



# Reflective Language Teaching

Practical Applications for TESOL Teachers

SECOND EDITION

Thomas S. C. Farrell

B L O O M S B U R Y

# **Reflective Language Teaching**

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*2nd edition*

*Practical Applications  
for TESOL Teachers*

**Thomas S. C. Farrell**

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# Preface

This is a revised version of *Reflective Language Teaching: From Research to Practice*, originally published in 2008. I was very pleased with the reviews of this edition, and especially most honored and flattered by the wonderful applied linguist David Nunan's review in the prestigious academic journal of *Applied Linguistics* (2010: 474) where he began his review by saying: "I should declare my position at the outset. This is a book that I wish I had written!" I was so pleased and thrilled that a scholar of his magnitude would say something so positive about the book. So when talking to the publisher about revising the contents of the book, I returned to this review not only as a basis for some of the revisions but also as encouragement to carry out the revisions in this new edition of the book.

Readers will note that from the outset, the subtitle of the book has now been changed to: *Practical Applications for TESOL Teachers*. Such a change also reflects Nunan's (2010: 474) review especially when he noted in the previous edition that "although the subtitle of the book is 'From research to practice,' the focus is firmly on practice." I totally agree and as David continues: "This is a book for practitioners: teachers and teacher educators—a 'how to' volume" (p. 475). Not only have I changed the subtitle of the book as a result; I have also changed the subtitles in each chapter to reflect the practitioner focus more. Thus after the introduction in each chapter now the topic of the chapter is the subtitle (rather than before when it had "what the research says"). Also instead of the subtitle "from research to practice" that followed this in each chapter in the first edition, I now have "practical applications for TESOL teachers" because as Nunan (2010: 475) again observed: "This book is unashamedly practice oriented." However, although I have highlighted the "practice" and "how to," I have not neglected the research and left most of what was there in the first edition. As Nunan (2010: 475) correctly points out: "Enough signposts are provided to the relevant research literature for readers who want to look in greater detail at the empirical basis of particular topics." I have since begun a writing project related solely to the analysis of empirical studies related to the practices that encourage TESOL teachers to reflect if readers are interested in such a focus (see Farrell, 2018).



More specifically, in this new edition I have added three chapters that add to the concept of reflective practice: Chapter 7 for teachers of young learners, Chapter 14 on online reflection, and Chapter 16 on effective teaching. I have also changed the title of Chapter 12 to “Collegial Friendships” from the original “Critical Friendships” as this could be confusing given such friendships include team teaching, peer coaching as well as critical friendships. I guess that the most controversial change that readers will notice is that I have omitted the chapter on teachers’ language proficiency. I made this change mostly for philosophical reasons many of which are explained in more detail in Chapter 16 where I include a subheading on language proficiency. Basically, I omitted the chapter because a whole chapter with such a focus in my opinion further encourages the dichotomy between so-called native speaker teachers and non-native speaker teachers and suggests a native speaker model proficiency in English and a deficit model of teacher development and reflection. My thoughts on teacher language proficiency have evolved and as such should be part of overall professional development and reflection that defines effective teaching. Most of this is explained in Chapter 16.

The structure of the book remains basically the same except for the differences in subheadings as noted above as such a pattern (with my updated sub-title changes now in parentheses), according to Nunan (2010: 475), “gives a sense of coherence to the volume: an introduction, (the topic of the chapter), a case study relating to the topic at hand drawn from Farrell’s own experience, a section entitled (Practical Applications for TESOL Teachers), which sets out practical ideas for getting started on implementing the topic, and a chapter scenario, which is, in effect, another mini-case study based on someone else’s experience.” Thus while the pattern remains the same, I have added a number of new and updated case studies to each chapter and most still based on my own experience with reflective practice in the preceding 12 years. I do this also in part response to Mann and Walsh’s (2017) suggestion that teacher educators are not practicing what they preach and reflecting themselves. I continue to reflect on myself and my practice as well as *with* (rather than *on*) other colleagues in order to promote reflective practice with others. I hope readers enjoy this new edition of the book.

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Brock University, Canada  
January 2018

# Reflective Language Teaching

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## Chapter Outline

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## Introduction

One day a young girl was watching her mother cooking a roast of beef. Just before the mother put the roast in the pot, she cut a slice off the end. The ever-observant daughter asked her mother why she had done that, and the mother responded that her grandmother had always done it. Later that same afternoon, the mother was curious, so she called her mother and asked her the same question. Her mother, the child's grandmother, said that in her day she had to trim the roasts because they were usually too big for a regular pot.

This adapted story is relevant for language teachers in that teaching without any reflection, such as the nonreflecting child's mother when dealing with the routine of cutting the slice off the roast each time before she put it in the pot, shows that experience is not enough for effective teaching, for we

do not learn much from experience alone as much as we learn from reflecting on that experience. Such continuous repetitive actions can also lead to burnout on any job. Dewey (1933) noted that teachers who do not bother to reflect on their work become slaves to routine (such as the mother in the above story) and their actions are guided mostly by impulse, tradition, and/or authority rather than by informed decision-making. This decision-making, Dewey (1933) insisted, should be based on systematic and conscious reflections because teaching experience when combined with these reflections can only lead to awareness, development, and growth. More recently, Zeichner and Liston (1996: 24) returned to Dewey's original ideas when they distinguished between routine action and reflective action and suggested that for teachers "routine action is guided primarily by tradition, external authority and circumstance" whereas reflective action "entails the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge." One of the only ways for teachers to identify routine, and thus help counteract the possible burnout, is to engage in reflective teaching. When teachers reflect on their teaching, they generally take the time to stop and think about what is happening in their practice to make sense of it so that they can learn from their professional experiences. This introductory first chapter provides a brief background to the origins of reflective teaching, explains what reflective teaching is, and then outlines and describes what reflecting language teaching is for second language teachers.

## **Reflective teaching**

### **Origins of reflective teaching**

Many years ago Dewey (1933: 9) called for teachers to take reflective action that entails "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads." Dewey (1933) identified three attributes of reflective individuals that I think are still important today for teachers: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. Open-mindedness is a desire to listen to more than one side of an issue and to give attention to alternative views. Responsibility means careful consideration of the consequences to which an action leads. Wholeheartedness implies that teachers can overcome fears and uncertainties to critically evaluate their

practice in order to make meaningful change. The education community did not really hear about reflective teaching again until the early 1980s and it was not until the last 35 years that research interest in reflective teaching proliferated with the work of such educators as Donald Schön (1983, 1987). This renewed interest in reflective teaching was also due to a press for the empowerment of teachers and out of the need to find some way to counteract a resurgence of teacher burnout in the teaching profession. At that time Schön's (1983) work centered on the notion of practitioner-generated intuitive practice. For Schön (1983, 1987), when a practitioner is confronted with a problem, he or she identifies the problem as being of a particular type and then applies an appropriate technique to solve the problem. However, he also asks what happens if these problems are non-routine problems. In this case Schön says that practitioners engage in a process of problem setting rather than problem solving. Clarke (1995: 245) explains this process of problem setting as follows:

When confronted by non-routine problems, skilled practitioners learn to conduct frame experiments in which they impose a kind of coherence on "messy" situations. They come to new understandings of situations and new possibilities for action through a spiraling process of framing and reframing. Through the effects of a particular action, both intended and unintended, the situation "talks back." This conversation between the practitioner and the setting provides the data which may then lead to new meanings, further reframing, and plans for further action.

In recent times, reflective teaching has become something of a buzzword and is promoted in most teacher education and development programs worldwide, and most educators agree that some form of reflection is desirable for all teachers.

## Definitions of reflective teaching

Today, one can find many different definitions of reflective teaching. However, most of the definitions can be contained within two main stances to reflective teaching, one that emphasizes reflection only on classroom actions, while the other also includes reflections on matters outside the classroom. Concerning the former approach, Cruickshank and Applegate (1981: 553) have characterized this reflection as a process that "help[s] teachers to think about what happened, why it happened, and what else could have been done to reach their goals." Schulman (1987: 19) concurred and suggested that

reflection happens when a teacher “reconstructs, reenacts and/or recaptures the events, emotions, and the accomplishments” of his or her teaching. However, Zeichner and Liston (1996) maintain that these definitions excluded the issue of linking teaching to the larger community called critical reflection. For Jay and Johnson (2002: 80) such critical reflection involves the broader historical, sociopolitical, and moral context of schooling so that reflective teachers can “come to see themselves as agents of change.” Within this latter definition then, if teachers want to reflect on student performance in their classes for example, they should not only consider the perspectives of the obvious main players (the teacher, the student, and the parents), but also the school culture that includes the context in which the schooling is taking place.

Reflective practice has also impacted the field of second language education and especially the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Since its emergence in TESOL, reflective practice has become a very popular term in many pre-service and in-service programs worldwide. Although most educators still agree that some form of reflection is a desirable practice among teachers, there is still less agreement on the precise definition of reflective practice—how to do it—and as yet no overall framework exists that all teachers can implement. Hence the main reason I have written this book is because of the many different approaches to reflective teaching that exist and so I believe that it is necessary for *each* teacher to define for themselves the concept of reflective teaching after reading this book. That said I am now able to offer a definition of reflective practice based on the culmination of the work I have done for the past 35 years on this complex concept that teachers can consider as they read the contents of the book. For me, reflective practice is:

A cognitive process accompanied by a set of attitudes in which teachers systematically collect data about their practice, and while engaging in dialogue with others use the data to make informed decisions about their practice both inside and outside the classroom. (Farrell, 2015: 123)

## Types of reflective teaching

There are said to be three major types, or moments, of reflective practice where teachers can undertake reflection. The first moment happens during the event, such as classroom teaching and is called reflection-in-action. The second moment is thinking about the event after it has happened and this is

called reflection-on-action. While the third moment is where teachers think about future actions and this is called reflection-for-action.

- 1 *Technical rationality*: The first type is where teachers engage in examining the use of skills and immediate behaviors in teaching with an established research and theory base (Chien, 2013).
- 2 *Reflection-in-action*: The second type, of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983, 1987), happens when teachers take for granted their tacit knowledge of teaching because many of their actions have become routine while teaching. In order for teachers to carry out these routine actions they must employ a kind of knowing-in-action (Schön, 1983). According to Schön, knowing-in-action is crucial for teachers because they cannot constantly question every action or reaction while they teach; otherwise, they would not be able to get through a class. So a teacher's knowing-in-action works similar to when we recognize a face in a crowd but we do not list and/or try to consciously piece together each separate facial feature that makes a person recognizable to us. We do not consciously think, "Could that be . . .?"—we just know. In addition, if you were asked to describe the features that prompted this recognition, it might be difficult because, as Schön (1983) has pointed out, that type of information usually remains at the subconscious level of our thoughts. However, when a new situation or event occurs and our established routines do not work for us, then according to Schön (1983), teachers use reflection-in-action to cope. There is a sequence of moments in a process of reflection-in-action:
  - a. A situation develops which triggers spontaneous, routine responses (such as in knowing-in-action): For example, a student cannot answer a question about a topic that he or she easily answered during a previous class such as identifying a grammar structure.
  - b. Routine responses by the teacher (i.e., what the teacher has always done) do not produce a routine response and instead produce a surprise for the teacher: The teacher starts to explain how the student had already explained this grammar structure in the previous class and that this current silence is troubling the teacher. Suddenly the student begins to cry.
  - c. This surprise response gets the teacher's attention and leads to reflection within an action: The teacher reacts quickly to try to find out why the student is suddenly crying by questioning the

student or asking the student's classmates why they think the student is crying.

- d. Reflection now gives rise to on-the-spot experimentation by the teacher: The student may or may not explain why he or she is crying. The teacher will take some measures (depending on the reaction or non-reaction) to help solve the problem: ignore the situation, empathize with the student, help the student answer the question by modeling answers, and so forth.

According to Schön these sequences of moments are all present and lead to reflection-in-action. Experienced teachers can use their repertoire of teaching routines to experiment in order to solve the dilemma, but novice teachers may have a problem reflecting-in-action because they have not built up such an advanced schema of teaching routines.

- 3 *Reflection-on-action*: The third type of reflection is called reflection-on-action and involves thinking back on what was done to discover how knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected action (Hatton and Smith, 1995). Here, teachers reflect on their classes after they have finished. Reflection-on-action focuses on the cognitive processes of teaching that depends on retrospection for analysis. So, reflection-on-action would come to mean some kind of metacognitive action, while reflection-in-action is the ability to frame problems based on past experiences, a type of conversation that takes place between the practitioner and an uncertain situation at the time of the occurrence of that situation.
- 4 *Reflection-for-action*: The fourth type of reflection is called reflection-for-action. Reflection-for-action is different from the previous types of reflection in that it is proactive in nature. Killon and Todnew (1991: 15) argue that reflection-for-action is the desired outcome of both previous types of reflection; they say that "we undertake reflection, not so much to revisit the past or to become aware of the metacognitive process one is experiencing (both noble reasons in themselves) but to guide future action (the more practical purpose)." Teachers can prepare for the future by using knowledge from what happened during class and what they reflected on after class.
- 5 *Action research*: The fifth type is action research (see also Chapter 8) as reflective practice and is self-reflective enquiry by participants in social settings to improve classroom practice mostly but can also involve critical reflection outside the classroom (Crooks, 2013).

As Stanley (1998: 585) suggests, all three above is what “reflective practitioners do when they look at their work in the moment (reflect-in-action) or in retrospect (reflect-on-action) in order to examine the reasons and beliefs underlying their actions and generate alternative actions for the future.”

## Levels of reflection

Connected to the different types of reflection outlined above is Day's (1993) notion of teachers acting within three different hierarchical levels of reflection: the first is where teachers focus their reflections on behavioral actions (P1), the second (P2) is where teachers also include justifications of these reflections based on current theories of teaching, while at the third level (P3) teachers include the first two and look beyond theories and practices to examine their meaning within ethical, moral, and social ramifications. P1 is where teachers reflect at the level of classroom actions, the reasons for these actions are at P2, and justification for the work itself is at the level of P3. These three levels are called: *descriptive* (P1: focus on teacher skills), *conceptual* (P2: the rationale for practice), and *critical* (P3: examination of sociopolitical and moral and ethical results of practice). Jay and Johnson (2002: 77–79) have neatly summarized the three levels outlined above although they use slightly different terminology for the second level (they call it *comparative reflection*) as follows.

- *Descriptive reflection* involves describing a situation or problem.
- *Comparative reflection* involves thinking about the situation for reflection from different perspectives. Teachers try to solve the problem while also questioning their values and beliefs.
- *Critical reflection* involves teachers looking at all the different perspectives of a situation/problem and all of the players involved: teachers, students, the school, and the community.

Day (1993) maintains that most teachers will find themselves planning and acting (constructing practice) at the descriptive, P1 level and less on observation and reflection (deconstructing practice) at comparative level P2 and/or critical level P3; in addition any change that may occur as a result of reflection happens mainly at the P1 action level. Day (1993) also criticizes Schön's (1983) notion of reflective practice (outlined above) because he says Schön fails to deal with discourse; he says that the dialogical dimension of learning can only emerge from the process of confrontation



and reconstruction. Day's (1993) main point here is that reflection needs to be analytic and involve dialogue with others.

In a more recent criticism of the dominance of written reflection at the expense of dialogical reflection, Mann and Walsh (2017: 12), agreeing with Day (1993) above, maintain that experiential knowledge is "supported by collaborative discussion where thoughts and ideas about classroom practice are first articulated and then reformulated in a progression toward enhanced understanding." They suggest that such an approach includes discussions with other practitioners and thus does not take place in isolation. Mann and Walsh (2017) do however recognize the importance of various written approaches to written reflection such as narratives (see Chapter 4), introspective journals (see Chapter 9), and online written forms of reflection (see Chapter 14). In this book I maintain though that these can be used in combination with other tools to help trigger overall reflection for teachers. Some teachers may have more preference for one particular tool over another and so academics must be careful of co-opting approaches and tools to reflection that may represent their desired approach but not necessarily the teachers who are engaging in reflection. We still have a long way to go in determining appropriate approaches and tools, but I do not think we can suggest a "one size fits all" approach for teacher education and development programs. I believe that dialogue and collaboration among teachers are covered in this book and in fact in a review of the first edition of this book, influential scholar and author David Nunan (2010: 474) pointed out: "While the focus [of the book] is on reflection, collaboration also features prominently, particularly in the chapters on teacher development groups, classroom observations, and critical friendships." Indeed, Chapter 10 on teacher development groups outlines how teachers can use dialogue in a collaborative group manner in order to facilitate individual teacher's reflection in addition to journal writing, classroom observations, and critical friendships.

## Benefits of reflective teaching

Why should language teachers look at what they do and reflect on their work beyond the quick after class muse of "That was a good class" or "The students were not very responsive today"? While these reflections are a necessary start, they are not very productive in that we do not know why the class was a good one (or even if the students learned anything or enjoyed it). Likewise, we should find out why the students were not responsive—it could be that

the teacher was at fault, the time of day was not conducive to having a class (after lunch or 5 p.m. on a Friday), or a host of many other possible and complex reasons. We need to know equally why a class was responsive or not responsive. We need to know what teachers believe to be good and bad teaching as well as what teachers do in their classrooms in order to be able to discuss teaching beyond mere preconceptions of what good teaching is or is not. Reflective teaching benefits teachers in the following ways:

- It frees the teacher from routine and impulsive action.
- It helps teachers become more confident in their actions and decisions.
- It provides information for teachers to make informed decisions.
- It helps teachers to critically reflect on all aspects of their work.
- It helps teachers to develop strategies for intervention and change.
- It recognizes teachers as professionals.
- It is a cathartic experience for practicing (and novice) teachers.

## Reflective teaching and professional development

Reflective teaching as it is discussed throughout this book differs from traditional professional development in that traditional professional development assumes that teachers can (or should) improve their classroom practices as a result of gaining new information and knowledge from taking a workshop or course. This top-down approach relies on the applications of research conducted by others as a framework for teaching and assumes that the transmission of knowledge (usually from an outside expert) in a workshop or the like will change classroom teaching behaviors. In reality though workshop sessions of this nature have little actual effect on classroom teaching as not much change happens and if it does, it does not last long. Although reflective teaching shares the common goal of improving teaching, as it is outlined in this book, it also provides a platform for teachers to change their level of awareness of their current practices so that they can consider if these are still appropriate to them after such awareness. So this reflection can result in affirming current practices rather than making any behavioral teaching changes. Awareness of current practices is very important because as Freeman (1989: 33) says, “One acts on or responds to the aspects of a situation of which one is aware.” Thus, reflective teaching involves looking at what is happening now in a teacher’s life rather than ingesting new

information or knowledge about teaching methods or assessment (although this too can aid a teacher's reflections).

In more recent times, within the field of education, reflective practice has had a major impact on virtually all areas of a teacher's life from teacher education programs for novice teachers to professional development programs for experienced teachers. Indeed, in the field of education Zwozdiak-Myers (2012: 3) emphasized that reflective practice is central to a teacher's development because it helps teachers "to analyse and evaluate what is happening" in their classes so that they can not only improve the quality of their teaching, but also provide better opportunities for their students to learn.

## Reflective language teaching

Language education embraced reflective teaching later than other areas within education and it is now considered an essential part of many language teacher education programs worldwide. Pennington (1992: 51) first proposed a general reflective/developmental orientation for language teachers "as a means for (1) improving classroom processes and outcomes, and (2) developing confident, self-motivated teachers and learners." She described reflection for language teachers generally as "deliberating on experience, and that of mirroring experience" and she also related teacher development to reflection where she maintained "reflection is viewed as the input for development while also reflection is viewed as the output of development" (Pennington, 1992: 47). The focus here is on analysis, feedback, and adaptation as an ongoing and recursive cycle in the classroom. However, and as in general education programs, the precise definition of reflective language teaching remains vague (Roberts, 1998). For example, in its weakest version, reflective language teaching is said to be no more than thoughtful practice where teachers sometimes, as Wallace (1996: 292) suggests, "informally evaluate various aspects of their professional expertise." This type of informal reflection does not really lead to improved teaching and can even lead to more "unpleasant emotions without suggesting any way forward." A second stronger version of reflective language teaching proposes that teachers systematically reflect on their own teaching so that they take more responsibility for the actions they take in their classrooms. Richards and Lockhart (1994: 1) emphasize this version when they say that teachers

should “collect data about their teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching.” Richards (1990: 5) maintains that such type of self-inquiry and critical thinking can “help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking.” The contents of this book embraces the latter stronger version of reflective language teaching where there is conscious recall and examination of the classroom experiences as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action. In addition and for the purposes of this book, I use the terms reflection, reflective practice, reflective inquiry, reflective thinking, and reflective teaching interchangeably indicating they hold the same meaning.

Thus within the field of second language education reflective practice has emerged as an approach where teachers actively collect data about their teaching beliefs and practices and then reflect on the data in order to direct future teaching decisions; thus the stronger version of the above definition is beginning to take root. This evidence-based approach to reflection encourages teachers to avoid making instructional decisions based on impulse or routine; rather, teachers are now encouraged to use the data they have obtained so that they can make more informed decisions about their practice (Farrell, 2015). Richards and Lockhart (1994: 1) summarize this evidence-based reflective approach where teachers “collect data about their teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching.”

Reflective language teaching, as it is discussed in this book, is a bottom-up approach to teacher professional development that is based on the belief that experienced and novice language teachers can improve their understanding of their own teaching by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences. It starts with the internal rather than the external and the real center of the process is teaching itself, and it uses the teacher’s actual teaching experiences as a basis for reflection. By making systematic reflections on teaching, teachers can become free from making too many impulsive decisions about what to teach, when to teach, and why to teach it. Teachers should move beyond designing routine activities for their students to complete just because they have always done these. Reflective teaching enables teachers to act in a more deliberate and intentional manner.

Reflective practice means that teachers must subject their own beliefs of teaching and learning to *critical* examination, by articulating these beliefs and comparing these beliefs to their actual classroom practices to see if there are any contradictions between practice and underlying beliefs. Hatton and Smith (1995: 35) note however, that the term *critical* as used in critical reflection “like reflection itself appears to be used loosely, with some taking it to mean more than constructive self-criticism of one’s actions with a view to improvement” (p. 35). For example, in language teaching Pennington (1995: 706) has defined critical reflection as “the process of information gained through innovation in relation to the teacher’s existing schema for teaching,” but she does not include the broader society in her definition of critical reflection. However, Bartlett (1990: 204) sees a need to include the broader society in any definition of critical reflection within language teaching. He says that in order for language teachers to become critically reflective, they have to “transcend the technicalities of teaching and think beyond the need to improve our instructional techniques.” For the purposes of this book the term critical in teaching includes “making judgments about whether professional activity is equitable, just, and respectful of persons or not” (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 35). In addition, a language teacher is considered to be reflective when he or she seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1 What and how is he/she doing in the classroom (**method**)?
- 2 Why is he/she doing this (**reason**)?
- 3 What is the **result**?
- 4 Will he/she change anything based on the information gathered from answering the first two questions (**justification**)?

In order to answer the first question posed above, teachers must first decide on what topic they want to reflect on and then systematically gather data about that topic. Topics that teachers can choose from to critically reflect on include:

- Aspects of their life and work by engaging in self-reflection (Chapter 2).
- Their beliefs and classroom practices (Chapter 3).
- Critical incidents and case analysis in their teaching and careers (Chapter 4).
- Their use of metaphors and maxims (Chapter 5).
- Communication and interaction in their classrooms (Chapter 6).
- Reflecting on teaching young learners (Chapter 7).

There are a number of procedures from which teachers can choose to facilitate this reflection over the course of their professional careers. Each procedure can be used alone or in combination with other procedures depending on the topic of investigation. For example, teachers can:

- Conduct an action research project to bring about change (Chapter 8).
- Write accounts of their experiences in teaching journals (Chapter 9).
- Join other teachers to discuss their teaching in teacher development groups (Chapter 10).
- Engage in classroom observations (individual, pairs, groups) (Chapter 11).
- Form collegial friendships in team teaching or peer coaching arrangements (Chapter 12).
- Use concept mapping to focus their reflections (Chapter 13).
- Use social media and online modes (Chapter 14).

Much of the discussion of reflective teaching thus far assumes a positive relationship between reflective language teaching and teacher effectiveness. However, education has a long but disappointing history of attempts to relate personality variables, styles, or qualities in teachers to student learning outcomes. Consequently, reflection and reflective practice has not escaped from its share of criticism. For example, a number of scholars have urged caution as to the applicability of reflective practice to real classroom situations. Some researchers have suggested that reflection and teaching are incompatible; reflection would paralyze a teacher from action and result in a dysfunctional classroom. Stanley (1998: 587) has cautioned language teachers that when they engage in reflective teaching, they may have some “emotional reactions to what is uncovered through investigation.” Consequently, teachers should be emotionally ready to face what they may discover after they begin their reflections. Hoover (1994: 83) also wondered that “the promising acclamation about reflection has yielded little research qualitatively or quantitatively.” He did not, however, rule out reflection in teaching, but he says reflection is a learned activity; he says it is “a carefully planned set of experiences that foster a sensitivity to ways of looking at and talking about previously unarticulated beliefs concerning teaching” (Hoover, 1994: 84). He also says that this self-analysis requires time and opportunity. I agree that reflection is a learned activity and I hope the contents of this book provide many different opportunities and tools for teacher learning to reflect on their practice.

## Reflection

- Are you a reflective teacher? How do you know?
- What kind of reflections do you do immediately before and after teaching a language class?
- Do you reflect during class? If yes, how do you do this?
- What is your definition of reflective practice?
- Compare your definition with the definition of other teachers. Can you see any patterns in the different definitions (if they are different)?
- What is critical reflection and how is it different from reflection?
- Dewey mentioned the following dispositions of a reflective practitioner: *open-mindedness*, *responsibility*, and *wholeheartedness*. What is your understanding of each of these?
- Which type or moment of reflective practice (from the three types outlined above) would be most difficult for you to implement? Why?
- How can experienced teachers perform reflection-in-action as they teach?
- How can reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action lead to reflecting-for-action?
- Detail one of your reflection-in-action moments as outlined in the steps discussed above in reflection-in-action
- Which level of reflection do you think you are operating at—P1, P2, or P3? How do you know?
- Do you think it is worth it to reflect on your practice even if you do not discover new teaching or assessment methods and just gain a better understanding of what you are doing now? Explain.
- How would you attempt to answer each of the four questions on the method, reason, result, and justification for your teaching decisions posed above?
- Which question would be most difficult for you to answer and why?
- How do you think method, reason, result, justification are all interrelated?
- Try to answer the four questions posed by Hatton and Smith above.
- Oberg and Blades (1990: 179) maintain that the potential of being reflective “lies not in the theory it allows us to develop (about practice or reflection) but the evolution of ourselves as a teacher. Its focus is life; we continually return to our place of origin, but it is not the place we left.” What is your understanding of this statement?

- Do you think it is unreasonable to expect language teachers consistently to engage in reflection? If no, why not?
- If yes, how often should teachers engage in reflection?
- Why do you think teachers should reflect on their practice?
- There still remain some unanswered questions (below) about reflective teaching that teachers may want to consider as they reflect (adapted from Hatton and Smith, 1995: 34–36). What are your answers to these questions:
  - Is reflection limited to thought processes about action, or more bound up in the action itself?
  - Is reflection immediate and short term, or more extended and systematic?
  - Is reflection problem-centered, finding solutions to real classroom problems, or something else?
  - How critical does one get when reflecting?

## Conclusion

Reflection for teachers as it is outlined in this Introduction (and indeed the book) is much more than taking a few minutes to think about how to keep students on task. Reflective language teaching involves teachers systematically gathering data about their teaching and using this information to make informed decisions about their practice. It thus implies a dynamic way of being in the classroom. I suggest this book not be read as a prescription for reflection; rather, individual, and groups of, teachers should build on what is presented in the book and generate further examples of principles and practices of reflection that best suit their particular situations and contexts.

## Chapter scenario

A group of experienced TESOL teachers were interested in developing professionally. The first teacher has to achieve rapid improvement in her students' communicative competence. As in most other countries around the world, the country she was teaching in sees the need to internationalize and the government is starting a drive to achieve this. The problem is it



also has to recognize that the education system's commitment to producing students who are able to understand English and to express themselves in the language has not been met because of the university entrance exams and old teaching techniques, among other things. This present discrepancy between the goals and the reality of English language education puts her under a lot of pressure to teach in ways that will result in great improvements in her students' speaking and listening ability. She seeks to become a better teacher. But it is not enough for her to know only which material should be taught, in what order it should be presented, and how the teaching process should be guided. She must also be able to find herself as a teacher by systematically looking at what she already knows and does, examining all the ideas presented by her, and then answering her own problems on the basis of her own experience.

The second teacher feels TESOL still do not have a very good idea of what we are doing when we teach. The concepts that dominate most TESOL theory seem to him only vaguely connected with the experiences of learners and teachers in the classroom. He thinks teachers have not been able to develop a dialogue with their experiences. Confronted on one side by theory and on the other by experience, we have only been consumers of other people's theory and not producers of the public data on which theory is dependent.

The third and fourth TESOL teachers were teaching for about 10 years and were both feeling burned out, and were not sure about what they were doing or where they were heading as TESOL teachers. They both realized that it would be a good idea to engage in some kind of professional development at this stage of their careers but were unsure about how or what to do.

The four teachers felt that TESOL teachers need to share their own experiences more to a clearer understanding of what it is to be a TESOL teacher and of how they can become better at what they do. Confronted by these complicated problems, the teachers were (separately) on the lookout for a group in which they could find answers. They all knew T (Tom) separately as he was facilitating reflection with teachers they knew in other locations and so they all asked him if he would facilitate their professional development through reflective practice.

With T's help the group decided to meet regularly and write a journal to write down their thoughts and their feelings about what they had done in the classroom. The four participants met together as a group once a week and brought journals for each other to read. At the eleven group meetings, which were supportive, T led a discussion about things that had concerned the

members during the week. The diverse subjects included life experiences, inability to deal with large classes, students' responses to questions in class, handling uninvolved students, material for conversation classes, giving feedback, and the concept of what it is to be a teacher. These meetings continued for one semester.

The teachers reported that they felt empowered as a result of this process of reflection. They noted that the refreshment of looking back on their teaching with an open mind gave them the chance to develop. Whether this help actually resulted in any development was up to the individual. That is the cornerstone they noted as they were still in the process of development. All three suggested that one semester is too short a period to expect any major development except for boosting or encouraging each other with different experiences. They all believe that they are more efficient teachers as a result of these reflections. As one teacher noted:

We believe we can more easily understand our students' point of view. But does this mean we really are better? We wanted to be better. We did try. If trying means one becomes better, then we are now better teachers. We did do a lot of talking about our problems in different school settings and from different perspectives and if sharing knowledge helps then this also means we are better teachers.

## Reflection

- Are you interested in reflecting on your teaching with a group of other teachers?
- How would you go about organizing such a group?
- What topics would you be interested in reflecting on?
- Would you like to write a journal to help you reflect in addition to regular group discussion?
- What do you think of the group of teachers above and their organization of a group to reflect on their work?
- The group suggested that one semester is not enough time to make any changes as a result of reflection. What do you think? How long would you be willing to reflect?
- What do you think of the topics they reflected on: life experiences, inability to deal with large classes, students' responses to questions in

class, handling uninvolved students, material for conversation classes, giving feedback, and the concept of what it is to be a teacher?

- What is your understanding of feeling of empowerment the teachers mentioned above?
- The teachers believe they are more efficient teachers as a result of their reflections. What is your understanding of this and the comment they made after that above?
- Do you believe that teachers must change and this change must be behavioral in the classroom or can it be cognitive as a result of reflecting on your practice?

When you have answered these questions return to your answers after you have read the complete contents of the book and see if they still hold true for you as a reflective TESOL teacher.

# 2

## Self-Reflection

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### Chapter Outline

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## Introduction

Over the centuries we have been encouraged to observe our lives so that we can better understand who we are; Buddha, for example, emphasized direct experience of reality to bring about greater insight into our lives while the great philosopher Socrates is remembered for his famous quote: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” This is an important saying too for experienced language teachers because self-reflection defined in this chapter as “the condition of consciousness characterized by awareness, objectivity, clarity, acceptance, and being in the present as well as by absence of opinion, preference, prejudice, and attachment” (Bergsgaard and Ellis, 2002: 56) is an essential beginning point for teachers before they explore other aspects of their work. As Palmer (1998: 3) suggests: “The work required to ‘know thyself’ is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we

attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge; it is a secret hidden in plain sight.” This chapter outlines how teachers can begin their self-reflections by telling their story: where they came from, where they are now, and ultimately where they may want to go through the use of storytelling and by compiling a teaching portfolio.

## Self-reflection

Palmer (1998: 2) has observed that some teachers can lose heart over the years because teaching becomes a “daily exercise in vulnerability” for them. Because teachers are constantly in the public eye, they tend to try hard to keep their private identity hidden so as to reduce this vulnerability. As such, Palmer (1998: 2) maintains that over the years teachers build up a wall between their inner selves and outer performances, and so he suggests it is important for all teachers to “attend to the inner teacher to cultivate a sense of identity and integrity.” Johnson and Golombek (2002: 6) maintain that language teachers can also make sense of their experiences through telling their stories of their professional development “within their own professional worlds.” By telling their stories, language teachers can “impose order and coherence on unpredictable classroom reality where there are always alternative solutions to cope with similar problems” (Olshtain and Kupferberg, 1998: 187). Palmer (1998: 5) urges all teachers regardless of the subject matter they teach to “ask the ‘who’ question—who is the self that teaches?” Research suggests that when teachers engage in personal self-reflection they can:

- Recall previous experiences for self-discovery.
- Become more aware of who they are as teachers.
- Become more aware of how they got to where they are at present.
- Become more aware of what they have accomplished over their career.
- Decide what is important for them personally and professionally.
- Become more aware of their thoughts, actions, and feelings.
- Decide where they may want to go in the future both personally and professionally.
- Gain keen insight into themselves and their practice.
- Share with other teachers a strong sense of personal identity that infuses their work.

Another way practicing language teachers can take stock of themselves and what they have accomplished over their years of teaching is by constructing a teaching portfolio. Brown and Wolfe-Quintero (1997: 28) maintain that a teaching portfolio “tells the story of a teacher’s efforts, skills, abilities, achievements, and contributions to his/her colleagues, institution, academic discipline or community.” Farrell (2002) suggests three main types of teaching portfolios that practicing teachers can compile: a *Working Portfolio* in order to document growth and development toward some performance standards that may have been set within the institution, or district, or at the national level. The materials that are included in this portfolio are intended to reflect a work-in-progress and growth over time, and not intended to be polished documents. The second is a *Showcase Portfolio* which showcases documents that highlight a teacher’s best work and accomplishments. The third is a *Critical Incident Portfolio* and document selected incidents (see also Chapter 4) that were particularly provocative and illuminating to teachers. The teacher should include a caption that explains the rationale for choosing the topic and a reflective statement about the critical incident. In this way, the teacher can outline his or her underlying philosophy of teaching and learning languages. Farrell (2002) discovered that the very process of compiling, developing, and analyzing a teaching portfolio helps teachers see their professional strengths all in one location. Research suggests that compiling teaching portfolios can benefit language teachers in the following ways:

- It cultivates reflection and self-assessment.
- It provides self-renewal.
- It promotes collaboration.
- It encourages ownership and empowerment.
- It shows a teacher’s efforts, skills, abilities, achievements, and contributions.

## Case study: Self-reflection with the “Tree Of Life”

The case study reported in this chapter uses the *Tree of Life* (Merryfield, 1993) as a self-reflective tool that briefly outlines a Japanese teacher of

English in Japan as she reflects on her experience in learning English, then considers how it has influenced her as a teacher of English. The “Tree of Life” is a reflective tool for trainee teachers and it is divided into the *roots*, or early influences, the *trunk*, later influences, and the limbs, the most recent influences especially as each limb represents an important or critical incident in one’s life. The “Tree” is presented in the teacher’s own words. The teacher’s professional journey is outlined in a graphic representation in Figure 2.1a.

## Roots

I was born and brought up in a Japanese family in Tokyo, I still live in the same community, and the only time I have been out of my hometown was during my stay in the United States for six months some years ago. My first cross-cultural experience was during my elementary school days. My parents would introduce me to colleagues from overseas. My mother was a researcher and I would be looking at her communicating in English with other researchers mainly from East Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines. I eventually learned that the way of communication with foreign people is English, and that started me on my path toward today.

## Trunk

Here I reflect on my own English learning experience as it developed me for my present career. Learning English has been extremely important for me ever since I started to learn it more than thirty years ago at the age of seven. At the conversation school, where I started, it was just fun for me. I remember that I learned various English words orally and how to write the twenty-six letters of the alphabet.

Official English education started when I entered seventh grade in junior high school. The English I had learned was American English: whose pronunciation and spellings are popular because of Japan’s occupation by the United States after the war, although it did not matter to me at all at the time whether the “English” I learned would be British or American. All I wanted to learn about English was the exact knowledge needed for passing upper educational institutions’ examinations, and I did not even think about how such a language could be actually used. Nevertheless, I did have a bit of a happy experience when I could feel that

## Limbs

**2013–Present:** The students in my current working school are very smart. What can I do for them?

**2009–12:** The students at my third school were the average in studying. They were well healthy both physically and mentally, so that my teaching always went smoothly.

***Limbs in the United States*** I was really lucky to have chance to study in the United States, which led me to study again as a graduate student.

- As a student, I was shocked at the Socratic style of education, because I had been used to the Confucian way of learning.
- As a teacher of English language, I wondered to myself who would be an appropriate person to teach English in Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom settings.

**2005–08:** My second school gave me various opportunities for establishing a high school.

**1999–2004:** I became a teacher of English in Tokyo and started my career of teaching.

**1994–99:** I majored in English language at undergraduate and in Linguistics and English at graduate school.

## Trunk

**University:** I thought I should improve my English proficiency because my major was English language. I took TOEFL several times to check my language ability.

**Junior and Senior High school:** I liked studying English and went to experience a homestay in San Francisco.

**Elementary school:** There was no English education at that time, but I joined in a conversation class in English.

## Roots

**Family value:** I was born in a Japanese family and speak Japanese.

**My heritage:** When I was little, foreigners seemed to me that “Gaijin” speak English.

**Figure 2.1a** Tree of Life.



I was using the language during a short three-week homestay experience in San Francisco.

During the above English education through junior and senior high school, I never imagined that I would become an English teacher. Looking back now, however, I might have been influenced by two female teachers of English I met in each school. In the high school where I am working, I work with one of them, and she still has the same aura of confidence for teaching English that I felt in my high school days.

## Limbs

After entering the Tokyo school system, I have been given the opportunity to get experience at four different high school branches. And my growth as an English teacher has been shaped accordingly.

