Book Review

Reflective Practice in ELT

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Reflective practice (RP) is considered a fundamental skill in several professional development programs, including language teacher education. However, research results are not always available to TESOL teachers and institutions. Consequently, it is difficult to operationalize effective forms of RP that can empower teachers and promote better learning experiences. Thomas Farrell addresses this gap in *Reflective Practice in ELT*. This release is the first book of an Equinox series edited by the author entitled *Reflective Practice in Language Education*. The book is divided into seven chapters that cover a range of issues from the conceptualization to the application of RP in language teaching. Each chapter includes an extensive theoretical background on RP followed by *Reflective Breaks*, which invite readers to reflect on the issues identified in research, position themselves in these theories, and investigate their own theories, practice, and experience.

As Farrell explains in Chapter 1, the lack of a clear definition for RP hinders the development of effective approaches to implement it. Furthermore, terms such as "reflection," "reflective practice," and "critical reflection" are often used interchangeably, causing even more confusion. In order to clarify the terminology and set the stage for the subsequent chapters, several definitions of reflection in general education are presented. While some of the definitions focus on classroom practice, others also include more complex aspects of teaching. As for the term "critical reflection," definitions encompass the ideologies behind our teaching such as our socioeconomic, historical, political, and cultural contexts.

In the field of TESOL, two main forms of RP guide the discussion. The weak form encompasses teachers performing informal evaluations of how they feel about their performance. The strong form, which involves teachers collecting and examining data about their teaching, seems to support practitioners in making informed decisions. Evidence-based approaches shape most current RP typologies in the field of education and TESOL. Farrell's own interpretation of RP suggests that teachers use an evidence-based approach and dialogue to inform their pedagogical decisions. It is not intended to be a final definition, but one that can evolve with the field of TESOL.

Chapter 2 focuses on different typologies of RP in the field of education and TESOL. Of special significance are the works of John Dewey and Donald Schön. Both approaches promote teachers' regular engagement in evidence-based RP in order to find pedagogical solutions to their classroom problems. The strength of this chapter, however, is in the evolution of Farrell's typologies based on TESOL research and designed for TESOL professionals. The major contribution of his early model is that it consists of providing opportunities and structure for reflection. Hence, it encourages teachers to take control of their teaching, instead of having their teaching defined by the materials available to them.

In this context, Farrell clarifies how he revisited influential theories and incorporated their concepts into his new framework for reflecting on practice (Farrell, 2015). In his view, a more comprehensive approach to RP includes five levels of reflection. First, teachers need to reflect on their own "philosophy, principles, theories, and practices" (p. 51). Also, teachers should reflect "beyond practice" (p. 52), evaluating the effects of the previous levels on their students, society, and themselves. More importantly, the sequence of these levels is not strict, which allows teachers to move from theory to practice or from practice to theory as it best suits their experience and context. The development of this new framework shows an inclusive RP typology that involves the individual, professional, practice, and context.

Six main principles of RP are explored in Chapter 3. First, RP is holistic because it involves different dimensions of reflection. Second, changes should be based on data collected from practice, reflection, students, feedback, and beliefs; therefore, RP is evidence based. Third, RP involves dialogue or a form of engagement with communities of practice. Likewise, RP investigates how principles are expressed into practice. Finally, RP requires an inquiring disposition, and RP is a way of life. It involves teachers consistently questioning their own practice and expanding their findings beyond the classroom.

In Chapter 4, major tools for RP are outlined. TESOL literature on RP shows that the most popular tools for reflection are discussion, reflective writing, and classroom observation. Other important RP tools include action research, narrative study, lesson study, case study analysis, and concept mapping. All of these tools, to some extent, address the principles outlined in Farrell's framework for reflecting on practice. In Chapter 5, in order to illustrate the use of these tools and his framework, the author reports on a case study of an experienced EFL teacher. The multiplicity and complexity of aspects identified in this teacher's RP confirms that Farrell's holistic framework is necessary to fully understand teaching.

Chapter 6 highlights the implementation of the principles discussed throughout the book. Teachers and institutions working together can support meaningful RP. In order to establish a culture of reflection, we must consider two different layers. First, individuals need to approach RP with an open

mind, commitment, and responsibility. Second, schools and institutions need to consider their unique culture in order to develop their approaches to reflection. For example, they can encourage teachers through mentoring and team teaching. Creating a culture of RP will help teachers professionally, which might be reflected in their students' experience.

The author concludes the book with 10 questions which aim to clarify ambiguities that still exist in RP research such as the acceptability, viability, and criticism of reflective practice in the field of TESOL. Even though the inquiry left the reader hanging with more unanswered questions, it also offered a series of discussion topics for future investigation. As it was proposed by the reflective breaks in each chapter, the book ends with suggestions for further reflection, setting the stage for the next volumes in the series.

Farrell's extensive knowledge and experience in reflective practice and language teacher education is clear throughout the book. He elevates the discussion of RP in the field from a mere "methods obsession" (p. 12) to a holistic approach proposed in his framework for reflecting on practice. The quality of the discussions and accessibility of the language makes this book an ideal tool for professionals at various levels of teaching experience to become more familiar with the topic of reflective practice. Furthermore, it should be highly considered as a textbook for undergraduate and graduate TESOL programs, as well as for language teacher professional development programs. This book has potential for promoting a culture of RP among individuals and institutions. It can empower teachers to take control of their practice and provide students with a better learning experience.

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Reference

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