

REVIEWS

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]

I like to begin this review on a personal note. The last decade has seen a splurge in book publication at large. Being an ELT practitioner, my attention was obviously diverted towards books published in the field and looking at the mass output, I reflected and came to the following conclusion. 'Most of these books are reproducing what is already said. There is no point in reading them anymore.' So saying I decided to take a *sanyas* from reading new books about two years ago only to realize soon how false my reflections were. I felt sorry for taking such a decision, for I began to discover that many books in the field introduced new concepts, new thoughts and put them across succinctly, making me realize how small I was. The book under review is one such that caught my attention and made me go through it in a single sitting.

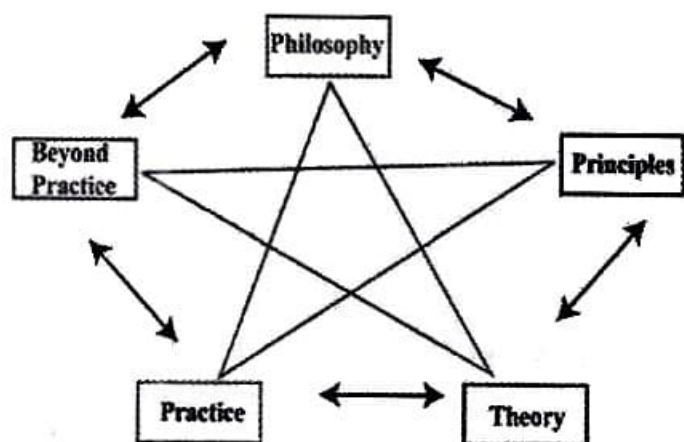
Farrell has been a well known author who is referred to extensively when matters pertaining to professional development and teacher education are discussed. The present volume discusses one aspect of professional development – Reflection.

Reflection and reflective practices have been talked about for over two decades now. Schon (1983), Woodward, T^r(1991), Wallace M (1991) and Edge J (2001), among others, began discussing the concept of reflection as an integral part of teacher development. This idea has been developed since and several theories have been posited for discussion. Though each of the works cited above offers a few suggestions to the practising teacher, there hasn't been a comprehensive book on reflective practices

as the present volume. Farrell provides a framework for reflection which can be used by teachers. The book provides a detailed description of the framework, its uses and tasks to reflect on the concepts introduced in the book.

The book begins with a discussion on the confusion that exists between two terms 'contemplation' and 'reflection'. Often these two words are used interchangeably. The author provides various examples from religion and philosophy to bring out the distinction. Contemplation, he 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. This framework is diagrammatically represented as follows: Each stage is closely interrelated to the others, as is evident from the diagram, and this clearly suggests that 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 discussed here.



Philosophy is recognized as a stage in the framework. Philosophy helps us probe the reasons that may exist for every action we are involved in, in the course of teaching. Each action constitutes a behaviour which can be attributed to the environment in which we are born and brought up. Hence behaviour is a cultivated trait and influenced by several factors that exist in our surroundings. How do we reflect on our behaviour? We as teachers are given to narrating incidents from our own life and experience. Farrell says 'telling our autobiographical stories' (p. 25) is an essential part of reflection and this helps us refine our behaviour.

Principles are the assumptions, beliefs and conceptions of teaching and learning we have. Assumptions, beliefs and conceptions, though they are different, 'are three points along a continuum' (p. 26). These are responsible for moulding our classroom practices. All three lead us to build a set of images (mental pictures of ourselves) based on the experiences in our life. These images further help us to compare and contrast ourselves with the images as perceived by others. Such a comparison helps us reflect and improve ourselves.

Theory is evolved from the practices we adopt in our classroom which are obvious

outcomes of the philosophies and assumptions. We as teachers have been exposed to a set of theories in the course of our training. Such theories which are established and universal are termed 'official theories'. The theories that we develop for ourselves, which are largely unconscious processes, are termed 'unofficial theories' by Farrell. Though we are not aware of the theories that we follow, 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. Here we need to conceive of planning in three different 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). Planning and execution of the plan capture the entire process of teaching, and reflecting on our practice happens best by looking at certain critical incidents and the way we handle them.

Practice is also the major part of our teaching. Farrell uses the metaphor of an iceberg to describe the entire framework. Practice is the 9/10 part of the iceberg that is submerged and hidden from our eye. This analogy helps us understand its importance. 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 here is conceived as three distinct entities, the third being an offshoot of the first two, *Reflection-in Practice* and *Reflection-on Practice* leading to *Reflection-for 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 have a set of social implications. The actions of the teacher 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? Factors such as cooperation, collaboration, coordination and consultation are important in the work environment. Whether a teacher adopts these practices is what is discussed in the chapter on *Beyond Practice*.

The book closes with a chapter on how to use the framework and is called 'Navigating the Framework'. Farrell makes it clear that his framework is more descriptive than prescriptive. This comes as a caution to the reader who would want to adopt the framework readily and use it in his profession without reflecting. This reminds us of the structure of grammar. Grammars have to be descriptive, but there is an inherent element of prescription in all grammars. This is inevitable, for grammars cannot work without an element of prescription. So is this framework.

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 is written in lucid, reader-friendly style. Each chapter is punctuated with several tasks at regular intervals that compel the reader to reflect on what has been read. Thus the book assumes the form of a series of worksheets that 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.

Bibliography

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S. Mohanraj

Dean, School of English Language Education
English and Foreign Languages University
Hyderabad 500 007 (India)