### Before 1999

During my university days, in fact, I was groping for a future that was still unforeseeable. Different from my parents' and elder brothers' fields of study, I was the only one that majored in the humanities. My mother worried about whether I could nevertheless find a job, and she actually wanted me to find work in which I could be regarded as working man's equal. I wanted to fulfill my mother's expectation, but it was not easy for me to find such a career because of the Japan's post-bubble job market. Looking around me, however, I saw that some of my friends were studying to pass examinations for becoming a teacher of English, and I realized that I also could aim at that goal. To improve my own English proficiency, and also to pursue my own interest, I went to graduate school. In addition to my studying at school, I tried hard to pass the examination for becoming a teacher of English in Tokyo. Luckily, I passed it and started my teaching career in 1999.

### 1999–2004

After finishing graduate school, I started really teaching English. The five-year teaching experience in the first school gave me a foundation as a teacher. I had never taught before and so was at a loss as to what I should do. One of my colleagues, my trainer, advised me most importantly to earn my students' trust in my teaching classroom. In short, a teacher should be proud of his or her own teaching. Though there is a lot of work for teachers in Japan

to do that is outside their specialty, such as becoming a sports trainer or a counselor to listen to adolescents, a teacher's teaching must be something that he or she can be proud of. All I could do then was somehow as eagerly as possible to finish each fifty-minute lesson. The students at that time were more likely to fall behind the normal student's average in studying. They might have been irritated over tiring lessons, but were warmly watching what was going on. All the students educated me as a teacher.

Moreover, what I learned from that school was that when I make decisions in my class, I need to consider both short-term and long-term results. It is natural for students with a variety of personalities to go in different directions than I had expected while preparing for the class. No matter how much time I took in planning, no class is ever exactly as I expected, and so I must always be ready to be flexible.

I have to pay attention to each student individually, and respect each of their personalities. This does not mean, however, that I always just follow whatever they want. For instance, to cater to each student's need, I have to have the alternative plans for whenever the original one does not work. Plan B needs to be maximally effective too, and carried out based on my teaching experience and study. It is necessary for teachers to be flexible but certain about the methods and materials in everyday teaching plans.

## 2005-08

It is natural for me as a local governmental employee to be transferred to another school every several years. In my working situation, when I transfer to another school, everything such as students' proficiency and their parents' needs can change completely. I experienced a transfer after five years of work at my first school.

The second school for me was newly founded and I was engaged in establishing its English language curriculum with my colleague. At that time, I truly realized the need for education: who will get it and what will it be for. Some students has expressed refusal to attend school because of bullying, and others had dropped out of school completely. They came back to this school because they wanted to try to learn again. Taking their problems into consideration, the size of each class was about fifteen which is less than half of that found usually, and the pace of lessons went along with their achievement in learning. What I taught to them was what they felt a need to learn, letters of alphabets at certain times, explaining questions from a cram school that students go to at other times. One of my students

was over seventy, the same age as my grandparents. I knew that when anyone wants to learn, I have a duty to help them acquire knowledge as they physically can.

## 2009–12

The tenth year came when I was working at the third school. The most memorable experience during this period was a trying half year as a student in the United States. Leaving Tokyo for the United States, I was excited to be away from routine work and to be relieved from the pressure of my duties, but at the same time I was worried about my English proficiency in this ultimate test. My campus life in the United States was not as easy as I had thought. To cope with the Socratic lectures, I studied in the United States much more than I had ever done to prepare for entering a university in Japan.

My student life in the United States was not only agony, however. Although I felt much pressure to submit paper assignments and give presentations, I got a sense of fulfillment from every moment of my studying. A course for learning assessment or testing taught me how seriously I have to be when I construct a test. I learned that a test can change a test taker's whole life.

At the same time, I became a teacher as well as a student in the graduate school of TESOL in the university in the United States. At a language school called IEOP, "Intensive English and Orientation Program," I had a teaching practicum together with a class observation. I met a lot of experienced teachers there and the astonishing thing for me was that there were a lot of lecturers who were not native speakers of English, but rather from such places as Korea and Brazil. They were teaching multinational students from China and Middle East countries. When I heard that I would take a teaching practicum there, I got really nervous because I am not a native speaker of English. I thought that students would be disappointed to see me, an Asian woman, instead of the native teachers of English that they came to the United States to be taught by. I found, however, that my thinking was wrong.

During the teaching practicum, I belonged to the advanced grammar class. On the first day of it, I pondered the best way to motivate the students that I was standing in front of. I still was unable to find any good solution to the problem. As days passed, I started conducting some new activities with the students, and at last I planned a whole lesson and taught it successfully in the class. On the last day of my teaching practicum, I got a feeling that was totally different from what I have ever experienced in Japan. The feeling was

that somehow I was conducting the lesson confidently by means of English. No students in the class could understand my mother tongue, Japanese. The only language to communicate with them was English. Through this teaching practicum, I learned to conduct a class in English dependably and also learned that rather than my own speaking, it is most important to give the students the same experience of using English dependably.

In addition, the practicum made me to think about my teaching style from a different point of view. When I make a teaching plan for a lesson in Tokyo now, I pay attention not only teaching methods and techniques but also to students' root motivation. If students' activities are clearly directed toward their goals, they always learn a lot. Therefore, teachers need to give students the ability to understand the purpose of each lesson, because that will lead them to understand how it matches with their own goals.

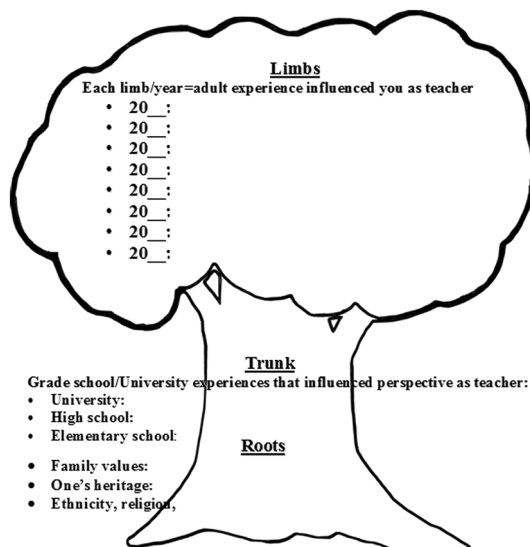
## 2013–present

I am engaged in teaching English to higher graders in a public high school in Tokyo. Most of them hope to enter a prestigious university in Japan, but some of them have various cultural backgrounds and are eager to study abroad. They think that they will get a business chance to work abroad, too. I cannot help but consider again and again how to take advantage of motivation methodology in the teaching of each of my classes. I hope that my students will become able to use English smoothly and profitably in each of their future circumstances.

I have now reflected on my own teaching experience in four different branches, with my roots and trunk of English learning. As a result of my reflections, I think that teachers are like a chameleon and sometimes change colors which their students prefer. They need to possess both personality and pedagogy and adjust the students in front of them.

## Case study reflection

- Comment on this teacher's journey so far.
- The teacher noted on reflection that she “might have been influenced by two female teachers of English I met.” How can past teachers influence our teaching careers?
- Have you been influenced by any of your past teachers?



**Figure 2.1b** Your Tree of Life.

- Fill in your Tree of Life in Figure 2.1b.
- Write your story from this tree.
- Share your story with another language teacher and have that teacher share his or her story with you.

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

### Teacher stories

Teachers can self-reflect on their practice by articulating their stories to themselves or others because these stories reveal the “knowledge, ideas, perspectives, understandings, and experiences that guide their work” (Johnson and Golombek, 2002: 7). By telling their story teachers can make better sense of seemingly random experiences because they hold the inside knowledge, especially personal intuitive knowledge, expertise, and experience that is based on their accumulated years as language educators teaching in schools and classrooms. These self-reflection stories can provide a rich source of teacher-generated information that allows them to reflect

on how they got to where they are today, how they conduct practice, the thinking, and problem-solving they employ during their practice, and their underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that have ruled their past and current practices. As Taggart and Wilson (1998: 164) maintain, teacher autobiographical sketches offer insight “into the past to uncover preconceived theories about teaching and learning.” Once these stories have been told they can be analyzed alone or with a peer (a critical friend), where the peer can give a different insight into the meaning and interpretation of the story than if the story was analyzed alone.

## Teacher portfolios

Language teachers can also “tell” their story by compiling and reflecting on their teaching portfolio. Two metaphors, the *mirror* and the *map*, help best answer why language teachers should assemble a teaching portfolio. The *mirror* metaphor captures the reflective nature of a developmental portfolio as it allows teachers to “see themselves” over time. The *map* metaphor symbolizes creating a plan and setting goals. After reviewing the evidence collected over time, teachers can reflect on where they were, where they are now, and, most importantly, where they want to go. A teaching portfolio might include lesson plans, anecdotal records, student projects, class newsletters, videotapes, annual evaluations, and letters of recommendation. A teaching portfolio is not a one-time snap shot of where the teacher is at present; rather, it is an evolving collection of carefully selected professional experiences, thoughts, and goals. This collection can be accompanied with the teacher’s written (or oral) reflection and self-assessment of the collection itself and plans for the future. Teachers can put the following items in a teaching portfolio:

- a) A teaching philosophy.
- b) Description of teaching goals and responsibilities such as courses and assignments.
- c) Materials developed by the teacher including lesson plans, syllabi, assignments, and examinations.
- d) Evidence of teaching performance and effectiveness from student and peer feedback.

Language teaching is a multifaceted profession. Teachers do more than simply teach. Among other things, they are involved in planning

instruction, regularly updating their knowledge on teaching, preparing teaching materials, collaborating with colleagues in different ways, assessing student learning as well as assessing their own teaching. Each of these kinds of activities is an important dimension of the teacher's work and in reviewing and planning his or her professional development; a teacher needs to look at his or her practice as a whole. A teaching portfolio is an excellent instrument for accomplishing this since it is a collection of documents and other items that provides information about different aspects of a teacher's work. Each teacher's portfolio will be different and my own has seventy-five double-sided pages (and thus impossible to include in this collection).

The following materials should be a part of any teaching portfolio regardless of the specific purpose for creating it (from Farrell, 2002):

- 1 *Knowledge of subject matter*: This first section of the teaching journal outlines what you know about the subject you teach and how this impacts the classroom (context) you teach in. Documents that relate to your knowledge of the subject matter might include the following artifacts:
  - Highlights of a unit of instruction, reflections on the class, and implications for future instruction. Regarding future instruction for example, one language teacher may want to experiment with using an inductive approach to teaching grammar in designing lessons and assessments. Another teacher may want to think about performing some action research topics in their classes. Still another teacher may want to try out task-based learning with certain classes.
  - A research paper (or other original materials such as books, papers, etc.) you wrote on the subject matter you teach and what you learned from the contents of the paper as it relates to your teaching. This shows that you are reflecting on the subject matter you teach.
  - Descriptions of courses, or workshops you conducted.
  - A reflective journal you have been keeping about your teaching of the subject matter.
  - A reflective essay about how your knowledge of the subject matter has informed your instructional decisions and how you plan to increase student learning. For example, as a language teacher educator my reflective essay would include answers to the following questions about curriculum construction:

- a. How much of the curriculum of the course(s) you teach should be influenced by:
    - *Reality of the classroom?*
    - *What research suggests we should include?*
    - *What practicing teachers think?*
    - *What trainee teachers think?*
  - b. How was the curriculum of the course(s) you teach set—by whom and why?
  - c. What is the impact (what conceptual changes did your students take on as a result of taking your course) of the curriculum in your course(s)?
  - d. How did you investigate this?
  - e. Do you know what aspects of your course(s) teachers are using/ implementing during their first year(s) as teachers?
  - f. How did you investigate this?
  - g. Do you think teachers who are in the schools/institutes now should be asked to help us when we are designing the curriculum of the methods courses?
- 2 *Planning, delivery, and assessing instruction:* This section of the teaching portfolio reflects who you are as a teacher. Documents compiled for this section include a statement about your beliefs and values regarding language teaching and learning, what you do in the classroom (lesson plans, video of a class, student works examples), and what others think about your classroom work (supervisor's evaluation, peer observation reports):
- A reflection of your beliefs about teaching and learning. This outlines your approach to teaching the language. For example, what are your conceptions of language teaching? Are you influenced by *Science/Research Conceptions*, *Theory/Values Conceptions*, and/or *Art/Craft Conceptions* (see Freeman and Richards, 1993, for a discussion on this).
  - Sample lesson plans.
  - Samples of student work.
  - Samples of students' evaluations'/feedback of your lessons.
  - A videotape and/or audiotape of you teaching a class with a written description of what you were teaching and your reflection of that class.
  - Feedback from a supervisor and/or an administrator.
  - Classroom observation report from a peer teacher.



3 *Professionalism*: This final section of the teaching portfolio shows who you are as a teacher in the wider community. Documents compiled for this section include a statement of what your development plans are, and other documents that confirm your standing in the profession (resume, copies of degrees, etc.):

- A current professional development plan. This plan outlines what you plan to achieve professionally in the near future such as attending certain conferences, seminars, and in-service courses that can upgrade one's skills, researching certain topics (action research projects) that can make one a more effective teacher, and upgrading one's technical skills (IT).
- A current resume.
- A list of membership of professional organizations.
- A description of any leadership positions held such as head of department, curriculum development unit, and committees.
- Copies of degrees, certificates, honors, and awards held.

## Reflection

- Write your autobiographical sketch that outlines some of the realities, dilemmas, joys, and rewards of your teaching life.
- Compare this with another teacher's sketch of his or her life story.
- Have you ever compiled a teaching portfolio? If so, what were the contents of the portfolio and how long did it take you to compile it?
- If not, try to compile your teaching portfolio by including suggested contents (a to d) above.
- Do you think it is useful for teachers to read each other's portfolios? What form of response would be useful when reading someone else's portfolio?

## Conclusion

According to Bullough (1997: 19), telling one's story "is a way of getting a handle on what we believe, on models, metaphors and images that underpin action and enable meaning making, on our theories. Through story telling,

personal beliefs become explicit, and in being made explicit they can be changed, where change is warranted, and a new or different story results; we behold differently.” Self-reflection for language teachers as outlined in this chapter is really self-initiated, self-directed, and self-evaluated because no one else can do this for us. In telling my story in this chapter and by reflecting on some critical incidences in my career, I have come to see some of the principles that have emerged from my practice. As Palmer (1998: 2) suggests, the very act of teaching holds a mirror to the soul for teachers, and he urges teachers to look into that mirror and “not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.” So by telling their story and also compiling and reviewing a teaching portfolio for self-reflection, teachers can come to know themselves better and really appreciate how much they have accomplished and grown during their careers.

## Chapter scenario

Paul, an instructor in an Intensive English Program in the United States, teaches academic writing and advanced listening. He has kept a teaching portfolio for several years and includes many things in it such as his course outlines and objectives, sample teaching materials, narrative journal entries that describe different issues he had to resolve during the semester, two lesson examples, some student evaluations, a written account of two classroom observations by peers, and a reflective essay about his approach to teaching and his own teacher development. After he reviewed his teaching portfolio, Paul was pleasantly surprised at the breadth and depth of what he had accomplished. Paul had the following comments to make about assembling a teaching portfolio: “I really enjoyed putting my portfolio together. It reminded me of how far I have come as a teacher since I started teaching.” Paul was happy that he had compiled his teaching portfolio also because a new director was appointed and wanted to review the whole Intensive English Program. Specifically, this new director wanted to know what each teacher had provided in the past such as the teacher’s course outlines, lesson plans, and other related information. When it was Paul’s turn to be appraised by the new director, he simply took out his teaching portfolio and explained what he had compiled and why he had included it. The director was very impressed, for as Paul noted: “The Director’s mouth opened when she saw

my portfolio and how I had arranged everything. She told me that I was well prepared and came across as a professional teacher.”

## Reflection

- Paul was proactive in compiling his teaching portfolio. What items in his teaching portfolio made him look like a professional teacher to his new director?
- Explain why compiling a teaching portfolio reminded Paul of “how far” he had come as a teacher? What items in his teaching portfolio would show him this?
- What other items could he have included?

# Teacher Beliefs and Practices

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## Introduction

There is increasing research evidence in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) that language teachers hold complex beliefs about teaching and learning and that these beliefs have a strong impact on classroom practices (Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell and Bennis, 2013; Kuzborska, 2011). Teacher beliefs, defined as “unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught” (Kagan, 1992: 65), are developed over a teacher’s career and are said to influence a teacher’s instructional decisions and actions. It is difficult to assess what a teacher believes about teaching and learning except by asking that teacher. However, what teachers say they do (their espoused theories) and what they actually do in the classroom (their theories-in-action) are not always

the same. In fact, a language teacher's espoused beliefs may be an unreliable guide to their actual classroom practices. This is especially important if there is any discrepancy between what teachers say they believe and their actual classroom practices. This chapter explores the complex issue of how language teachers can reflect on their espoused theories and beliefs and compare these to their theories-in-use so that they can become more aware of the influence of both.

## Teacher beliefs and practices

Borg (2003: 81) maintains that "teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs." As a result teachers actively construct their theory of teaching by, among other things, reflecting on their beliefs systems and examining how these beliefs are translated (or not) into actual classroom practice (Tsui, 2003). Burns (1992: 59) investigated the influence of six experienced teachers' beliefs on instructional practice related to the use of written language in beginning English as a second language (ESL) classrooms and identified "an extremely complex and interrelated network of underlying beliefs . . . which appeared to influence the instructional practices and approaches adopted by the teachers." Borg (1998), through a series of classroom observations and interviews, illustrated the manner in which the teacher's instructional judgments and decisions in teaching grammar were directly influenced by the interaction of his belief system, his educational and professional experiences, and the context of instruction. Knezevic (2001: 10) has suggested that awareness of beliefs and practices is a necessary starting point in reflections because we cannot develop "unless we are aware of who we are and what we do" and "developing awareness is a process of reducing the discrepancy between what we do and what we think we do."

A number of studies have sought to investigate the extent to which beliefs and practices converge or diverge. In an Asia-Pacific wide study of writing teachers, Pennington et al. (1997: 131) discovered that a gap existed between ideal perceptions of teaching and actual teaching situations mainly because the participants explained that the "constraints of the educational system" caused these gaps because the teachers adapted the "process approach" to writing to suit their individual circumstances. Similarly, Richards, Gallo, and

Renandya (2001: 54) discovered that although many teachers stated they followed a communicative approach to teaching, “many of the respondents still hold firmly to the belief that grammar is central to language learning and direct grammar teaching is needed by their EFL/ESL students.” A study by Breen et al. (2001: 497) examined the relationship between the classroom practices and beliefs of eighteen teachers in Australia, individually and as a group, and discovered that even though individual teachers favored distinctive practices unique to their particular classrooms, there was also the presence of “a collective pedagogy” that the group as a whole shared. Consequently, research on language teacher beliefs has revealed the following:

- Teachers’ beliefs influence perception and judgment.
- Teachers’ beliefs play a role in how information on teaching is translated into classroom practices.
- What teachers say they do and what they actually do in their classes may not always be the same.
- Awareness of beliefs and practices is one necessary starting point in reflections.
- Awareness of the sources of teacher beliefs is important for self-reflection.
- Understanding teachers’ beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and teacher education programs
- Understanding teachers’ beliefs about the language they are teaching is important.

## **Case study: Beliefs and classroom practices of novice second language reading (L2) teacher**

The case study reported in this chapter examined the beliefs of one second language reading (L2) teacher and his actual instructional practices while L2 reading (Farrell and Ives, 2015). In addition, the study sought to examine how the stated beliefs corresponded to the observed classroom practices, whether they converged or diverged. The teacher Dantes (a pseudonym), a novice ESL teacher, was interviewed to obtain his stated beliefs, and also observed while teaching various L2 reading classes.

Table 3.1 Dantes’ Beliefs

Theme	Belief
Language teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help students develop language abilities</li><li>• Help students develop skills necessary for their learning purposes</li><li>• Choose topics that students will find interesting</li><li>• Importance of pair and group work</li><li>• Develop students’ critical thinking skills</li></ul>
Teaching L2 reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A teacher helps students develop reading skills and strategies</li><li>• Promotes skimming and scanning as L2 reading strategies</li><li>• Activates students’ topical knowledge as L2 reading strategy</li><li>• Promotes using contextual cues as an L2 reading strategy</li><li>• A teacher uses a reading passage for more than one purpose</li></ul>
Language learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Homework necessary</li><li>• Students should be active learners when learning a language</li></ul>

Beliefs

Table 3.1 outlines Dantes’ stated beliefs as expressed during the pre-study interview. These professed beliefs were organized into three themes: language teaching in general, teaching L2 reading, and language learning.

With regard to the language classroom, Dantes said that teachers need to make lessons interesting. Regarding his beliefs about language teaching in general, Dantes stated that he encourages his students to think critically by having his students not focus too much on what the answer is but on the reasons for such an answer. Regarding the teaching of L2 reading, Dantes said that he believes that teachers should help students develop their reading “skills and strategies like scanning and skimming to draw out the main points of a reading passage.” Another reading strategy that Dantes said he finds important is activating students’ prior knowledge of a topic; he stated, “First I like to get them thinking about the topic and I’ll do that by using specific pre-reading activities, or discussion questions that makes them draw on their own knowledge of the topic.” Dantes also expressed that he believes that it is valuable for students to use clues from the text to help them “to understand vocabulary words and can also help them to predict content.” He also said that he expects his students to be active and to participate in class.

Classroom practices

Table 3.2 outlines Dantes’ classroom practices during each of the six observed lessons.

**Table 3.2** Dantes' Classroom Practices

Observed practices	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
Teacher gave extra time in class to complete exercises	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher took up activities in a step-by-step process	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
Students worked on activities in pairs or groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher used various means to guide students to answer	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
Teacher assigned homework at the end of the class	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
Students required to provide reasons for their answers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher facilitated class discussions	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Teacher read a passage with the class	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Teacher encouraged students to use information from text	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The other language skills were practiced in the class	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skimming and scanning was highlighted in the activity	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key: Each lesson is identified by the main activities completed during the lesson.

D1: Dantes' Lesson 1: Dictionary Skills/Information Recall

D2: Dantes Lesson 2: Dictionary Skills (cont'd)/Word forms

D3: Dantes' Lesson 3: Pre-reading Discussion Questions/True and False

D4: Dantes' Lesson 4: True and False (cont'd)/Passage Analysis

D5: Dantes' Lesson 5: Information Recall

D6: Dantes' Lesson 6: Exam Review (Pre-reading Discussion Questions/True and False)

✓ = observed practices

# = limited occurrence

×

As Table 3.2 indicates, many classroom practices were observed consistently across all six lessons, while only a few were not observed during each lesson. For example, across all six lessons Dantes was observed giving extra time in class to complete exercises, he encouraged students to use information from the text to aid their comprehension; students worked on activities in pairs or groups and they were required to provide reasons for their answers, he also had students practice other language skills besides reading. Other practices that were observed in all but one class were the ones in which Dantes took up activities in a step-by-step process—he used various means to guide students to answer and assigned homework at the end of each class, and he highlighted skimming and scanning as a reading strategy in all but one class. He was only observed facilitating class discussions and reading a passage with the class in two out of six classes and did not use humor as a teaching strategy in all but one of the observed classes.



Beliefs and practices

Table 3.3 outlines the comparison between Dantes’ professed beliefs and his observed classroom practices.

As Table 3.3 indicates although Dantes’ professed teaching beliefs mostly converged with his classroom practices, but there were also some practices that tended to diverge from his beliefs. In relation to language teaching, Dantes stated that a teacher helps students develop overall language abilities (listening, speaking, and writing). It was observed in all lessons that Dantes included activities aimed at addressing not just reading but also listening,

Table 3.3 Dantes’ Beliefs and Classroom Practices

Theme	Beliefs	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
Language teaching	• Help students develop language abilities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Help students develop skills necessary for their learning purposes	×	×	×	×	×	×
	• Choose topics students find interesting	×	×	×	×	×	×
	• Importance of pair and group work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Develop students’ critical thinking skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teaching L2 reading	• Help students develop reading skills and strategies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Use of skimming and scanning	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Activate student’s background knowledge	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
	• Promote using contextual cues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Importance of activities that accompany a reading passage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Language learning	• Homework necessary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
	• Students should be active learners	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key: D1: Dantes’ Lesson D1: Dictionary Skills/Information Recall D2: Dantes, Lesson D2: Dictionary Skills (cont’d)/Word forms  
 D3: Dantes’ Lesson D3: Pre-reading Discussion questions/True and False D4: Dantes’ Lesson D4: True and False (cont’d)/ Multiple choice  
 D5: Dantes’ Lesson D5: Information Recall  
 D6: Dantes’ Lesson D6: Exam Review (Pre-reading Discussion Questions/True and False).

✓=observed in practice  
 #=limited occurrence  
 ×=not observed.

speaking, and writing. For example, he used pair and group work (all lessons) in addition to class discussions (e.g., lessons 3 and 5) to promote listening and speaking, and his students wrote answers to promote writing (e.g., lessons 1 and 5). Dantes also stated the importance of pair and group work in the classroom and all six of the observed lessons demonstrated this belief. Additionally, Dantes said that he wanted his students to think critically; all six of his observed classroom practices demonstrated examples of this belief. Dantes also said that it was important to make his classes interesting for his students; however this belief was difficult to observe during his lessons as he was not clear about how he defined interesting and we did not interview any of his students about whether or not they found his classes interesting.

In terms of Dantes' beliefs about teaching L2 reading, there was mainly convergence with his classroom practices. For example, Dantes said that a teacher helps students develop reading skills and strategies. During each lesson, students were observed practicing various reading skills and strategies through the assigned activities. Some of the observed reading skills and strategies included skimming (all lessons), scanning (all lessons), predicting reading content (e.g., lessons 3 and 6), and using contextual clues (all lessons). Dantes also said that he finds it important for teachers to prompt students to use contextual clues to gather information about a reading passage. He demonstrated this belief in the observed lessons by requiring his students to include the information they used to arrive at a particular answer. Dantes also stressed the importance of skimming and scanning. During all but one of the lessons, it was observed that Dantes had his students' practice skimming and scanning through activities such as true or false (e.g., lessons 3, 4, and 6) and a passage analysis (e.g., lessons 1 and 5). In addition, Dantes stated that it was important to activate students' background knowledge of a topic; however, this belief was only observed in two of the six lessons.

Some classroom practices that Dantes had not professed as his beliefs were also observed. For instance, during the lessons, it was observed that Dantes liked to encourage his learners to go through a step-by-step process when working on particular activities that he assigned them. Another observable practice that was not professed in his beliefs was related to the classroom environment and affectivity. We noted that Dantes tended to use a lot of humor throughout the six lessons. Of course this practice is consistent with Senior's (2006) report that language teachers use humor to encourage spontaneity and ready interaction, and Dantes was surprised to hear that we observed this in his classes but he realizes that he uses humor to motivate his students. Thus some of Dantes' observed classroom practices contained

beliefs that he had not professed in the interview nor written in his journals. This finding is consistent with research that suggests that a teacher may have difficulty verbalizing the reasons for particular practices because they are either not fully aware of these beliefs, or they were still in formation and thus not fully developed. As Senior (2006: 248) has observed, a teacher's beliefs "are constantly developing and evolving as insights from new teaching situations are fed into their personal frameworks."

## Case study reflection

- What is your opinion of the method used to explore the teachers' beliefs and practices about L2 teaching of reading?
- Can you think of other ways they could have been explored?
- What are your beliefs about teaching L2 reading?
- What are your classroom practices about teaching L2 reading?
- Are your beliefs about teaching L2 reading reflected in your classroom practices about teaching L2 reading? How do you know?
- Why do you think that some classroom practices observed were not expressed by Dantes in his stated beliefs?
- Do you think that because he was a novice ESL teacher his teaching beliefs were still forming?
- Do you think that experienced teachers have difficulty expressing their teaching beliefs?
- Do beliefs and practices always have to converge or can they also diverge?
- Is it good to have some tensions between beliefs and practices? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Can you think of any other ways teaching beliefs and classroom practices can be investigated and compared than was discussed in the case study above?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

One problem with examining teachers' beliefs is that they often remain hidden to the teacher and so must be brought to the level of awareness

by being articulated in some way. When teachers are given a chance to articulate their beliefs about teaching and learning, they soon discover that their beliefs are far from simple. After articulating beliefs, teachers should then examine the sources of these beliefs that have been built up over their career. For example, Shi and Cumming's (1995: 104) study of the beliefs and practice of five experienced language teachers discovered that even though they had been educated in the same institution and by the same methods, the knowledge guiding their instruction is largely based on personal beliefs "founded on years of previous experience, reflection, and information." One or more of the following sources of beliefs can be considered and used either individually or in combination (adapted from Richards and Lockhart, 1994):

- *Teachers' past experience as students.* For example, if a teacher has learned a second language successfully and comfortably by memorizing vocabulary lists, then there is a good chance that the same teacher will have his or her students memorize vocabulary lists too.
- *Experience of what works best in their classes.* This may be the main source of beliefs about teaching for many second language teachers and as such many practicing teachers may not want to break an established, and perceived successful, routine.
- *Established practice within a school.* These practices can be difficult to change because the school has always used a particular method or the school makes teachers complete a particular lesson unit in a specific time period as an established practice.
- *Personality factors of teachers.* This can be an important source of beliefs as some teachers really enjoy conducting role-play or group work in their classes while others are more comfortable conducting traditional teacher-fronted lessons.
- *Educationally based or research-based principles.* This can also be a source of teachers' beliefs in that a teacher may draw on his or her understanding of research in second language reading to support use of predicting style exercises in reading classes.
- *Method-based sources of beliefs.* This suggests that teachers support and implement a particular method in their classes, as for example, when a teacher decides to use total physical response (TPR) to teach beginning second language learners, he or she is following a method of suspending early production of language for the learner.

In the case study reported on in this chapter, Dantes indicated that the source of his beliefs was related to teaching originated from his past experiences

as a learner. Dantes said that he considers it important for students to be active language learners in the classroom. He consistently provided such an environment to allow active learning. He said that this belief derived from his past experiences as a learner. Dantes said that he realized that reflecting on practice gave him such awareness. By way of summary, Richards, Ho, and Giblin (1996) discovered the following beliefs that teachers in Hong Kong believed about their role in the classroom that may be a useful guide for other teachers to reflect and compare with their own beliefs:

- Provide useful language learning experiences.
- Provide a model of correct language use.
- Answer learners' questions.
- Correct learners' errors.
- Help students discover effective approaches to learning.
- Pass on knowledge and skills to their students.
- Adapt teaching approaches to match students' needs.

Second language teachers are not the only players that hold beliefs about teaching and learning, students also hold beliefs about teaching and learning language; however, these beliefs may not be the same for both sets of players. Barnes (1976), for example, maintains that the language a teacher actually uses in his or her classroom performs two functions simultaneously: it carries the message that the teacher wants to communicate, while at the same time it conveys specific information—who the teacher is; whom he/she is talking to; and what the teacher believes the situation is. So, the way a teacher organizes patterns of classroom communication depends on the teacher's frame of reference (beliefs) which is influenced by the teacher's prior experiences as a student, the teacher's theories about how a subject should be learned, and/or the teacher's beliefs about how a subject should be taught. Barnes (1976: 18) has maintained that "learning is not just a matter of sitting there waiting to be taught." In this regard, Richards (1998) noted that the kinds of learners teachers thought did best in their classes included those who:

- Were motivated.
- Were active and spoke out.
- Were not afraid of making mistakes.
- Could work individually without the teacher's help.

Language teachers thus must be given opportunities to be able to articulate their beliefs and what they mean to them and whether their beliefs still

remain valid in light of present-day research in teaching and learning before being encouraged to make any changes. After articulating and reflecting on their beliefs about teaching and learning, language teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their actual classroom practices to see if there is alignment between their stated beliefs and their classroom practices. When comparing the teachers' stated beliefs with their actual classroom practices in the case study reported on in this chapter, for the most part the teacher showed a strong sense of convergence between his stated beliefs and actual classroom practices. Dantes seems to have achieved his goal of teaching L2 reading: to provide learners with strategies related to their reading purpose, nature of the text, as well as the context of the situation, a similar goal asserted in the literature on teaching L2 reading. However, the main purpose is not to advocate for the best L2 teaching practices (although most of the practices observed seem to be supported by current research in teaching L2 reading such as developing students' reading strategies with skimming and scanning, using contextual cues, and promoting critical reading), but rather to encourage reflection as a form of self-mediated professional development. The results suggest that overall the combination of classroom observations, journal writing, and discussions all tended to contribute to the exploration of and reflection on teacher beliefs and practices.

The case study presented in this chapter investigated the extent to which teachers' beliefs influenced their classroom practices, and found further evidence to suggest that what teachers say and do in the classroom is strongly governed by their tacitly held beliefs.

When beliefs have been stated, teachers should monitor their classroom practices to see if there is evidence of these beliefs in classroom practices (deductive approach), or alternatively, teachers can look at their teaching first and then stand back and examine what beliefs are being manifested through actual classroom practices (inductive approach). The point about reflecting on the possible alignment between beliefs and practices is not to suggest that one method of teaching (L2 reading or any other macro language skill) is better than any other. Indeed, this "productive tension" (Freeman, personal communication) between stated beliefs and actual classroom practices provides teachers with the opportunity to systematically look at their practice so that they can deepen their understanding of what they do and thus come to new insights about their students, their teaching, and themselves. Professional growth comes from reconstructing our experiences and then reflecting on these experiences so that we can develop our own approaches to teaching.

The purpose of examining language teacher beliefs and classroom practices is not to look at or for “best practices”; rather, the idea is to see what *is* so teachers can become more confident knowing that what they believe about language teaching and learning is reflected in their classroom practices. Exploring language teachers’ beliefs and their corresponding classroom practices can help clarify how teachers can implement any changes to their approaches to teaching and learning over time. This type of reflection is possible through many of the activities that are covered in this book, including reflecting on teacher narratives (Chapters 2 and 4), classroom communication patterns (Chapter 6), teacher metaphors and maxims (Chapter 5), with teaching journals (Chapter 9), group discussions (Chapter 10), classroom observations (Chapter 11), collegial friends (Chapter 12), concept maps (Chapter 13), and online reflections (Chapter 14).

However, teachers must also realize that students also have beliefs, values, and purposes for learning. In addition, students interpret (through their frame of reference) what teachers say by filtering the information through their preexisting beliefs, as this is the only way they can make sense of it. As Barnes (1976: 21) maintains, every student will “go away with a version of the lesson which in some respects is different from all other pupils’ versions, because what each student brings to the lesson will be different.” It is interesting to note that the two teachers reported on in the case study presented in this chapter were not consciously aware of their own beliefs about teaching and learning English language until directly asked by the interviewers. In addition, they were not consciously aware of their classroom practices concerning the teaching of grammar, and as such they had no way of comparing their beliefs and classroom practices. Also, they stated that they had not even considered asking their students to reveal their beliefs about grammar teaching and learning. Thus, students can be surveyed about their beliefs concerning learning and teaching by asking them such questions (adapted from Richards and Lockhart, 1994) as:

- What do you think about English (or the target language if it is different than English)?
- What do you think is the most difficult aspect of learning English (or the target language if different than English)?
- What are the best ways to learn a second language?
- What kind of learners do best in class when learning a second language?
- What kind of learning style do you have?
- How do you see your role in the classroom?

- How would you define effective teaching?
- What are the qualities of a good teacher?
- What do you think about the role of textbooks in your language course or program?
- What do you think about the assessments used in this course or program?
- What changes would you like to see in this course or program?

In addition to answering the questions posed above for students, teachers can also ask themselves the following questions (adapted from Richards and Lockhart, 1994) about their beliefs and practices:

- What are my beliefs about teaching and learning?
- How do these beliefs influence my teaching?
- Where do my beliefs come from?
- What way do I actually teach in the classroom and how do I know?
- What do my learners believe about learning?
- What do my learners believe about my teaching?
- How do these beliefs influence their approach to learning?
- What learning strategies do my learners adopt?
- What learning styles do my learners favor?
- What is my role as a language teacher?
- How does this role contribute to my teaching style?
- What do my learners perceive as my role as teacher?

When teachers critically reflect on the answers they give to the above questions, they can develop a deeper understanding of their beliefs and experiences and use this new understanding as a basis for making more informed decisions about their teaching. As Richards and Lockhart (1994: 6) maintain, reflecting on beliefs and practices “involves posing questions about how and why things are the way they are, what value systems they represent, what alternatives might be available, and what the limitations are of doing things one way as opposed to another.” Consequently, they maintain if teachers are active reflectors of what is happening in their own classroom, they better position themselves to discover whether there is any gap between what they teach and what their students learn.

One final word concerning possible limitations of teachers articulating their beliefs especially if they do not also compare these stated beliefs with their classroom practices is that second language teachers may vary to the extent that they can articulate their beliefs in that teachers may not be able to



verbalize why they have made a particular decision partly because these beliefs are forever changing (Senior, 2006); and even when beliefs have been articulated, they may be an unreliable guide to the reality of their classroom actions (Pajares, 1992). As such, when beliefs have been stated, teachers should monitor their classroom practices to see if there is evidence of these beliefs in classroom practices (deductive approach), or alternatively, teachers can look at their teaching first and then stand back and examine what beliefs are being manifested through actual classroom practices (inductive approach). Senior (2006: 261) has pointed out the strong link between beliefs and practices when a teacher in her study was faced with a position of having to teach in ways that conflicted with her teaching beliefs, which resulted in her subverting the system so that she could “continue to teach in the way she believed was right.”

## Reflection

- What are your beliefs about second language learning?
- What are your beliefs about second language teaching?
- Richards and Lockhart (1994: 3) have suggested that “teachers are often unaware of what they do when they teach.” Do you agree or disagree with them? Why or why not?
- Do your classroom practices reflect your stated beliefs in both language learning and language teaching? How do you know?
- How would you go about investigating if your stated beliefs are congruent with your actual classroom practices?
- How have your past experiences as a language learner influenced you as a language teacher?
- How much are you influenced to continue to use activities that have worked well in your classes?
- Are you, or have you even been, influenced to continue to use established practices within a school?
- What would you do if a school wanted you to teach in a way that ran contrary to your beliefs?
- What would you do if you were asked to teach a textbook designated for a course that you are teaching that ran counter to your personal beliefs such as a book of grammar explanations for a speaking class?
- How much of your personality influences your teaching style?

- How has research in second language education influenced your teaching?
- Has your teaching been influenced by any one method or a combination of methods?

