

BOOK REVIEW

Farrell, Thomas, S. C. (2015). *Promoting teacher reflection in second language education: A framework of TESOL professionals*. New York & London: Routledge. (pp XV + 138) [ISBN 978-1138-025042]

The book under review by the well-known author discusses one aspect of professional development – **Reflection**. Reflection and reflective practices as an integral part of teacher development have been talked about for over two decades now. However, there hasn't been a comprehensive book on reflective practices as the present volume. Farrell provides a detailed description of a framework for reflection, which can be used by teachers, its uses, and tasks to reflect on the concepts introduced in the book.

The book is organized into 9 chapters. There are two initial chapters that introduce us to the essential concepts we need to understand in order to go through the book. The third chapter provides a detailed description of the framework and the successive five chapters (chapters 4 – 8) discuss each of the stages of the framework. The book concludes with a discussion on the use of the framework.

The book begins with a discussion on the confusion that exists between two terms 'contemplation' and 'reflection', often used interchangeably. Contemplation, Farrell says, is a precursor to reflection (p. 6). Contemplation makes us think of a situation but without involvement and does not "entail any intervention". However, reflection cannot be free from intervention. It is a "conscious process" and analyses "what we

are doing and why we are doing it" (p. 8). The rest of the book is devoted to building and discussing the framework for reflective practices.

Farrell conceives a five-stage framework where each stage/level is closely interrelated to the others.

There is no hierarchy among these stages. However, Farrell assigns each stage a number and discusses them in a logical progression as part of the framework, though he mentions that each stage is modular and can be discussed independently of the other stages. The five stages of the framework as presented in the book are briefly discussed here.

Philosophy helps us probe the reasons for every action we are involved in, in the course of teaching. Each action constitutes a behaviour, which is a cultivated trait influenced by several factors that exist in our surroundings. How do we reflect on our behaviour? Farrell says "telling our autobiographical stories" (p. 25) is an essential part of reflection and this helps us refine our behaviour.

Principles are our assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions of teaching and learning, which "are three points along a continuum" (p. 26) and are responsible for moulding our classroom practices.

Theory is evolved from the practices we adopt in our classroom, which are obvious outcomes of the philosophies and assumptions. The theories we have been exposed to in the course of our training are termed "official theories"; the ones we

develop for ourselves, which are largely unconscious processes, are termed “unofficial theories” by Farrell. We may not be aware of our theories, but we do reflect on them, and such reflection takes us to practice.

Practice is an outcome of reflection on theories we have arrived at. Practice is seen in our ability to plan our teaching. Planning may be conceived of in three ways – *forward planning*, *central planning*, and *backward planning*. *Forward planning* helps us decide on the objectives and materials we propose to use in the class. *Central planning* has a focus on the classroom techniques and the way we negotiate them during the class. *Backward planning* helps us assess the outcomes (p. 69). Reflecting on our practice happens best by looking at certain critical incidents and the way we handle them.

Practice is a major part of our teaching. Practice also needs to be observed, and this can happen through self-observation using audio or video recordings, peer observation using a checklist (“the observer should not carry his own baggage while observing the other’s lesson” (Bolitho, 2013)) and Action Research. Farrell uses the image of a ripple that is created by throwing a stone in a pool of water to help us understand how reflection becomes possible while observing our own lessons (p. 85). ‘*Reflection-for Practice*’ is seen as an offshoot of ‘*Reflection-in Practice*’ and ‘*Reflection-on Practice*’ (p. 82).

Beyond Practice is the last stage of the framework, which is seen as a process of refinement. The practices that teachers adopt

in their class and work should promote social values and instill in the learners a sense of social responsibility. Does the teacher cooperate with colleagues or does he/she work alone? Values such as cooperation, collaboration, coordination, and consultation are important in the work environment.

The book closes with the chapter ‘Navigating the Framework’ on how to use the framework. Farrell’s statement that his framework is more descriptive than prescriptive cautions the readers who would want to adopt the framework readily and use it as such without reflection.

The book is written in a lucid, reader-friendly style. Each chapter is punctuated with several tasks in the form of worksheets at regular intervals that compel the reader to reflect on what has been read. The worksheets can be used on a teacher development workshop. As one reads through the book, one is obviously made to recall several critical incidents from one’s own teaching experience and relate them to what is discussed. This is a good demonstration of ‘reflection-in-action’. The book is a welcome addition to the existing literature on professional development and a useful source of reference to students on teacher development courses.

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[**Editor’s Note:** An earlier, longer version of this review was published in the Golden Jubilee Special Number of *JELT* (57/3, pp.105-107), which may be accessed from the journal website.]