

Reflective Writing for Language Teachers (Frameworks for Writing Series)

Thomas S. C. Farrell

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Working with busy teachers who are taking part in in-service professional development, I have sometimes found the introduction of the term *reflective practice* to be met with irreverent eye-rolling. These professionals working flat out to meet learners' needs, conform to program guidelines, and satisfy new funder-driven initiatives cannot imagine a world where they could possibly have time to engage in the utopian practice of introspective reflection. In a number of publications Farrell (e.g., Farrell 2007, 2008; Richards & Farrell, 2011) has passionately argued that reflective practice is what defines language teachers as professionals and, rather than adding to their workload, it is the very mechanism that will mitigate teacher burnout and boost teachers' satisfaction with their role. Here Farrell extols the benefits of reflective practice as a form of professional development that "involves teachers looking intensively and systematically at their practice and involves teachers being personally invested" (p. 26). In this latest book expanding on Farrell's original principles of reflective practice for language teachers, there is a detailed yet highly readable examination of how language teachers might use writing as the tool for such reflections, and each chapter carries us through different approaches and activities for such practice.

The book is organized into seven reader-friendly chapters exploring writing for reflective practice, beginning with a chapter critically examining the nature of professional development through reflective practice and how writing can be used as a tool for reflecting. Every chapter begins with a preamble that introduces the chapter's contents through anecdotal commentary drawn from Farrell's extensive experience. Thus each chapter's content is comfortably situated in a teacher's perspective from the outset. Throughout each chapter are abundant questions and exercises that make up a "Reflection Journal" to accompany the reader through the entire book. These activities are ubiquitous and at first seemed a little overwhelming, with the first chapter containing 12 Reflection Journals and each journal containing at least four questions. In spite of the obvious intent to provide practical training in reflective writing, the sheer number of questions seemed distracting. However, as I worked through the book chapter by chapter, I found myself anticipating and looking forward to reading these questions in order to see how the chapter's content intersected with my own teaching experience.

In Chapter 1, "Professional Development," Farrell asks the fundamental question, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" (p. 6).

This phrase underpins the philosophy of the book that systematic reflection on teaching practice can be effectively achieved through reflective writing practice. In Chapter 2 Farrell reiterates the principles, practices, and benefits of reflective practice from his previous work (Farrell, 2007, 2008; Richards & Farrell, 2005). The third chapter, "Writing as Reflective Practice," expounds the benefits of writing as the ideal tool for supporting teachers to become more systematic about their reflections. Much of this chapter is dedicated to insights the author gained from writing his dissertation. Simply stated, "the main reason I write is to see my own thoughts" (p. 79). The next two chapters, "Reflective Teaching Journals" and "Narrative Reflective Writing," detail approaches, benefits, and practice activities for a variety of types of reflective writing that could be undertaken by a language teacher. These include journaling, storytelling, critical incidents, and case studies. Throughout these chapters the reader is guided in developing skills through the practice activities for each of the different types of reflective writing approaches introduced. The book then moves on to consider reflective writing through the different phases of a language teacher's career, from the "sink or swim" beginnings of the novice teacher to the "serenity" of the experienced reflective practitioner. Farrell concludes in Chapter 7 with a discussion of the progression of reflective practice into the area of language teacher research, also known as action research or practitioner inquiry. In this chapter, he summarizes language teacher research undertaken around the globe by comparing, topics, methods, results, and contexts.

Those readers familiar with Farrell's writings may not find dramatic new perspectives or radical shifts in thinking in this book. However, those looking for a detailed consideration of how to harness the unique nature of the writing process to develop systematic habits for reflecting on their teaching will be highly engaged and actively involved throughout. The book is highly sympathetic to the teacher's perspective and advocates for a bottom-up approach that engages teachers to define their own identities, practices, gaps, challenges, and professional development needs. This book practices its own message of self-reflection and challenges readers to become personally invested in their own practice.

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