## Conclusion

Language teachers need to be challenged to reflect on their existing beliefs and classroom teaching practices and to “question those beliefs in the light of what they intellectually know and not simply what they intuitively feel” (Johnson, 1999: 39). The purpose of examining language teacher beliefs and classroom practices is not to look at or for “best practices”; rather, the idea is to see what *is* so teachers can become more confident knowing that what they believe about language teaching and learning is being practiced in their classes. Since language teachers’ beliefs about successful teaching form the core of their teaching behavior, this chapter has suggested that opportunities be provided for practicing language teachers to articulate and reflect on their beliefs and classroom practices while also investigating any discrepancies between the two. As Woods (1996: 71) has cautioned, language teachers must be on guard against any claim of “allegiance to beliefs consistent with what they perceive as the current teaching paradigm rather than consistent with their unmonitored beliefs and their behaviour in class.”

## Chapter scenario

Frank, an EFL teacher, decided to reflect on his beliefs about communicative language teaching and especially teaching English conversation by monitoring his classes over a period of five weeks using a teaching journal. After monitoring his classes in this way over the first four weeks, he noticed a pattern developing in his journal entries that concerned his students’ lack of response in his conversation class; he felt disappointed because his students were not responding well to the various activities he introduced during these classes. As this was an English conversation class, he had expected them to speak more than him during the class even though they were false beginner level students (they studied grammar rules in class, but did not practice using the language much during the classes). He had used activities that

encouraged students to speak rather than read, listen, or write because he believed this was the best approach to communicative language teaching. Frank reflected as follows in one entry in his teaching journal:

I was trying to introduce the idea of learning strategies during this period of reflection but the class had not gone well. I interpreted the students' lack of response because they just returned from a long vacation. Now I realize that I must work harder on my introductions to each lesson to make sure they understand what I am trying to get them to do during each class. I am unsatisfied, even after four classes. I had wanted them to talk more. I was not happy too because Sergio especially was speaking a lot using his native language in class. A good lesson for me is when students are talking together; today and the past few lessons they were not talking at all.

He continued a few days later in his journal:

From now on I am going to write all my instructions on the board in English and get one of the students to explain what I want them to do during that particular class. Then if they do not respond, at least I will know it has nothing to do with the instructions I give. I will use this process of elimination to see what is going wrong and what is going right in my class.

## Reflection

- What do you think of Frank's method of reflecting on his beliefs?
- Do you think he was successful with this method? Why or why not.
- Discuss other procedure of reflection that Frank could have used to reflect on his beliefs about communicative language teaching.
- Think about your first years of teaching and compare what you did then with what you do now.
- What are some of the important ways your approach to teaching has changed (e.g., my teaching is not as teacher-centered as before)?
- What are the sources of the changes you identified above?

# 4

## Teacher Narrative

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## Introduction

In Chapter 2 teachers were encouraged to self-reflect by telling their life stories. This type of narrative reflection is important for language teachers because they can obtain new understandings of themselves as second

language teachers when they reflect on their own perspectives of teaching and learning. However, Bell (2002) has suggested that narrative inquiry goes beyond language teachers simply telling stories and also features them recounting specific classroom events and experiences. Narrative inquiry for language teachers as it is outlined in this chapter is grounded in Dewey's notion of reflecting on teachers' specific experiences because a teacher's life is itself a narrative of the composite of these experiences such as specific critical incidents that happen both inside and outside the classroom as well as analyzing specific case studies of teaching practices.

As Dewey (1920: 164) notes, inquiry takes into account: "observation of the detailed makeup of the situation; analysis into its diverse factors; clarification of what is obscure; discounting of the more insistent and vivid traits; tracing the consequences of the various modes of action that suggest themselves; regarding the decision reached as hypothetical and tentative until the anticipated or supposed consequences which led to its adoption have been squared with actual consequences. This inquiry is intelligence." Whereas Chapter 2 encouraged language teachers to look at the overall picture of their teaching lives, this chapter outlines how practicing teachers can use narrative inquiry to analyze specific critical incidents and case studies so that they can become more aware of what influences their practices.

## Teacher narrative inquiry

Although it is difficult to define because they vary with context and approach, and as Webster and Mertova (2007: 2) have pointed out, "People make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them. Stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events, because stories do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives." Narrative inquiry techniques vary as does its definition and can include an analysis of critical incidents, that occur inside and outside the classroom, and case analysis. In this Chapter I focus only on such critical incident and case study analysis as techniques to facilitate reflection for language teachers when engaged in meaning-making within the concept of narrative inquiry. In this manner teachers, as Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey (2002: 21) suggest, can "interrogate their teaching practices to construct the meaning and interpretation of some compelling or puzzling aspect of teaching and learning through the production of narratives that lead to understanding, changed practices, and new hypotheses."

A critical incident is any unplanned and unanticipated event that occurs during class, outside class, or during a teacher's career but is "vividly remembered" (Brookfield, 1990: 84). Incidents only really become critical when they are subject to this conscious reflection, and when language teachers formally analyze these critical incidents, they can uncover new understandings of their practice (Richards and Farrell, 2005). An incident can appear to be typical rather than critical at first sight, and it becomes critical through analysis by viewing it in terms of something that has significance in the wider context (Tripp, 1993). Thus, when a critical incident occurs, it interrupts (or highlights) the taken-for-granted ways of thinking about teaching, and by analyzing such incidents teachers can examine the values and beliefs that underpin their perceptions about teaching.

Another means of engaging in teacher narratives is to reflect on case studies of specific events that occur in a teacher's work. Whereas a critical incident is a retrospective analysis of any unexpected incident, a case study starts with the identification of an issue and is then followed by the selection of a case-method procedure for reflecting on it. A case is a freeze-frame of a classroom situation that allows time for reflection (Schön, 1983). Case materials can be written and videotaped and they provide a detailed means for helping teachers develop a capacity to explore and analyze different situations and dilemmas. Thus by reproducing and attempting to relive one specific situation, the case typifies the sort of dilemma that many teachers may face during their careers. They allow for a bridging of the gap between theory and practice. Shulman (1992: 2) maintains that cases can be used to teach:

- 1 Principles or concepts of a theoretical nature,
- 2 Precedents for practice,
- 3 Morals or ethics,
- 4 Strategies, dispositions, and habits of mind, and
- 5 Visions or images of the possible.

Case studies give raw information about what teachers actually experience from their frames of reference and are particularly helpful for other teachers to examine because of the insider viewpoint. Case reports can show how peers have dealt with similar teaching incidents, such as critical incidents discussed above and when deconstructed through a process of questioning and analysis, they can show how teachers' beliefs and knowledge form the basis for how they act in many situations. As Shulman (1992) maintains: "Case-based teaching provides teachers with opportunities to analyze situations and make judgments in the messy world of practice, where

principles often appear to conflict with one another and no simple solution is possible” (p. xiv). Research indicates then that when teachers analyze specific events and situations as outlined in critical incidents and case reports, they can:

- Gain a greater level of self-awareness.
- Learn how to identify important issues.
- Learn how to frame problems.
- Develop an awareness of teaching/learning complexities.
- Learn how to pose critical questions about teaching.
- Bring underlying beliefs to the level of awareness.
- Realize that there are no simple solutions or answers.
- Learn how to summarize common emotional experiences.
- Learn how to create opportunities for action research.

## Case study I: ESL teacher’s critical incident

The following critical incident was reported by an experienced second language teacher in Canada. The critical incident is reported in the teacher’s own words and in four different sections as follows:

- *Orientation*: This part answers the following questions: Who? When? What? Where?
- *Complication*: This part outlines what happened and the problem that occurred along with any turning point in the story.
- *Evaluation*: This part answers the question: So what? What does this mean for the participants in the story?
- *Result*: This part outlines and explains the resolution to the complication.

### Orientation

I was teaching a course entitled Socio-cultural Influences on Teaching English as a Second Language. It was in the autumn term; 3 hours per week; most were university graduates who wanted to become ESL/EFL teachers. The survey is called the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and it is done across the province by all colleges. It is the primary source of information about the course and we are held accountable for the responses. For

example, in previous years, there was a very low part of our KPIs related to college facilities and we, as a department, had to hold a focus group with our students to better understand their responses. We discussed it with our program advisory committee, and the program chair had to come up with strategies for improvement. It asks students to comment on a very wide range of things from the actual learning experience and program quality to college resources, facilities, technology, cafeteria/bookstore, skills for future career, right down to teacher punctuality. They complete it at the end of the program. Not all courses in a program have to do it every term and not all programs necessarily do one every year. Because it is so extensive, they take a cross section of programs in the college. (I think). It is the type of questionnaire where a statement is given and the students can mark their answer on a continuum: agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, disagree strongly (something like that).

The student in this incident was one who had repeatedly, from the very first class, demonstrated a contemptuous boredom with the program as a whole. He had indicated this in a number of ways to all his teachers. In person, he was tactfully polite, but in his written assignments, he would express his truer feelings. He always seemed to resist or think he was above what we were teaching in the program. We suspected that his fiancé, who was also in the program, had dragged him there so that they could travel overseas together. He had just completed university and seemed to think he was above a college program; although, this is now my own perception, as I seek to understand why someone would stay in a program that he clearly did not like. Because the negative feedback came from this student, I could have dismissed it more easily. It was predictable; of course, he did not like anything. It was really not a surprise. And yet, I still felt the sting of the negative result and comments and had to reflect upon why.

## Complication

When we did our official surveys, I could tell that 7 percent always disagreed and we always got one person who hated everything.

## Evaluation

I was very disturbed by some unsolicited comments from a teaching English as a second language (TESL) student at the end of December. Even after all our talk about feedback from students and our ability to



take feedback and make changes, and not taking it personally, I was amazed by my hugely, negative, emotional response. Just when you think you are above the fray, bam some negative feedback hits you between the eyes. After doing some thinking on the experience, I have come to realize that it was not the comment itself that disturbed me (basically because I knew it was not valid), but the fact that this student felt he had a right to criticize the course content (and indirectly me) despite the fact that he had not attended a significant portion of the course and actually failed the final exam. The fact is that I felt vulnerable. I think I was worried that someone (other teachers?) was going to listen to this guy and that judgments would be made about this course and about me.

## Result

I am totally over that. In fact, I think I am probably a more severe critic of myself than anyone else could be. I was not concerned by the positives or the negatives or the neutrals. I mean I looked at them and it was interesting and there were not really surprising things but I knew that that was him and it was like, oh well. So I feel empowered by our PD (professional development). I do not know if it is a direct result of our PD. The surveys never actually give you anything really, really concrete to do in your class but you get this feedback and then you are like, well what do I . . . What do I do with this? How does it affect me? Now, it is different. So, I think by openly discussing the surveys . . . Then today, today I had to send out the “Have Your Say,” like our ESL teachers do a mid-term survey called Have Your Say. Basically the way it is structured is the different skills thumbs-up/thumbs-down.

## Case study I reflection

- How did analyzing the critical incident in Case Study I above lead the teacher to a greater awareness of her practice?
- Now analyze the above incident with a colleague and see if you give a different interpretation or insight into the meaning of the story.
- Have you ever experienced a critical incident like the one above concerning fear of class surveys? If so, describe the incident and explain why it was critical to you (e.g., what made it critical to you)?

## Case study II: “Should I give the rule or get on with the lesson?”

The following incident was reported by an English language teacher in Singapore (Farrell, 2003). The class from high school that is discussed here is an English language class that is considered to have above average English language proficiency skills. The class consisted of forty students, and the teacher prepared sentence examples on an overhead transparency before the class. When asked by the observer (after the class) what he thought the students had learned in the lesson, the teacher said he could not tell for sure. The teacher said that he was not sure how to teach subject-verb agreement as a grammar structure, but he realized this only when he started to answer the questions (on the overhead transparency) he had set for the students. Suddenly, he said that in the middle of the lesson he thought: “Should I give the rule or get on with the lesson?” He knew at that moment that he did not have a firm set of beliefs about the place of grammar in the curriculum. Thus, he was faced with the dilemma of whether to give the grammar rule to the class or continue with what he had planned for that lesson. Initially, he wanted to conduct an inductive grammar lesson. However, as the lesson progressed he became less focused because of many additional and contributing factors. For example, the teacher’s lesson objectives were full of vague statements, and the lesson lacked concrete activities that would have enabled the students to interact more with each other. The teacher did not check the students’ prior knowledge of subject-verb agreement before he started the lesson, nor did he know why he chose this particular grammar structure to teach. The teacher used grammar examples that he was not comfortable with, or did not know. In addition, during the class, the teacher’s instructions became less clear to the students. The teacher said that his beliefs about the place of grammar (including his whole approach to teaching grammar) in English lessons was still unclear to him after the lesson and that he would have to rethink this.

## Case study II reflection

- The statement made by the teacher above in case study II, “Should I give the rule or get on with the lesson,” embodies the complexity

of teaching English grammar in a real classroom situation. What do you think went through his mind immediately after this critical incident?

- How did analyzing his classroom practices in case study II lead the teacher to a greater awareness of his beliefs?
- The teacher did not check the students' prior knowledge of subject-verb agreement before he started the lesson, nor did he know why he chose this particular grammar structure to teach. Why should he have checked for this knowledge before teaching the lesson?
- The teacher used grammar examples that he was not comfortable with, or did not really understand. What should he have done to prepare these before class?
- Have you ever experienced a critical incident like the one above during your teaching of grammar? If so, describe the incident and explain why it was critical to you (e.g., what made it critical to you)?

## **Case study III: How do I know when it is appropriate for students to use their home language during ESL class?**

The following narrative was reported by an EFL teacher who was trying to determine when (and if) it was appropriate to use L1 in class as outlined in the teacher's own words (Farrell and Baecher, 2017).

I provide EFL instruction to 16- and 17-year-olds on a daily basis. Where I teach, students all share the same home language, which I also speak—but I try not to use during class time. They love being social together and have a lot of energy. It is always a struggle to get the class started and to get them to work. From the moment I walked into the classroom the other day, my students were very talkative, but not in English. No matter how much I tried to get their attention and told them to use English during the lesson, they kept going back to using their native language. They used their native language with each other and even when responding to my questions posed in English. I had broken them into pairs to practice a speaking activity and

that seemed to work as they used the phrases provided in the workbook, but then they began chatting again in their native language.

I really want to make them use English all period since this is the only time they really have to focus on English. I know they are not shy or afraid, they just do not seem to realize that this is their time to practice English. I also know that sometimes I probably use too much of our common first language in explaining directions, reprimanding their behavior, etc. I wondered if I had been guilty too of not using English enough during our class time.

I thought about whether I had really established a clear rule about English-only during our class, and decided to start the next day with a new system. I started class by telling the students that we would be only using English from then on in our classroom, and I put each student's name on the board with a smiley-face next to it. If they used only English, the smile would stay. If they were caught not using English, an eye/mouth/etc. would be erased. At first they did not seem to believe that I really was going to enforce the rule, but I kept to it. The class definitely quieted down a lot as they now had to use English to communicate!

I found that I also caught myself using our native language instead of English, so I put my own "smiley-face" on the board too! The students enjoyed monitoring and catching me not using English, and I could see that we were making strides towards using English more often. During group activities, I assigned an English "monitor" to make sure the group stayed on track too. These decisions have helped make English used more often in my classroom, but I do worry that I am becoming the English "police" and sometimes it uses up a lot of time to get an idea across where it would be much faster to just say it in the native language. I am still not always sure when I should or should not allow the native language to be used in the class.

## Case study III reflection

- Do you believe ESL/EFL classes should be conducted exclusively in English? Why or why not? In what situations would you make that determination?
- Have you ever heard students using their home language during the ESL/EFL class and felt concern that they should only be using English? Have you created an English-only policy and how did it work out?

- What are the concerns you have when students are not using English when you want them to?
- Have you experienced a similar situation? How have you handled it?
- What seems to be successful about the way the teacher is addressing this problem?
- What supports will the teacher need to have in place in terms of routines and lesson tasks in order to successfully implement an English-only policy?
- What are ways to reward students for using English in the classroom? What systems do teachers use? Survey teachers to discover several methods they use.

## Case study IV: “Who I am Is How I Teach”

The following is a summary of my own case study of my reflections on my professional role identity (from Farrell, 2017a). Professional role identity includes the concept of “self” (or the *who* as in “who I am is how I teach”) as an essential consideration of a teacher’s self-image, but many teachers’ conceptualizations of their self-image and the various roles they play are usually held at the tacit level of awareness. In terms of my mantra of “who I am is how I teach” I consider it is difficult to separate the person from the professional when we want to reflect on who we are as teachers and teacher educators. Consequently, in order to reflect on who we are as teachers we will need to get to know ourselves better so that we can better align our philosophy, principles, and theory with our practices and beyond practices as teachers and teacher educators. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well because we will be centered as a human being while a professional. Such self-study is in fact itself a methodology and a natural outgrowth of reflective practice studies. Reflective practice strategies can assist language teachers not only access and articulate their professional role identity but then to nurture its ongoing development.

In summary, my professional role identity as a teacher and teacher educator would have been influenced by my upbringing in a small town in Ireland and probably was typical for my generation as I was raised in a homogeneous socioeconomic class group (middle), of Caucasian race and with religion (Catholic) imposed by family. In addition and without going

into much detail I decided that I would never teach (as a language teacher and as a language teacher educator) the way many of my grade school teachers went about teaching me. For the most part, I was educated in teacher-led classes, but especially while learning foreign languages and English language. University life in Ireland in the 1970s did not change my views much and after doing my degree I went into teaching and as a result decided I would never educate teachers the way I was educated and more specifically I would never supervise teachers on a practicum the way I was supervised, as I see my role differently. Thus by reflecting on my professional role I was able to reveal important historical factors, power differentials, and/or cultural values in teachers' lives that may have impacted my role enactments and how I teach in a particular manner.

As a language teacher educator, in summary I would call myself a *reflective-professional language educator* who attempts to practice what he preaches and writes a lot not only to inform the field but to fulfill my own mode of reflection: writing. I believe that I “must see what I say” and I write to provide others (mostly language teachers rather than academics) with ideas they too can reflect on. In order to be a reflective-professional language teacher educator I believe the following four ideas (I have more but these are at the core) about my role identity:

- Knowing myself is as crucial as knowing about my research and my students.
- Taking a constructivist approach to my research, teaching, and learning, I believe that all teachers (preservice and in-service) will make sense of the ideas that I present in their own way.
- As such, I always try to guide teachers (preservice and in-service) away from the familiar and to question the unfamiliar.
- Thus, I encourage independent and critical reflection by all teachers.

## Case study IV reflection

- What is your professional role identity?
- How was this defined and by who?
- Why would knowing yourself be crucial as knowing about teaching and students?
- What is your understanding of a “constructivist approach”?
- What is your understanding of guiding students away from the familiar?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

In this section, I outline some practice applications for teachers of research and theory related to critical incidents and case study analysis.

### Critical incidents

There are basically two main phases of reflecting on critical incidents: a description/production phase that is followed by an explanation phase (Tripp, 1993). In the description/production phase, some issue is observed and documented as an event or incident in which something happened. Thus the incident is “produced.” The incident is then explained by the teacher in terms of its meaning, value, or role to that particular teacher (Measor, 1985). Classroom critical incidents can be positive and/or negative events and may be identified by reflecting on a “teaching high” or a “teaching low” (Thiel, 1999). A teaching high in a language class could be a sudden change in the lesson plan teachers make during class because of their perceptions of the current events. They then decide to change the events and the change had some positive overall effect on the lesson. A teaching low could be a specific classroom incident that was immediately problematic or puzzling for the teacher, such as one student suddenly crying during class for no apparent reason. Thiel (1999) suggests that by recalling and describing critical incidents like these one can begin to explore assumptions about effective teaching practice. The teacher in Case study II did not have a firm set of beliefs about the place of grammar in the curriculum. The teacher said that he had not thought about this before class, and that he did not have a specific approach to teaching grammar. Thus, he was faced with the dilemma of whether to give the grammar rule or continue with what he was doing in the lesson. Initially, he wanted to conduct an inductive grammar lesson. It was not until he analyzed this class critical incident that he realized his confusion of not only his teaching practices but also his beliefs. We can all learn from analyzing this critical incident that teachers of English grammar (and other skill areas) should be aware of all the different approaches to teaching grammar, and that they should also be able to articulate their own personal beliefs about the place of grammar teaching in English language lessons.

Case study III shows the need for teachers to become aware of the use of L1 in the language classroom by the teacher and the students and if this inhibits or contributes the learning of the target language. This is not an easy dilemma for a language teacher to answer because there will always be a certain amount of code-switching in the classroom and some of this can help students in different ways. So ESL and EFL teachers can become more aware of the elements that go into a decision about the place of the L1 in ESL/EFL instruction. For example, administrators and teachers must consider several elements such as the teacher's language proficiency, students' language levels, type of curriculum, context for teaching, opportunities for outside of school use of the language, and other learner variables and so on. It is through such reflections that administrators and teachers can make informed decisions about the L1 in the language classroom rather than a blanket ban on its usage that sometimes occurs.

Critical incidents can also be general incidents that have occurred outside the classroom but have had an impact on the teacher and even resulted in a significant change in the teacher's personal as well as professional life. These can also be considered a turning point in a teacher's career and can be captured when the teacher examines episodes from his or her past. These career critical incidents can be represented in the form of an autobiographical sketch, or with the "Tree of Life" as outlined in Chapter 2. Thiel (1999) suggests that the reporting of critical incidents (written or spoken) should follow specific steps:

- Self-observation—identify significant events that occur in the classroom.
- Detailed written description of what happened—the incident itself, what led up to it, and what followed.
- Self-awareness—analyze why the incident happened.
- Self-evaluation—consider how the incident lead to a change in understanding of teaching.

## Case analysis

Whereas a critical incident involves looking back on an unplanned classroom incident and reflecting on its meaning, a case analysis is broader and starts from identification of a particular issue and then involves selecting a method for collecting information about it. Of course identification of a critical incident can provide the initial motivation for a case study (Richards and



Farrell, 2005). Preparing, reading, and discussing cases provide information about teaching that is produced by teachers themselves that addresses their own real needs and issues. Teachers can write their own cases based on what actually happened in their classrooms or they can read and discuss cases prepared by other teachers such as can be found in such collections as the enormous TESOL Case study series. As teachers discuss a case, they define problems, clarify issues, weigh alternatives, and choose a course of action. These abilities compose critical reflection. Cases can also provide a focus for journal writing (see Chapter 9) as well as online reflections (see Chapter 14), and specific case examples can be a component of a teaching portfolio (see Chapter 2). Wassermann (1993) suggests that cases be processed by teachers in terms of three stages:

- *Fact-finding*: Before dealing with the situation or problem of a case, it is useful to generate questions about relevant facts and concepts. During this early stage, the emphasis is on surfacing all of the details that are possible clues for later analysis. This is one way for teachers who jump to premature solutions to slow down their thinking and to focus on the facts of the case only.
- *Meaning-making*: Now that you have completed the first stage of case analysis, you have accumulated a lot of information and need to make sense of it. One way of organizing the information from the point of view of making sense of it all is to use concept maps (see Chapter 13) to see the complex relationships that may have developed within a case. At this stage of case analysis, teachers attempt to identify the problems within the case from the teacher's view first and then their own points of view.
- *Problem-solving*: In the final stage of case analysis, teachers attempt to make decisions about the case based on the previous set of questions. The last two categories (meaning-making and problem-solving) are for the purposes of promoting teachers' growth in critical reflection.

The following are examples of case studies that could be used as part of a teacher reflection activity (from Richards and Farrell, 2005: 128–29):

- Information collected over a period of a semester concerning how two different students (one with high proficiency and one with low proficiency) performed during group activities.
- An account of the problems a teacher experienced during her first few months of teaching.

- An account of how two teachers implemented a team-teaching strategy and the difficulties they encountered.
- An account of observation of one high-achieving student and one low-achieving student over a semester in order to compare their patterns of classroom participation.
- A teacher's journal account of all of the classroom management problems she had to deal with in a typical school week.
- An account of how a teacher made use of lesson plans over a three-week period.
- An account of how two teachers resolved a misunderstanding that occurred between them in relation to the goals of a course.
- A description of all the changes a student made in a composition she was working on over a three-week period, from the drafting stage to the final stage.

## Case study V: Mismatched textbooks and assessment

This is a case study of a young TESOL teacher from Vietnam related to textbook usage and an improper testing format. It is written in the teacher's own words.

In the second year of my teaching at college, I was assigned to teach a pronunciation course to a class of 50 first year English-major students. While the students' starting points were just pre-intermediate English learners basing on their scores in our internal CEFR test, the textbook I was asked to use was *Headway: Intermediate Pronunciation* published in December 1990. My foremost impression was that the content was beyond my students' ability to absorb and practice exercise in the book was far from communicative approach. During some first weeks, my assumption was confirmed when I witnessed that my students could not catch up with the speedy recordings and showed little interest in practicing individual sounds or doing scripted exercise. I correspondingly felt hopeless to impart a great amount of phonetic knowledge and allocate sufficient practice time for my students in a crowded class. Regarding the testing format, students had to complete two in-class tests designed by me and one final test designed by a senior teacher.

The final paper-based test format has been fixed for over 15 years and included providing phonetic transcriptions of given words, marking word

stress, and sentence stress as well as drawing arrows to demonstrate intonation patterns. As I thought the more my students were familiar with the test, the better they performed; I had designed the two mid-term tests in the same format with the final one. In fact, it was such a dilemma for me. Although I saw that it was definitely impossible for my students to improve their pronunciation and be well-trained enough to do well in the transcription tests, at that time I was not confident enough to make any significant changes for several reasons. First of all, as it was my first time to teach the course, I did not have much experience in adapting the given textbook to suit my students' level. Second, as I was explained by the senior colleague that most of final test's items were taken from the given textbook, I was absolutely anxious.

I was governed by the feeling that if I provided my students with authentic practice rather than follow the textbook and let them do text-based exercise, my students' performance in the final test would be at stake. Also, I was afraid of losing face when being confronted and asked why they were not taught the knowledge essential for them to pass the final tests. I recognized that although I cared for my student's improvement on their oral performance, I still prioritized the curriculum, the syllabus and relied heavily on the given textbook when teaching is test focusing. Predictably, at the end of the course, I was really disappointed when I did not see much progress in my students' performance: neither did they pronounce better nor get high marks in the final test. The undesirable experience from the first pronunciation course urged me to make changes in my teaching approach.

In the following school year, when considering my students' level and the impractical aspect of the tests and I daringly and of course secretly minimized the usage of the given textbook, introducing another more up-to-date textbook and modified the two in-class tests. I knew that if I had officially reported about my using a new textbook, it would have been a disadvantage for me. It could lead to being objected and complained as I did not follow the established rules. With the experience gained from the previous year, I identified core content of units and chose other suitable materials such as *Ship or Sheep* for minimal pairs' and dialogue practicing. Most of the class time was dedicated to practicing sounds and intonation patterns in authentic conversations. I insisted the importance of the practice by informing my students about the two oral mid-term tests. However, I could not forget the importance of the final test, so some exercise in the old textbook was chosen and assigned as homework, then checked in the following classes. I always

reminded my students about the similarity between the homework and the final test. At the end of the course, I was pleased to witness their excitement, their improvement in learning and felt satisfied with their scores in the final paper-based tests.

However, when considering my previous decision, I think that changes applied in my class are just a short-term and small-sized solution, as students of other teachers may still suffer from a similar learning constraint in their pronunciation classes. Therefore, I reason that changing the textbook and the test format is a must. However, it is indeed another dilemma in my school. As I am just a novice teacher, my voice is not strong enough and the senior teacher holding superior power in designing the tests is extremely conservative. Currently, I believe that rather than secretly go on my own way, I certainly need to discuss and propose necessary pedagogical changes to the senior. And this can be accomplished through gathering substantial support from other colleagues and explaining to the test-maker persuasively with obvious achievement that I have gained in my class.

In this case study, I have experienced a problem in how to balance between the school practice and the students' real benefits. It makes me more aware about the importance of analyzing students' real need and their English level to adapt suitable teaching methods as well as develop a suitable testing framework to improve students' oral performance and assess their ability in a fairer way.

## Case study V reflection

- What is your analysis of this case study?
- Use Wassermann's (1993) processing of a case in terms of:  
*Fact-finding*: Before dealing with the situation or problem of a case, it is useful to generate questions about relevant facts and concepts.  
*Meaning-making*: Now that you have completed the first stage of case analysis, you have accumulated a lot of information and need to make sense of it. One way of organizing the information from the point of view of making sense of it all is to use concept maps (see Chapter 13) to see the complex relationships that may have developed within a case.  
*Problem-solving*: attempt to make decisions about the case based on the previous set of questions.

- The last two categories above (meaning-making and problem-solving) are for the purposes of promoting teachers' growth in critical reflection. The teacher said this case helped her gain some insights into her educational practice from a critical perspective. What is your understanding of her insight?

Analyzing cases based on descriptions of teachers dealing with the particular issues such as the mismatch between textbooks and assessments above as well as critical incidents can offer teachers a method of reflecting on their practice where they define problems, clarify issues, weigh alternatives, and choose a course of action. As a result, they can become more critical practitioners.

## Reflection

- When does an incident become critical for a language teacher during class?
- How can analyzing critical incidents lead to a greater awareness of teaching?
- Have you ever experienced a critical incident during class? If so, describe the incident and explain why it was critical to you (e.g., what made it critical to you)?
- Why is a case a “freeze frame” of a classroom situation?
- What is your understanding of the jazz maxim “You have to know the story in order to tell the story”?
- Suggest more examples of topics that would be suitable as the subject for teacher case reports.
- Look at the following incident and identify what makes it critical. Rachael, in her capacity as ESL teacher was sometimes asked to teach what were termed “Remedial classes.” Rachael thought nothing of this labeling until one day she overheard one student ask another if he was a “spastic” because he was in a remedial group. Rachael was appalled to hear this in her class.
- Write a short description of an incident from a recent teaching experience in terms of who, where, when, and what happened. Next try to interpret where this incident fits into your beliefs, and theories of language teaching. Can you compare this incident with any other such incidents and/or events?

- The following may give you some ideas about where to search for career critical incidents:
  - What experiences do you base your identity as a language teacher on?
  - The most influential mentor for you through your early teaching career.
  - Influential students you have encountered in your classes.

## Conclusion

Narrative reflection as discussed in this chapter suggests that language teachers can choose from various different means of “imposing order” (Johnson and Golombek, 2002: 4) on their seemingly disparate practices such by as analyzing critical incidents and case studies. Both critical incident analysis and case analysis can stimulate the habit of reflective practice for language teachers. Indeed, by analyzing critical incidents and case studies that “conflicts with our expectations, we can come to a greater understanding of the expectations themselves—what our beliefs, philosophies, understandings, conceptions (of the classroom, of the language, of the students, of ourselves) actually are” (McCabe, 2002: 83). Analyzing critical incidents and cases provides teachers with further opportunities to consolidate their theoretical understanding of their practices and can lead to further exploration of different aspects of teaching through later specific action research projects (see Chapter 8 for more details on how to set up action research projects).

## Chapter scenario

Brian, a third-year British English language teacher in the UK, has had a bit of trouble maintaining discipline and control in his classes this semester. He has tried to win the students over by being as friendly as possible to them both inside and outside class. He even brought them on class trips and paid for all himself. However, he noticed recently that two international students from the same country in one of his oral English classes whisper constantly together at the back of the room especially when he was teaching or trying to explain something. Brian sensed that the two students did not have much confidence in him as a teacher and suspected they were making fun of him

but he was not sure because he did not understand their language. From time to time he asked them to stop talking to each other but they did not seem to pay much attention to him and soon began chattering away again in their mother tongue. Brian decided to establish a policy of giving students 20 percent of their end of term grade based on their classroom participation and cooperation. Since he did not notice any change in the two disruptive students' behavior at the end of the semester he only gave them 1 percent for participation. When the two students received their grades they are very disappointed and asked to speak to Brian. In that meeting they explained to Brian that he was in fact their favorite teacher and that they really enjoyed his class and that is why they worked so hard to impress him, so they always decided to say a sentence in a whisper to each other to check it before saying it aloud in class. What Brian thought was chattering was actually the two students discussing or rehearsing the language they would need to use for a specific classroom activity. From this incident Brian realized that he should have spoken to the two students in private to find out why they were talking and to remind them what he was trying to achieve while teaching and when such talk could prove disruptive.

## Reflection

- What made the incident above critical for Brian?
- How would you have reacted to what happened in Brian's class?
- Why do you think it is necessary for teachers to examine what went before and what comes after a particular critical incident?

# 5

## Teacher Metaphors and Maxims

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### Introduction

Practicing language teachers have accumulated images about learning and teaching that influence what they do in their classrooms. According to Senge (1990: 175), metaphors, or mental models, are what humans carry in their heads “in the form of images, assumptions and stories . . . and not only determine how we make sense of the world, but how we take action.” However, many teachers may not be aware of the impact of these images on their current teaching practices, because they are held tacitly. So at some time during their careers, teachers should explore the images, metaphors, and



maxims they have built up; as Burns (1999: 147) maintains, the metaphors that teachers hold can be used as “an introspective and reflective tool.” This chapter outlines and describes how second language teachers can explore and reflect on their use of metaphors and maxims in order to become more aware of the impact of these on their classroom practices.

## Teacher metaphors and maxims

A metaphor, defined by Dickmeyer (1989: 151) as “the characterisation of a phenomenon in familiar terms,” is often used by people to simplify their experiences. Lakeoff and Johnson (1980: 232–33) suggest that a large part of self-understanding is the “search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives . . . . The process of self-understanding is the continual development of new life stories for yourself.” Metaphors are also an important part of teachers’ personal practical knowledge that shapes their understanding of their role as teachers. Pajak (1986: 123), for example, maintains that metaphors can be a means for teachers to verbalize their “professional identity.” Metaphors are indications of the way teachers think about teaching and also guide the way they act in the classroom, and thus when teachers begin to unpack the meaning of the metaphors they hold, they can begin to understand what they really believe about teaching and can start to transform themselves as teachers (Clandinin, 1986).

In early research that reviewed the metaphors that second language teachers use, Block (1992: 44) discovered both “macro” and “micro” metaphors and the two most common of the macro-metaphors used by teachers to describe their roles are: teacher as a contracted professional who coordinates but not dominates his/her students’ classroom activities and teacher as a providing parent who encourages his/her students. For learners, Block (1992) identified two further macro-metaphors: learner as a respected client and learner as a respected child. Block (1992) later discovered the following metaphors used in addition to the two macro-metaphors above: teacher as researcher, God, devoted professional, comrade/friend, and enforcer. Recently one of the most comprehensive literature reviews on the study of metaphor usage in second language teaching was conducted by Oxford et al. (1998). Oxford et al.’s (1998) typology covers four perspectives of teaching second language:

- 1 *Social Order*: For example, teacher as manufacturer; teacher as competitor.

- 2 *Cultural Transmission*: For example, teacher as conduit, teacher as repeater.
- 3 *Learner-Centered Growth*: For example, teacher as nurturer; teacher as lover; teacher as scaffolder, teacher as entertainer.
- 4 *Social Reform*: For example, teacher as acceptor, teacher as learning partner.

Research has uncovered the following metaphors that second language teachers use:

- *Teacher as manufacturer*
- *Teacher as competitor*
- *Teacher as nurturer*
- *Teacher as lover*
- *Teacher as scaffolder*
- *Teacher as entertainer*
- *Teacher as learning partner*

## Case study I: “The Teacher Is A Facilitator”

The following case study details the reflections of three experienced ESL teachers in Canada through the use of metaphor analysis (Farrell, 2016a). The three participants (for reasons of anonymity called T1 (teacher 1), T2 (teacher 2), and T3 (teacher 3)) in the teacher reflection group were all experienced female ESL college teachers in Canada. The metaphors generated by the three teachers were coded according to the Oxford et al. (1998) classification discussed above to see how they would fit into the four philosophical perspectives of education. Of the four aspects used in the Oxford et al. (1998) framework, only one, cultural transmission, did not appear; therefore I report on the other three.

Table 5.1 illustrates the frequency count of the metaphors used by each teacher. Next, Table 5.2 illustrates specific examples of the most used metaphors that occurred in the Oxford et al. (1998) framework.

As can be observed in Table 5.1, the teachers only used metaphors in three of the categories: learner-centered growth, social order, and social reform, but not any for cultural transmission. All three teachers used a total of ninety-four metaphors throughout the period of the group

**Table 5.1** Teachers’ Metaphors Frequency in Each Category

	Social order	Learner-centered growth	Social reform	Total
T1	14	15	7	36
T2	11	23	0	34
T3	10	14	0	24
Total:	35	52	7	94

**Table 5.2** Teachers’ Metaphor Examples of “Teacher is a\_\_\_\_\_”

Aspect	T1	T2	T3
<b>Learner-centered growth</b>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Facilitator</i>	<i>Nurturer</i>
	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Therapist</i>
	<i>Janitor</i>	<i>Coach</i>	<i>Coach</i>
<b>Social order</b>	<i>Border Guard</i>	<i>King</i>	<i>Army General</i>
	<i>Guard Dog</i>	<i>Competitor</i>	<i>Dictator</i>
	<i>Peacekeeper</i>	<i>Police Officer</i>	<i>Judge</i>
		<i>Production-line Worker</i>	<i>Micromanaging Boss</i>
<b>Social reform</b>	<i>Learning Partner</i>	N/A	N/A
	<i>Soldier</i>		
	<i>Archaeologist</i>		

discussions and interviews. The metaphors used most were those related to *learner-centered growth* (52), followed by *social order* (35), and then *social reform* (7). T1 used the most metaphors (36) in the group discussions and interviews followed by T2 (34) and T3 (24). All three teachers used metaphors from the learner-centered growth category most, followed by social order. I now present some metaphor examples (using the framework as outlined in Oxford et al., 1998) the teachers used and as shown in Table 5.2.

## Learner-centered growth

Learner-centered growth had the highest frequency (52) of metaphors the teachers used to describe their work. Of the three teachers, T2 had the highest frequency of usage among the three ESL teachers in this category followed by T1 and T3. Within this category the three metaphors T2 used most were teacher as *facilitator*, *mother*, and *coach*, with teacher as *facilitator* being the most used metaphor by her. T2 said that she always tries to

facilitate her students' learning and chooses what to do in class and how much time is necessary for each lesson and that she "has a routine of 'crowd-pleasers' that always capture my students' attention" so that she can help them with their learning. T2 also said that she tries to "facilitate fun" in all her classes. She also noted that she is sometimes a *mother* to her students because she said that she "worries about all her students and their progress" and that in certain cases she "forces students to carry their own weight and take responsibility." When this does not happen, she said, she reacts as a "worrier"; when one of her male students fell behind the other students in class she said that she "used to worry myself sick about him" just as a mother would. She also noted that sometimes she is a coach because she said that she "sets the bar and encourages students to reach it." In order to carry out her duty as a *coach* she said that she "looks out for weak and wayward students and pushes these students to go on as hard as they can" just like a couch would in a sports team.

