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Reflective Language Teaching: From Research to Practice

Thomas S. C. Farrell (2007)

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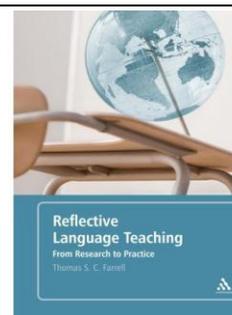
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One of the attempts to explore teaching beliefs and practices is doing reflective teaching. This practice helps teachers gain their teaching awareness through critical reflection and conscious self inquiry (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Richards, 1990). In response to the needs for such praxis, Thomas Farrell's *Reflective Language Teaching* offers a practical and easy-to-read guide for new and experienced language teachers and teacher educators who wish to pursue sustained professional development through reflective language teaching practices.

This 14-chapter volume covers core issues on reflective language teaching and self-reflection, teacher beliefs and practices, teacher language proficiency, teacher metaphors and maxims, classroom communications, reflective activities (e.g., teaching journals), and professional development through reflective language teaching. Each chapter includes reflective questions, enabling readers to engage in the text. Almost all of the chapters contain theoretical and empirical accounts about the issues highlighted.

The book begins with an overview of reflective teaching together with reflective language teaching, including its origins, definitions, types, levels, benefits, and place in professional development for language teachers. Chapter 2 discusses how to do self reflection through (1) narrating stories using “the Tree of Life organization”—the roots, trunk, and limbs, depicting early influences, later influences, and most recent influences respectively and (2) teacher portfolios alongside portfolio formats.

Chapter 3 emphasizes teacher beliefs and practices. The interesting issue of the chapter is examining how language teachers reflect on their beliefs and classroom practices so as to gain more confidence in knowing that what they believe about language teaching and learning is actually practiced in classrooms. This notion suggests that there should be a match between teacher beliefs and classroom practices. The next chapter addresses a teacher narrative as a tool for recounting specific classroom moments through critical incidents and case studies. As Farrell pinpoints, both critical incidents and case studies allow teachers to do selective and critical narrative reflection.

Chapter 5 highlights teacher language proficiency as one of the core components of a language teacher's professional competence because it shows the teacher's ability to “provide a reliable model of [the] language input for his or her students” (p. 56). This idea suggests that teachers be role models and motivators for future language learner success. Chapter 6 goes on to examine the importance of metaphors such as “teacher as learning partner” and maxims such as “the maxim of empowerment” in articulating teacher roles and his or her professional identity in the classroom.

Using metaphors and maxims, language teachers can construct and deconstruct their teaching beliefs and practices.

Chapter 7 touches on classroom communication, including classroom interaction patterns, teacher questioning, and classroom communicative competence. The author argues that reflecting on those issues helps language teachers obtain beneficial first-hand information to make informed decisions of their own teaching practices. Chapters 8-13 provide the reader a range of ways to conduct reflective activities, including action research, teaching journals, teacher development groups, classroom observations, critical friendships (e.g., peer mentoring or team teaching), and concept mapping. In short, these chapters help teachers and teacher educators identify suitable tools to engage in reflective practices based on their own teaching-learning contexts.

The final chapter spotlights reflective teaching as a way of pursuing continuous professionalism (see also Bailey, 1997). The author goes on to close the book by suggesting a framework of reflective language teaching, including five core components: opportunities for reflection, ground rules, time, trust, and external input.

Albeit comprehensive in its coverage, the book does not address other key issues, including:

- a) how post-classroom observation conferences can be used for dialogically negotiated reflection in teacher development groups;
- b) how other classroom observation data analyses (e.g., ethnographic microanalysis) can be used for gathering richer data for reflection; and
- c) how ethnographic teacher and student diaries are potentially used as a tool for reflective teaching practice and research to gain triangulated sources of data for reflection.

Notwithstanding these minor shortcomings, I have found this volume a compelling read because it includes theoretically, empirically, and practically grounded accounts of reflective language teaching. Farrell's *Reflective Language Teaching* is not just a collection on reflection, but also the author's sample lived reflective works. The book is reader-friendly and a practical resource and guide for novice and veteran language teachers and teacher educators who wish to pursue vibrant personal and professional development through reflective language teaching.

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