate on this act and nothing else. Then as we focus on our breathing, we can gain insight into the "self" as we watch various thoughts and emotions come and go because we do not react to any of them. We can thus become clearer about who is the *real self* that teaches. For example, at the beginning of a class or at a transition



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possible.”**

time during a lesson, a teacher can turn the lights off and ask students to take a few deep, slow, clearing breaths and be silent for a few minutes while they focus only on their breathing and simply doing nothing. Then ask them to transition slowly from the depth of contemplation to the classroom and continue the lesson. Indeed, students report sensations of peacefulness, a clearer mind, and a feeling of centeredness.

Visualization is a meditative technique in which the practitioner visualizes a place (new or old) or a task and remains in a general state of openness while using this place as a type of sanctuary where one feels safe, because this mental sanctuary is uniquely individual. As he or she sees inside this sanctuary, they become calm and totally relaxed. Because this sanctuary is uniquely individual, it reflects personal identity. As a result, we gain knowledge of the self. A teacher might try this before class and see if their attitudes toward teaching, students, and learning change. Such visualization can help teachers become more mindful of their own attitudes towards their classroom practices and also become more mindful of their students’ emotions and experiences.

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Movement meditation includes any body movement as meditation. The most popular types of movement meditation include yoga and tai-chi, but even a simple routine such as walking or jogging can also be considered movement meditation. Teachers can do simple stretching exercises or body movements that relax both body and mind before they enter a class, or they can take a walk/jog during lunch hour to experience meditation through movement.

Conclusion

For most of its young history, the field of TESOL has favored methods over teachers to the extent that methods were developed as close to being teacher-proof as possible and the role of the TESOL teacher was to follow the method and exclude the self as much as possible.

This article has pointed out that we can best put our COVID-19-imposed lockdown to good use by getting to know the *self* as teacher. Contemplation can lead to more self-awareness, and I outlined three techniques that TESOL teachers can use to gain such personal understanding: insight meditation, visualization, and movement meditation. For far too long, TESOL as a profession has separated the teacher from the act of teaching, as publishers have long searched for *the* correct method while all along ignoring the person who must deliver such a method, the teacher. I agree with Palmer (1998, p. 1) when he states, “Knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.... When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are.”

Stay safe and healthy.

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The Author



The Reflection Connection



The Look: Reflecting on Classroom Observation

By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell

The Account

She had already arrived and was sitting at the back of the room writing something on a large piece of paper. Oh no! I didn't know she was coming today. Oh my! I should not have gone to that party last night. What is her name anyway? I wonder, should I go down and explain why I had just arrived at nine o'clock and not my usual fifteen minutes before?

Oh no! She has stopped writing and is looking up. I guess she expects me to begin. I hope that little Brian is quiet today. Now let me get my notes.

Oh Lord! She is *staring* at me. Ok! Ok! Cool down, I better review yesterday's lesson. Where the hell are my notes? She is still *Looking* at me. Oh boy!

No Brian, don't ask a question. No! [Brian's hand goes up!]

"Yes, Brian?"

"Oh! Mr. Farrell, why are we doing this lesson today, we already finished this last week?"

"Quite right, Brian, thank you for telling me, anyway today we are going to review..."

And so went my first experience with *The Look* from my observer. This was, of course, my teaching evaluation from my university practicum days.

This was not the last time I was to get that same *Look*. Oh, no!

When I traveled to South Korea a year later to teach at a prestigious institute at a top-rated

university, I got *The Look* again! In fact, it started from the moment when I was interviewed for the job. Yes, that very same "What can you do?" *Look*.

Then after one week of teaching, I heard a knock on the classroom door I was teaching in. I opened it, and in walked the director without any warning. She had on her face *The Look* of "Let's see what you can do."

"I want to *Look* at you teaching," she said.

"Fine," I said. But it was not really fine.

Reflection on the Account

I coped, somehow, but I still remember that first day in Ireland when the observer was sitting in my classroom waiting for me and that first week in Korea experiencing the exact same feeling of a supervisor sitting in the back of the room with an "I am the expert, let's see what you can do" type of *Look*. It took me 18 years to write about my first experience of *The Look*, but I have never completely recovered from that initial experience. Many years and many workshops and talks in many different countries made me realize that I was not alone when I heard of *so many* similar experiences from highly accomplished TEFL professionals.