T1 used and alluded to the metaphor *friend* many times in the group discussions; this metaphor was used especially when she wanted to get something important across to her students and to show her students that she cared. For example, T1 said that "if some form of communication or point I am trying to make breaks down, I'll find another way to build those bridges and make those bonds and that I feel support their learning." She also said that her policy for her students was to always encourage them with a smile; she continued: "Let me give you a smile to brighten your day." Related to the use of the metaphor *friend* was her use of the metaphor of *parent* for the teacher, similar to T2's use of *mother*. T1 said that she noted that she sometimes feels her students' pain and also feels their emotions when they are struggling to learn various aspects of English. In one instance T1 noted that she "almost was in tears when she left the classroom one day after a student had a difficult learning experience." At that time she said she really felt like a *parent* who was guiding her children and feeling their pain when they felt pain with the struggles of growing up. That said, her metaphor usage for learner-centered growth did not always focus on the positive when dealing with her students and she used one interesting metaphor to sum up her frustrations: *janitor* because sometime she said that she had to "clean up their mess in order to make things right." Perhaps this is closely linked to the feeling of being a real parent as they too sometimes feel frustrated with their own children.

Within this category the three metaphors T3 used most were teacher as *nurturer*, *therapist*, and *coach*. T3 said that she always tries to nurture her

students by caring for them, which is similar to T1's teacher as *parent* and T2's teacher as *mother*. She said that she even tries to care for them after her classes by taking them shopping to the mall if she thinks they may need help speaking English for their basic living needs. This, she said, "helps them in their real learning of English" and, as she said, "helps get students through the course." For teacher as *therapist*, T3 noted that she always tries to "build up" her "students' attitudes" and "open their eyes to new ideas and new ways of thinking." For teacher as *therapist*, T3 mentioned that she is concerned a lot with the emotional well-being of her students but that this of course brings mixed feelings from within her students and her own thought processes, and she noted this when she said that she was mindful of "feelings and causes of feelings with students." Like T2 she used the metaphor of *coach* when she said that she tries to "encourage my students to try hard and do their best."

## Social order

Social order followed learner-centered growth as the most popular category of metaphor used by all the teachers. Within this category of social order, T1, the most frequent user, made use of the metaphor of teacher as *Border Guard* to indicate how she controls her students. T1 noted that she controls her students by "creating the line and stops students from crossing it." Related to the border guard metaphor, T1 also used the metaphor teacher as *Guard Dog* to suggest that although she thinks she controls the classroom, she also notes that she has to be "fierce and intimidating to protect what's valuable to her in her classroom." In a more conciliatory tone however she also used the metaphor teacher as *Peacekeeper* to indicate how she tries to keep her classroom and all that is in it (students) close to her as she says that she "can't take things too personally." T1 continued: "Generally, I think we are very forgiving of our own gaps and faults as well as our students' gaps and faults."

For Social Order, T2 used teacher as *King* a lot in the group discussions. For example, T2 used teacher as *King* when she said, "Everybody's dragging their feet sometime in class so it is better to lay it on the line because as teacher I'm the king." T2 also used the metaphor *police officer* to augment what she was saying for teacher as *King* as she said she "sets the rules in class and then enforces them strictly" and she also said she "lays it on the line for them." A related metaphor she used within social order was teacher as *competitor* in the sense of competing with her

students for control of the classroom when she mentioned more than once that the classroom and teaching are in her domain and not the students; she said: “It’s my game. I made the rules and you can’t have the points.” She also used the metaphor *Production Line Worker* to describe herself as a teacher when she repeats things over and over in class without thinking about them; T2 noted this when she said: “Especially, I know I’m on autopilot because I’m just doing and it goes along and I’m not really thinking about it.”

Within Social Order, T3 used the metaphor *Army General* to say that she “calls the shots on what goes in the classroom” and that she “assigns tasks and send students on their way” to do them. She said that when some of her students “whine and don’t try their best” she becomes a *Dictator* because she said that she does not allow students to dictate what happens in the class; she said, “I have a firm foothold on the class” and that she always “stands her ground.”

T3 also used the metaphor of *Judge* as she says she “judges her students’ actions and behaviours” because some “students attack teachers from all angles, creating misery and more work” and that she “tries to be fair, but has moments of frustration and emotional outbursts.” So she said she acts as a *Micromanaging Boss* sometimes because she watches students and thus makes sure they “do all the small things.”

## Social reform

Social Reform was only used by T1 and not at all by the other two teachers. T1 used three interesting metaphors almost interchangeably; teacher as *learning partner*, *soldier*, and *archaeologist*. For *learning partner*, T1 noted that she always “works together with the students and puts in effort into learning together” so that they all (both teacher and students) can “pull their weight together.” In order to accomplish this, T1 said that she sometimes acts as a *Soldier* because she “fights for her students’ rights and well-being” and this occurred in one occasion when she had to stand up for her students in front of some other teachers; she said: “I had to get ammunition so I could deal with those teachers.” She also said that she acted as an *Archaeologist* sometimes because she is “always digging up more information to help her students.” When asked after the reflection period if the metaphor *advocate* would better represent her belief of fighting for her students, T1 responded, “Perhaps but I will still *soldier* on for my students.”

## Case study reflection

- The results from the teacher discussions showed in this paper are: a teacher is not only a teacher in the general sense, but also a *Facilitator, Mother, Coach, Nurturer, Border Guard, Guard Dog, Peacekeeper, King, Competitor, Police Officer, Production Line Worker, Army General, Dictator, Judge, Micromanaging Boss, Friend, Parent, Janitor, Therapist, Learning Partner, Soldier, and Archaeologist* to name but a few. Comment on your understanding of each of these and if they apply to you in any way as a teacher of English to speakers of other languages.
- Why do you think metaphor analysis allows teachers to reflect on who they are and why they act the way they do in their professional lives?
- Once teachers have articulated their teaching and learning metaphors, they challenge them and decide if these metaphors still hold true for their present context and conditions of teaching. Can you now challenge your stated metaphors and if so can you develop alternative and more appropriate metaphors that best represent your current professional practice?

In addition to the exploration and reflection on metaphors used, teachers can also explore the maxims, or dictums, they use to explain specific classroom actions. This is an important addition to the reflection on teacher images because as Richards (1996: 286) notes, a teacher's maxims "function like rules for best behaviour" and also guide a teacher's classroom actions just like metaphors. Richards (1996) maintains that exploring teachers' maxims is an attempt to understand language teaching in its own light because it reveals the working principles which teachers adhere to as they teach. For example, Tsui (1995: 357) explored the personal maxims of two ESL teachers in the same Hong Kong secondary school and discovered two very different approaches to teaching the same subject, the same class, and the same level. One teacher, a Chinese female, was a strict disciplinarian and followed a *maxim of order* which was based on her cultural and educational background which "valued subservience to authority and emphasized observation to protocol." The other teacher, a native of New Zealand, encouraged a more informal relationship with his students and his classes were very different than that of the first teacher because of his Western cultural background in which Tsui (1995: 359) points out, "More

emphasis was placed on the individual, most classrooms had done away with the traditional protocol, and the relationship between students and teachers was much less formal.” Research has also uncovered the following maxims language teachers use:

- The maxim of Accuracy: work for accurate student output.
- The maxim of Efficiency: make the most efficient use of class time.
- The maxim of Empowerment: give the learners control.
- The maxim of Encouragement: seek ways to encourage student learning.
- The maxim of Planning: plan your teaching and try to follow your plan.
- The maxim of Involvement: follow the learners’ interests to maintain student involvement.

## Case study II: “Teach the same way as I have been taught”

The following case study details the maxims a second language teacher used to guide her teaching in Singapore together with a classroom observer (Farrell, 2007). The case study highlights three main maxims the teacher used after her first classroom observation and how reflecting on these maxims contributed to positive changes in her teaching practices to promote more effective learning opportunities for her students.

- Maxim of Apprenticeship of Observation: *Teach the same way as I have been taught*

The first maxim that the teacher used was the maxim of apprenticeship of observation: “teach the same way as I have been taught.” This is because the teacher said that she had decided to teach her classes in the same way as her teachers had taught her when she was a student. For example, for her second lesson observation the teacher decided to strictly follow the book and use worksheets because she said her secondary school teachers used this approach.

- Maxim of Planning: *Finish the lesson at all costs*

The second maxim she used was the maxim of planning: “finish the lesson as all costs.” She related that this maxim was her explanation of why all her lessons were carried out according to her original lesson plan regardless of what transpired during the lesson.



- Maxim of Conformity: *Give observers what they want*

The third maxim presented here is the teacher's use of the maxim of conformity: "give the observers what they want." This maxim can be also linked to the chapter on classroom observations (see Chapter 11) and is important as many experienced language teachers have been observed while teaching for evaluation purposes and if the evaluator/observer was armed with a checklist, you may have been tempted to try to "cover" as many items on the checklist as possible so the evaluator could check them off.

## Case study reflection

- Have you ever used a maxim similar to the ones above indicating your teaching practices may be influenced by your past experiences as a student? Explain.
- Do you use any other maxim to explain what influences your practices? Explain.
- Have you ever used a similar maxim as the ones above indicating your teaching practices may be over-influenced by the presence of an observer in your class? Explain.
- Have you ever used a similar maxim as the ones above indicating your teaching practices may be over-influenced by your lesson plan? Explain.
- Do you use any other maxim to explain how you plan and execute lessons? Explain.

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

### Teacher metaphors

When language teachers reflect on their use of metaphors and maxims, they can examine who they really are as teachers and what guides them as they teach.

When I was teaching in Singapore (Farrell, 2006b) I asked some teachers to answer the following questions: "What is the teacher's role in the classroom? How should learning take place?" Additionally, they were asked

to complete the statement: “A teacher is\_\_\_\_\_.” One teacher said that her perceptions of teaching were shaped by the following metaphor she used: *A classroom is a battleground*. She said that the classroom was a place of tension between the teacher and the student, with both waiting to do battle. She continued: “It is a battle between the students and the teacher. In the beginning, both parties do not know a lot about each other. The teacher has to fight to make the students receptive towards him/her.” For her the meaning of the word battle included an internal struggle for both teachers and students to use appropriate strategies within the classroom. The teacher remarked:

There is a constant battle of making the right choices. The teacher has to decide what materials are suitable for the students. The students, on the other hand, have to choose among the choices and come up with a correct answer. In a battlefield the General has to decide what strategies to use to defeat the enemies. Similarly, the teacher has to think of ways to finish the syllabus in time and also to make it interesting and captivating.

She also used the metaphors like *teacher as a mother*, *teacher as a motivator*, and *teacher as a facilitator*, and mentioned that all three metaphors were connected for her. She maintained that in order to motivate the students to learn English, the teacher has to facilitate the process by being a mother-type to the students. She linked her use of *teacher as motivator* to her time as a student in the school system in Singapore when she noticed these qualities in her English language teacher. She explained as follows:

As a motivator, I want to interest my students about the wonders of English language. I want them to enjoy English lessons (like I did) and not hate them. My English teachers have made my lessons interesting by teaching them with such zest. I will strive to be like them. When the students are motivated and interested, they would want to learn more about English. This will help them master the language even faster.

She clarified the *teacher as a mother* metaphor as the umbrella metaphor for her as a teacher. She says: “I see myself as a mother to all my students. I do not want to be just their English teacher. I want to be a listening ear, a friend, and someone they can turn to when they are in trouble.” Consequently teachers can be asked to do the following:

- Finish this statement: “An English language teacher is\_\_\_\_\_.”
- Finish this statement: “A language student is\_\_\_\_\_.”

- Finish these statements:
  - “A good second language teacher is \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - “A good second language student is \_\_\_\_\_.”

As Berliner (1990: 86) has noted, for teachers, “Metaphors are powerful forces, conditioning the way we come to think about ourselves and others.” Therefore, it is important for language teachers to be able to access these metaphors and to test their validity in light of current practices.

## Teacher maxims

In the case study reported in this chapter, the teacher was asked to identify the maxims she used to describe her teaching. When she identified and then reflected on the maxims she used to guide her teaching, she began to uncover her unconscious assumptions about teaching and learning. As she articulated and reflected on her maxims, she also began to realize that many of them may have been somewhat misguided and as a result may also have led to self-defeating teaching behaviors in her classroom. For example, after reflecting deeply on her first maxim of apprenticeship of observation and its implications over a period of time, she began to see how her instructional decisions may have been over-influenced by her past experiences as a student herself and thus she was imitating her own teachers’ practices without much thought or reflection. When she realized this and decided that she no longer wanted to follow such practices, she began to formulate a new maxim similar to what Richards (1996: 290) has termed “the maxim of encouragement: seek ways to encourage student learning” as she attempted to provide more learning opportunities for her students. Similarly, after much reflection and discussion on her maxim of planning, the teacher realized how the execution of her lessons was too heavily controlled by her lesson plan and not reactive enough to what actually transpired during the actual lesson. As Richards (1996) has noted, this is a situation where teachers see their students only as instruments in implementing and completing their lesson plan called the maxim of planning: “Plan your teaching and try to follow your plan” (Richards, 1996: 288). This approach however, has a tendency to downplay students’ interpretations and reactions to the lesson material and as such can block opportunities for learning. As the teacher reflected on this more, she began to articulate a different maxim to describe her instructional approach, one similar to what Richards (1996: 287) has termed “the maxim of involvement: follow the learners’ interests to maintain

student involvement.” The teacher’s use of this maxim of conformity, her third maxim, can be partly explained by Richards (1996: 291) as follows: “Make sure your teaching follows the prescribed method.” In this case the “prescribed method” was the teacher’s attempt to predict what her observer wanted to see in her classes for evaluative purposes rather than teach the classes the way she “would normally have done.” When she realized that she was “under the spell of the observers” she began to move toward using a more appropriate maxim related to what she wanted her students to achieve and get from all her classes regardless of who was observing or not, and again she used the maxim of encouragement: “Seek ways to encourage student learning.” She said that in the future regardless of who was observing her teaching or for what reason, she would follow this new maxim. In such a manner second language teachers can be encouraged to reveal the maxims they would use to describe their practices and again test their validity in light of current practices.

## Changing metaphors and maxims

When language teachers identify the metaphors and maxims they use, they can also be challenged as to their current relevance and then they can begin to develop alternative and more appropriate metaphors and maxims that best represent their practice. Language teachers may thus be able to restructure previously entrenched beliefs as they become more aware of the metaphors and maxims they use, and as such, it may also be possible to trigger a repackaging of the old beliefs they held. So, by a process of critical reflection on metaphors and maxims (old and new), language teachers can understand and combine the unknown into what they already know (Provenzo et al., 1989) as changes in metaphor and maxim usage signal changes in their conceptions of teaching and learning a second language. The real test of the teachers’ metaphor and maxim usage is not whether they are “right or wrong” according to an outsider’s perceptions, but the extent to which they are useful for the teacher (Roberts, 1998). This is the key point in this chapter with regards to reflective teaching and professional development in that it is the practicing teachers who decide whether to hold onto their present metaphors and maxims or to develop new ones that may better represent their current teaching state. As was pointed out in the case study reported on in this chapter, when the teacher realized that the maxims she had used to describe her work were not useful anymore, *she* came up with “new” maxims as a result of her critical reflections on her practices.

## Reflection

- What metaphor or maxim do you use for your role as a teacher?
- Has your use of this metaphor or maxim changed over time since you became a language teacher?
  - If yes, what differences have you noticed?
  - What experiences have led to the change you noticed?
  - If no changes have occurred in your metaphor usage, what experiences have resulted in this confirmation of your original metaphor usage?
- What metaphor or maxim do you use for the role of your students in your classes?
- Has your use of this metaphor or maxim changed over time since you became a language teacher?
  - If yes, what differences have you noticed?
  - What experiences have led to the change you noticed?
  - If no changes have occurred in your metaphor usage, what experiences have resulted in this confirmation of your original metaphor usage?
- What metaphor or maxim do you use for your perception of the role of classroom management styles for second language teachers?
- Has your use of this metaphor or maxim changed over time since you became a language teacher?
  - If yes, what differences have you noticed?
  - What experiences have led to the change you noticed?
  - If no changes have occurred in your metaphor usage, what experiences have resulted in this confirmation of your original metaphor usage?
- In second language education, Block (1992) documented metaphors of both second language teachers and also their learners' use of metaphors that describe the teachers: Examine and discuss each of these and try to give examples that could be used from each one.
  - Teachers' metaphors:
    - *Teacher as a contracted professional*
    - *Teacher is a providing parent*
  - Learners' metaphors:
    - *Teacher as detector of mistakes*
    - *Teacher as seeker of effective methods*
    - *Teacher as friend.*

- Finish the sentences below concerning how you see teaching (from Bowen and Marks, 1994: 41):
  - I see myself as an actor because\_\_\_\_\_.
  - I see myself as a guide because\_\_\_\_\_.
  - I see myself as a diplomat because\_\_\_\_\_.
  - I see myself as a waiter because\_\_\_\_\_.
  - I see myself as a chat-show host because\_\_\_\_\_.
  - I see myself as a coach because\_\_\_\_\_.
  - I see myself as a \_\_\_\_\_ because\_\_\_\_\_.

## Conclusion

When experienced second language teachers attempt to unpack and reflect on their use of metaphors, they can begin to probe their meaning in a relatively safe way, and if they discover any metaphors that may not be suitable for their teaching lives anymore, they can revise their metaphors in light of their present needs for teaching second language, for their students' learning that second language, for subject matter decisions, and for their classroom environments. As such, a close examination of these metaphors may not only provide them with some insight into their prior beliefs but also provide language teacher educators with the same awareness which in turn can be an important starting point to initiate change in such metaphors if they conflict with what they see in their present surroundings.

## Chapter scenario

Three teachers came together as a group in Singapore to reflect on their use and meaning of metaphors for their practice. They decided to try to answer (using metaphors) and discuss the following main questions in their group: "What is the teacher's role in the classroom? How should learning take place?" Some of the metaphors they articulated included: *teacher as imparter of knowledge*; *teacher as moulder*; *teacher as mother*; *teacher as octopus*. One teacher explained the *teacher as imparter of knowledge* as follows: "A teacher should impart skills in acquiring knowledge . . . a mandatory transfer of knowledge for the exams." Another teacher said that the teacher must "impart knowledge to facilitate learning. To build-up each student's

potential and to inculcate good character building.” The metaphor *teacher as moulder* was explained by a teacher as follows: “A teacher should mould the students’ characters by imparting values.” Additionally, the metaphor *teacher as octopus* was explained by a teacher to represent the many jobs, skills, and responsibilities a teacher had to have in Singapore. The *teacher as mother* metaphor was explained to mean that she considered herself a second mother for her students.

## Reflection

- What is your understanding of the metaphors the teachers used?
  - Teacher as octopus
  - Teacher as imparter of knowledge
  - Teacher as moulder
  - Teacher as mother
- The context of the above scenario may have played a role in the type of metaphors the teachers used. For example, the teacher as imparter of knowledge was used to explain why English language teachers must provide content knowledge for their students so that they can pass examinations. Obviously, in other contexts where examinations do not play such a significant role, second language teachers will use different metaphors that help them form such judgments about such educational issues. What metaphors are most used by teachers in your context?

# 6

## Classroom Communication

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### Introduction

Classroom communication, that is face-to-face communication and interaction between teachers and students, cannot be easily controlled by a teacher because it is shaped by moment-to-moment actions and interactions within that classroom (Johnson, 1995). That said, teachers tend to follow established patterns because they have for the most part, subconsciously set up various rules by using language that performs two functions simultaneously: to carry the message that a teacher wants to communicate while at the same time, to convey specific information about who the teacher is and whom he/she is talking to. Because teachers are often unaware of what communication



patterns exist in their classes and may not know how to examine the different communication patterns that exist in their classrooms, this chapter explores how language teachers can reflect on the communication patterns in their classrooms.

## Classroom communication

Research on teaching in mainstream classrooms and second language classrooms suggests that the following classroom communication pattern is the most usual (or unmarked) in many classes regardless of subject content (Johnson, 1995): the teacher initiates something (I), a student or students usually respond (R), and then the teacher usually evaluates (E) the student response, the *IRE* sequence. The following example (from Farrell, 2004b) illustrates this unmarked underlying communication structure that can be found in a majority of language classrooms:

- 1 Teacher: What time is it? [Initiation]
- 2 Student: It's 2pm. [Response]
- 3 Teacher: Good. *It's* 2pm. [Evaluation]

In turn 1 the teacher asks the students for the time and wants the student to supply the actual time and the contracted *it's* for *it is*. The student responds in turn 2 with the correct contracted form *it's*, and the teacher positively evaluates the response in turn 3 with *good*, and repeats (with emphasis on *it's*) the student's earlier response. This brief exchange shows how a teacher uses language to manage and control classroom communication. Outside classrooms, it is unusual to find participants in everyday conversations evaluating responses to solicits; rather, participants usually acknowledge such solicits. In fact, research by Belleck et al. (1966) has revealed that nearly one-third of all teachers' moves while teaching consist of evaluation of their students' responses.

Additionally, research has shown that in second language classrooms the teacher tends to do most of the talking (teacher talk) and one aspect of teachers talk that has been investigated in depth is that of speech modifications made by second language teachers. Research results indicate that teachers simplify their talk to non-native speakers and that these modifications seem to make the language easier to comprehend and that this in turn facilitates acquisition (Pica, Young, and Doughty, 1987). Pica and Long (1986) studied the speech of experienced and inexperienced second language teachers in

terms of its complexity, question types, the functions of questions, statements, and imperatives, and comprehension checks and requests for clarification which make comprehension easier for language learners. Apart from the discovery that experienced teachers tended to use a wider range of question forms, there were few other speech differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers while teaching.

One aspect of teacher talk that is important for second language teachers to reflect on is their use of questions in class. Research has shown that 60 percent of the time a teacher talks in class involve questioning of some sort, and of these teacher questions, most are of the type that the teachers know the answers to, or display questions as in a lockstep *IRE* teacher-led sequence rather than referential questions where the teacher does not know the answer (Long and Sato, 1983). Farrell (1999b) confirmed these findings where the teacher, who was teaching a listening comprehension class in which the students had to listen to and watch a videotape of a current affairs program, learned from the results of a Seating Chart Observation Record (SCORE) analysis that she had in fact asked forty-five questions in a fifty-minute class. All of these questions were display-type questions where the teacher knew the answers to each of the questions she asked. The teacher reflected after hearing this: “Until now I had no realization about my questioning pattern.”

Furthermore, research has also pointed out that other factors relating to teacher questions such as question type can also significantly impact student participation and interaction in the second language classroom. A “taxonomy of teacher questions” proposed by Ellis (1994) distinguishes between two main types of questions and their subcategories. The two main types in this taxonomy include *echoic* questions, which seek the repetition of an utterance or the confirmation of information, and *epistemic* questions, which “seek information of some sort” (Farrell, 2009a: 53). Various subcategories of echoic questions encompass comprehension checks, clarification requests, and confirmation checks. While subcategories of epistemic questions include referential, display, expressive, and rhetorical questions.

Within the Epistemic question types in Table 6.1, two main types of questions language teachers often ask are *display* and *referential* questions. Research suggests that display-type questions, or questions in which the answer is known to the teacher, can provide an opportunity for students to display their knowledge and understanding (Long and Sato, 1983). While in contrast, referential questions, or questions in which the learner is required to express their opinion, reasoning, or information were said to promote

**Table 6.1** Taxonomy of Teacher Question Types (adapted from Farrell, 2009a: 54)

1. Echoic	Comprehension checks	All right? Ok?
	Clarification requests	What do you mean?
	Confirmation checks	Did you mean . . . ?
2. Epistemic	Referential	Why didn't you do your . . . ?
	Display	What's the opposite of up?
	Expressive	It is interesting, isn't it?
	Rhetorical	Why didn't you do that? Because you . . .

more genuine communication in the second language classroom (Long and Sato, 1983).

Consequently, Long and Crookes (1986) trained teachers to ask more referential questions but discovered that the use of display questions by the teachers produced more student turns, the referential questions elicited longer responses and mastery of lesson content was greater in classes where teachers used more referential questions. Beliefs play a role in the way a second language teacher talks in class (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). For example, if a teacher believes that his or her students require comprehensible input from the teacher in the target language, then the amount of teacher talk time will greatly increase in the classroom. However, if a teacher believes that his or her students will learn best by using the target language, then learner talk will increase more than teacher talk. Consequently, language teachers should be aware of the impact of the following:

- The underlying communication structure in the classroom—if the communication follows the unmarked IRE structure or if there is a variation at any stage of the lesson.
- The impact of underlying communication structure in the classroom.
- How students follow what is required from them in lessons.
- The function of teacher talk in the classroom such as the teacher's use of:
  - praise,
  - instructions,
  - speech modifications,
  - use of comprehension checks,
  - feedback, and
  - questions—the number, type, and functions of your questions.

Language teachers may not realize that two types of teacher talk predominate in many classrooms, exploratory talk and final draft talk (Barnes, 1976). When teachers use exploratory type of speech they are not giving the final word on an issue in that they are admitting that they do not know all the answers. A type of tentativeness characterizes their type of exploratory talk where they may be seen to be rearranging their own thoughts as they speak. They do not use a type of language that emphasizes their authority as the expert on the topic at hand, which is characteristic of final draft talk. As Barnes (1976: 108) maintains, “Final draft language is the contrary of exploratory.” Whereas exploratory speech is represented by detours where the teacher is hesitant to give a definite answer or evaluation, final draft talk is more polished in which the teacher follows a direct IRE sequence; he/she initiates, the students respond, and the teacher evaluates. As mentioned in a previous chapter, research has shown that teachers mainly evaluate rather than respond (a characteristic of final draft speech); however, if teachers evaluate rather than reply they, as Barnes (1976: 129) suggests, implicitly devalue the students’ knowledge and his/her “ability to contribute to the lesson.”

## Case study I: Teacher questions

This case study outlines and discusses the reflections of one novice ESL teacher in a university language school related to his use of teacher questions (from Farrell and Mom, 2015). Steve (a pseudonym), a male ESL teacher with four years’ teaching experience was teaching in an English for academic purposes (EAP) language program at a university where he taught an intermediate grammar class. Four one-hour classroom observations of this class were conducted after he was interviewed about his stated beliefs on the use of questions in his teaching. Steve’s stated beliefs are first presented in Table 6.2, followed by his observed classroom practices in Table 6.3 and then his observed questioning types in Table 6.4.

As can be seen, Steve indicated that he frequently used questions that allowed students to display their knowledge among other things. In addition he thinks he asks between 15 and 20 questions in each lesson.

Steve asked all display questions in each of the four lessons while referential questions were not observed. He also used questions in all his observed classes to check for student comprehension. In addition, in order to get a more detailed idea of what was observed Steve’s questioning practices were subdivided with regards to frequency of each observed question type as in Table 6.4.

Table 6.2 Steve’s Teachers’ Beliefs on Questions

Stated beliefs on questions	Steve
Questions can be used to introduce a topic.	✓
Questions can be used to promote noticing.	✓
Questions can help students build on prior knowledge.	✓
Types of questions should be sequenced with a purpose.	✓
If students don’t understand the question, teacher needs to change questioning strategy.	✓
Some questions are planned before class, but new questions are formed in response to the way the lesson unfolds.	✓
It is important to ask more questions in which students can demonstrate their knowledge.	✓
It is important to frequently check for comprehension.	✓
Perceived average number of questions asked each lesson.	15–20

Key: ✓ = agrees

Table 6.3 Steve’s Observed Questioning Practices

Observed questioning practices	Steve			
	S1	S2	S3	S4
Teacher used questions to introduce a topic.	✓	×	×	×
Teacher used questions to promote noticing.	#	#	#	#
Teacher planned questions ahead of time, but created new questions in response to the way the lesson unfolded.	✓	✓	#	#
Teacher repeated, reformulated, or asked a new question if students didn’t understand question.	✓	#	#	#
Teacher asked referential questions.	#	#	#	#
Teacher asked display questions.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher used questions to check student comprehension	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher used questions to incorporate the cultural diversity of students’ backgrounds into the lesson.	×	×	×	×
Teachers sequenced types of questions with a purpose.	#	#	#	#

Key: ✓ = observed

×

× = not observed;

# = minimal occurrence

S1: Steve’s Lesson S1 – Gerunds and infinitives

S2: Steve’s Lesson S2 – Gerunds and infinitives continued

S3: Steve’s Lesson S3 – Gerunds and infinitives continued

S4: Steve’s Lesson S4 – Gerunds and infinitives continued

**Table 6.4** Steve’s Observed Questioning Types

Class	Question types							Total # of questions
	CC	CR	CN	R	D	E	RH	
1	4	1	6	10	17	0	0	38
2	6	0	4	4	23	0	0	37
3	4	0	4	4	21	0	0	33
4	5	0	4	5	16	0	0	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>138</b>
Overall frequency (%)	13.8	0.7	13.0	16.7	55.8	0	0	100.0

*Key:*  
 CC: Comprehension Check; CR: Clarification Request; CN: Confirmation Check; R: Referential;  
 D: Display; E: Expressive; RH: Rhetorical

As shown in Table 6.4, Steve utilized display questions (such as “So, in that sentence, what is our gerund?”) most frequently in all four observations. Of the 138 questions asked in total, display questions accounted for 55.8 percent followed by referential questions (such as “What’s the meaning of the first sentence?”) at 16.7 percent. Furthermore, echoic questions consisting mainly of comprehension checks (such as “Alright, any questions about these verbs?”) and confirmation checks (such as “The chapters?”) constituted 27.5 percent of the total questions asked.

Steve was not truly aware of the number of questions he asked in a typical lesson. Although he was conscious of the fact that he employed a high proportion of questions in every class, the number of questions he used on average was far higher in comparison to the observed average number of questions he asked. In several cases, the observed average number of questions for the participants was double. A possible factor that could account for this divergence is that teachers plan only some of their questions and adapt their questioning practices to the flow of the classroom.

Steve’s teacher’s beliefs with regard to teacher questions were for the most part convergent with his questioning practices in the classroom. During the follow-up interview, Steve indicated that he asked display questions most frequently and expressed that his reason for doing so was to try “to get [the students] to come up with specific answers.” When contrasted with his observed questioning practices, this belief is consistent. Display questions formed the bulk of questions in each observation and constituted 55.8 percent of the total number of questions asked. Similarly, Steve indicated that he

employed comprehension checks frequently as well, citing the reason was “to make sure [the students] understand what we’re doing in class.” In terms of the frequency for different question types, echoic questions made up 27.5 percent of the total number of questions asked, with comprehension checks comprising over half at 13.8 percent. Furthermore, Steve employed referential questions at a lower frequency of 16.7 percent when compared to the frequency of display questions.

During the follow-up interview, he indicated that he does use referential questions, but that the usage is dependent “on the topic that we’re doing.” Steve also indicated that he asks “questions to introduce a topic and get the students to think about the topic that’s going to be covered in class” (Follow-up interview). Consistent with stated beliefs, it was observed that Steve used referential questions to introduce the topic of the new unit of gerunds and infinitives. Steve indicated, “Even some of the questions in the lesson plan, I don’t need to ask them because they [the students] already know something, or I notice they’re not getting something or understanding something. . . . I try to come up with new questions” (Follow-up Interview).

Steve’s belief regarding the importance to use a lot of display questions was consistent with his questioning practices. The proportion of display questions was much higher in comparison to the proportion of referential questions. However, we also must consider that Steve taught a beginner class and may have had to employ more display questions in order to promote participation among the students with lower language proficiency.

According to Steve, the main objective of the grammar class was to improve students’ accuracy of specific grammar items and thus the grammar exercises lend themselves well to the use of display questions to gauge students’ understanding of how to apply prescriptive rules. Indeed, research indicates that display questions may be more effective than referential questions at promoting student participation at lower language proficiencies since students potentially lack the language necessary to attend to the demands of a referential question or higher-order question.

## Case study I reflection

- How many questions do you ask in class?
- What kind of questions do you ask?

- How do you know how many and what kind of questions you ask?
- What is the function of your questions in your classes?
- Do you plan your questions before class?
- What do you think of Steve's percentage of display questions in the above case study?
- Do you think the objective of the class will determine the type of teacher question?

## Case study II: Exploratory talk or final draft talk?

Case study II outlines an excerpt from part of an Elementary School English Language class (grade 5) in Singapore (Farrell, 2004b). At the end of the lesson, the teacher wanted the students to be able to list five methods of writing an introduction to a composition and apply one of the five methods to write an introduction for a given picture composition.

### ***Turns 1–9***

- 1: Teacher:** Why do you say it's past tense?
- 2: Melvin:** It's better we make more mistakes.
- 3: Teacher:** It's better you make more mistakes ok, but I think most of you will use past tense because in composition, we were told to use er . . . past tense, right? Because it tells us something in the past. But for dialogue.  
[Silence]
- 4: Teacher:** Eh . . . What about punctuation marks?
- 5: Bernard:** Include commas.
- 6: Teacher:** Yes, you have to include a comma, the open inverted commas. Very good and you should be careful in the sense that you have to place all your punctuation marks correctly at the right place. Ok? For example here, comma must come first before the close inverted commas and not the other way round, you see. So you have to be very careful in your punctuation so that you will not make eh . . . punctuation.  
[Silence]
- 7: Teacher:** We have "Dialogue," we have "Flashback" "What, Where and When." We have "Description of Surroundings." The last one?
- 8: Leonard:** About weather. Sunny . . .



**9: Teacher:** About weather. That is “Description of Surroundings” already. Ok, one more. Last one? Think.

An analysis of the classroom talk throughout the lesson indicated that it was mostly final draft talk. What the students said and how it was said was actually a final presentation for the teacher’s approval. However, there were some instances of exploratory talk too. For example, in Turn 2 the response from the student “It’s better we make more mistakes” sounded quite vague since the student did not specify what kind of mistakes. In this example, the teacher encouraged the use of exploratory talk as seen from the question posed in Turn 1. In fact, in Turn 1 the teacher seemed to withhold direct correction but tried to provide sufficient prompting so that the students could perform self-correction. The students were not required to give their own opinions. They could also predict that even if their responses were wrong or insufficient, the teacher would “help” them correct the mistakes entirely or even help them to expand on their answers. Some examples could be seen in Turns 3, 6, and 9.

## Case study II reflection

- Do you think the students understood the concepts being taught at the end of the lesson? Why or why not?
- Did the students have many opportunities for self-correction?
- What problems might teachers face if they use exploratory talk exclusively in their classes?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

Language lessons are different than other content lessons in two main ways, the first relates to the way lessons are structured and the second relates to the way language is used in the classroom. Richard-Amato (1988) suggests that the format of second language lessons is different than other content lessons because the same concepts may need to be reinforced time and again using different methods, especially for beginning and intermediate level students.

The format of a language lesson according to Richard-Amato (1988) can be structured into five parts or phases.

- 1 The *perspective or opening* first phase of the lesson is where the teacher uses various procedures to orient the students such as give a preview of a new reading lesson that he/she will teach. This opening stage of the lesson is often marked by changes in the teacher's voice quality, or volume, their use of formulaic language to help signal the beginning of these events, and/or in the teacher's location or posture.
- 2 The second phase of a language lesson, the *simulation* phase, is where the teacher poses a question (or questions) to get the student thinking about the coming activity.
- 3 The next phase of a lesson, called the *instruction/participation* phase, is where the teacher introduces the main activity of the lesson. During these two phases, different teachers will follow different formats for lessons as they divide their lessons into sub-activities using different transitions between each activity (Richards and Lockhart, 1994).
- 4 The *closure* phase is where the teacher attempts to get the students' input regarding what they have learned in the lesson that was just presented.
- 5 The *follow-up* and final phase has the teacher using other activities to reinforce the same concepts and introduce new ones. Classroom communication research thus highlights that success of the class in terms of student learning necessitates that teachers and students be on the same wavelength in their understanding of what is required (Richards and Lockhart, 1994).

Rivers (1981: 486) has said that language lessons should "contain certain familiar routines in order to serve adequately as vehicles for new information." Different teachers sequence lessons in different ways depending on the overall goal of the lesson. For example, regarding the internal structure of many lessons, some teachers build in familiar routines that include doing something before the activity (pre-), doing the activity (during), and doing something after the activity (post-activity). When students know what they are supposed to do each day without having to spend too much time working this out each day, they can better focus what they are supposed to be learning.

# Teacher questions

Language teachers use questions as one of their main sources of seeking feedback that their students are learning. Different taxonomies have been developed to describe and understand the different types of questions language teachers ask in class.

Figure 6.1 shows Long and Sato’s (1983) taxonomy of the functions of teacher’s questions. This taxonomy differentiates between the *echoic* question type, which seeks repetition or confirmation of something, and the *epistemic* question type, which asks for information of some sort. We can compare the referential and display questions in this epistemic section with the open and closed type of questions that Barnes (1976) has talked about; they are similar but not the same as display questions, which test the students’ knowledge, although can be *closed* and referential questions can be *open*; the opposite is also possible for both. Not only are the type of questions a teacher asks important, so also are the ways teachers ask questions during their classes. Teachers have several options available when asking general questions in class. One option is to ask the whole class a question and have students self-select when to answer. Students can vie for the teacher’s attention by putting their hands up, by shouting out the answer (although not recommended in many teacher education it has its purposes especially if some of the students are shy then the pressure may be off them to answer in public—can you think of other purposes you may want students to shout out the answer?). Also, teachers can call on students who do not raise their hands to see why they think they cannot answer the question. It may be that they know the answer but they may not want to answer in public. Teachers also have the option of calling a student’s name first and then asking the question. This alerts the student that a question is coming his/her way: “Suzie, what do you think?” Of course, if a teacher calls the

1. Echoic	a. <i>comprehension checks</i>	All right? Ok?
	b. <i>clarification requests</i>	What do you mean?
	c. <i>confirmation checks</i>	Did you mean?
2. Epistemic	a. <i>referential</i>	Why didn’t you do your . . . ?
	b. <i>display</i>	What’s the opposite of up?
	c. <i>expressive</i>	It is interesting, isn’t it?
	d. <i>rhetorical</i>	Why didn’t I do that? Because . . .

**Figure 6.1** Long and Sato’s taxonomy of the functions of teachers’ questions.

student's name first, then he/she cannot be sure the student is following. So, another strategy may be to ask the question first and then call a student's name. This way, teachers can monitor if a student has been following the lesson. After asking the question, teachers must wait for their students to answer. This does not always happen and many students have been socialized into waiting *before* suggesting an answer, as many teachers will provide the answer just to fill in the silence. Cazden (1988) maintains that teachers wait at least three seconds after asking the question to allow students to think before doing anything.

