

Book Reviews

Surviving the induction years of language teaching: The importance of reflective practice (book review)

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Farrell's study of English as a Second Language and the importance for teachers of developing reflectivity on their work and development in the classroom is an important initiative in developing teachers' careers and in teacher training. The key aim of this book is to show how teachers can and should reflect on the quality of their work and use what they find to improve their classroom methodology and their attitude to teaching language classes.

In fifteen chapters Farrell studies the career of a Canadian ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher called Roger (not his real name) and his reflection on his first to third years of teaching and its effect on his attitude to his classes and his methodology.

Roger graduated from university in Canada with an MA (Master of Arts) in Applied Linguistics with a major in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and started work in language learning and teaching. He himself was not from the English-speaking part of Canada and he was teaching foreigners living in Canada who needed to learn English as a foreign language. Guided by Professor Farrell, he learned to apply reflective practice to his teaching to learn lessons about his attitude, his methods and his confidence in his teaching over the first three years of work.

The book is divided into 15 chapters, focusing on Roger's feelings about his first year after graduation and his third year of teaching, what problems he has faced and what solutions he has found. Other chapters explore the role of reflection on one's teaching and understanding why problems may have occurred and how the process of systematic reflection on a teacher's working environment, the courses taught, the quality and response of the students and the effectiveness of the methodology can improve. Above all, it explores how the key issue of engaging with students in the classroom works and can work better. As Farrell states, many novice teachers drop out in the early years of teaching. In his view, developing the ability of novice teachers to reflect on their teaching style and attitude can help them make any adaptation of their attitude and methodology to ensure their success.

A very positive feature of each chapter is where Farrell invites readers to reflect on their own classroom activities, maybe by recording a class and when playing back the recording reflecting on the teacher's voice volume, pronunciation and what he or she notices about the students. This section, entitled *Reflective Break*, is very useful as an activity for use in teacher training classes. Farrell stresses that the first year of class teaching can be very different from the experience of being a student

'So, what is reflectivity and how does it work? It's about standing back after classes, seeing and thinking about what happened and seeing how you feel about it and what works and what maybe you need to change. One way, Farrell suggests, is to record your class on video or audio and listen and note what you think worked and what didn't. Write it down. A written record of your experience will stimulate your thinking about the class and how best to respond. You might undertake the process of reflection on your own, with peers or with mentors or supervisors, recording your experiences in the classroom in writing or using sound or video recordings and reflecting on how you might improve and help you respond to challenges you might have encountered'

in a university or a teacher training school. Many crises can occur and the ability to reflect on these is an important part of novice teacher development and encourages them to stay in their jobs.

So, what is reflectivity and how does it work? It's about standing back after classes, seeing and thinking about what happened and seeing how you feel about it and what works and what maybe you need to change. One way, Farrell suggests, is to record your class on video or audio and listen and note what you think worked and what didn't. Write it down. A written record of your experience will stimulate your thinking about the class and how best to respond. You might undertake the process of reflection on your own, with peers or with mentors or supervisors, recording your experiences in the classroom in writing or using sound or video recordings and reflecting on how you might improve and help you respond to challenges you might have encountered. An effective reflective process might cover your teaching approaches and methods, your personality, your experiences as a teacher, what works best for you and what doesn't work so well and what your school or educational institution has established as good practice.

In doing his reflections, Roger realised that his training had not prepared him for the reality of working with students in a real language learning class; an important lesson for teacher trainers who may concentrate on principles rather than on practice and, where possible should provide students with the opportunity to work in a classroom as part of teaching practice. For Roger, his first year's reflection led him to focus on how to give new information to his students, how to give examples and how to make grammar practical using real life examples. He also reflected on how he asked questions and how he felt about himself as a teacher.

From Farrell's point of view, teachers' emotions in relation to their teaching are an important thing to reflect on. In Roger's case, he listed confidence, curiosity, excitement and enjoyment. However, as Farrell points out, teachers in the classroom are

very much left to sink or swim and being able to recall and state their emotions is a good way for novice teachers to understand their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their teaching. As Roger experienced at the end of his second year, a 'bad' class can affect how you operate, with Roger depending on his personality rather than methodology to manage the class with a degree of success. He was also conscious of putting his learners' needs first but experienced certain difficulties in adapting to the different and diverse cultural backgrounds of many of his students. He tended increasingly to focus on PowerPoint presentations as a way of introducing grammatical constructions but came to realise that it was getting in the way of practice and student interaction.

So, while focusing on Roger's varied experience with language classes and his advantages and challenges, not to mention the gap between his language teaching course and his classroom experience, what principles would Farrell propose to help practising teachers improve their performance and overcome difficulties in the classroom?

First, he suggests novice teachers try to develop some new routines but not to fall into a routine where you are always doing the same. Secondly, try new things so that you don't fall into a rut. Thirdly, remember your students are changing all the time and a bad term this term may be better next term. Fourth, make a practice at the end of term of reflecting on your own or with colleagues what went right and what went wrong and needs changing. Fifth, find a 'buddy' who you can exchange with as the teaching progresses, exchanging views on how things are going and how issues can be dealt with.

In creating a programme to review and assess the achievements in teaching a course and the challenges teachers may face, Farrell suggests reviewing the following points.

1. *Opportunities.* A school should create opportunities for teachers to exchange experiences and raise and discuss issues through group discussion, journal writing and classroom observation.

2. *Ground rules.* In order not to drift off the subject it is worth agreeing ground rules for teachers to use in exchanges. Three or four rules should be sufficient.

3. *Time.* This is important in a teacher's life. The time allotted to reflective practice and discussion should depend on four fundamental factors, the time that the meeting should last, the length of a teacher's discussion of their activity, and how long it takes to develop the relationship and the discussion between the participants. The final factor is the period for reflection, the time it is estimated to take to complete the process. All these factors should be agreed by the group before they start the reflection.

4. *External input.* In the reflective process teachers will be discussing their own experiences of what has happened in class and how they felt about it. However, as well as the personal input participants might want to consider evidence from academic journals and information about what other groups of teachers have done.

5. *Trust*. Inevitably, some of the issues raised by teachers based on their classroom activity may cause anxiety. It is important that the teachers in the reflective practice session develop confidence and trust in each other to avoid anxiety and concern about sharing difficulties.

Teachers are generally busy and don't have a lot of time to discuss at length the issues that have arisen in the classroom and affected the transmission of knowledge and getting the students to practise the language they are learning. Nevertheless, as Farrell summarises in his book, recording critical incidents that arise

in class, being aware of issues and problems that arise in class, and noting insights that occur which might affect methodology and materials introduced in future classes and how they are used is important.

In summary, this is a practical and useful presentation of reflectivity, what it is, how to put it into action and how it can affect the teaching especially of novice language teachers for the better. In addition, the example of Roger's teaching, his experiences in the classroom and how record them, reflect on them and act on them is especially valuable.

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