The above account of a teacher being observed is actually me and my first experience as a learner teacher while on practicum in Ireland many, many years ago. At that time, I was required to teach (as part of the practicum) in a high school each morning for two hours and attend lectures (as part of the coursework) in the university in the afternoons and evening as part of my Higher Diploma in Education (post-graduate work) that

“There is such a power differential that I think it borders on learner teacher abuse, especially if not addressed at the beginning of a learner teacher’s life and career.”

qualifies one as a teacher in Ireland. For the practicum portion of the diploma, I was informed I would be supervised and visited four times during the year in the school where I was teaching. I was not informed any time before any visit nor was I debriefed from any of the four visits. The supervisor was in the room each time for the first 9 a.m. class of the day and left after 45 minutes each time. *The Look* that I am talking about lasted all four visits, and each time I was on the receiving end of it, my anxiety in the classroom increased to very high levels. Thank goodness my students were on their best behavior for each visit; it’s a pity the supervisor wasn’t. Not one time did this supervisor sit down and talk to me about my teaching before or after her observation. Instead, she spent all of these observations writing speedily on paper about what she was “seeing”; at the end she just said “thank you” and left the room.

So what does all this mean? I believe that these sessions, still very much prevalent in our profession, are akin to “drive-by” drop-ins that can turn-off a teacher for life if they are judgmental concerning the abilities of the teacher’s teaching skills. But, of course, if the supervisor does not talk to the teacher, this makes things worse. I passed this course in teaching practice, but I never received any report or recommendations, which further traumatized me for future teaching. Yes, I can never forget *The Look*. But I decided not to ignore it and educate colleagues about the possible abuses of observing another in class. There is such a power differential that I think it borders on learner teacher abuse, especially if not addressed at the beginning of a learner teacher’s life and career.

I am over this *Look* now, as I have reflected deeply on it and talked to colleagues about their similar early teaching observation experiences,

and I have come up with a basic set of questions I now ask anyone (supervisor or teacher or administrator) who wants to observe me teaching:

1. Why do you want to come to my class? If the answer is to watch me teach, then my answer is no because I am not a model teacher and you are probably going to judge me against some preconceived notion of what constitutes good teaching.
2. What are you going to do in the class? If the answer is just sit at the back, then my answer again is no because I want an observer to help me critique some aspect of my teaching that I am interested in. So the observer has to be active.
3. What are you going to use the observation process for? If the answer is research, then I say no. I want to know the exact research project and how I fit into the scheme of things (i.e., how my class can help in this research). I am not against research, and in fact I am constantly conducting my own. Rather, I think bad research (not set up with clearly defined objectives) can do more harm than good to the teacher being observed and his/her students, who may not like outsiders in the classroom.

I have found that these three questions have helped me to avert *The Look* because when the answers to the questions are to my liking, the observation process can be a wonderful experience. It can be an enlightening exploration of what it is to be a teacher working with other teachers (peer observation), and it can be a learning experience (for focused research). Also, it can be used to evaluate. But evaluators should be able to explain their criteria for evaluation. It would be interesting to see their *Look* at that time!

Always remember that this is *your* class, *your* students, so if anyone says they are coming to observe you, do not be afraid to give them *The Look*!

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The Reflection Connection

Overcoming “The Imposter Syndrome” Through Reflective Practice

By Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell



I almost always feel like I'm "playing teacher." I'm in the middle of my 6th year, and I legit feel like a phony so much of the time. My colleagues look like they have it all together. I'm so glad to see I'm not alone in this!! (8th Grade teacher, Language Arts, U.S.)