## Classroom communicative competence

Johnson (1995) reminds second language teachers that our students come to our classes from backgrounds that may be different than that of the mainstream education system. This is especially true in multicultural societies because the students' first language linguistic background or learned ways of talking may be different than the language of the school and teachers must be aware that this difference (especially if the interaction patterns at home are very different than those expected in the school) may play a big influence on the quantity and quality of the students' learning. For example, research on classroom communication on the role of culture on turn-taking by Philips (1983) resulted in a finding that the unwillingness of Indian students from the Warm Spring Reservation in Oregon, United States, to participate in class activities did not mean that they were of inferior IQ, or overly shy; rather, Philips discovered that it was a result of how the class activities were organized and these findings heavily influenced future teaching methods. Teachers must therefore ask themselves if there are any discontinuities between the languages of the home in which their students come from each day and the language and interaction norms of the classroom in which they teach. They must ask themselves what the learned way of talking is in their own classrooms so that none of their students will be disadvantaged. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to adjust instructional practices to the competencies of the students—what are the teacher's frames of reference about the students, their cultural beliefs, the status, and expectations of the teacher? According to Johnson (1995) the teacher should be supportive and use verbal and instructional scaffolds in order to make classroom events predictable for the students so that they know what to expect and what is expected from

them. Johnson (1995) further suggests that teachers must *define* their students' Classroom Communicative Competence (CCC), *establish* it, and *extend* it. Johnson (1995: 160) defines CCC as "students' knowledge of and competence in the structural, functional, social, and interactional norms that govern classroom communication." Richards and Lockhard (1994) talk about the related concept of learners' interactional competence which looks at how they understand the rules of classroom interaction, which derives from the learner ability to understand classroom etiquette for appropriate interaction and is influenced by culture such as use or not of a teacher's first name in class, students' encouraged to speak out or not in class, how to interact in group work collaboratively, knowing how to get assistance and feedback, when to challenge what the teacher and/or peers say, and other such norms of interactional competence.

The key to language teachers understanding the importance of classroom communication and how this either sets up or blocks opportunities for their students' learning only takes on real meaning when teachers themselves investigate and reflect on the communication patterns in their classrooms (Farrell, 2004b). That is, teachers must gather concrete data about the communications that exist in their classrooms and then use the information garnered from this data to make informed decisions about their teaching (Farrell, 2004a). The most important type of data a teacher should obtain is in the form of classroom transcripts. The teacher collects this type of data by placing a tape recorder and/or video recorder in his/her classroom. However, it may not be necessary to transcribe the entire recording as teachers can decide what aspect of the classroom communications they are interested in knowing more about. Fanselow (1987) has suggested that transcriptions be made at certain intervals or at special events that the teacher wants to investigate. For example, teachers may be only interested in reflecting on the impact of their verbal instructions in their classes, so all they need to do is to listen and transcribe those parts in the tape that show the teacher giving instructions and then the immediate turns after this (for about five minutes) to see what impact these instructions have had on their students learning. Other topics could include the type and frequency of teacher (and student) questions, how tasks are set up in their classes, or the type of language used in group discussions (for more details on the topics teachers can reflect on in their classrooms, see Farrell 2004b). After transcribing the classroom communication, the teacher can then analyze and interpret the data.

# Reflection

- What does classroom communicative competence mean to you?
- Discuss your understanding of etiquette for appropriate interaction in your context. For example, what is involved for students in terms of group work, challenges, and receiving feedback?
- What format have you developed when sequencing activities in your lessons?
- Does this format reflect any methods you have been trained to do from your teacher education courses or modifications of these methods?
- Do you vary your lessons? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How many questions do you ask in a normal class? How do you know?
- What kind of questions do you usually ask? How do you know?
- What is the function of the questions you ask?
- What is your wait-time after asking a question? How do you know?
- Philips (1983) characterized verbal interaction in Anglo-American classrooms as organized in one of four participant structures. Compare these four characteristics of verbal interaction in the classroom to the verbal interactions that exist in your classroom:
  - 1 Teacher interacts with all students (*most common*)—T controls who will talk, when, voluntary S's participation through self-nomination and/or compulsory participation through teacher nomination.
  - 2 Teacher interacts with small groups of students (also common) as in reading groups where the students' participation is generally the result of teacher's nomination and requires individual performance.
  - 3 Students work individually at their desks and the teacher is available for student-initiated interaction.
  - 4 Small group activities for competing specific tasks with indirect supervision by the teacher—more common in higher grades.
- Conduct your own action research project on one of the following:
  - Will increase of the use of referential questions rather than display questions stimulate students to use more complex language?
  - Can I set up a project to stimulate and monitor the amount of student talk?
  - How will dividing my class into smaller groups, which are more responsive to learner needs, improve the quality of learning in my classes?

## Conclusion

Classroom communication differs from normal everyday communication in that its main purpose is to instruct and inform. Classroom communication may seem to be haphazard but it is in many cases highly regulated and ritualized. Reflecting on the patterns of classroom communication that exist in a language teacher's lessons can provide useful information that can help to further legitimize actions and confirm preconceived insights.

As language teachers the only real concrete evidence we have that a lesson has occurred is a recording and transcription of the communication that represents the moment-to-moment communications between the teacher and students and between students themselves that occurred during the lesson. By reflecting systematically on classroom communication, language teachers can make more informed decisions about their teaching that are based on information obtained from analysis of transcripts of that communication.

## Chapter scenario

A Chinese native speaking teacher was teaching non-Chinese speakers in the United States how to talk about animals in Chinese. The teacher was interested in exploring the communication patterns in his classes and so he decided to audio-record one of his classes. The lesson starts with the teacher asking a general question to the students with an eventual lead into the topic of the "Zoo" which takes about two minutes. The class then learns how to ask questions in Chinese such as "What is this?" and "What is that?" He transcribed the first thirteen turns in his lesson opening to see how he oriented his students, and then the first thirteen turns in the main instructional phase of his lesson which outline how the teacher taught the students how to say "turtle" in Chinese.

## Lesson opening

### *Turns 1–13*

Teacher: When you were a kid, did you wish to go anywhere? Lisa?

Lisa: Kennywood.

Teacher: Doonsoon?

Doonsoon: Korea.

Teacher: Korea? No. When you were a child, you were a kid.

Doonsoon: I'm sorry, I didn't follow you.

Teacher: What is your favorite place?

Doonsoon: (Silence)

Teacher: Phew! How was your childhood?

Teacher: How about Bill?

Bill: My grandma's.

Teacher: Ah~ok. Yeah, when I was a kid, I liked to go to this place. (shows the picture). What is this?

Chungwen: Zoo

## Instruction Phase

### *Turns 1–13*

*Teacher: (Showing a picture of turtle) Jen, what is this?*

Jen: A turtle.

Teacher: Yeah. What about in Chinese?

Class: (laugh)

Teacher: In Chinese . . . (shows the phonetic transcription)

Class: *Guei*

Teacher: *Guei*

Class: *Guei*

Teacher: We don't have turtles in zoos?

Lisa: You can find out in aquarium.

Teacher: Aquarium?

Lisa: There are some turtles in the zoo in some areas

Teacher: Uh~ ok.

[Data Source: Chih Fang, 2001]

In the opening of the lesson it seems that the teacher asks open-ended questions but not all of the students were able to follow the topic of these questions (e.g., turns 3–9). In fact, the teacher wants to “guide” the students to an answer he has in mind because the content of his lesson is talking about animals in Chinese. In the opening phase transcript in Turn 1, the teacher was not really interested in getting an answer such as Doonsoon answered as she responded “Korea” and not the zoo. Also, in Turn 10, the teacher is trying to elicit the answer “Zoo” from Bill, and so he did not respond when Bill answered “Grandma’s” in Turn 11. Rather, the teacher finally showed



the class a picture of a zoo in turn 12 and asked the class what the picture signified. Chungwen provided the correct answer. In the instructional phase transcription, the teacher wanted to teach the students how to say “Turtle” in Chinese. It may seem that the question in turn 3 is a display question, but according to the teacher it was not as he knew that Jen (an American) would not be able to answer it as the teacher said that this type of question “usually could make the class laugh.” It is interesting that after teaching the students how to say the word “Turtle” in Chinese, he then asked referential questions referring to turtles and if they are in the zoo.

## Reflection

- What kind of questions did this teacher use mostly in class and what were the functions of these questions?
- In the opening phase, it is possible that Doonsoon did not understand the question and it is also possible that Doonsoon really wanted to go to Korea, but the teacher wanted to steer the discussion toward the topic of zoos as Chungwen finally answered. What is your understanding of the classroom transcript in these opening turns?
- Get together with a colleague and record and transcribe the communication in your classes. Next, analyze (and compare) your lessons for one or all of the following:
  - The underlying structure of classroom communication.
  - Variations in the underlying structure.
  - How the academic task structure was set.
  - Analysis of the social participation structure.
  - How many and what kind of questions were asked?
  - The type of language evident in group work.
  - What overall patterns can you see in communication structures in your classroom and in your colleagues?

# 7

## Reflecting on teaching young learners

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### Introduction

As English has become a very important means of global communication tool in all walks of life, recently many countries who do not use English as a first language have begun to encourage its younger learners to embrace English early so that are better prepared to function in this new world. As a result, governments have also begun to include English language in early grade school curriculum with the idea that these young learners (considered from 2 to 12 years of age in this chapter) will be able to better communicate

in English later. Of course much of the responsibility for this learning has been placed on the already stressed teachers and in many cases these English lessons have become something of an add-on and many have to do these lessons without adequate training.

This chapter will thus focus on how teachers of English to young learners can engage in reflective practice in order to better facilitate their building of a more principled understanding not only of their young learners but also of themselves as teachers. The chapter's main idea is that through the concept of reflective practice, and by engaging in systematic observations (see also Chapter 11) of their young learners' undertaking of the various activities they have devised, teachers can better gauge the effectiveness of their teaching so that they can provide opportunities for learning.

## Teaching Young Learners

Recently there has been a very big focus on getting younger and younger learners (I will not discuss the controversy over what a young learner is but see Copland and Garton (2014) for a full discussion) to study English earlier with the idea that the earlier and younger the better the learning outcome will be. This may be based on the idea that younger learners “pick up” languages easier than older learners because they only want to communicate and they do not “see” mistakes they make, nor are they as worried about them as older learners. This may well be the case but as Copland and Garton (2014: 224) have pointed out, “Learning a language in a school environment is a very different experience.” For example, Copland and Garton (2014) say that in such a context with class size of up to thirty young learners, with limited amount of instructional hours focused mostly on group activities, compared to that of a caregiver for bilingual children who provide many more hours of “input” on an individual basis.

However, regardless of the inconclusive evidence supporting the introduction of English into the curriculum of many grade school programs (Pinter, 2011), the reality (pushed by ministries of Education as well as parents) in many countries is that young learners in primary schools are required to learn English in such school environments. As such, and as Copland and Garton (2014: 224) have noted, teachers will need to have a sound knowledge of the learners they are teaching or “a strong understanding of children's social and cognitive development as well as a good understanding

of theories of second language acquisition in order to teach effectively.” Not only will teachers of English to young learners need to be able to have this knowledge, they will also need to be able to make this transferable by being able to choose appropriate teaching activities and methods so that they can provide optimum conditions for learning. As Copland and Garton (2014: 224) again point out: “A child of three will be very different from a child of five or seven and classroom approaches that are suitable for the latter will not be so for the former.” Generally, research (e.g., Emery and Rich, 2014) indicates then that when teachers teach English as an additional language to young learners:

- Children are social learners.
- Children are active learners.
- Because younger children have limited concentration spans, there should be a lot of variety in activity and many changes of pace during instruction.
- Children progress at different rates.
- Young learners need active, group, and physical tasks and games, and to settle and calm down children, listening to stories with the teacher may be good.
- Build from what children already know to introduce new ideas.
- Embed new learning in familiar classroom routines and activities.
- Using questioning techniques and activities to help children notice new learning points.
- Show children how to complete a task.
- Suggest alternative ways of doing things.

## **Case study: Reflecting on teachers’ attitudes toward young learner teaching**

Beddall (2015) outlines an interesting case study that examined TESOL teachers’ feelings about teaching young learners (YLS) in a teaching institution in Japan. He defined YLS as children between the ages of 6 and 17 years, which may be a bit different than most who work with young learners. Beddall (2015) gave twenty-six full-time and eleven part-time teachers an

online questionnaire, and attitude survey and interviews on their feelings about a variety of YL-related issues. He discovered three “groups” of teachers within the staffroom of one institution, each with a different profile and attitude toward YL teaching. The three groups were as follows:

- *Group 1:* He called this group the “The Typical Teacher” and they had a positive attitude about YL teaching. Beddall (2015) reported that they viewed it as interesting and rewarding, felt it would add a nice variety to their schedule, and were motivated by the greater job security that may come with the experience. They liked children and enjoyed YL classroom interaction. Some had an interest in pedagogy related to areas outside linguistics and most were confident with discipline in the classroom. Their major concerns were with demotivated learners and stress surrounding YL teaching.
- *Group 2:* Teachers in the second group (33 percent of respondents, nine teachers) were found to differ from the “typical teacher” on a number of points according to Beddall (2015). While the typical teachers thought largely alike, the defining characteristic of Group 2 was that they did not. Teachers in this group each had their own unique mix of concerns, namely dealing with demotivated children, classroom management, discipline, stress, and dealing with parents. Despite these varied concerns, however, it is noticeable that 89 percent of respondents in this group believed that YL teaching could be very rewarding.
- *Group 3:* The third group made up 23 percent of the staff room (six teachers). The overwhelming characteristic of this group was that no teachers had any interest in teaching YLs and 83 percent said that this feeling would not change even with sufficient training. And 67 percent claimed to be put off by issues surrounding discipline in the classroom. It is a complex picture as some teachers claimed to like children (33 percent) and even believed that YL teaching can be rewarding (50 percent). Although none of them saw YL teaching as linked to job security, 67 percent believed that relevant experience would improve their career prospects.

There was a certain amount of unanimity in opinion among teachers on certain points. A high number of teachers (85 percent), for example, believed that YL teaching can be very rewarding and many also saw everyday classroom interaction with YLs as enjoyable. A similarly high number had an interest in pedagogy outside linguistics and saw themselves as suitable

for YL teaching. Despite these positives, there was nevertheless consensus among teachers (74 percent) that YL teaching can be stressful. There was no agreement on the benefits of YL teaching experience to job security, perhaps surprisingly given the upward trend worldwide in YL teaching.

## Case study reflection

- What is your attitude to teaching young learners?
- Why do you think three distinct types of teacher groups exist in that school regarding teaching young learners?
- Which group do you think would you be a member of?
- Why do you think Group 2 teachers have a number of concerns around aspects of YL teaching such as classroom management and motivation?
- Why do you think that teachers in Group 3 hold such intense (negative) feelings about teaching young learners?
- Copland, Garton, and Burns' (2014) survey of teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face generated the following responses (1,931 in all): the most comments was *speaking problems*, with 254 comments. This category comprised teaching speaking in general (143) and teaching pronunciation in particular. This was followed by the general category of discipline problems (179), which included *discipline problems* (77), *behavior problems* (55), and *classroom management* (47). Then came *motivation* (168) and next *differentiation* (166), in which was grouped *different/mixed levels/abilities/aptitudes/abilities* (65), *weak students* (33), *learners with problems/difficulties* (29), *meeting students' needs* (19), *individual differences* (12), and *special needs* (8). *Writing* was in fifth place with 141 comments divided between *teaching writing* (125) and *spelling* (16). *Grammar* and *class size* each attracted 109 comments.
  - Comment on the order of these teachers' responses. Is this the same order for you or would you rank them differently?
  - Discuss each category and what you think would be the issue within each one.
- What do the results of this case study say about the needs of in-service TESOL teachers about teaching young learners?
- If you do not teach young learners, would you be willing to teach them even though you do not have any specific training?
- Would you seek such training and if so, where would you think you would get this?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

The above brief discussion and case study on teaching and reflecting young learners and what teachers need to understand in order to be able to provide optimum conditions for learning also raises the important requirement for teachers to be aware of what it is they actually do and what is happening in their classroom. For example, Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) recounted a recent example of teachers of English to young learners expressing their frustrations about why the children (age 12) struggled to learn a grammar point. This example can also demonstrate the importance of evidence-based reflective practice because what they perceived as a student problem could in fact have been a teacher problem with choice of an inappropriate activity for this age group.

These is also a good example of why Dewey (1933) suggested teachers to slow down and engage in reflective inquiry by following the five steps or main phases of reflective inquiry as follows:

- 1 *Suggestion*: A doubtful situation is understood to be problematic, and some vague suggestions are considered as possible solutions. However, it is important to note here that Dewey (1933) did not consider a problem as an error or a mistake but rather as a puzzling, curious, inviting, and engaging issue for a teacher to investigate.
- 2 *Intellectualization*: The difficulty or perplexity of the problem that has been felt (directly experienced) is intellectualized into a problem to be solved. In other words our initial emotional reaction to some issue that occurred is not turned into a more intellectual reaction.
- 3 *Guiding Idea*: One suggestion after another is used as a leading idea, or hypothesis; the initial suggestion can be used as a working hypothesis to initiate and guide observation and other operations in the collection of factual material.
- 4 *Reasoning*: Reasoning links present and past ideas and helps elaborate the supposition that reflective inquiry has reached, or the mental elaboration of the idea or supposition as an idea or supposition.
- 5 *Hypothesis Testing*: The refined idea is reached, and the testing of this refined hypothesis takes place; the testing can be by overt action or in thought (imaginative action).

Thus Dewey was advocating a teacher-led form of bottom-up and teacher-led evidence-based reflective practice. For example, these teachers could begin at the first step of suggestion where the issue initially is about student learning but can be refocused to a different teacher interest. This brings in the next phase where the initial emotional reaction and focus on frustration with students failure to learn to an intellectual reaction where different questions are asked such as “Is there a problem with my teaching?” Teachers next move on to the third phase of *guiding idea*, and here the new question is investigated to find specific evidence. For example, the teachers look at all possibilities of the issue by attempting to answer questions such as “What do they actually do in class (collect evidence)?” “What do the students think the teachers actually do (interview students)?” and “What do colleagues think I do (invite a peer to observe)?” They then try to solve the issue and may come up with what Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) have speculated or they may come up with something else. The main point is the importance of engaging in evidence-based reflective practice rather than impulsively blaming the students in a “why won’t they do what I ask” frustrated response.

In the previous section I relayed an example (from Copland, Garton, and Burns, 2014) from teachers of English to young learners expressing their frustrations about their children’s grammar learning and how this could actually have been a teaching issue, but one that we cannot be completely sure of unless we have the evidence to reflect upon. One type of evidence related to examining this issue would be a recording (audio and/or video) of a class that can be later transcribed so that we can know exactly what occurred (not what we think occurred) in the class.

In fact, many teachers have a tendency to raise their hands in the air and wonder why students do not do what they ask. Episode 1 below is a case study of a primary school teacher who was teaching a class on reading comprehension to young learners. The teacher has just finished giving instructions to her students about their grammar homework and was answering questions about the previous homework.

## Episode 1

S1: Do we need to draw a picture?

T: Draw what picture?

S1: The . . .



T: No, you don't have to draw the pictures, just write the sentences. All right, now will you take out your green book four.

S1: Mrs K, do we need to write number one on the book?

T: No, you don't have to write number one, otherwise it would be twelve pairs of sentences, wouldn't it? Eleven pairs.

S2: Do we get the green book four?

T: Green book four, yes. You know it's reading lesson, why don't you get it out ready? All right, now, green book four. Last week, we were reading Kee Knock Stan. What is Kee Knock Stan? Janice.

S3: I cannot understand.

T: Yes, And what language is it supposed to be? Julia.

*(cannot hear answer)*

T: Right. And where is Lalloon Land supposed to be?

Ss: (Silence)

T: Do you think there is a real country called Lalloon Land?

Ss: No.

T: T: No. But in the story, what does it say about Lalloon Land?

Ss: (Silence)

T: Have you been to Lalloon Land?

Ss: (shake heads)

S4: (raises hand)

T: Michele?

S4: Can we give in our grammar on um Wednesday?

T: Can you give in your grammar on um Wednesday? You have a lot of homework for tomorrow?

Ss: Yes, yes.

S5: We have our last exercise.

T: You have to do-

S5: Our last exercise.

T: Oh that's because you have been lazy and didn't do your work properly. Right?

Ss: No.

T: So, I'm sorry, you have to do it, otherwise I won't be able to finish marking your books to give you back before the holidays.

*Key: S1= student1, T =teacher*

First of all the exchange as outlined in the transcript shows what actually happens in a short time at the beginning of one class rather than what the teacher thinks has happened. Of course it is not the complete picture but it gives us a reliable snapshot of that part of the lesson and we can use what is in the transcript as a basis for a discussion *with* the teacher and even *with* the children. In other words we are not reflecting on the teacher or on the children.

We should now consider what we mean by reflecting *with* the teacher. We can use the transcript of just three minutes of the opening of the lesson to reflect *with* the teacher so that the teacher can become more aware of the opening dynamics of her lesson and any particular patterns that may emerge in communications and interactions (of course teachers can also self-reflect by first recording their own lesson and after transcribing it examine it alone for patterns that may be evident).

When reflecting on this transcript we can ask the teacher if the lesson went according to her plan or if something occurred at the beginning of the lesson which might have derailed it, as suggested by the evidence. When we examine the first few turns, we can note that the teacher was trying hard to get to her main lesson (pedagogical) objective which we can surmise was to teach a reading lesson from a prescribed text. However, evidence from the transcript, especially from after the beginning, suggests that the lesson did not progress in a manner she had planned. In fact, it becomes clear that the teacher's frame of reference and the students' frames of reference were different: The teacher wanted to get on with the lesson and start teaching the reading passage from the text, but the students were really worried about their homework assignment; they did not understand it. They were especially concerned about getting the correct instructions for homework and they were worried that they did not have enough time to finish the homework assessment. It is important to note that the way a teacher organizes a lesson depends on their frame of reference which is influenced by (among other issues) that teacher's prior experiences as a student, her theories about how a subject should be learned, and of course her beliefs about how a subject should be taught. In contrast, most students interpret what they are presented with in each lesson by the teacher through their frame of reference by filtering the information through their preexisting beliefs, as this is the only way they can make sense of it. This reinforces that the link between what teachers teach and what students actually learn may not be as guaranteed as school administrators and teachers may want. In the transcript above we can see that the differences in the frames of reference between the teacher and the students caused interference in the students' participation and as a result the teacher could not fulfil her lesson objective until she had addressed her students' anxieties about their homework from a previous lesson. However, the teacher was unaware that the reason the remainder of her lesson did not go well was because of this opening exchange. In fact the students could not move on with this new reading lesson because they were still worried that they did not understand what the teacher really wanted them to do, so they

wanted correct homework instructions. When presented with the evidence of the transcript from the recording, the teacher was surprised to learn this, but on reflection they realized that her intuition that “something was not right” during that lesson was in fact her problem and not a problem related to her students’ attitudes or motivation to learn English.

The example above illustrates the importance of obtaining real evidence for teachers of English to young learners so that they can become more aware about their practice. The key to this process outlined in the example above is that after teachers gather evidence, they can use the information obtained to help them make more informed decisions about their teaching. One way to facilitate reflection is to record lessons using an MP3 player and/or a video recorder and to transcribe it (if time permits) so that you can have as much evidence as possible to work with as you explore your teaching. The example above showed that this information (or data) was obtained from a transcribed recording.

A teacher can collect this type of data by placing a tape recorder and/or video recorder in his/her classroom. A problem arises now as to how one can record all of the communication in the classroom. I have found that two recorders are probably necessary: one near the teacher to pick up what he/she is saying and the other in the middle of the classroom. If students break up for group/pair work, then place the recording device in the middle of one of the group as it may be impossible to record what each group is saying. Once the data has been collected, the teacher then needs to transcribe the recording and this can be the most painful part of the whole process as it can take up to 15 hours to transcribe a one-hour class. However, it may not be necessary to transcribe the entire recording as teachers can decide what aspect of the lesson they are interested in knowing more about, such as the opening three minutes of the lesson in the example above.

After transcribing, the teacher then attempts to analyze and interpret the transcript. After making these interpretations about their lessons, teachers can reflect even further and decide how they want to make changes (if any) in their practice. In this way, teachers can take more responsibility for the decisions they make in their lessons but now these decisions are informed from the evidence they have collected and not just based on feelings or impulse. Thus they have engaged in evidence-based reflective practice.

Whatever strategies teachers of English to young learners employ so that they can provide opportunities for effective learning, it is important to consider again that these learners are very young, and as already discussed above, and different than more adult learners. When teachers engage in reflective practice

for the most part, it should be conducted *with* the children rather than *on* the children so that they can also get something out of it and we can promote not only reflective teaching but also reflective learning. Thus when we include children in our evidence-based reflective practices we not only explore a teacher's issues but we also try to explore children's concerns as well. This was the case in the example outlined above where reflection not only unearthed the teacher's problems with giving and interpreting instructions but also the children's anxieties about the homework they did not understand. In fact, Pinter and Zandian (2014: 66) have taken this one step further and maintain that we should in fact view young learners as "co-researchers" because they are "capable of providing useful and reliable insights into their own lives" as well as being "resourceful and knowledgeable, especially concerning their own experiences." I totally agree with them for the area of research covered in this chapter is reflective practice, but I also think this should be the case in all research in reflective practice that includes humans regardless of their age and all participants should be volunteers who are able to opt out at any stage also regardless of their age (thus including young learners).

## Reflection

- Some scholars suggest the need to introduce "child perspectives" into research, shifting the focus to children's concerns and agendas. What is your understanding of this and do you agree with this?
- Although research suggests that we still do not know much about teaching English to young learners (e.g., Copland and Garton, 2014), researchers state that a belief drawn from bilingual or immersion contexts that children are like sponges and will soak up English is not tenable when transferred to contexts where children have very limited input and this input is in large group settings. What is your understanding of this and do you agree with it?
- Would you conduct reflective practice differently for younger rather than older learners? Explain.
- Why is it important to consider reflective practice *with* rather than *on* young learners?
- Although the research suggests that the early introduction of English into the curriculum for young learners is inconclusive in terms of benefits, nevertheless primary English learning has exploded in many countries recently. Why do you think this is the case?

## Conclusion

In response to this increased push by governments to teach English earlier in grade school to young learners recently the TESOL profession has begun to address this as a separate subfield of focus for teachers with publications on how to teach young learners as well as publishers expanding their coverage of textbooks for young learners that are different from the majority of textbooks for more adult learners that have generated millions of dollars to some in the field. The main idea for many unfortunately has had less to do with the quality of publications and more to do with quantity as some see this new sub-area of TESOL as a “growing market” to be exploited (similar to what has already occurred in TESOL in the past forty or so years). However, we as professionals must be very careful when teaching young learners and we must make sure we understand that young learners do not have a choice about learning and are being exposed to English as a subsequent language, and so teachers should have a principled understanding of what it means to teach young learners and that they are different than other learners. In other words, teachers of English to young learners (TEYL) should engage in reflective practice to become aware of what is happening in their classrooms so that they can have a better understanding of how effective their teaching strategies are and if they need any adjustments so that they can ensure that they have created a positive learning environment for their young learners. Reflective language practice for teachers of English to young learners, as it is discussed in this chapter, is a bottom-up approach to professional development that is based on the belief that experienced and novice language teachers can improve their understanding of their own teaching of English to young learners by engaging in evidence-based reflective practice *with* young learners so that both the teacher and the young learners can develop together.

## Chapter scenario

John, an experienced EFL teacher in Korea with an MA in TESOL, was suddenly asked to teach a class of young learners as his university English program decided to expand their summer programs to include the teaching of young learners. One of the reasons for this was that the government

had included a section on English in the national curriculum for the early learning of English so that children would get a head start. John thought that this would be no problem for him as it could not be so different than teaching adolescents or young adults as he had been used to.

However, when he started teaching young learners he was shocked at his realization that his usual teaching methodologies and activities did not work and he had a hard time getting the children to actually speak English. He discovered that most of the children were not willing to speak English in front of the others and became very anxious when he tried to make them speak English. So he did not know what to do as he always had a policy before of only allowing students to speak English and not their L1. He also noted that when any child spoke English he or she had real problems with pronunciation and although he tried to help them, it led to further anxiety for that particular student. On top of this, John also experienced problems with some unruly children who probably lacked discipline from their home, and also lacked motivation, as not many of the children really wanted to learn English. As John noted, the government introduced English into the curriculum, and not the children. So after one month of teaching English to his class of young learners, John was exhausted and frustrated as he felt totally unprepared, untrained, and now unwilling to teach them anymore.

## Reflection

- Why do you think the children found that speaking English in public was face-threatening for them?
- Do you think teachers of English to young learners should allow them to speak their L1 in class? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- How can teachers of young learners encourage children to speak English?
- What discipline problems would you expect with teaching English to young learners?
- Why do you think John was frustrated after one month of teaching young learners?



# 8

## Action Research

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### Introduction

Action research generally involves inquiring into one’s own practice through a process of self-monitoring that generally includes entering a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on an issue or problem in order to improve practice. Wallace (1991: 56–57) maintains that action research can have a “specific and immediate outcome which can be directly related to practice in the teacher’s own context” and is “an extension of the normal reflective practice of many teachers, but it is slightly more rigorous and might conceivably lead to more effective outcomes.” As mentioned in Chapter 1, systematic reflection means that language teachers collect data about teaching so that they can make more informed decisions about their teaching; however, whereas reflective teaching can result in non-observable behavioral changes in the classroom such as increased levels of awareness of a teacher’s



assumptions, beliefs, and practices, conducting an action research project usually results in some kind of transformation of the research into actual and observable actions. This chapter outlines and discusses how reflective language teaching can be facilitated through conducting action research.

## Action research

Within second language education, action research has usually been associated with the study of classroom actions rather than addressing social problems associated with language teaching. Bailey (2001: 490) maintains that action research for language teachers is “an approach to collection and interpreting data which involves a clear, repeated cycle of procedures.” Action research is conducted by practicing language teachers because they themselves are valuable sources of knowledge regarding their own classroom situations and as a result change can be implemented more credibly because practicing teachers will find the results more credible and valid for their needs. However, action research is different from usual research conducted by academics, and while academic research is valuable in its own terms, it often has little practical application for practicing teachers. As Sagor (1992: 3–4) has observed: “The topics, problems, or issues pursued [in academic research] are significant, but not necessarily helpful to teachers on the front line.”

Examples of actual action research abound in the English language teaching literature in the recent times and teachers who have carried out action research often report significant changes to their understanding of teaching. Gow, Kember, and McKay (1996) working in Hong Kong, for example, focused on encouraging independent (student) learning at the tertiary level, and reported improved student learning as result of their action research project. Another interesting study conducted by Curtis (2001) who encouraged twenty Hong Kong teachers to carry out small-scale action research studies which focused on how they could increase and improve the quantity of spoken English used by their learners in their English lessons also reported positive results from partaking in action research such as increased teacher awareness of classroom dynamics and expectations of their learners. In addition, Curtis (2001: 75) reported that the teachers learned “a great deal about themselves, their students and their teaching and learning environments through action research.” Stewart (2001: 79 ) carried out action research to explore how Japanese university

students use questions in formal debates and concluded that action research for language teachers is not only a way to solve problems “but it is found in the very act of entering into the cycle of investigation.” Stewart (2001: 87) maintains that action research “forces teachers to think about what they are doing in the classroom in a systematic way through a lens focused on one particular area of their practice.” The literature on action research for language teachers suggests the following:

- It involves collecting information about classroom events (in the classroom), through observation or through other ways, such as through interviews, questionnaires, or recordings of lessons.
- It involves careful and systematic collecting of information.
- The research involves some kind of follow-up action.
- This action involves some change in practice, and monitoring the effects of such change.
- The results are owned by teachers, rather than the research community.
- The results of the research can be reported at a staff meeting or through a written report.
- Action research seeks to build up a knowledge base about teaching based on practitioner’s knowledge, rather than expand the knowledge based developed by academics and theoreticians outside of the school context.

Among the goals of action research, therefore, are the following:

- To develop research skills useful for classroom inquiry.
- To bring about changes in classroom teaching and learning.
- To develop a deeper understanding of teaching and learning processes.
- To empower teachers by giving them the tools which they can use to further impact changes within their profession.

## **Case study: “Tag Questions are Complex, aren’t they?”**

This is an unpublished action research study I conducted some time ago on the use of English tag questions. The reason I conducted this action research project was that I noticed that EFL students can have a difficult experience when trying to master the use of tag questions in English because a special

emphasis is placed on intonation in English when asking a tag question. This may not be the case in the students' L1. Also, the grammatical structure of the tag itself is syntactically complicated. Not to mention they usually have to learn all this from a textbook.

So I set out to discover how I can make the use of tag questions less complex for ESL/EFL students. I wanted to first find out all I could about tag questions in the literature in terms of their formation and function that includes a review of the syntactic analysis of tag questions, the intonation patterns of tag questions, and the discourse function of tag questions. Next, I analyzed a corpus of research on the use of tag questions in naturalistic environments, three TV talk shows and a classroom talk, and compared this with the review of the literature. I used these findings to teach tag questions to EFL students. I now provide a summary of how I conducted this action research project.

## Literature review

I discovered that different grammar textbooks have given different definitions of tag questions. The usual way they are explained, I discovered, is that tags added to the end of a statement ask for confirmation of the truth of the statement. The answer expected is “yes” if the statement is positive and “no” if the statement is negative, and vice versa. So tag questions are an extension of simple yes/no questions (where we do not ordinarily know the answer until the person to whom we are speaking has given his/her reply). In a tag question, the first part is a statement, a declarative, and the last part can be defined as a shortened yes/no question. Therefore, tag questions can be defined as declarative sentences with short yes/no questions added to the end, giving them the apparent structure of a yes/no question. An example of this would be the following sentence: “We’re going to the cinema (statement), aren’t we (tag)?” One final distinction I discovered when defining tag questions is that general tags at the end of a sentence, which gives emphasis—“They’re lovely and juicy, those apples”—are not the same as tag questions.

I discovered that tag questions are structured like other yes/no questions: they have subject noun phrases and auxiliaries in inverted order. That is, they show the effect of subjectauxiliary inversion. So, grammatically, tag questions are formed in the following descriptive way:

- 1 Copy a pronoun version of the subject noun phrase (NP) at the end of the sentence, if it is not already a pronoun, pronominalize.

- 2 Copy the first auxiliary to the right of the copied pronoun at the end of the sentence. Do not copy any morpheme. If there is no auxiliary verb or copula BE, DO must be added, for example, “The secretary typed the letter, didn’t she?”
- 3 Make the tag negative if the statement/sentence is affirmative, and make the tag affirmative if the statement/sentence is negative. The negative tag is realized by inserting NOT to the right of the copula and the auxiliary, at the end of the sentence and contract not with the preceding auxiliary.
- 4 Apply subject-auxiliary inversion to the tag question.

These four descriptive rules do not account for all formations of tag questions, there are some exceptions. In sentences with the existential “there,” verb agreement and tag question formation conflict. An example would be the following: “There is a fly in your soup, isn’t there?” or “There are flies in your soup, aren’t there?” These exceptions will be discussed later in the section on functions of tag questions.

The preceding grammatical/syntactical review only gives a clinical analysis or description of tag questions. However, there is a distinction between form and function. Tag questions operate like interrogatives, but the possibility of variation in intonation on the tag itself allows the function of the whole sentence to be closer or further removed from the simple interrogative function. When the intonation is further removed from what is usually associated with the interrogative, the utterance functions as a request for confirmation and indicates the expectation of a particular answer.

Then this started to get complicated as I discovered the effect of intonation on the meaning of tag questions is not so easy to understand: Sentence (1) “He likes his job, doesn’t he?” (positive+ negative and rising tone) assumes that John likes his job, and is just looking for confirmation of this. Sentence (2) “He doesn’t like his job, does he?” (negative+ positive and rising tone) assumes just the opposite, and is also looking for confirmation of this too. Therefore, the exact meaning of a tag question depends entirely on how you say it. If the voice goes down, you aren’t really asking a question, you are only asking the other person to agree with you: “Tom doesn’t look very well today, does he?” (*falling tone*). But, if the voice goes up, it is a real question: “You haven’t seen Ann today, have you?” (*rising tone*). This was my understanding in its simplest form but I realized also that there are exceptions but as a language teacher I gave up on these as I figured I had enough information on tags and I wanted to see how tags are actually used by people rather than reading any more about it in the literature.

I recorded three TV talk shows—one late night, and the other two day time—and a university class in the United States. The presentation of the material will not be a word-by-word representation of the corpus; rather, only the context of the occurrences of tag questions will be presented as they occurred in the talk show, the classroom, and the natural conversation.

The first talk show that was recorded was 1 hour long and the main topic of the show was: “Reuniting people teased and tortured as kids with the bullies that made their life miserable.” The most interesting result of this recording is that tag questions were only used three times in the whole show. This would probably indicate the preference for talk shows to ask yes/no questions, thus looking for an unknown answer rather than a reconfirmation of an idea. The following exchanges using tag questions took place:

Example #1: Context—how the bully actually assaulted the participant.

- Participant: “In journalism class, they would just use a scissors and they would cut my hair. They would poke at me with pencils and they would push me against the wall, they would . . .”
- Host: “Did you fight back? You did once, didn’t you” (*falling tone*)
- Participant: “I did once . . .”

Example #2:

- Host: “You really couldn’t fight back, could you?” (*falling tone*)
- Participant: “I couldn’t fight back, I . . .”

Example #3: Context—the same topic; the participants meet the bullies face-to-face.

- Host: “You saw the movie Flat fires, right?” (*rising*)
- Participant: “Yeah.”
- Host: “What’s your theory about that?”

Example #4: Context—Participant is explaining her earlier relationship with the bully.

- Host: “You met him in High school, right?” (*rising*)
- Participant: “I had just moved down from up north and . . . I prided myself as being a Tomboy. I was great at sports. I used to arm wrestle all the boys.”
- Host: “Then you arm wrestled Raymond, right?” (*rising*).
- Participant: “Yes. Very traumatic.”

Example #1 above shows a falling intonation type of tag question which seeks confirmation—the addressor had a 90 percent idea that her answer would be confirmed. The structure of the tag question follows the polarity principle—did in the statement and did not in the tag, positive to negative. Example #2 above shows falling intonation seeking confirmation. However, this example has a negative statement and a positive tag. Examples #3 and #4 above are quite different in that they come from the idiosyncratic, unsystematic lexical-type tag. The rising intonation would give the listener the clue that the tag is inviting confirmation in both examples.

The few examples of the use of tag questions in the above hour-long program all seem to follow the rules for tag questions I discovered in the literature review. I recorded two more talk shows to investigate not only the type of tag questions used, but also their frequency of use. Both the shows confirmed the earlier findings that tag questions are used very infrequently on talk-shows.

A final example I recorded was the use of tag questions that comes from a class seminar at a university in the United States:

Example #1: Context: Discussing the worth of rote memorization of 100 pages of verse in ancient Greece. The professor has been speaking at length on this topic, he continues:

- Professor: “The point is the separation of the literary immersion in inspiration which is apart from the craft of criticism, which is what we inherited, right?(*rising*) . . . a lot of, you know (*rising*), you see (*neutral*) . . . also, students were using, you know (*rising*) without seeking an answer. Socrates was put to death, you know(*rising*).”

Example #2: Context: The professor continues to talk on the same subject matter:

- Professor: “This is basically our predicament . . . the only thing we are good for . . . management wants grammarians . . . we want the kids to have grammar, you know?(*rising*), because them to be managers of IBM, not to think critically, you know what I mean, don’t you? (*rising*) . . . to write good memos, you know (*rising*).”

The above examples, while not exactly tag questions (except for #2) should be considered as tag questions. They fulfill all the requirements for tag question formation except for the polarity principal in example #1. In example #2, the polarity principle is actually adhered to and the result is a tag question. However, he did not use a negative tag because he did not require a response.

The function of the unspoken tag question is exactly the same as a regular tag question and therefore should be considered the same as a tag question.

In light of the above discussion on the form and function of tag questions and how they are actually used in naturalistic conversations, I decided that I would teach tag questions to ESL/EFL students in the following manner from that time on:

I would ask them to

- 1 record naturalistic English conversations—TV, radio, and their lectures and classes in English;
- 2 analyze the recording for the use of tag questions, if nothing else, this exercise will sharpen their listening skills; and
- 3 write down all the tag questions and intonation contours that accompany them.

What I discovered with this action research project is the same as what my students discovered in that tag questions are not frequently used on TV talk shows (as my students also discovered when they analyzed the English TV shows they recorded). They also discovered that tags are not used much in classroom lectures as a means of communication. They also discovered that the majority sample of tag questions used in the naturalistic environments recorded were present tense and had an affirmative statement with a negative tag. For me as a teacher tag questions in English were originally straightforward until I had to explain them to my students who found them complex and a bit mysterious. Having the students' record their use in real-life situations made the grammar rules of tag questions a bit clearer in that they brought them to life as opposed to having to learn them from a book. I guess that was what I really took from my action research project.

## Case study reflection

- Why do you think it may be a good idea to read up on a topic before conducting action research?
- Can you think of other ways the above action research project could have been conducted?
- Do you think the action research project outlined above seems complete? Why or why not?

- How do you teach tag questions?
- Do you think it is a good idea to have students record spoken English in TV talk shows, and classroom lectures and discussions?
- Where else can they record naturalistic conversations?
- Why is it difficult to teach tag questions?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

When teachers want to conduct an action research project, they enter into a cycle of investigation that includes the following steps:

- 1 *Identify an issue.*
- 2 *Review literature on issue and ask questions to narrow focus of issue.*
- 3 *Choose method of data collection.*
- 4 *Collect, analyze, and interpret information.*
- 5 *Develop and implement and monitor action plan.*

### Identify an issue

According to Bailey (2001: 490) the action research cycle begins when “the researcher decides to address a problem, investigate an issue, or pose and answer questions in his or her own context.” Selecting an issue is probably the most important and most difficult part of the action research cycle because it involves considering a number of practical considerations that must be kept in mind such as limiting yourself to one issue or problem, usually an issue that you are really interested in and that will have a positive impact on your class or on your teaching. Wallace (1998: 21) suggests that when selecting a topic and purpose for action research the following points should be considered:

- 1 *Purpose:* Why are you engaging in this action research?
- 2 *Topic:* What area are you going to investigate?
- 3 *Focus:* What is the precise area you are going to ask yourself within that area?
- 4 *Product:* What is the likely outcome of the research, as you intend it?
- 5 *Mode:* How are you going to conduct the research?



- 6 *Timing*: How long have you got to do the research? Is there a deadline for its completion?
- 7 *Resources*: What are the resources, both human and material, that you can call upon to help complete the research?

A large number of interesting general issues are available for language teachers wishing to reflect on their practice through action research including (but not limited to) the following:

- *Teaching the four skills* (issues related to changes in the aspects of reading, writing, listening, or speaking are taught in your class).
- *Classroom dynamics* (issues related to the kinds of interaction which occur in the language classroom).
- *Learner language* (issues related to the kind of language that is generated by specific activities your students use when completing classroom discussions and the amount of language they produce during pair or group work).
- *Grouping arrangements* (issues related to how different grouping arrangements such as pair, group, or whole class, promote learner motivation, language use, and cooperation).
- *Use of materials* (issues relating to different ways in which materials are used and how these affect the outcomes of lessons).
- *Grammar and vocabulary* (issues related to the teaching of grammar and vocabulary and the effect of using different teaching and learning strategies).
- *Assessment policies and techniques* (issues relating to the forms of assessment you currently use in your classes and their outcomes).

## Review literature and ask questions

After deciding the focus of the topic of interest for action research, teachers can start reading some background literature on the topic. Although Burns (1999: 192) maintains that “referring to the literature should be a matter of choice” and Wallace cautions that busy teachers may not realistically have time to read; reading about what others have discovered before can give teachers more ideas about how to conduct their own action research projects by following similar research methods or adapting the methods used for their own contexts. For example, in the case study outlined in this chapter the interview questions used to gather information were adapted from a review of the literature on error

correction. Five fundamental questions about error correction were chosen in the case study interview:

- 1 Should learner errors be corrected?
- 2 If so, when should learner errors be corrected?
- 3 Which learner errors should be corrected?
- 4 How should learner errors be corrected?
- 5 Who should correct learner errors?

Also at this stage teachers can decide whether they want to explore the issue alone or with other teachers who are interested in the same issue. In this regard, Burns (1999) insists that teacher collaboration is a vital aspect of action research because of the sharing involved in every aspect of carrying out the research from the practical to the emotional support.

## Choose method of data collection

The teacher next plans and decides on a strategy to collect data now that the problem has been identified and even read up on. Burns (1995) maintains that in action research projects, the data collection methods most commonly used and most appealing to second language teachers draw on qualitative and ethnographic methods and techniques and these usually include some combination of the following careful and systematic collection of information about classroom events through interviews, observation, field notes, questionnaires, recordings (audio and video), and transcriptions of lessons. Among other methods, Burns (1995: 8) suggests the following approaches to collecting classroom data:

- *Journals/diaries*: regular dated accounts of teaching/learning plans, activities, and classroom occurrences, including personal philosophies, feelings, reactions, reflections, and explanations.
- *Teaching logs*: more objective notes on teaching events, their objectives, participants, resources used, procedures, processes, and outcomes (anticipated and unanticipated).
- *Document collection*: sets of documents relevant to the research context, for example, course overviews, lesson plans, students' writings, classroom materials/texts, assessment tasks/texts, student profiles, and student records.
- *Observation*: closely watching and noting classroom events, happenings or interactions, either as a participant in the classroom (participant

observer) or as an observer of another teacher's classroom (non-participant observation). Observation can be combined with field notes, recordings, and logs or journals.

- *Field Notes*: descriptions and accounts of observed events, including nonverbal information, physical settings, group structures, and interactions between participants. Notes can be time based (e.g., every 5 minutes) or unstructured according to the researchers purpose.
- *Recording*: audio or video recordings, providing objective records of what occurred, which can be re-examined. Photographs or slides can be included.
- *Transcription*: written representations of verbal recordings, using conventions for identifying speakers and indicating pauses, hesitation, overlaps, and any necessary nonverbal information.

Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages to each of these forms of data collection and it is most important that the information collected is reliable in that the procedures that are used measure accurately what they claim to measure. One way to ensure this is to collect information from several different sources about the issue under investigation. For example, in the case study outlined in this chapter, the researchers decided to triangulate their data collection by using classroom observations that were recorded and transcribed, teacher interviews that were recorded and transcribed, a number of student interviews that were also recorded and transcribed and a collection of writing samples of students' work, and lesson plans (document collection in the above list) as well as the researcher's written-up log of not only classroom observations but all interactions during the action research project in order to get the best understanding of the issue under investigation. For example, in the case study reported in this chapter, the last stage in data collection involved collecting two pieces of graded compositions from each student that included the students' corrections. One of the compositions was completed before the action research project started, and the other composition was most recently assigned when the action research began. The rationale for collecting the compositions that were completed before the research began was to check whether there were any discrepancies between teachers' usual habits and their practices during the period of research. While collecting the writing samples after the AR began served as evidence for the teachers' actual correction practices. In addition, the student interviews were used to supplement the data collected from the writing samples so that more detailed information could be elicited.

## Collect, analyze, and interpret information

Once the data has been collected, the teacher then analyzes and reflects on it and makes a data-driven decision to take some action. Wallace (1998: 21) maintains that teachers can also think about changing or refocusing their original research question at this stage: “As you proceed with your research, do you suppose that you will have to rethink your original question?” As a general guide the goals at this stage of action research are

- to identify patterns in the data;
- to compare findings from different sources of data; and
- to build an interpretation from the information collected.

The main purpose of this stage is to make meaning of data gathered in order to determine the value of the intervention and involves sorting through the data to discover important themes related to the issue under investigation. For example, in the case study reported in this chapter responses from the teachers’ interviews were transcribed and analyzed to find out what the teachers claimed to do in the area of grammar correction in compositions and their underlying rationale for their perceived actions. The teachers’ claimed practices were then verified through an analysis of their correction techniques as observed in the collected writing samples (the analysis of the writing samples only focused on grammatical errors that the two teachers had spotted). Recorded tapes and field notes from classroom observations were also used to confirm (or deny) the teachers’ claimed practices in giving grammatical feedback. If data from the analysis of teachers’ correction techniques in the writing samples and the classroom observations supported the responses made in the teacher interviews, this was regarded as an alignment between beliefs and practice. On the other hand, if data from the analysis of teachers’ correction techniques in the writing samples and the classroom observations contradicted the responses in the teacher interviews, this was considered as a discrepancy between beliefs and practice.

## Develop, implement, and monitor action plan

The final steps in the cycle of action research is reflection in terms of deciding on some type of action, monitoring the effects of that action and if necessary, problem redefinition. Teachers ask themselves at this stage what

it all means for them and the result of this reflection usually involves some change in teaching practice, which is monitored. Eventually, the whole cycle can begin again as the teacher redefines the problem in light of the findings of the first cycle. For example, in the case study reported in this chapter as discovered, both the teachers corrected every grammatical error they could find in their students' compositions. They also showed an alignment between their beliefs and actual marking practices in terms of types of grammatical focus possibly because of their common dislike for selective-marking. Although most students said they believed that they could benefit from grammatical feedback in their compositions, only 50 percent of them wanted their teachers to correct every grammatical error in their writing. We relayed these findings to the teachers, and also that research indicates that correction of every grammatical error does not positively contribute to students' improvement of grammatical accuracy in their composition and that more selective grammar correction on students' written compositions might be more beneficial for students for their language development. The teachers told the researchers that they would implement the suggested changes including using more selective correction of grammar in their students' writing and would also explain to the students why they were going to make these changes by citing not only the findings of the action research but also the findings of the literature reviews.

The overall best and simplest way to decide if an issue you are considering qualifies as action research is to ask three questions about the proposed study and if the answer to all three is "yes," then it fits under an action research umbrella, but if the answer to any is "no," then action research may not be an appropriate approach:

- 1 *Is the focus on your teaching action?*
- 2 *Are you in a position to be able to change your future actions (teaching and otherwise) based on the results of your action research project?*
- 3 *Is improvement possible?*

If the answer to these three questions is yes, then you can begin to reflect using action research as a means of inquiry. If the answer is no to any of the questions, then it may be a better idea to choose some other means of reflecting on your work for that particular issue. Thus action research as it is outlined in this chapter can be not only enjoyable but also rewarding for teachers and it is viewed as a cycle of activities rather than a one-step response to a problem and is a natural extension of a teacher's classroom activities because it can be conducted by teachers in their own classrooms. As Burns

(1999: 183) maintains, action research can help to “build a community of practitioners aligned toward teacher research and a professional climate that is open to public scrutiny and constructive critique.”

## Reflection

- What is your understanding of action research and have you ever conducted an action research project? Explain.
- Why do you think academic research generally has little impact on practicing teachers? Do you think there is a gap between academic research findings and practice in the classroom? Why or why not?
- In what ways can conducting action research empower a second language teacher?
- In what ways can conducting action research develop a collaborative relationship with other teachers?
- Do you think the results of the action research projected should be reported, for example, at a staff meeting or through a written report to a journal? Explain.
- Wallace (1998) discusses how an interest in a topic such as *group work*, must be thought through to find a more specific focus for classroom investigation. For example, he suggested it could focus on. Can you add any more to the above list developed by Wallace?
  - How to set up groups?
  - How to form groups?
  - How to resolve personality clashes within groups?
  - How to deal with the use of the mother tongue during group work?
  - How to select materials for group work?
  - How to assess the effectiveness of group work?

## Conclusion

Action research serves the needs of the reflective professional well because it combines the mastery of the professional knowledge a teacher has built up over the years with the wisdom of everyday practice. Although there is no one universally accepted set of processes that constitute conducting action research, it is generally agreed that it focuses on researching an issue

of interest to the teacher and usually takes place inside the classroom to determine what is currently occurring. Action research involves the teacher systematically collecting information about this issue and then acting on the information to make improvements to the issue. In order to help teachers collect information related to their action research project, they can use such reflective tools such as teaching journals, classroom observations, narrative analysis, and group discussions among other methods that are all covered in this book. Through a process, then, that includes planning, observing, analyzing, acting, and reviewing, language teachers can learn a great deal about the nature of classroom teaching and learning as well as acquire useful classroom investigation skills. One caution with engaging in action research is that reflective teachers must be weary of being in the “action research bubble” of trying to fix some problem without considering the person-as-teacher as it is difficult to separate the teacher (person) from the act of teaching. Therefore it is best to take a holistic view of reflection while using the tool of action research.

## Chapter scenario

Joan is a native English speaking teacher from the United States and has just arrived in Korea to teach English in a university language institute. Before this she was teaching EAP courses in a university institute in the United States. Her students came from various cultures and were more than likely going to attend (or were attending) college. She has an MA in TESOL from an American university. When she arrived in Korea, she started teaching oral proficiency courses (called conversation classes) in a language institute attached to a university. This was the first time she had taught students from the same cultural background (Korean). She was given various classes from beginning level to advanced level. Joan was the type of teacher who continuously asked her students if they were following the lesson and if they could understand her. She continued this practice in her classes in Korea. So she was surprised one day when the director of the institute (a Korean professor) called her in to his office after her first month of teaching to tell her that all her beginning students complained about her teaching methods and her speed of speaking in the class. They also complained that she was constantly drinking coffee during her classes. She was shocked because the students had never complained to her directly and they had always told her

that she was a great teacher when she asked if they understood the lesson. Joan had always had her coffee cup with her in her classes in the United States and the students would come to her if they had any problems. Joan decided that she would conduct an action research project on this topic of culture difference and she started by reading more books on Korean culture. She noted the vast and subtle differences between the cultures of the United States and Korea in general terms and in terms of teaching in a university institute. Next Joan decided that she would have to adapt several new strategies to check if the students were following her lessons, and if she was acting in a culturally appropriate manner in her classes. She decided to carry out the following strategies and activities:

- Not to take a yes answer as evidence that the students were following her lessons.
- To build in quizzes into every lesson to check if the students really understood what she was teaching.
- To try and build up relationships with the students after class time.
- To find out how Korean teachers conduct their classes (by observing their classes).
- To hold several classes on topics related to cultures: Korea and the United States.
- To talk to more experienced native English speaking teachers in the institute and try to set up some peer coaching type collaborations.
- To team-teach some classes with native English speaking teachers and Korean teachers.
- To keep a teaching journal and note instances where there could have been a cross-cultural mix-up.
- To self-monitor her classes more carefully by recording some of her classes.

Joan enacted most of these activities over a two-month period and built up a wealth of information and knowledge about teaching EFL classes in Korea. After about three months, Joan became more comfortable teaching in this new culture and her students began to see what a concerned teacher she really was. Joan could have become a bitter EFL teacher and blamed her students, the institute, and the new country for her initial problems. Instead, being the professional that she is, she examined her situation and carried out her own action research analysis of the problem and as a result, developed her understanding of different teaching circumstances.



## Reflection

- What do you think of the strategies Joan attempted?
- Outline some more strategies Joan could implement to help her solve the dilemma this case presented her.
- The general stages (cyclical) of the action research process outlined above are: (1) *plan* (issue identification), (2) *research* (literature review), (3) *observe* (collect data), (4) *reflect* (analyze and interpret), and (5) *act* (redefining the problem).
  - How can you advise Joan to implement such a cycle of action research for the problem she faced above?
  - What difficulties do you anticipate Joan may face in carrying out action research using this cycle? How could these difficulties be resolved?

# 9

## Teaching Journals

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### Chapter Outline

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### Introduction

Teaching journals are another means language teachers can use to reflect on their practice. Teaching journals provide teachers with a written record of various aspects of their practice such as classroom events and enables them to step back for a moment to reflect on their work. When teachers write regularly in a teaching journal, they can accumulate information that on later review, interpretation, and reflection can assist them in gaining a deeper understanding of their work. This chapter explores how and why regular journal writing can help language teachers reflect systematically on their work.

## Teaching journals

Although the role of writing as a method for language teacher reflection has not been widely acknowledged either positively or negatively by language educators (Burton, 2005), what little research exists nevertheless mostly suggests that journal writing can help language teachers (both beginning and experienced) think about their work. Ho and Richards (1993: 8) maintain that journal writing can be an “opportunity for teachers to use the process of writing to describe and explore their own teaching practices.” McDonough (1994: 64–65) observed that experienced teachers who wrote regularly about their teaching became more aware of “day-to-day behaviors and underlying attitudes, alongside outcomes and the decisions that all teachers need to take.” More specifically, Jarvis (1996), who analyzed the content of journals written by practicing language teachers that were intended to promote reflection in an in-service course, discovered that journal writing benefited language teachers in the following ways: as a problem-solving device, for seeing new teaching ideas, and as a means of legitimizing their own practice. In addition, Seaman et al. (1997) noted the positive effects of reflecting with the aid of teaching journals on busy teachers.

Bailey (1990: 218) suggests that a teaching journal can be a place for language teachers “to experiment, criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions” about their practice. When this form of journal writing is performed alone by a language teacher, it has been called an *intrapersonal* journal because the teacher writes solely for himself or herself (Gebhard 1999). However, the research of Brock, Yu, and Wong (1992) suggests that practicing language teachers can benefit more from having others (peers) read their journals (once issues of trust and confidentiality have been agreed upon) so that they can get another’s perspective, insight, and interpretation that may be difficult to achieve if a teacher attempts to reflect alone. As Brock, Yu, and Wong (1992: 300) discovered, collaborative journal writing “raised our awareness of classroom processes and prompted us to consider those processes more deeply than we otherwise have.” The research of Keiko and Gaies (2002) has indicated that it is possible and probably more desirable for language teachers to combine both intrapersonal journal writing and peer sharing of journals where one teacher can first write an intrapersonal journal and later share it with a partner who can read and comment on the journal entries, noting patterns and issues that can be discussed. Teachers can also work in pairs or in a teacher development group and decide on a

single topic in which each participant will write about and then later share their writing. Consequently, the research suggests that journal writing for teachers can serve the following purposes:

- To clarify one's own thinking.
- To explore one's own beliefs and practices.
- To become more aware of one's teaching styles.
- To monitor one's own practices.
- To provide positive feedback on one's teaching, for example, by writing about successful experiences.
- To vent one's frustrations and set goals for remedying problems.
- To raise questions and issues to think about in the future.
- To collaborate with other teachers in exploring teaching issues.
- To trigger insights about one's self as a teacher and about one's teaching.
- To provide a record of one's teaching for others to read.

Collaborative journal writing for peers while incorporating all of the above benefits for individual teachers can also serve the following purposes:

- To encourage reflective enquiry.
- To challenge, support, and monitor the teacher's thinking.
- To questions.
- To analyze the teacher's development, learning, and current levels of understanding.
- To guide instruction.
- To link and synthesize the teacher's understanding with his/her classroom practices.

## **Case study I: Three EFL teachers write about their teaching**

This case study reports on three EFL teachers who met weekly in South Korea to reflect on their practice (Farrell, 1998a). All three teachers were experienced EFL teachers in Korea. Initially, all three teachers agreed to write an ongoing journal account of their experiences during the semester of reflection. They agreed to write at least one entry after an "event" was

experienced; an “event” was to include a class observation and/or discussion, and a group meeting.

At the end of the semester of reflection each teacher’s journal showed a different focus of reflection. For example, T1, out of a total of twenty-two entries in one semester, was mostly concerned with evaluating her teaching. She frequently cited problems, both personal and teaching-related, that influenced her teaching. One such difficulty she wrote about concerned the issue of how and when to correct her students’ language errors. In an early journal entry she addressed this issue when she was considering how to correct a pronunciation class: “One of my weakest points is voiced sounds like [z] in zoo or museum. But I’m not an English native speaker, too.” In contrast to T1, T2 was the most prolific of the three teacher-writers with twenty-eight entries over one semester, and used the journal to focus his reflections on theories of teaching. For example, he wrote about how he as a language teacher makes a decision about how long to wait after asking a question in class and what the research says; he continued: “We must extend the wait time before we make a decision as long as we can stand the uncertainty, as we extend it waiting for a student response. This is what makes teaching a buzz anyway, the uncertainty. This is what Lortie was writing about in *The Schoolteacher*, which I’m reading now.” T3 was the least active of the three teachers in her journal writing and had only six entries after the semester. In fact, T3 said that she stopped writing in her journal completely after a few weeks because she noted that writing “gave me stress, I always had to write something down, but I didn’t have anything to write.”

## Case study I reflection

- T1 in the case study outlined above wrote about her concern about how and when to correct her students’ language errors. Have you ever been concerned with this same topic? If yes, what did you do about it?
- If you have not reflected on this topic before, write a journal entry on how and when you correct your students’ language errors.
- What are your theories of teaching and who or what has influenced them? Where do your theories of teaching originate?
- T2 was interested about the amount of time he should wait (wait-time) after asking a question?

- How long do you usually wait after asking a question before you resume talking if students do not answer?
- In the case study of experienced EFL teachers outlined in this chapter, the three teachers agreed to write for one semester and after an event of interest. Do you think one semester of such journal writing is a sufficient amount of time for reflection? Why? Why not?

## Case study II: “I See My Biggest Challenge As Achieving Balance In My Life”

Jessica (a pseudonym) was a very experienced ESL teacher who was interested in keeping a regular journal about her teaching as she wanted to engage in reflective practice as part of her professional development. Jessica decided that she would write about anything, whenever she wanted, and to write at least one entry after an “event” was experienced inside or outside her classroom during the academic year. I now present a summary of her reflections during the first semester (for more detail see Farrell, 2013a).

The more Jessica wrote during the academic year and the more she analyzed her writing during that year, the more she became more self-aware of who she was as a teacher and what she was doing rather than what she thought she was doing. Jessica started her entries about self-awareness tentatively as she wrote first about how she perceived herself when interacting with her students while teaching:

I am also aware this week that I am really funny in class lately—which surprises me. I enjoy interacting with the students casually before jumping into the lesson for the day. I believe this is important. I like to be myself with the students—authentic but in a positive way. I guess the recent pressures of my life have eased (somewhat) and this is allowing me to relax and enjoy the classroom.

In later journal entries throughout the first semester she continued to reflect on her awareness of her day-to-day choices in teaching:

I have my own philosophy to teaching (however conscious or subconscious it may be) but this is reflected more concretely in my day-to-day choices, my

practices and preferences in teaching. I am not an indiscriminate user of tricks in the classroom. If you ask me why I have done something in the class—I am confident that I could articulate for you why.

Jessica then began to write more about her need to achieve a sense of balance in her life between her work and her personal life as she said this was her biggest challenge:

I see my biggest challenge as achieving a balance in my life. I am actively involved in a lot of things outside of the classroom and I enjoy that, but I stay at work too late and I come home very tired every day . . . . Work responsibilities can overtake personal and home life.

In another journal entry Jessica noted her confusion about how much she should put into her duties outside the classroom and how much into her actual classroom teaching and her perceived conflict between the two:

In the last three days in addition to the “usual” classroom stuff, my tasks ranged from kitchen duties to handling student conflict to discussing changes in college policy. Do my students realize that the reason I am rushing in two minutes late is because another student grabbed me in the hall with his or her “issues”?

Jessica then wrote that she wondered if her professional life was in fact healthy and now at this mid-career stage; she wondered if she would be a teacher like this for the following years:

Is the pace at which I’m working a healthy and normal pace? Is it healthy to be so invested in your work? What are my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher at this stage of my career? What’s next? Am I really going to love doing this for another 20 years?

Toward the end of the first semester as Jessica started to balance her work and personal life more to her liking, she noticed how that act of writing in her journal had allowed her not only to “see” the extent of her exhaustion that semester but also allowed her to work through all the frustrations with her trying to do everything and please everyone:

As I analyze my [journal] notes from this week first, I can see the trend already. I do not feel tired as I write this journal (as I usually do). I don’t feel overwhelmed by the approaching term. I don’t feel worried about what students think about my teaching. My personal issues seem less monumental. Suddenly, I feel calm and in control.

After this journal entry at the end of the first semester Jessica decided to write her reflections on her writing by going over all her journal entries in more detail and to try to sum up their meaning for her and also her views of how writing impacted her reflections. On reviewing all her journal entries, Jessica said that she really noticed just how the topic of her health had dominated much of her journal writing: “But most of all, re-reading the journal has allowed me to see once again the trend in my professional ‘mood/health’—the real issue for me.” Jessica then noted the importance of reading journal entries after taking some time to look for patterns, as she commented:

At one point, I noted a pattern in my journals: I was saying how tired I was every week. I knew that, but seeing it in the journal weekly really hit the point home. Re-reading these journals today as a collection shows a lot more: fatigue, emotional upset, some health problems.

For Jessica, journal writing was very important as it enabled her to enhance her personal growth and development. She said that reflecting through journal writing allowed her to not only note some issues that were impacting her teaching, but that writing things down and thinking them through allowed her to move beyond these issues. As Jessica noted, “Journal writing allowed me to unpack any emotional baggage be it personal or professional and get beyond it.”

This was because she said that regular journal writing provided her with the mental space for her to reflect, and the more she wrote, the more she wanted to look more deeply not only into her teaching, but also into herself as a teacher. Jessica remarked: “The journal gave me an uninterrupted, private space where I could explore what was important to me . . . I could take my time with it. I was forced to identify and select topics in my own work week that I felt I wanted to investigate more.”

## Case study II reflection

- Case study II provides details from Jessica’s reflective writing about her concern for achieving more “balance” in her life. After reading her journal entries above, what is your understanding of her concerns with “balance”?
- Do you have similar concerns about balance with your personal and professional life?



- If you have not reflected on this topic before, write a journal entry on achieving balance in your teaching life.
- Jessica, a very experienced TESOL teacher reflected that journal writing allowed her to “unpack any emotional baggage be it personal or professional and get beyond it.” How do you think writing helped her achieve this level of reflection?
- What is it about the act of writing that can facilitate teachers in their reflections?
- How can reflective writing facilitate self-awareness?
- Why is self-awareness important for an ESL teacher?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

Language teachers can start writing a journal as soon (if they have not done so before) as they start their first job; however, even experienced teachers who have never written a teaching journal can start anytime and start reflecting and investigating various aspects of their work. It is not always easy to start writing a teaching journal because some teachers may not know where to focus their reflections. Bartlett (1990: 209) says a teacher can start to write about our “conversations with pupils, critical incidents in a lesson, our personal lives as teachers, and our beliefs about teaching, events outside the classroom that we think influence our teaching, our views about language teaching and learning.” So there are many possible topics to choose from such as group work in class, giving of instructions, the use of teacher questions, giving feedback/correction of errors, to more macro concerns such as lesson planning, textbook selection, curriculum development, and administration influences. The following procedures may be useful when starting a teaching journal for the first time:

- Start a teaching journal (if you have not already done so).
- Reflect on a recent teaching practice or experience in the classroom, positive or negative, that caused you to stop and think about your teaching.
  - What happened before this incident?
  - What happened after it?

- Why was this incident important for you?
- What does this incident tell *you* about *you* as a teacher?
- Write this (word processing or on paper).
- Decide whether you want this to be an intrapersonal journal or a dialogical journal.
- After each journal entry ask yourself two or three questions about what you have written. Your peer may respond to these questions.
- Keep writing about your chosen topic for at least a month.
- Review your entries each week. Can you find any patterns emerging?
- If you have chosen an intrapersonal journal, write a summary of important events and what you have learned.
- If you have written a dialogue journal, decide on what parts of the text you want your peer to read (block text, staple pages together that you do not want made public, or write a different version for your peer).

By writing a teaching journal for a month, the reflections can thus be spread over a period of time and this allows teachers to observe patterns and trends that they may not ordinarily see. In order to achieve this focus it is best to set boundaries to help you pinpoint a focus for more inquiry by disciplining yourself to write each week and for 15 minutes each day for that period. It may be an idea to respond to the same prompts for each entry as the participants in the case study outlined in this chapter such as: “What did you notice in your classes this week?” and “What professional issues are of interest to me today?” In this way the participants in the case study outlined above also created some manageable boundaries for themselves. All three teachers then decided to share their journals with each other by photocopying their journals but no comments were written or made on each of the journals. Alternatively, some teachers may already have issues that they consider important for them to explore by writing

After writing for some time, teachers can look for patterns they may see emerge in their entries and when they have noticed a pattern, they can investigate it in more detail by engaging in an action research project that critically explores whatever theme or pattern that has emerged. Many teachers may never have had the experience of writing about their own teaching and may wonder about what form of writing they should use, how much to write, and for how long they should write before they stop and analyze their writing. In the beginning, teachers should write regularly about a topic for at least a month while at the same time reviewing their entries each week. At the end of the month it may be a good idea to write a summary

of some of the important events that arose and what has been learned as a result of the reflection process. Later teachers can increase the period of writing as they become more comfortable with the writing process as a means of reflection. In terms of the appropriate style of writing, Richards and Farrell (2005) have suggested that language teachers can use a *stream-of-consciousness approach* or an *edited* approach when writing a teaching journal. When writing a “stream-of-consciousness” form of journal, teachers should remember that grammar, style, and organization are less important than obtaining a written record of teaching acts and a teacher’s feelings and thoughts about those teaching acts. This type of exploratory writing can generate lots of ideas and awareness that can be examined later and analyzed for recurring patterns of events. The following is an example of a stream-of-consciousness type of journal entry from one of the teachers in the case study reported on in this chapter.

When my students took a seat face to face with me most of them looked nervous. So I started with “How are you today? How was your exam?” to make them relax. But on the contrary it backfired. Some of them were panicked by my unexpected questions. So I stopped to do that and got to business right away. In fact, I meant to comment on his grammatical problems but I changed my mind. Because I, as teacher, made many mistakes, too. I felt whenever I opened my mouth I was making a mistake. Nevertheless our communication worked. Isn’t that our aim to learn a language? Besides, I don’t want to dampen cold water on his enthusiasm to practice English.

When writing for another teacher peer a more edited writing style may be the best approach (although the peer could also overlook grammatical errors) and written entries by the peer can be made directly on the journal. In this way, the teacher can decide what to include in the journal for the peer to see and what to leave out. Richards and Farrell (2005) suggest the following general format for such journals:

- **Date and time of entry:** A journal entry should be written on the day of the event if possible, otherwise we may forget details of what happened and when.
- **Sequencing of the events:** To help you record what happened and when, it is best to make a brief list describing what happened before, during, and after the event.
- **Elaboration of details:** Describe the event that happened in detail and add how you felt at the time these events happened.

- **Analysis of the event:** Try to explain what you think the event's significance is for you: what did you learn? Did the even raise more questions than prove you with answers? Try to figure out what have you accomplished and how you plan to follow up on what you have learned.

The following is an example of an edited teaching journal (adapted from Richards and Farrell, 2005):

March 16, 2:30–3:30.

Sequence of Events:

- Started class as usual.
- Went over homework.
- Noticed that most students did not do the homework.
- Was annoyed and frustrated.

Events:

We (the class and myself) went over the grammar exercises (articles, *a*, *an*, and *the*) that I had given for homework (because they always make many mistakes in articles in their writing) for the first fifteen minutes. I had tried to make these grammar exercises interesting for the students by proving handouts that challenged their knowledge to (a) recognize that there was a grammar mistake and (b) try to give the correct answer. I have found that my students are so used to doing the fill-in-the-blank type grammar exercises that they do not have to think about why there may be a mistake. So, my main reason for providing a passage with all the English articles omitted was to get the students thinking about their knowledge of grammar (recognizing that there is a mistake in the first place) and then correcting that mistake. I hope they will use this system in their peer editing of compositions too.

Episode:

After about ten minutes in which I was going around the class asking the students for their answers, I noticed that many of them had not done their homework. I was very disappointed because I had spent a long time preparing this homework sheet (handout) and I had thought long and hard about how I wanted to teach articles to these students because of the quantity of mistakes in their written and oral work. I felt really annoyed that these students did not appreciate the work I was doing for them or the fact that they were not motivated enough to correct their misuse of articles in their writing and speaking. This never really happened in any of my classes before.

## Analysis:

At this stage, I cannot really say that I came up with any clear solution to the problem. Was it that they were just not motivated to study grammar or articles in particular? Was this the reason why they all did not complete their homework assignment? Or was it because they did not know how to complete the assignment? Maybe they are not used to this sort of grammar assignment (first find the mistake and then correct it). Maybe it is because they were used to fill-in-the-blank style exercises? I think I should have explained this type of grammar exercise in more detail and show them why it is very useful for their grammar development. On reflection, maybe I should have done more of these article exercises during class. I was really surprised at their level of resistance to this type of homework. I now realize that by writing this down, I have a clearer picture than when it happened in class with all the associated emotions. But it was a bit of a shock for me because students would always tell me if they had not understood something before. Anyway, I just went on to another topic. I will return to the topic of articles in English grammar next week and explain why this type of grammar exercise is useful and how they can use this in their peer editing during composition classes.

Additionally, teachers should consider whether they should or want to share their journals with other teachers (and even their students!) or keep them private. If teachers have written a journal to share with their peers, they can decide on what part of the text they want their peer(s) to read. If they do not want a peer to read a particular part of a journal, they can block the text they do not want made public by stapling or gluing pages together, or they can simply write a different version (a summary) for peers to read. For example, in the case study outlined in this chapter, T3 could have omitted the entries she did not want the other participants to read rather than abandoning her writing and thus reflections.

Now the internet offers more scope for teachers to share their teaching journals on a wider scale. An example of this is a new approach to keep *on-line teaching journals* and blogs. Towndrow (2004: 175) used a laptop to keep an “electronic journal-cum-diary” to record his own reactions and observations of his students’ learning during a course and found this form of reflective journal writing very successful. In addition, Siemens (2004) has recommended that teachers become involved in blogging, defined here as a format constant (archives, links, time stamps, chronological listing of thoughts and links), personalized, community-linked, social, interactive, democratic, and new model innovation built on the unique attributes of the internet. Among other uses, Siemens (2004) suggests that blogs are useful

for self-expression and knowledge sharing and management, and as he suggests for “free flow—any idea can be expressed . . . and accessed by any one.” The reason why Blogs have taken off so fast is that they are relatively easy to get started with and language teachers can share them easily with other teachers because they are your story.

Journal writing is not necessarily something all teachers enjoy or think is useful. Richards, Ho and Giblin (1996) in a survey of what thirty-two teachers’ evaluations of their experiences of writing a journal, found that 71 percent of the teachers found it useful, 25 percent of the teacher found it fairly useful, while only 4 percent did not enjoy writing a journal. Here are some things language teachers said about journal writing:

## What teachers liked about it:

- Writing a journal forces the teacher to reflect on certain issues and bring them out in the open.
- Journal writing gets teachers thinking about things that are unconsciously going on in the mind.
- Journal writing enables receptive teachers to discover the importance of relating their own experience of learning to that of the pupils they teach.
- Journal writing enhances awareness about the way a teacher teaches and a student learns.
- Journal writing serves as a means of generating questions and hypotheses about teaching and the learning processes.
- Journal writing is the most natural form of classroom research.
- Journal writing promotes the development of reflective teaching.

## What teachers did not like about it:

- Writing a journal is time-consuming.
- Writing a journal can be artificial unless it is a regular activity.
- Comments by peers can be unfocused.
- Journal writing can become tedious after some time.
- Journals can be difficult to analyze and interpret by teachers, peers, and teacher educators.
- Some writers really do not enjoy writing a journal or diary as a form of reflection.

Obviously journal writing takes time: time to write and time to read (and time to analyze and make interpretations). So, a major decision one has to make concerning journal writing is how many entries to make (frequency) and what length (quantity) each entry should be. Concerning the reading of journals, peers and/or groups of teachers could read the journals at the start of every meeting, and this would be easier if the journals were e-mailed to participants before each meeting. In addition, some teachers may require special training in journal writing. Teachers could be given models of effective journal writing and asked to follow these models if they are uncomfortable with their own way of writing.

## Reflection

- Do you enjoy writing? If yes, why. If not, why not?
- Have you ever written a teaching journal? If not, why not?
- If yes, what kind of entries did you make? How often did you make them? Was this journal an intrapersonal journal for yourself or a dialogue journal for other teachers to read and comment on?
- Discuss Jarvis' (1996) findings that journal writing can benefit language teachers in the following three ways: *as a problem-solving device, for seeing new teaching ideas, and as a means of legitimizing their own practice*. Do you agree with these findings? Why? Why not?
- What general topic would you like to start writing about?
- How will you write? Will you use a pen and paper and/or electronic and/or use of a blog?
- Compare different kinds of journal writing such as using a notebook (pen and paper), a computer, or record in an audio recorder. What are some of the advantages and limitations of each way of keeping a journal?
- Which type of journal do you think will be most effective for your needs, a stream-of-consciousness type or a more edited type as outlined above? Explain your answer.
- In a dialogue journal, a peer responds to journal entries through discussion or through written entries. What type of responses from a peer would you like to see written in your dialogue journal? What type of responses would you write to a peer in such a teaching journal?
- Recently, there has been an increased interest in the use of "blogs" and "weblogs" as a means of writing a teaching journal for publication.

What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of these ways of keeping a teaching journal?

- How long do you think is the ideal duration for writing a teaching journal so that you can begin to see patterns in your practice that give you insight into your beliefs, assumptions, and practices? Explain your answer.