Introduction

Teachers, regardless of how many years they have been teaching, can suffer from a kind of professional identity crisis that involves the teacher feeling like an imposter. As the quote above suggests, many teachers reveal that they are “playing the role” of teacher, but do not really feel that they are real teachers. This is called the “imposter phenomenon” in general psychology, or the “imposter syndrome” in teaching. For teachers, such imposter type feelings never really go away, and I suspect a lot more TESOL teachers also “suffer” in silence and possibly without being aware of why they have such a debilitating feeling of being inadequate as a teacher. However, I believe that teachers who continuously engage in reflective practice can not only better understand these largely undeserved feelings but can also brush off any such feelings throughout their career because they know they are making informed decisions throughout their practice.

The Imposter Syndrome

“Impostorism” and impostor fears generally describe the psychological state of people who think of themselves as intellectual frauds, and as a result, have a fear of being exposed as such. The

“imposter phenomenon” in psychology, or feelings of intellectual phoniness, generally “strikes” successful people as being unable to handle and internalize their success. Indeed, we may be surprised to learn that famous and influential people we are familiar with as public icons have experienced feelings of inadequacy, even though they are famous and fully established, such as Academy Award winner Kate Winslet, who has noted that when she wakes up each morning before going off to a shoot, she said she thinks, “I can’t do this. I’m a fraud.” Alan Dye, who was vice president of Apple, has noted that he was scared “that at some point I [was] going to get found out.” (Shorten, 2013).

People (some say up to 70% of the public have experienced some episode of the imposter feelings) who experience the imposter phenomenon generally worry that they may be exposed as a fraud at any time, and as a result, feel distressed that the achievements they may have acquired are largely undeserved (Gravois, 2007). I should point out that an “imposter” is not a perfectionist because psychologists tell us that perfectionists usually do not tell anyone about their mistakes because they fear that telling them will cast them as being imperfect. On the other hand, although they also fear to appear imperfect, imposters are nonetheless more open in voicing their self-perception of feelings of inadequacy to others. The problem is, however, that the imposter syndrome disrupts the psychological well-being of individuals who suffer from it because they always feel they need to be special or the very best. As a result, they experience fearful feelings of failure because they will deny their own competence. If they experience any success, they will probably

deny it and/or feel guilty about it and discount any praise they may receive.

The good news is that the imposter phenomenon is not a pathological disease. Although it can be damaging and self-destructive, it can also be overcome with a better understanding of its nature. Perhaps we all suffer from feelings of being inadequate at different times in our lives, but when these become more frequent, we can feel that we are going to get found out in some way at some time. In other words, we will always be looking over our shoulders. When we experience such feelings as teachers, and we similarly always feel that we are looking over our shoulders, then tensions between our philosophy, principles, theories, and teaching practices will erupt. Our students, if they do not pick up on these, will suffer from not having the most optimal opportunities to learn. Because teachers of all experience levels are sometimes vulnerable, and as a result may be prone to the imposter syndrome, engaging in reflective practice becomes all too important for TESOL teachers of all levels of experience throughout their careers.

TESOL teachers can collaboratively use the framework for reflecting on practice (Farrell, 2015), which encourages them to examine their philosophy, principles, theory, and practice, and critically reflect beyond practice. Such collaborations can be facilitated in TESOL teacher education programs and the early years of teaching in different contexts (see Farrell, 2021) through mentoring. In addition, the use of critical friends groups, team teaching, and peer coaching, along with providing them with such reflective tools as writing, dialogue, engaging in action research, and making use of whatever technology can help them develop a reflective stance during their teaching career (Farrell, 2018, 2019).

Conclusion

The imposter syndrome can be very disruptive if not fully understood for what it is. Thus, a greater awareness of the imposter syndrome through self-reflection with other teachers (perhaps in

the KOTESOL RP-SIGs) using the framework for reflecting on practice can help TESOL teachers better minimize its impact, thus preparing them better for how to deal with any perceived feelings of inadequacy or failure throughout their teaching careers. We do not have to let the imposter syndrome control our thoughts or actions as long as we understand what it is and where it comes from, and constantly engage in reflecting on our practice. As one experienced ESL teacher in Canada wrote in an email to me in response to a workshop I gave on reflective practice:

There were moments in my teaching until now where I've done something because that's the way I've always done it...but without really questioning what was going on! Before, I always felt like there was something missing, and I felt like I was faking it. But I know that I won't be faking it anymore. I'll be reflecting on more things.



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