## Conclusion

Language teachers can write teaching journals to record their reflections of most aspects of their practice and reviewed later for patterns that may have emerged as a basis for reflection. It is this very process of writing that helps teachers to consciously explore and analyze their practice (Shin, 2003). Of course, and as the results of the case study presented in this chapter suggest, writing may not be suitable as a means of reflection for all teachers for different reasons such as fear of revealing one's reflections in writing, and even difficulty with the writing process itself but hopefully with practice they may change their minds. That said, for the majority of language teachers, research has indicated that writing about one's practices seems to be an efficient means of facilitating reflection. Writing a teaching journal also has an added advantage in that it can be done alone by individual teachers or it can be shared with other teachers. When teachers share their reflective journals, they not only foster collegial interaction but they can also gain different perspectives about their work while also contributing to professional knowledge in the field as a whole.

## Chapter scenario

John, an ESL teacher in the UK decided to write about his reflections on the student evaluations he just received concerning teaching English as a second language in a small university language center. He wrote the following in his teaching journal after he received these evaluations:

I just got my student evaluations today and I was surprised to see that out of forty evaluations (twenty for each semester), some of the students thought that they were not improving their English language speaking ability and that I was not correcting them enough when they thought they had made mistakes. Apart from that, they all seemed satisfied that I was doing a good



job. I think that they link my lack of corrections to their perceptions that they are not improving in the speaking ability, but I am pushing fluency over accuracy. I guess I will have to explain this more and why I do not interrupt them in mid-sentence even if they make a mistake. I follow my own rule: If the mistake does not interfere with the overall meaning of the sentence, then I think it is fine. I do, however, point out mistakes if I see a pattern of common mistakes in a student's speech, but only at the end of the class. Actually, I write them down when the student makes these mistakes, so I must show the students exactly what I am doing about this. I must also ask them how they expect to improve as a result of taking a short conversation course (2 hours per week, for 12 weeks).

He decided to continue with his journal writing the next semester to monitor what will happen with his students, their learning and their evaluations of his teaching.

## Reflection

- Try to finish John's reflections on the student evaluations as if you were that teacher.
- Write about your own reflections on the most recent evaluations your students have given you.
- Choose one (or more) of the following issues specifically related to English language teaching and explore them through journal writing first in an intrapersonal journal and then share your writing with a peer in a dialogue journal.
  - Classroom management problems such as having too many students in one class and how to conduct a class while still maintaining control.
  - Problems with too much teacher talk and not enough student talk in the target language.
  - Problems with students who continuously speak in their native language during class and make few attempts to speak in the target language.
  - Problems with students who speak too much in class and do not give chances to others.
  - Problems with different cultural groups within one class.

# Teacher Development Groups

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## Introduction

Since the day they started to teach, teachers have been socialized to work in isolation from their colleagues and this has led to feelings of insecurity because teachers may be afraid to share their experiences with other teachers for fear of being "exposed." However, if teachers come together on their own initiative in order to reflect on their work, they can complement individual members' strengths, and compensate for each member's limitations, all for

the common good of the group and the institutions in which they work. As Little (1993: 138) has pointed out one principle of professional development for language teachers is that it can offer “meaningful intellectual, social, and emotional engagement with ideas, with materials, and with colleagues both in and out of teaching.” This chapter outlines and discusses how teachers can work together when they volunteer to join a teacher development group in order to form relationships with colleagues in order to discuss, share, and reflect on their beliefs and practices both inside and outside the classroom.

## Teacher development groups

Teacher development groups provide a context where participants can reflect on and come to understand their classroom practices, and plan their professional growth and development together in a safe place. Head and Taylor (1997: 91) define a teacher development group as “any form of co-operative and ongoing arrangement between two or more teachers to work together on their own personal and professional development.” Teachers as well as other members of a school (or teachers from different schools) come together in such groups or networks in order to improve their teaching and their students’ learning through collaboration on the basic assumption that collaborating with a group of colleagues will be more effective than reflecting alone. Research suggests that collaboration is an important component of teacher professional development because it involves teachers sharing their personal and professional knowledge with other teachers. As a result of participating in teacher development groups, teachers can change their thinking about their work and as a result can become more confident practitioners (Matlin and Short, 1991).

Research indicates that language teacher development groups facilitate dialogue, sharing and collaboration, and the exchange of resources, information, and expertise.

For example, after realizing that they have been pursuing their own professional development in isolation for several years as individual language teachers, three language teachers in the United States decided to come together in a teacher development group not only for the purposes of reflecting on their practice but also as a means of offering “hope to others wishing to break out of the shells of isolation separating teachers from their colleagues as well as from teacher educators” (Oprandy, Golden and Shiomi, 1999: 152). Oliphant (2003) has observed that language teachers join a teacher

development group in order to pursue professional development, because individually they can only do so much such as attend conferences, read the literature on language teaching, and self-monitor their teaching. She also noted that teachers can become empowered through teacher development groups because they benefit from working together with other teachers. Teachers become empowered because they become more confident in themselves and their work as a result of group membership and they begin to question the so-called experts as they gain more experience in the group (Matlin and Short, 1991). For language teachers then the research suggests the following advantages and benefits to working in teacher development groups:

- The group can generate more ideas about classroom issues than can any one individual.
- Within the group there is a variety of levels of expertise allowing novice teachers to learn from the experience of experts.
- A group provides supportive social relationships for its members.
- A group provides a non-threatening environment in which teachers can develop new knowledge and skills and gain supportive feedback from peers.
- A group provides an opportunity for language teachers to help other teachers face and overcome dilemmas related to their practice.
- A group of teachers working together can achieve outcomes that would not be possible for an individual teacher working alone.

## **Case study I: Experienced language teachers in group reflections**

This case study reports on a language teacher development group in Korea (Farrell, 1999a). The participants met for twelve group meetings where each group meeting was planned for one hour, but usually lasted two hours. At the first meeting all were told that it was up to each participant what topic or topics they wanted to reflect on during the project and that all discussions within the group would allow for equal sharing of power by all group members.

The most frequent topics that the teachers talked about in the group meetings included their approaches and methods to teaching and learning, their theories of teaching, how they evaluated their teaching, and their self-awareness of themselves as teachers. They were most interested in talking

about descriptions of their teaching methods, procedures, and class content, while relying on classroom experience to guide these practices. They also seemed to be quite concerned about the school context, both inside and outside the school, as well as concerned about their learners. Their discussions of theories of teaching centered on personal opinions, with little justification for these theories expressed and little or no evidence of application of these theories to classroom practices. In addition, all three teachers evaluated their teaching in terms of problems they encountered. For example, one teacher said at the second group meeting that the feeling he gets from class is “not about what I think I should be. I want to feel good about teaching, but I don’t. There must be a perfect way for teaching for everyone.” Another pattern evident in the group meetings was the limited discussion on teacher self-awareness and few questions about teaching. When the participants did talk about these issues, it was mostly about perceptions of themselves as teachers, and in the form of asking for advice, respectively.

## Case study I reflection

- Have you ever participated in a teacher development group such as the one outlined above? If yes, explain. If no, why not?
- If your answer to the above question was yes, explain how you got together, how long the group lasted, and what you all talked about.
- If your answer to the above question was no, do you see advantages or disadvantages to starting a teacher development group similar to the one outlined above?
- Why do you think the most frequent topic they talked about in group meetings concerned their approaches and methods of teaching and learning?
- Why do you think the teachers did not talk so much about their self-awareness of themselves as language teachers?

## Case study II: “I’ve Plateaued . . . Gone A Little Stale.”

This case study reports on the experiences of three female experienced college ESL teachers during in a university language school in Canada.

I present a summary of their first experiences (for more details see Farrell, 2014). The genesis of the teacher group they joined was somewhat unusual, in that I was approached by the three participants and asked if I would be willing to help them with their professional development as a group. As one teacher said: “I’ve plateaued . . . gone a little stale.” I was approached because one of the teachers said she was familiar with my work on reflective practice and, as such, suggested to the other two that I might be able to facilitate their reflections at this stage of their teaching careers. My role was discussed by all of us, and we agreed that I would facilitate their group discussions and, where appropriate, share my perceptions openly with the group as a participant-observer in the group discussions. The teachers, all very experienced ESL teachers with advanced degrees, met over a two-year period with weekly group meetings during the academic terms of the first year and follow-up meetings during the second year in order to reflect on their practice.

The most frequent category covers remarks the teachers made about the school *administration*. In general, most of the three teachers’ comments focused negatively on the school administration, but positively about their interactions with other ESL teacher colleagues. For example, when they talked about their school’s administration, they suggested that the administration did not really know what an ESL teacher’s many duties and roles were within the school, and that they sensed that there was a real disconnect between the administration and the ESL teachers in the school. As a result, all three teachers agreed that they felt somewhat under-appreciated by the administration. They also felt a special pressure as ESL teachers that other teachers in the institution may not have felt, that of student retention because all were well aware of the institution’s desire to move the international students into other programs in the institution as soon as possible after “successfully” completing their ESL courses.

As reported in the above, although for the most part the three experienced ESL teachers held negative perceptions toward their school’s administration, the opposite was true toward their colleagues within the TESOL Department (apart from the teacher group reported on in this chapter who are also in the same department) in that all three ESL teachers said that they enjoyed interacting and collaborating with their TESOL colleagues.

All three teachers said that they enjoyed being in the classroom teaching and being around students in general, both inside and outside the classroom, and saw this as the most satisfying and rewarding part of their professional lives thus far. Although positive about their learners they did have an issue with the type of relationships they had established with their students, not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom and school. All

three teachers maintained that when teachers can identify with their students beyond the classroom, it tends to make teaching in class easier and more effective, but at the same time it also takes up a lot of their free time and energy and that they sometimes had a problem balancing these. Therefore, they all wondered about where they should draw a line between their professional and private lives regarding interacting with their students outside class.

So all three mid-career ESL teachers seemed to be frustrated with their administration but had positive feelings and interactions toward their colleagues and their learners. The three teachers in the case study reported on in this chapter seemed to feel that they have had an impact on their students' learning and achievements both inside (language learning) and outside the classroom (successful acculturation to Canadian culture), and this was realized while reflecting in their teacher discussion group. The period of reflection for all three mid-career ESL teachers seemed to help them not only articulate their frustrations regarding their perception that the administration did not understand their roles and duties but also to articulate these roles and duties in terms of their interactions with their colleagues and their learners.

## Case study II reflection

- Have you ever participated in an experienced teacher development group such as the one outlined above? If yes, explain. If no, why not?
- If your answer to the above question was yes, explain how you got together, how long the group lasted and what you all talked about.
- If your answer to the above question was no, do you see advantages or disadvantages to starting a teacher development group similar to the one outlined above?
- Why do you think that experienced ESL teachers may have issues arising in their careers and especially mid-career plateauing?
- Why do you think the most frequent topic they talked about in group meetings was their concern with the administration in their school?
- Do you have similar concerns with your administration?
- Why do you think they identify with their learners so closely?

## Case study III: Novice language teachers in group reflections

This case study reports the experiences of three female novice ESL teachers during their first semester teaching in a university language school in Canada. I present a summary (in terms of shocks the teachers experienced) of their first few weeks as representative of their first semester overall experiences (for more details see Farrell, 2016b).

The first shocks occurred on the very first day and then all during their first week on the job. On the first day all three novice teachers reported that they had not been welcomed when they walked in the door. As one teacher remarked, “It’s not welcoming. You don’t feel like, ‘Hey come on in. Thanks for joining the team. This is what’s going on.’ You have to find out a lot of things for yourself.” Another teacher in the group said that in order for her to figure out what to do she had to try to listen to what other teachers were saying and pick up information at that time but for the most part she said: “I was becoming aware of similar feelings in being not welcome from the first day.” Thus, all three novice teachers from their very first day experienced some kind of alienation because they did not feel welcomed and they realized that they would have to discover everything by themselves if they were to survive their first semester. As the third teacher noted, “You’re just thrown in to survive yourself.” In fact one teacher in the group said that during this first week she felt as if she was in a swamp: “The first week is like you’re in a swamp.”

More shocks were to occur before any of the three teachers walked into their classroom for the first time. One of these shocks for another member of the group occurred when she said that the textbook she was told she was going to use in one of her classes was suddenly changed before her first class even though she had already prepared lessons with this book in mind, and moreover, nobody had a copy of this new textbook because it had not arrived at that time. The teacher said that she felt exasperated because when she was informed she was hired and what courses she would be teaching, she was also given a textbook so she could prepare in advance. She remarked: “Then on arrival I was given a different book than what I was told before and they didn’t even have it.”

To compound these shocks all three teachers noted that they did not know who they should talk to for guidance. They mentioned this when they said that one reason they did not know the other teachers in the school was that a staff meeting planned for the first week was suddenly cancelled without



explanation. The three novice ESL teachers' sense of isolation and frustration only increased as their first semester progressed as all three teachers noted that by the fifth week, they had not had any staff meetings with any other teachers, coordinators, or the administration and were left completely on their own to "figure out things by themselves."

In terms of process, the three novice ESL teachers set up a teacher reflection group in part because they felt the need to talk about their experiences as each member was feeling lost during their first week. All three novice teachers said that they found the group meetings very helpful and "useful to meet just to bounce ideas off of like because they're in the same position, so we could bounce ideas" as one teacher commented. Another teacher noted that meeting in a group and talking about issues allowed her to hear her colleagues' ideas and get feedback from them. So, overall that first semester in the absence of any real inductions program, the novice teacher reflection group they were members of helped the teachers better understand the many shocks they experienced so they could "swim" rather than "sink" in their first semester as ESL teachers.

## Case study III reflection

- Have you ever participated in a novice teacher development group such as the one outlined above? If yes, explain. If no, why not?
- If your answer to the above question was yes, explain how you got together, how long the group lasted and what you all talked about.
- If your answer to the above question was no, do you see advantages or disadvantages to starting a teacher development group similar to the one outlined above?
- Why do you think the most frequent topic they talked during the first semester in the group meetings concerned their lack of school support?
- Do you think they would have survived their first semester if they did not have a group to reflect with?
- How do you think the novice teacher development regular reflections helped them survive their first semester?
- Why do you think they experienced shocks before any of the three teachers walked into their classroom for the first time?
- Examine all three case studies above and note the similarities and differences for experienced and novice ESL teachers.

# Practical applications for TESOL teachers

## Types of teacher development groups

Generally, there are three main types of teacher development groups and they can extend not only within the school but may span several schools or school districts as well as other organizations: *peer groups* can be set up within a school, teacher groups can be set up at the district level—*district level groups* and *virtual groups* can be formed anywhere.

### School peer groups

Language teachers can set up a peer network within one school such as an English language group made up of all the English language teachers in the school/institution (Sitamparam and Dhamotharan, 1992). The committee can decide on specific activities designed to provide the individual teacher avenues to develop in whatever ways he or she wants and needs.

### District level teacher groups

Peer networking can also operate outside the school and within a school district. Teachers can set up a central coordinating committee that integrates activities and communicates with the teachers. Special-interest groups such as a writing teachers' group can carry out activities in the district related to their area of interests. For example, a group of teachers interested in teaching writing can come together to decide the best ways to introduce more process-type writing activities into the curriculum of that particular school district. This group then communicates with the central coordinating committee who supports this writing teachers' group in terms of providing resources, and contacts with other districts to consult what they have done on this topic to advise the group. They can also provide logistical support such as places where the teachers can meet regularly for meetings.

### Virtual teacher groups

Virtual groups of language teachers such as TESL-L can of course be set up anytime as they can easily communicate and “interact” on the internet.

One of the positive aspects of these virtual groups is the willingness of many professionals within the field to offer advice and good quality information free of charge to teachers from all over the world. Many of these groups provide easy instructions on how to join and members receive regular communications via e-mails. One of the drawbacks (apart from the vast amount of e-mails these groups generate) of these virtual communities of language teachers is that since the vast majority of the participants have never met, some professional teachers may feel they are users (not contributors) of the group just gathering up all the information without putting anything back into the group. One free electronic journal, TESL-EJ, also exists on the internet as a forum for language teachers to publish their research (<http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/tesl-ej/index.html>).

## Forming teacher development groups

### Starting a group

Teacher development groups are built on a foundation of shared understandings which is developed and nurtured by projects that involve members of the group in meaningful interaction with each other. Richardson (1997) has suggested that when colleagues come together in a group to reflect on their work, four basic features or ingredients need to be present if the group is to be successful:

- 1 Each participant needs to feel “safe” within the group. This means that the group must be seen as a place where each participant is able to open up and experiment as they discover who they are personally and professionally.
- 2 Each participant needs to feel “connected” in some way or other.
- 3 Each participant has to have a sense and to be able to feel passionate about the group and what they are trying to accomplish together. For this to happen, they must feel that they as a group are making a difference of some sort.
- 4 Each participant must honor, and be grateful for the group’s existence. This sense of group solidarity blends the other three features mentioned above.

The above four features were important for the participants in the case study reported in this chapter when they were starting their language teacher development group. In fact, they sought each other out originally not only

for their own professional development, but they were also seeking the camaraderie of working together as a group. Nevertheless, all three had different purposes for coming together as a group. They were each concerned with the isolation of their various roles as teachers in Korea but all wanted to probe deeper into their teaching and their students' learning processes.

## Participants' roles

Once a group of teachers decide that they want to form a teacher development group they must now figure out how they want to operate such a group in terms of members, roles, topic setting, and general rules of the group. Each teacher study group is composed of members with different roles, one of the most important being the group's leader. Kirk and Walter (1981) suggest a democratic approach, where the leader should not attempt to manipulate the group into doing what he/she wants. It seems that when groups have leaders, these group leaders may face a dilemma between getting the task completed, while at the same time maintaining good relations with and among group members. That said, group leaders must be able to create a trusting environment by encouraging and acknowledging the contributions of all members so that any individual is not allowed to dominate the group discussions. However, it may also be possible for a teacher development group to have a type of coexisting leadership in order to provide more opportunities for getting the task done (one co-leader) and maintaining group cohesion (another co-leader) as developed in the case study reported in this chapter. Regarding roles of individual members in a teacher development group, Belbin (1993) suggests that individual members tend to be predisposed toward one or more natural roles in the group as follows:

- *Coordinator or facilitator*—who makes a good chairperson and ensures that everyone in the group has an opportunity for input.
- *Shaper*—who drives the group forward.
- *Implementer*—who gets things done.
- *Monitor evaluator*—who ensures that all options are considered.
- *Team worker*—who helps cement the group together.
- *Resource investigator*—who develops outside contacts.
- *Complete/finisher*—who finishes things off.
- *Expert*—who provides specific areas of knowledge.

In the case study reported in this chapter, the group facilitator and also group shaper throughout the period of reflection assumed the group leader

role at first but an aspect of change in the interaction in the group was the emergence of T2 as an alternate leader after the fifth meeting as the group members were beginning to become more comfortable with each other. T3 assumed the team worker mantle as well as monitor, while T3 could be seen as a plant in that she was always willing to look at issues from several different angles. One result of the findings of this teacher development group is that it may be better for future groups to be aware of and even negotiate up front all the different roles possible from the beginning rather than letting roles happen.

## Deciding on topics

When teacher development groups come together for the first time they may or may not have a focus for the group discussions. Participants can first brainstorm a topic together and then narrow it down by identifying specific questions to explore. This narrowing down of a topic allows participants to focus their attention on issues that have personal meaning for them. The group can also at this stage decide if they have the resources available for them to continue reflecting on that particular topic. When the topic is temporarily exhausted, then the group can start another cycle of brainstorming a topic followed by a narrowing of the topic with development of specific questions addressing that topic. In the case study reported in this chapter the original facilitator of the group started each group discussion for the first five meetings but T2 started to set the topics for each meeting after that by the very act of starting each meeting by asking: "What do we want to talk about this week?" From the fifth meeting onwards, different pairs or trios, excluding the group facilitator, interacted with each other.

## Sustaining the group

As with any activity involving people with different personalities, backgrounds, levels of interest, experience, and goals, teacher development groups can and will encounter issues that will need to be addressed. Because teaching is a very personal activity, as teachers in a group begin to open up and discuss personal and professional issues that are important to them with other teachers whom they may or may not know there will inevitably be a certain level of anxiety present. So a non-threatening environment of *trust* should be fostered in the group. This can be done through observations and comments that keep judgments to a minimum. It is important that trust

develops naturally from people caring about each other as a group in order for all participants to grow together as teachers.

In the case study reported in this chapter two different patterns of interaction seem to have emerged in the group. For example, in meetings two, three, and four the group facilitator was more active than the other participants, while in meetings five, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve a different pattern of interaction developed where the original group facilitator was less involved as the other individual group members became more active. Thus, meetings one, two, three, and four can be called Phase I of the group process—the *getting to know you stage*, while Phase II includes the remainder of the meetings (meetings five to twelve)—the *reflective stage*. In addition to breaking periods of silence in the first four meetings, the group facilitator also set the agenda for each of the initial meetings and set the topic of discussion for these meetings in the getting to know you stage. However, from the fifth meeting onwards, different pairs, excluding the group facilitator, interacted with each other and established the reflective stage of the group. Thus, trust was established after the fifth meeting and T2's use of language in these later group meetings and his paraphrasing of members contributions all contributed to lowering the level of anxiety levels in the group. This, in turn, encouraged the other participants to reflect more and become more freely involved in the group discussions.

Another issue that must be considered is *time* because there is no optimum time plan that fits every group. Teacher development groups should consider that member availability can affect a group's time plans and institutional time limits may affect time factors for many groups. The teacher development group reported on in this chapter took a flexible approach which was informal for each of the activities and they did not specifically state what we wanted to achieve in each of the activities. With this level of flexibility in the group, each participant exhibited a different level of energy and time commitment. For example, two of the participants were active in all of the activities, while the other participant chose to be active in only one of the activities. This flexible approach on the one hand provided opportunities for the group to progress at its own pace, in a way which best suited each individual's own needs. However, on the other hand it appeared that at times the group and individual members within the group drifted off into their own agendas and there was always a danger that more pressing (sometimes important but mostly trivial) matters or problems would take over each participant's level of commitment. Nevertheless, once the group has begun to meet, members should have the right to modify the existing time

arrangement to fit their needs. These can normally be resolved relatively easily as long as group members are committed to the success of the support group and are willing listeners. However, teachers who set up support groups should be aware that trust among the group members is very important because as teachers discuss and open up to other teachers about issues that are important to them, there will inevitably be a certain level of anxiety present. The following are suggestions that teacher development groups can consider so that they can maintain and sustain their group reflections over a period of time:

- *Commit to the group*: make time to be at each meeting, try to be on time for each meeting, and stay the course of the group reflections as a whole.
- *Negotiate ground rules*: try to work out what ground rules you want to establish for each meeting in terms of topics to be covered.
- *Assign roles*: give each group member a specific role (e.g., leader, implementer, expert—see above) and assign a task each week to each member in order to focus the discussion of each meeting (e.g., bring in a reading of interest on theory or practice of a specific aspect of language teaching to share with the group).
- *Listen to each other*: really listen to everything each member says without judgment for as long as possible so that all members have had a right to voice opinions in a democratic format, and then member should offer feedback that is supportive.
- *Look at the Positives*: Focus on achievements and accomplishments rather than on what is difficult to achieve in the group.
- *Agree to confidentiality early on*: Decide on some way where confidentiality will be guaranteed from the very first meeting possibly in the form of a written agreement or contract stating how group members will deal with confidentiality.

## Evaluating the group

After a teacher development group finishes its period of reflection it is important that all group participants evaluate the influences of the group on their personal and professional growth so that they can have some closure. They can also reflect on the group processes as a whole. Participants can reflect on whether they achieved their individual and group goals, their individual and the group accomplishments and factors that can be considered if they or others want to set up another teacher development group. Also

they can at this stage also consider if they want to share their findings with other teachers who may benefit from hearing about their experiences. They can attend a conference and report about their group to other teachers and they can also write up the group developments for a journal publication. Two participants from the teacher development group reported on in this chapter wrote up an informal paper that was not published about their experiences while participants in the group. They started their reflections by writing the following: Two members of a teacher development group seek to continue the experience by looking back at it and trying to make sense of it. Examining their feelings and regarding the experience/writing as experimental, the interpretation they put on it is personal but the implications they see as extending beyond their own experience to all TD groups. They believe the group empowered them and made them better if not more insightful teachers and that other people working in such groups can receive the same benefits. All participants said that they came together in order to become more confident teachers. Initial goals set were general in nature from wanting to reflect on their teaching from discussing theory to observing their practice. All the twelve group meetings were supportive and covered such diverse topics as general life experiences, inability to deal with large language classes, students' responses to questions in class, handling uninvolved students, material for conversation classes, giving feedback, and the concept of what it is to be a teacher. The meetings lasted an average 2.5 hours each, exceeding the time participants had allocated. Because the goals of the group were not made specifically clear from the beginning, some of the participants felt they had either been unsure of the direction they were heading. They all said that they believe the teacher development group empowered them and made them better if not more insightful teachers and that they encourage other teachers to work in similar groups so that they too can receive the same benefits.

## Reflection

- Three main types of teacher groups were outlined above: Peer networks within a school, groups within a school district, and virtual groups. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of all three.
- Which type of group would suit your present needs and why?
- Can you think of any other type of teacher development groups?



- Discuss Richardson's (1997) four basic features necessary for the successful formation of a group of teachers. Do you agree with these? If yes, why? If no, why not? Can you add more?
- Each teacher development group is composed of members with different roles. Discuss each of these roles and how they can be assigned to different member in a teacher study group.
- Why do you think it took five group meetings to really get going in the case study reported on in this chapter?
- Do you think that all teacher development groups will encounter the same two stages of development as resulted in the case study report: the getting to know you stage and the reflective stage?
- Time constraint is often given as the major problem when teachers want to meet in a group. Discuss how time should be addressed when forming a teacher development group.
- How can groups develop trust?

## Conclusion

When language teachers come together in a group they can foster more of a sharing attitude with each other and can help each other to articulate their thoughts about their work so that they can all grow professionally together. Teacher support groups provide a context where its members can reflect on and come to understand their beliefs and practices, and others' beliefs and practices so that they can develop into more aware and confident teachers. Teachers as well as other members of a school can come together in such groups in order to improve their teaching and their students' learning through collaboration in which they discuss diverse topics related to such issues as teacher self-development, curriculum, teaching methodology, and other aspects of a teacher's work. Teachers who join teacher development groups report that they develop a greater sense of professionalism because it allows them to live the process as learners that they wanted to create for their students.

## Chapter scenario

Three teachers of English language, Jerry, Mark, and Sophie, decided to come together as a group to explore strategies for teaching writing.

Most of the students in the school came from a non-English speaking home environment and had below average English language proficiency, especially in writing. After approaching the school principal, Rita, to ask for school support, Jerry, Mark, and Sophie decided they would go ahead with such a collaborative relationship with Sophie acting as a kind of coach to the other two: Sophie would help Jerry and Mark clarify certain issues regarding their teaching of writing in order to make their classes more effective. Rita was delighted that they had volunteered to enter into such a collaborative relationship, so she decided that she would help them both personally and administratively. First, Rita agreed that when Sophie was observing Jerry and Mark teach, she would teach their classes. Rita also made time for them in their teaching schedules so that they would be able to meet at least one time a week as a group to discuss their progress. All three teachers decided to gather information during the their sessions: they would keep a written journal of their experiences, Sophie would observe Jerry and Mark teaching at least two times each week, they would hold a discussion directly after each observation, and that they would write up their findings at the end of the collaborative relationship so that other teachers could find out what went on (this last point was influenced by Rita, the principal).

## Reflection

- What do you think about the way the school principal and the three teachers approached this idea of collaborating in a group?
- What do you about the way the school principal helped administratively?
- What do think about the activities they selected for the peer coaching?
- What do you think about how and when they wanted to carry out the activities they planned?
- How do you think Jerry, Mark, and Sophie each benefited as a result of entering into this group arrangement?
- List the various reasons why a group of language teachers would want to come together to talk about their teaching. Which of these purposes would be the easiest to pursue? Which would be the most time-consuming? Which would be the most likely to succeed giving the realities of a language teacher's busy schedule?

- What are the major factors to consider when forming a teacher development group like the one above? Rank these factors in order of importance.
- Thinking about your own particular context now, how would you form a teacher development group and who would you ask to join you in this group?
- What do you think is the best method of attracting members to a teacher development group? If you have had experience in a teacher development group, how were you and other members recruited?
- Setting up a teacher development group is not without its problems. Discuss some possible problems that could arise (e.g., when organizing the group, group size, conflict, rules, frequency of meeting, etc.).

# Classroom Observations

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## Introduction

Because classrooms are such busy places, with many different activities happening at the same time, much of what is really happening in that classroom for the most part actually remains largely unknown to the teacher. By systematically reflecting on their classroom teaching and their students' learning, language teachers can develop better awareness and understanding of not only their own instructional processes but also the different agendas that are being pursued by their students. Engaging in classroom observation for the purposes of professional development can help language teachers develop more of an awareness of the principles and decision-making that inspires their teaching so that they can distinguish between effective and

ineffective classroom practices (Day, 1990). This chapter outlines and discusses classroom observations that include self and peer observation for the purposes of professional development rather than evaluation so that teachers can become more confident in knowing that they are providing optimum opportunities for their students to learn in that classroom.

## Classroom observations

Research suggests that classroom observation for second language teachers can be unnerving for the observed teacher thus many practicing teachers would rather avoid being observed by a peer or supervisor. This is because many observations are conducted by peers or supervisors who evaluate teachers with the aid of checklists comprising of preconceived categories of what constitutes good or bad teaching. Williams (1989: 86) maintains when teachers are observed by peers or supervisors who use a checklist it can be “threatening, frightening, and regarded as an ordeal.” Consequently, Williams (1989: 87) suggests that if classroom observations take a developmental rather than an evaluative approach, the teacher “knows that the visit is not a test, but a mutual problem-solving experience” and can thus develop their critical thinking skills. In order for such developmental observations to succeed, Gebhard (1999: 35) has pointed out that they should entail: “Nonjudgmental description of classroom events that can be analyzed and given interpretation.” These descriptions can be verbal or written, depending on the purpose of the observation.

Self-observation is a systematic approach to “the observation, evaluation, and management of one’s own behavior” (Richards, 1990: 118) in order to have a better understanding of teaching and ultimately to gain better control over it. Richards (1990: 118) defines self-observation as a “teacher making a record of a lesson, either in the form of a written account or an audio or video recording of a lesson, and using the information obtained as a source of feedback on his or her teaching.” This type of self-observation can lead to critical reflection on teaching, to “move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking” (Richards, 1990: 119). When classroom observations are carried out with a peer, they can lead not only to more collegiality in a school but also more self-knowledge about the type of teaching strategies other teachers use. In addition to that,

Fanselow (1988: 116) has noted that when we observe other teachers, we can “construct, reconstruct, and revise our own teaching.” Research has thus far indicated that classroom observations have the following benefits:

- A way of developing self-awareness of one’s own teaching.
- A means of collecting information about teaching and classroom processes.
- A way of examining classroom events in details.
- A chance to see how other teachers teach.
- An opportunity to get feedback on one’s teaching.
- Observer sees how another teacher deals with many of the same problems that he or she faces on a daily basis.
- Can collect information about the lesson that the teacher who is teaching the lesson might not otherwise be able to gather.
- Observer sees the teacher using effective teaching strategies that the observer has never tried.
- A mean of building collegiality in a school.

## Case study I: “What Kind of Writing Teacher Am I?”

This case study outlines how one teacher of academic writing used classroom observations with a colleague to help her reflect on her practice (Farrell, 2006c). The teacher pointed out: “I want to have an observer’s perception and interpretation of these academic writing classes.” Three main issues emerged from the classroom observations as noted by the observer: *classroom interaction*, *peer-response feedback*, and *language medium* in her classes.

### Classroom interaction

One major issue to emerge from the class observations was the teacher’s interest in classroom interaction in her writing classes. The first class in this writing cycle (pre-writing) commenced with the teacher standing in front of the students (seated in rows) giving an introduction to the writing lesson. The teacher asked individual students questions in lockstep fashion (e.g., the teacher asked a question, and students answered in choral fashion [or not at all] and so on) until the end of the class. On reflection she noted that her

class could “involve more participation from the students rather than me doing the talking which became monotonous after a short while and there wasn’t any analysis of any kind of the results [of the class discussion].”

## Peer-response feedback

The teacher initiated the peer-response session during the fourth class of the writing cycle and started the class by asking the students to move into groups to answer questions on peer-response handouts. The students were asked to fill in these handouts to answer questions about their peer’s composition. The students sat in groups of four, read compositions, and then wrote at length on the handouts. Next they exchanged the peer-response handouts and talked to each other in Mandarin (and according to the teacher, not necessarily about their writing). The teacher noted after this class that one of her main concern was that the students seldom talked to each other (or the teacher) about their writing after the response sheets were returned.

## Language medium

The teacher said that she does not now require the students to speak in English at all times during the class. She said that she had adopted this stance only recently (the previous year) when she was reading one of her student’s journals about being forced to only speak English in class. She continued: “After reading one student’s journal who felt he was giving up his Chinese when learning English I had never demanded students to use English in their discussion.”

## Case study I reflection

- Look at the three main issues that emerged from the classroom observations in the case study outlined above: *classroom interaction*, *peer-response feedback*, and *language medium*. How do you treat all three areas in your writing classes?
- When asked in the post-observation interview about how she provided feedback to the students, she said that she provided feedback according to student expectations and also according to what point she wanted

to emphasize during a class. She commented: “I tend to focus more on content and organization. Previously, I tried to correct the errors when I read drafts. Based on feedback from previous students, they would like the teacher to correct their errors. So now I correct them as I spot them in the essays.” Do you think the observer should have challenged this view or not? Explain your answer.

- Although the teacher said that she takes a process approach to teaching writing, it was evident to the observer that she has made her own interpretations about how to apply this approach to writing and this came out in the post-observation discussions. She said that this involves getting the students “to understand the different stages a composition goes through from brainstorming to planning, drafting, peer-conferencing/peer-editing to an eventual final draft composition.” How do you think the observer facilitated the teacher to express her beliefs and reflect on her classroom practices regarding her teaching of writing?
- What other activities could or should the observer have done to facilitate the reflection process outlined above and why?
- What “ground rules” should be built into the relationship between the observer and the observed?

## Case study II: Wait-time

This case study outlines and discusses the reflections of four ESL teachers in a university language school related to their wait-time (from Farrell and Mon, unpublished manuscript). Four ESL teachers teaching in an EAP language program at a university volunteered to participate in the study as an opportunity for their professional development. There were two novice teachers (less than five years’ teaching experience) and two experienced teachers (more than five years of teaching experience). The pseudonyms Priscilla, Steve, Molly, and Gunther have been assigned to the four participating teachers in this case study. Priscilla, a female novice ESL teacher, and Steve, a male ESL teacher, both have four years’ teaching experience. The other two participants possessed more than five years of experience teaching in an ESL context. Molly, a female experienced ESL teacher had approximately eight years of teaching experience. While, Gunther, a male experienced ESL teacher had a little over six years of teaching experience. Four one-hour classroom observations



were also conducted. During the classroom observations, the observer sat at the back of the room, where she would not disrupt the students. A tape recorder was used to record the classes observed. The observer took notes to describe the teachers’ actions during the classes. The classroom observations formed the basis for discussion with each teacher after each observed class about what they did and why. All classroom observations were recorded and transcribed. The main focus of these observations in this case study was how long they waited for their students to answer after they asked a question or their wait-time.

Before being observed, all four teachers felt that an appropriately long teacher wait-time was important in order for students to process the question and formulate a response. The indicated average teacher wait-time length varied from teacher to teacher, but all agreed that it should be longer than 5 seconds with Pricilla thinking she waits 30 seconds, Steve between 5 and 15 seconds, Molly up to 60 seconds, and Gunter 5 or more seconds.

As Table 11.1 indicates Priscilla’s overall teacher wait-time average was approximately 1.23 seconds. Steve’s overall teacher wait-time average was approximately 1.58 seconds. Molly’s overall teacher wait-time average was approximately 0.64 seconds. Gunther’s overall teacher wait-time average was approximately 0.76 seconds. Although the teacher wait-time varied slightly from teacher to teacher, however, each teacher’s wait-time was approximately 1 second. Table 11.2 compares the teachers’ perceived wait-time or what they thought their wait-time was before they were observed teaching and their actual wait-time when observed teaching.

All teachers expressed the importance of teacher wait-time. For example, Molly stated, “If you’re working with some of the Asian cultures, it takes them a little bit longer to process and then to have the confidence to speak . . .

Table 11.1 Average Wait-time (sec)

	Priscilla Average Wait-time (sec)	Steve Average Wait-time (sec)	Molly Average Wait-time (sec)	Gunther Average Wait-time (sec)
<i>Observation 1</i>	1.11	1.61	1.04	0.4
<i>Observation 2</i>	1.56	1.70	0.22	1.06
<i>Observation 3</i>	1.13	1.39	0.25	1.17
<i>Observation 4</i>	1.11	1.60	1.04	0.4
<b>Overall average</b>	<b>1.23</b>	<b>1.58</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>0.76</b>

**Table 11.2** Comparison of Teachers' perceived Wait-Time and Observed Wait-time

	<b>Perceived Teacher Wait-time (sec)</b>	<b>Observed Teacher Avg Wait-time (sec)</b>
<b>Priscilla</b>	30	1.23
<b>Steve</b>	5-15	1.58
<b>Molly</b>	60	0.64
<b>Gunther</b>	5+	0.76

so I wait as long as it takes them to speak.” Similarly, Steve stated, “You definitely need to give students time to think about the answer.” Priscilla indicated, “If it’s a complex question, I will tell them they need to think long about this one before they answer.” Likewise, Gunther indicated, “The classes I’m teaching this term . . . my wait-time needs to be about 30 seconds.” From these follow-up interview statements, teachers are well aware that a long teacher wait-time is necessary for students to process the question and think when formulating an answer.

However, the results from Table 11.2 indicate a great disparity between the teachers’ perceptions about their teacher wait-time and their observed average wait-time. Although, there were instances where teachers exceeded the recommended teacher wait-time of 3–5 seconds, the average teacher wait-times for all teachers was approximately 1 second. This average teacher wait-time of 1 second is well below the recommended wait-time and is remarkably lower than wait-times indicated by the participants. It is also interesting to note that both novice teachers had the longest wait-times.

## Case study II reflection

- What is your understanding of teacher wait-time?
- What is your wait-time and how do you know?
- Why do you think there is divergence between the teachers’ beliefs regarding teacher wait-time and their observed teacher wait-time practices?
- Why do you think the novice teachers’ wait-time tended to be longer than the more experienced teachers?
- Do you think the length of teacher wait-time has any significant effect on student participation?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

Classroom observation can be carried out alone, as in self-monitoring, and/or in pairs (as in critical friendships) where teachers observe each other's class, and/or in small groups where teachers in a group take turns in observing each member's classes. The former is the most unobtrusive while the latter may be the most disruptive to the learning environment. Perhaps experienced teachers who have not observed their own or other teachers classes should consider starting with their own classroom observations by looking at their own teaching. For example, teachers may not realize the following kinds of things about their teaching (from Richards and Farrell, 2005):

- Their explanations are not always very clear.
- They sometimes over-explain or under-explain things.
- They talk too quickly at times.
- Many students do not pay attention while they are teaching.
- They tend to dominate their lessons.
- They tend to speak to some students more often than others (linked to the teacher's action zone—position where the teacher is standing).
- They have some irritating speech mannerisms such as over-frequent use of “Yes,” “Uh, Uh,” or “right.”

Consequently, self-monitoring can help teachers better understand their own instructional practices and make decisions about practices they wish to change.

Self-monitoring can be carried out through journal writing, self-reports, tally sheets, and/or recording (audio and video) lessons with or without coding schemes. Journal writing (see also Chapter 9) connected to classroom observations consists of written recollections of a lesson in as much detail as possible and as soon as possible after the lesson. Of course it would also be useful for the teacher to write before the lesson about what he or she wanted to achieve in that lesson and how he or she was going to go about teaching the lesson. Then immediately (if possible) after that lesson the teacher can reflect on what he or she thought the students learned and what the lesson accomplished. By later reviewing what was written, aspects of teaching that may not have been obvious during the class may become clearer to the

teacher. In addition to the teacher's written reflection, he or she can ask the students to reflect on a particular lesson by asking them to answer questions in the last five minutes of the class about that lesson such as:

- What do you think the lesson was about?
- What was easy for you?
- What was difficult?
- What activities were easy for you or that you liked? Explain.
- What activities were difficult or that you did not like? Explain.

Another method of gathering information for a teacher who is reflecting his or her lessons is by the use of self-reports. Self-reporting allows the teacher to make a regular assessment of what a teacher is doing in the classroom and this can be done quantitatively or qualitatively. Self-reporting using a quantitative approach involves completing a checklist of some sort in which the teacher marks which practices were used during the lesson and how often they were used. The accuracy of self-reports increase when teachers focus their reflections on the teaching of specific skills and when the self-report is constructed to reflect a wide range of teaching behaviors (Richards, 1990). The following topics may be suitable for focused classroom observations and self-reports:

- *Teacher's time management*: allotment of time for different activities during the lesson.
- *Students' performance on tasks*: their strategies, procedures, and interaction patterns.
- *Teacher's action zone*: the extent to which the teacher interacted with some students more frequently than others during a lesson.
- *Use of the textbook*: the extent to which a teacher used the textbook during a lesson and the types of departures made from it.
- *Pair work*: the way students completed a pair work task, the responses they made during the task, the type of language they used.
- *Group work*: students' use of L1 versus L2 during group work, students' time-on-task during group work, and the dynamics of group activities.
- *Classroom interaction*: the different types of seating arrangements that provide opportunities (or block opportunities) for more student participation and language development.
- *Lesson structure*: The nature and impact of the learning activities.
- *Classroom communication*: the communication patterns evident, including teachers' use of questioning, that either promote or block opportunities for learning.

When a teacher uses self-reports over a period of time, he or she can discover the kinds of activities he or she uses or favors, and the kinds of activities that worked well or did not work well.

Tally sheets, although they can be open to misinterpretation, they are easy to use to focus on specific elements, good for self-analysis by teacher, and useful for the observer to use while watching class. The following example of a tally sheet for describing group interaction was used by a teacher group I was working with in Asia, and it may be helpful to get teachers started in thinking about and ultimately making their own tally sheet that best meets their particular needs and the needs of their students. The tally sheet was used to monitor small group interaction within group work where a small number of students were working together and alone; in other words the teacher was not controlling the interaction and task completion in the group. This tally sheet helped the teacher determine how the group used its time when completing a required task. The teacher coded every 10 to 15 seconds to illustrate what the group is doing at that particular moment and then looked at the pattern that emerged over the task completion time.

Task	Frequency
Discussion in target language	_____
Discussion in native language	_____
On-task discussion: general group	_____
On-task discussion: one/two dominate	_____
Off-task discussion	_____
Group silence	_____

This same tally sheet can be adjusted to monitor the involvement and participation of individual students during group work when the teacher chooses one particular student (or observes different students within one group every few minutes) from one group and observes this student every 10 to 15 seconds and make an entry.

Teachers can also record their lesson via audio or video recordings in order to gain insights into their classrooms. A recorder (video and audio) can be placed in a strategic place in the classroom in order to capture as much as possible of what is occurring during the class. A microphone can be placed on the teacher’s desk, and/or on the teacher himself/herself. Teachers can also place several recorders around the room. Video recordings can later

be viewed alone or with other teachers. Certain things can be done to minimize the influence and possibility of disruption of the presence of an audio or video recorder on the lesson and on classroom interaction. For example, a teacher can make lesson recording a regular feature of his or her class, even if he or she does not plan to use all of the lessons that have been recorded. This way both the teacher and the students can become familiar with the presence of the cassette and/or video recorder so that it soon ceases to be a distraction and all might even forget that it is there. Then one of the recorded lessons can be chosen for study. Freeman (1989) further suggests that when teachers choose to audiotape or videotape their lessons they should make sure the equipment is working properly before class, make notes as an activity is being recorded (e.g., while students are doing a group task), use more than one recorder, particularly when doing group activities. When reviewing the lesson, Richards and Farrell (2005) suggest that the teacher needs to ask questions about his or her teaching that will depend on how the teacher views things such as:

- His or her role in the classroom and how he or she tries to relate to students.
- The kind of student-teacher and student-student interaction the teacher tries to encourage.
- The extent to which the teacher believes in such things as learner autonomy and learner centeredness.
- The extent to which the teacher favors a direct or a more indirect teaching style.

The teacher can then consider questions such as the following:

- What did I do well?
- What did I not do so well?
- Did I learn anything unexpected about my teaching?
- What kind of teaching characterized the lesson?
- Were there ample opportunities for learning and for student participation?
- How well did I do in relation to the following aspects of the lesson:
  - Pacing
  - Explanations
  - Questions
  - Feedback to students
  - Creating a positive and supportive atmosphere

In terms of collecting information from classroom observations, language teachers can also use pre-designed coding schemes such as Fanselow’s FOCUS—Foci for Observing Communications Under Settings (Fanselow, 1987) or SCORE, seating chart observation record (Acheson and Gall, 1987), or teachers can take an ethnographic approach (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). If teachers use a detailed coding scheme they code according to predetermined categories that are the focus of the observation and all categories hold equal importance for the teacher. In ethnographic observations data emerge only from the observations themselves. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages and it is probably best for teachers to use both approaches rather than just one. The case study reported in this chapter used a combination of both approaches and the teacher who was being observed said that she benefited most when the SCORE was used during classroom observations. For example, Figure 11.1a shows the SCORE analysis of the flow of communications during a fifteen-minute segment (teacher asked all twenty questions) of a first class that both observer and teacher deemed was representative for how she usually teaches academic writing; in this class it can be seen that the teacher asked most of the questions and the students responded with choral or group answers.

After the class the teacher (who also examined the SCORE segment) noted that the type of interaction that had just occurred was not what she had intended, because she said that she believes that students should interact more with each other during the pre-writing stage in order to generate their own topics for writing. So the teacher later implemented these ideas the next time she started a pre-writing cycle (the seventh classroom observation in

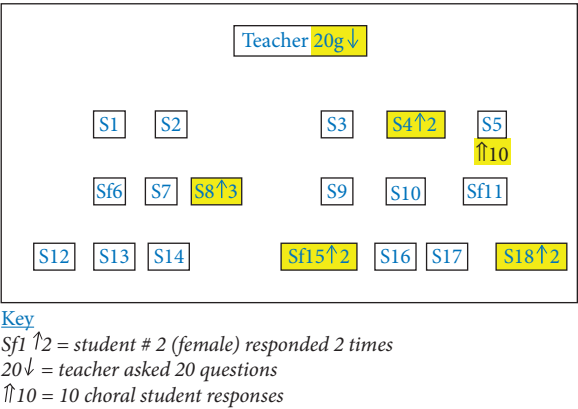
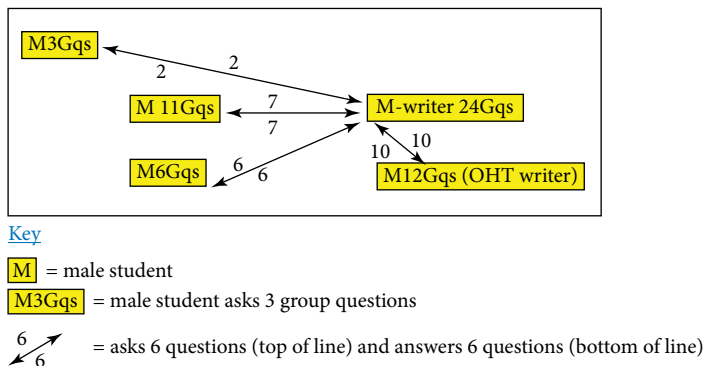


Figure 11.1a SCORE analysis for interactions in Class 1.

our process) within her approach to teach writing. She set up these discussion groups of students so that they could generate topics for writing and as a result, the classroom interaction between the students increased dramatically. The teacher realized this change in the classroom interaction: “As the observer observed the groups working, one group at the back of the class had a lot of interaction and oral discussion and was using English.” Figure 11.1b shows the SCORE analysis of the communication flow in this particular group.

Often when a teacher monitors his or her own teaching, the information obtained is private and not necessarily shared with others. However, there may also be times when the information collected through self-monitoring is usefully shared with another teacher as in a critical friendship or with a group of teachers. A teaching critical friendship means engaging with another teacher in a way which encourages talking with, questioning, even confronting, the trusted other, in order to examine planning for teaching, implementation, and its evaluation” (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 41). Peer observations within a critical friendship then is a great opportunity for teachers to develop a critically reflective stance to their own teaching. This is very important for practicing teachers for as Gaies (1991:14) has pointed out, “What we see, when we observe teachers and learners in action, is not the mechanical application of methods and techniques, but rather a reflection of how teachers have interpreted these things.”

In order to carry out peer observations Richards and Lockhart (1994) maintain that when peers get together to observe their classes taking turns at teaching and observing, they should incorporate pre-observation, during and post-observation discussions. Before each observation, the teachers meet to discuss the aim of the observation and to assign the observer a goal



**Figure 11.1b** SCORE analysis of Class 7.



for the observation and a task to accomplish. The teachers also agree on observation procedures or instruments (quantitative, qualitative, or both) to be used during this session and arrange a schedule for the observations. During the observation, the observer then visits the teacher's class and completes the observation using the procedures that both partners had agreed on and in the post-observation discussion, the observer reports on the information that he or she collected.

In the case study reported in this chapter, the teacher initiated the process and decided during the pre-observation orientation session that the observer should observe one cycle within her process approach to teaching writing. This cycle amounted to observations of seven of her classes (each class lasted two hours): the first three pre-writing activity classes, the fourth peer-response class, the fifth class, which was for writing and typing the first draft of the essay, and the sixth class, which was for revising the first draft. The seventh class was the first class of a new cycle. For this last observation she asked the observer to "observe any changes you see from the first cycle." She did not ask the observer how or what to observe in any of the other classes. Thus, no specification of the role of the observer was ever made explicit. The pattern that developed was that the observer would document his observations within each phase of the cycle and only share these observations at the end of the observation cycle. Although the teacher and the observer met after each teaching session, they did not have detailed discussions about these sessions and only talked generally about the lessons. The teacher wanted to have detailed discussions after the cycle of observations were completed.

## Reflection

- What feelings do you have associated with classroom observations?
- Do you feel happy that you will get feedback or worried that someone will evaluate you?
- What benefits would you outline for the teachers who want to experience classroom observations in their classes? What problems would you caution them against when carrying out such an exercise?
- Have you ever recorded (audio or video) your classroom teaching? If yes, what was your feeling? Did you find listening to (and looking at yourself) your own voice strange? What other things did you notice?

- The purpose of a recording is to identify aspects of one's teaching that can only be identified through real-time recording. Discuss what aspects of a lesson can only be identified by an audio recording. Which aspects of a lesson can only be identified by a video recording?
- Have you ever been observed by others (apart from your students) while you were teaching? Who observed you and why? Describe your experiences of being observed.
- Was your experience positive or negative? If positive, what made this classroom observation experience positive? If negative, what made this classroom observation negative?
- What can a teacher learn from observing another teacher teach a language class?
- Ask a colleague to join you for classroom observations. Decide on what aspects of your teaching you would like to look at and/or discuss. Ask the friend to observe you teach and document what he/she saw. You decide what aspects of the post-observation discussion you would like to focus on. For example, you can use an adapted set of Wallace and Woolger (1991: 322) questions to answer at the end of the observations:
  - Establish the facts—what did the teacher do and what did the students do?
  - What was achieved? What did the students learn?
  - Seeking alternatives—what else could have been done?
  - Self-evaluation—what have you learned?

## Conclusion

The goal of reflecting on our practice through the use of classroom observations is to become more aware of our teaching. It can also be used within peer coaching to gauge the impact of the implementation of any new practices. This becomes important for experienced language teachers because Day (1998: 268) has pointed out that most have “already found their own personal solution to perceived problems” and do not need or want to be told what to do. However, classroom observation, either self-monitoring or with peers and groups, can help language teachers become more aware of what they do in the classroom and why they do it so that they can decide if they want to continue with such practices in the light of this new awareness. When classroom observations are handled in a nonjudgmental

manner where development is the goal, then they can become something teachers look forward to and which they see as time well spent rather than something to be dreaded and avoided. As Watson-Gegeo (1988: 588) says: “By increasing their observational skills, teachers can gain new awareness of classroom organization, teaching and learning strategies, and interactional patterns in their own classrooms.”

## Chapter scenario

Yoko, Hitomi, and Sachiko, three female Japanese EFL teachers in different institutions in Japan, decided to meet regularly to discuss their teaching after they attended a talk on teacher development at an international language learning and teaching conference in Japan. They were especially interested in videotaping their English language classes and then watching these videotapes together in order to discuss what they observed. As they were all teaching in the Tokyo area, and within two or three subway stops, they decided that they could observe each other teach for one whole semester. However, they had a few issues to discuss before the peer observations and videotaping could take place. These were:

- 1 Who would tape the classes? Answer: Hitomi.
- 2 Can the observers talk to the students? Answer: No.
- 3 Who would act as facilitator for the discussions after the viewing? Answer: Yoko, because she has the most experience teaching English (5 years); Hitomi has 3 years teaching experience and Yoko has two years teaching experience.
- 4 Who would set the agenda for the discussions? Answer: They decided that each teacher would set the agenda when they were viewing their particular videotape of the lesson.
- 5 How many lessons would they observe and tape? Answer: three for each teacher during the twelve-week semester. They also decided not to discuss each class until they had finished all three rounds of observations for all three teachers.
- 6 What aspects of their teaching would they focus on for discussions? Answer: As this was their first time to observe each other teach and for them to be videotaped, and that it was unusual for teachers in Japan to share their teaching and classrooms, they decided to look at general

aspects of their teaching and to look for patterns in their teaching and that of the other teachers. If they discovered anything else, they could focus on that later.

After their initial nervousness of being taped, especially for Yoko as she was the most inexperienced teacher—“The taping made me nervous. I felt I was performing for the camera”—each teacher settled down to teach their classes as they would normally do and went through the three rounds of classroom observations and videotaping smoothly. They then met to discuss the tapes and decided to devote separate meetings to discuss each set of videotapes of one teacher’s class. They learned many things about their teaching as a result of the videotapes and the group discussions about their lessons.

## Reflection

- What do you think of the three teachers’ usage of observations?
- Look at each of the issues outlined above and discuss each issue in terms of agreement or disagreement about the outcome. Try to think of other issues a similar group may need to consider when observing, reviewing videotapes of classes, and interpreting these tapes.
- Outline how each of these three teachers could develop research projects as a result of their initial findings as members of this teacher support group.
- How can classroom observations such as the ones above promote collegiality?
- How can institutions support and reward teachers who wish to carry out classroom observation on a regular basis?



## Collegial Friendships

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## Introduction

The previous chapter on observation briefly addressed the idea of language teachers entering into critical friendships as a means of reflecting on their teaching. This may especially be important for teachers who have undergone such self-monitoring (Chapter 11) of their classes and self-reflection (Chapter 2) in general it may be difficult to confront the self without such support. This support can come from other colleagues in the arrangement

of having another teacher act as a critical friend (Stenhouse 1975), team teaching and/or peer coaching whereby both collaborate in the exploration of teaching and learning language. This chapter discusses the process whereby language teachers can come together in collegial friendships, team teaching and peer coaching in order to reflect on their work.

## Collegial friendships

Critical friendship is a term first discussed some time ago by Stenhouse (1975) when he recommended that another person could work with a teacher and give advice as a friend rather than a consultant in order to develop the reflective abilities of the teacher who is conducting his or her own reflections. Teacher critical friendships entail entering into a collaborative arrangement with another teacher “in a way which encourages talking with, questioning, and even confronting, the trusted other, in order to examine planning for teaching, implementation, and its evaluation” (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 41). Such critical friends can give voice to a teacher’s thinking like looking into a mirror, while at the same time being heard in a sympathetic but constructively critical way. In addition, Farrell (2001b) reminds teachers that the word “critical” in such a collaborative friendship arrangement does not, and should not connote any negativity, as the word tends to do in everyday conversation. Research has indicated that critical friendships:

- Reduces the sense of isolation teachers may feel.
- Promotes collegiality.
- Promotes shared observation and associated benefits.
- Take time to evolve.
- Trust must be negotiated and earned between the teachers involved.

Team teaching is a type of critical friendship arrangement whereby two or more teachers cooperate as equals as they take responsibility for planning, teaching and evaluating a class a series of classes or a whole course (Richards and Farrell, 2005). Stewart, Sagliano, and Sagliano (2002) discovered that successfully implementing a team teaching arrangement in an English-medium four-year university in Japan where partners were equals demands a lot of time, patience, and honest reflection by the teachers and administrators. In addition, Sturman (1992) noted positive outcomes of a team teaching arrangement in Japan where native and non-native teachers teamed up to teach English. Although the Japanese teachers had initially expressed low

expectations about the whole idea of team teaching, as the project progressed beyond the pilot scheme, they began to feel more positive about their experiences. The native speaker teachers also had positive impressions of the team teaching experience beyond the pilot scheme as they felt that everyone gained from the experience. In addition, the students believed that their English was improving and that they had enjoyed this way of team teaching. Overall, research suggests that team teaching arrangements can have the following benefits for both teachers and institutions in which they occur:

- It provides opportunities for teachers to discuss their teaching.
- It promotes recognition and appreciation of alternative methods and techniques of teaching and evaluating lessons.
- It provides a ready-made classroom observation situation but without any evaluative component.
- It provides an effective means of teacher development.
- It provides more opportunities for individual student interaction with a teacher because there is more than one teacher in the room.

Although similar in many ways, peer coaching (another form of critical friendship) is actually different than team teaching because its main aim is for one teacher to help another improve his or her teaching. In a peer coaching arrangement there is no evaluation, no supervising, just a professional collaboration in which one teacher wants another peer to observe his/her class in order to obtain feedback on one specific aspect of teaching or learning. It focuses specifically on the process of teaching and on how two teachers can collaborate to help one or both teachers improve some aspect of their teaching. Peer coaching has the following characteristics: two teachers decide on a collaborative relationship; the two plan a series of opportunities to explore teaching collaboratively; one adopts the role of coach or “critical friend”; they undertake a joint project or activity that involves collaborative learning; and the coach provides feedback and suggestions (Richards and Farrell, 2005). Research has indicated that peer coaching benefits language teachers because:

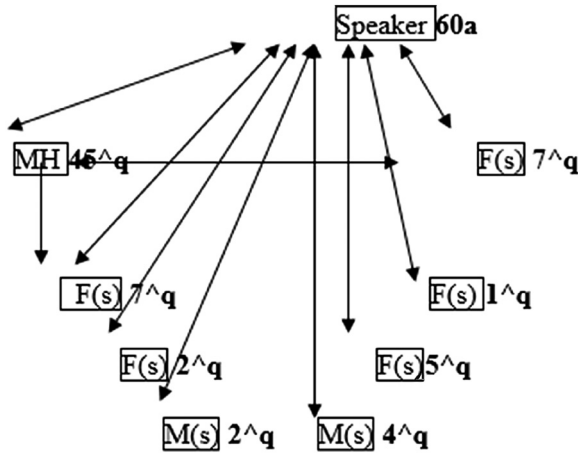
- It provides opportunities for teachers to look at teaching problems and to develop possible solutions.
- It is a useful way of helping beginning teachers learn from more experienced colleagues.
- It provides a supportive context in which teachers can try out new teaching strategies or methods.
- It helps develop collegiality between teachers.



## Case study I: Non-native speaker teacher and native speaker critical friend

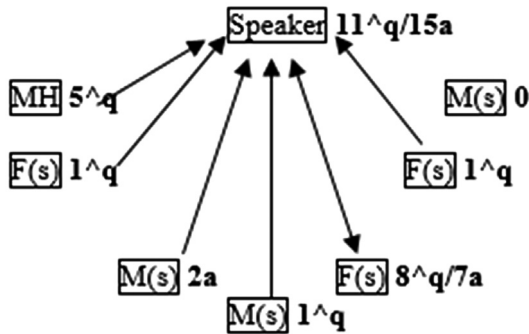
The first case study presented in this chapter presents the outcome of a critical friendship where the teacher, Mee-Hee (a pseudonym), a female Korean EFL teacher wanted to reflect on her work with a critical friend (Farrell, 1999b). Mee-Hee was observed for six classes during the semester, which were audio-recorded. Mee-Hee also wrote a teaching journal in order to help her further reflect on her teaching. After her first class, Mee-Hee said that she was a little uncomfortable with her actual teaching methods and this was why she wanted a critical friend to observe her teach: “I try to change my teaching method but I can’t. I follow the text habitually . . . I always do that way because I learned such a way from my professor.” In reaction and after talking about this with her critical friend, Mee-Hee decided not to prescribe a book for her speech class; instead, she said she would bring in her own materials. The second class had a student standing at a podium reading a prepared speech for thirty-five minutes and after Mee-Hee asked all the questions until the end of class. After this class, Mee-Hee said that her lesson objective had been for the students to make a ten-minute speech followed by question and answer period by the other students. When her critical friend shared his observation notes, Mee-Hee commented that her class may need some change: “I need to establish rules for the discussion and speech. Before class the speaker should give a handout of vocabulary list to the students and have time to go over the words.” She also said that she would like to know the times in the class when she asked questions and gave instructions. Both decided to use a modified version of a SCORE (Seating Chart Observation Record) chart (see Chapter 11) because Mee-Hee was familiar with this instrument. Figure 12.1a outlines the SCORE analysis after Mee-Hee’s third class.

The SCORE shows a lot of back-and-forth flow of communication between the speaker and the students (after the speech) in the form of questions and answers. Mee-Hee was surprised to find out from this SCORE analysis that she had asked forty-five questions during the class as she said she had thought that she was “a silent participant as a listener in my classes.” She continued, “Until now I had no realization about my questioning pattern.” She decided to change these patterns. The SCORE analysis of Mee-Hee’s fourth class is shown in Figure 12.1b below.



**Figure 12.1a** SCORE Analysis of Mee-Hee's third class.

(Note F(s) = female student; M(s) = male student; MH = Mee-Hee (the teacher); ^q = ask; a = answer question. The long arrows show the directional flow of the questions and answers).



**Figure 12.1b** SCORE Analysis of Mee-Hee's fourth class.

(Note F(s) = female student; M(s) = male student; MH = Mee-Hee (the teacher); ^q = ask; a = answer question. The long arrows show the directional flow of the questions and answers).

This SCORE analysis shows a dramatic change in the communication pattern. The critical friend's observation notes showed that at the beginning of the class when the speaker and the other students realized that Mee-Hee was going to stay silent they got on with the class themselves and the discussion after the presentation even included a sustained competitive discussion between one female student (on the right of the SCORE analysis figure) and the speaker.

## Case study I reflection

- Discuss what you think of the critical friendship process as outlined in the case study above.
- What was the role of the critical friend in this case study?
- Why do you think Mee-Hee was able to look at her classroom practice more critically and move beyond descriptions of what she was doing?
- How do you gauge how many questions you ask in class?
- Mee-Hee says that she wants to personalize topics to Korean culture. What do you think about personalizing topics that are in the textbook?

## Case study II: Native speaker teacher and native speaker critical friend

The second case study presented in this chapter concerns another example of a critical friendship which lasted over a period of sixteen weeks. An Australian EFL teacher in Korea and a native speaker critical friend (this author) came together, to consider the professional development of both participants. This example will focus only on the reflections of the EFL teacher in the critical friendship dyad and report the results. The initial goal of the critical friendship was to talk about teaching in general and the teacher's teaching a set of specific classes in a private company in particular and all at the teacher's request. The teacher also kept a teaching journal and wrote whenever he wanted to. The teacher, Greg, was teaching an English conversation class, which was part of a private company's ongoing education program. The objective of the course was to increase the students' (who were all company employees) English conversational ability.

Greg invited the critical friend to visit his classes and observe with the use of a video camera (both negotiated this and agreed it would be good for the reflection process. No specific role was discussed for the critical friend except to manage the observation process of his teaching and to try to stimulate discussion of the teacher's teaching after observed classes. The discussions after each observed lesson usually started with the teacher evaluating his lesson either positively or negatively. He then tried to

interpret the students' interactions and/or problems he perceived that they had encountered. For example, in one meeting, he started with a negative evaluation of his lesson. He said that he was disappointed with the class. He continued:

I must work harder on the lead in to my introduction, but still I am unsatisfied, I had wanted them to talk more. I was not happy with Y.S., speaking a lot of Korean. A good lesson for me is when students are talking together; today they were not talking, so it was not a good lesson.

On one later occasion he asked the critical friend for suggestions on how to check what his students' had learned in each class. The critical friend suggested he use a short questionnaire that he had used in his own classes that asked four short questions as follows:

- 1 What do you think you learned today?
- 2 What was easy for you?
- 3 What was difficult for you and why?
- 4 What did you enjoy?

He decided to use the questionnaire at the end of his following class near the end of the reflection process. In his teaching journal he wrote that the students gave less than flattering answers: "Two [out of a class of seven] did not understand the first question, and one answered he did not enjoy anything, and said nothing was interesting." Even though this he was surprised with these answers, the process of asking his students for their perceptions caused him to reflect on his teaching in general; "I haven't looked at my teaching. I haven't been looking at my class and my teaching closely, only vague and theoretical." As a result in the final discussion he said he would try to change: "I am trying to develop a new teaching method because I don't want to continue the same old way. I have to work harder."

## Case study II reflection

- Discuss what you think of the critical friendship process as outlined in the case study above.
- What was the role of the critical friend in case study II?
- The teacher in case study II above said that he would follow his lesson plan even if the class was not going well. What is your opinion of this?

- The teacher also said that he judges the success of the class with how the students react. What is your opinion of this?
- What is your opinion of the short questionnaire that the critical friend gave to Greg?
- How do you judge if your teaching is successful?

## Case study III: Group critical friends

This case study the experiences of three female novice ESL teachers during their first semester teaching in a university language school in Canada. I present a summary of their first experiences (Farrell, 2014—see also Chapter 9 for other details on this group). The teachers, all very experienced ESL teachers with advanced degrees, met over a two-year period with weekly group meetings during the academic terms of the first year and follow-up meetings during the second year in order to reflect on their practice. I report here on their realization on the importance of critical friendships while teaching ESL.

During the group discussions one teacher said that she realized that teaching is an isolated act and that teachers are isolated within their classrooms when she remarked that, “So often you are out on your island ‘Oh my God! Here I am by myself. Am I the only one having this issue?’” She then noted that she always knows that she can talk to another colleague about any issue and that her colleagues do not judge her. Another example was when another teacher talked about working with an ESL teacher in the same institution (but outside this teacher group) about her struggles teaching the same level class so that they could help each other. As a result of this collaboration, the teacher said that she realized that she now viewed this other teacher “in a whole new role” as a “critical friend.” She added that she was happy that her colleague took on a mentor role for her because she had not had any experience teaching at that particular level before, but the colleague had. The teacher continued: “She clicked into almost a mentor mode because she had taught speaking so much more than I have recently and then she came up with these [teaching] ideas.”

This critical friendship made her realize the value of colleagues collaborating; she continued: “It just started to hit me that as we were talking that we could do more together than this; that’s what you need between colleagues to get this kind of thing going.” As a result she said that she tried

to meet other colleagues to discuss her teaching: “I’m meeting with other teachers and we’re talking about our teaching. We’re trying to become better teachers. I like to share what I learn with them.” The other teacher in the group of three also reflected on the value of collaborating with other colleagues and how she found these collaborations “reassuring” for her. She added: “It was nice to see that people have some sort of common characteristics and you have to understand how each is working together as a staff.” Thus all three teachers were collaborating with their colleagues in critical friendships so that they could reduce their feelings of isolation.

## Case study III reflection

- Discuss what you think of the critical friendship process in groups as outlined in the case study above.
- Why do you think teaching can be an isolated act?
- How can reflecting with a critical friend reassure your practice?
- Have you ever “clicked” with a colleague?
- If yes, did it lead to a critical friendship for both of you?
- If no, are you willing to seek out a colleague as a critical friend?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

### Critical friends

Critical friends are teachers who collaborate in a two-way mode that encourages discussion and reflection in order to improve the quality of language teaching and learning. This collaboration incorporates Schrange’s (1990: 40) depiction of collaboration as “the process of shared creation” wherein “two or more individuals with complementary skills [interact] to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own.” This type of collaboration requires teachers to embark on reflection; however, not all teachers are ready to reflect (Moon and Boullon 1997). Therefore, the readiness of the teacher should be considered before the process begins. Since critical friendship means self-disclosure and

some process of change, the person who is reflecting should be in a good personal psychological state in order to be able to confront any inconsistencies that may occur. It should be understood that reflection can cause doubt, and that for this reason some people may not want to face any further uncertainties at this stage of their life.

That said, it may also be necessary within the friendship when trust has been established that the friend not be afraid of challenging the teacher if he or she observes instances where the teacher could be challenged. As Hatton and Smith (1995) suggest this challenging by the critical friend may be very necessary for a deeper examination and evaluation of teaching. In case study II outlined in this chapter the teacher said that he judged successful teaching on his students' reactions (or lack of reactions) and when they exhibited any signs of boredom (such as yawning or glazed eyes) he evaluated these signs of distress or noninvolvement as his inability to entertain the students; he commented:

It is a reflection on you if they are not involved. I must entertain them. If they are not involved, it is a reflection on you as you are not popular and we must get more people to come. I am interested in attention getting; there is no learning if there is no interest. Entertainment is a performance, not like music, like theater. I must get more interesting topics.

When challenged by the critical friend that he may want to consider changing his lesson plan, Greg was not convinced as he said he would "stick to the lesson plan even if it wasn't going well." In a later discussion he said that he was still concerned with his students' silence and he became very sensitive to their reactions in his class. The critical friend challenged him again to not look at each specific reaction and Greg agreed that "Maybe I am too sensitive but a slight indication of tiredness, yawning or eyes not focused or not looking at the book is a sign of distress" for him. He said he would work at reconciling this. When challenged about his theories of teaching, he said that he was somewhat confused. He continued:

I do not really know what I am doing. I do not plan in advance; it is not that I am not organized; it is a problem of knowledge about teaching. Sometimes I am grasping at straws. I want to fill up the time. Now I want to get down to work and leave theory behind. It is necessary to go further in ESL, but I do not know how.

As it turned out, he started a Master's degree in education around the same time and possibly as a way to look deeper into his teaching. Even though the

critical friendship did not produce any observable change in the teacher's teaching behaviors, it was, nevertheless, successful in providing him with a forum to begin probing his teaching theories and beliefs; he seemed comfortable when talking with me after his class, although these discussions were general in nature. In his journal he wrote: "Conversation with the critical friend after class was a meeting of the minds. We were on the same wavelength and it was possible to say what I thought and I felt good after it." Similarly, in case study I outlined in this chapter Mee-Hee's reflections six months after her experiences with the critical friend were mostly positive. Although she said it was difficult for her to look at her own teaching, she nevertheless said that she is now "a more empowered teacher." As Francis (1995) says, "Critical friends can stimulate, clarify, and extend thinking . . . and feel accountable for their own growth and their peers" (p. 234).

## Team teaching

In language teaching critical friendships can be formed as a stand-alone general reflective arrangement outlined above, or in a more focused team teaching or peer coaching arrangement. Teachers who come together to team-teach a course (or a lesson) must first consider what roles each will play within the team so that they can collaborate successfully. Richards and Farrell (2005) outline some of the following team teaching arrangements that teams can choose from depending on what best meets their needs:

- *Equal partners*: both teachers see themselves as having an equal experiences and knowledge and so all decisions are shared equally for all stages of the lesson: planning, delivery, monitoring, and checking.
- *Leader and participant*: one teacher is given or assumes a leadership role because he or she has more experience with team teaching.
- *Mentor and apprentice*: one teacher is recognized as an expert teacher (and thus take more responsibility) while the other is a novice.
- *Native/Advanced speaker and less proficient speaker*: in some situations (such as in Japan's JET program and Korea's KET program) a native English language speaker or an advanced speaker of English may team-teach with a less proficient speaker. In some cases the native/advanced speaker takes responsibility for those aspects of the lesson that are more linguistically demanding but in many cases the lesson takes place in the less proficient speaker's class so he or she must take responsibility for setting up the lesson.



Next, teams should realize that team teaching is just that, a team, not two individuals, approach to planning the lessons, deciding and preparing the activities, delivering the lessons, and evaluating the effectiveness of the lessons. Both members of the team should take equal responsibility for every stage of the teaching process and trust each other throughout. Of course, team teaching must also allow for teachers who have differing personalities, teaching styles and even planning styles. In order to accommodate such differences, Struman (1992: 169) suggests that the team consider “The principle of flexible equality” whereby teachers with different personalities acknowledge these differences and not to try to avoid or bury them. Instead, the teachers can define their roles and responsibilities that are most suitable for their own individual needs and situations. Teachers in a team teaching arrangement must then decide more specific day-to-day actions that take into account such logistical issues as who will begin each class and who will finish the class if they decide both will teach each class. Alternatively, the team can decide that one teacher will teach (and possibly plan) one complete class. If this is the case, then the team must decide what (and where the other teacher will sit or stand and if the teacher will join in or not) the other teacher’s role will be. One useful exercise here would be for the team to ask the students in each class what they would prefer in such arrangements because they are supposed to be the ultimate beneficiaries of a team teaching arrangement. The best of all worlds here would be a combination of all the has been discussed above at least for the first few classes so that both the team and the students can decide which arrangement best suits teaching and learning needs.

If team teaching is adopted by the administration of a school, as is sometimes the case, Richards and Farrell (2005) suggest that it is very important that each team knows what the overall aim of the team teaching program because team teaching may not be for everybody. It is important then for the administration to inform their teachers about certain aspects of team teaching such as:

- If it is voluntary.
- If one gets to choose who to teach with or not.
- How much time it will take.
- The amount of extra work it will involve.
- How conflict between teachers in a team will be resolved.
- How the students will be briefed about the team teaching process.
- How the teams will be evaluated.

Stewart, Sagliano, and Sagliano (2002) outline an interesting institutionally arranged team teaching situation in which prior to each term the teachers choose partners by making a ranked selection of desired co-teachers. Administrators then set the teams by matching first and second choices. Each teaching pair negotiates their own procedures for developing and teaching a course. Then as equal partners, co-teachers jointly create materials, teach simultaneously in the classroom, and determine grades. The authors concluded that successful implementation of team teaching demands time, patience, honest reflection, by both teachers and the administration.

## Peer coaching

A peer coaching arrangement takes place so that the observed teacher can develop new knowledge and skills and a deeper awareness of his/her own teaching. To make the peer coaching work successfully, each participant must recognize that he or she has a specific role to follow in the peer coaching relationship. For example, the peer coach can help their less experienced teachers in the following general ways (adapted from Bova and Phillips, 1981):

- To encourage less experienced teachers in setting and attaining short- and long-term goals.
- To teach less experienced teachers the skills necessary to survive and promote career-scope professional development.
- To protect less experienced teachers by limiting their exposure to responsibility.
- To provide opportunities for less experienced teachers to observe and participate in their work.
- To act as role models.

In addition, Gottesman (2000: 37) suggests the following roles for the teacher in a peer coaching relationship:

- Be committed to peer coaching to analyze and improve instruction.
- Be willing to develop and use a common language of collaboration in order to discuss the total teaching act without praise or blame.
- To request to enter into a peer coaching relationship (e.g., by requesting a classroom observation visit and to observe as a coach if so asked).

- Be open-minded and willing to look for better ways of conducting classroom business.
- Act as a colleague and as a professional.

Classroom observations can be phased-into peer coaching in a typical developmental classroom observation four-step sequence of pre-observation discussion, actual classroom visit, post-visit discussion, and general review of the process. The teacher can take the first step in a peer coaching situation by requesting a visit from a more experienced or knowledgeable peer to come to his/her class for a limited period of time. At this pre-observation stage both the teacher and the peer coach should attempt to establish common ground rules about the process during this phase so that there is no misunderstanding. For example, the teacher and the coach should make sure what kind of feedback will be given to the teacher after the classroom visit. The teacher then teaches a class where a peer coach is also present but does not get involved in any way. The classroom visit may be audio-recorded and/or video-recorded depending on the issue of investigation and a lesson transcript may also be prepared for later discussions if both teacher and coach think it useful for their purposes. The two teachers later meet and discuss what was written and what was achieved. This discussion initially focuses on the information that the coach collected as was agreed to in the pre-observation meeting. After, the information has been shared the teacher can ask the peer coach to make specific suggestions for further development of the issue under scrutiny and they can enter into another cycle of observation after this to see if the new suggestions have had an impact on the teacher's teaching. Teacher and coach can then review the whole process especially if they want to switch roles—the teacher becomes the coach for his/her fellow teacher.

## Reflection

- Have you ever experienced a critical friendship relationship? If yes, describe your experiences.
- What is your understanding of the term “critical” in critical friendship relationships?
- When teachers meet as critical friends, they should focus on the more on the friend and less on the critical. Discuss this approach to critical friendship.

- Have you ever experienced a team teaching relationship? If yes, describe your experiences.
- How was the relationship set up, and what were the different roles played by each team member?
- Do you think it is possible for two teachers to take equal responsibility for planning and teaching a class? If not, why not?
- How can the students benefit from having two teachers teach the same lesson?
- Both teachers in a team teaching relationship have certain roles to play. Discuss these different roles and outline possible problems that may arise within each role.
- How can peer coaching benefit the teacher, the coach and the school?
- Richards and Farrell (2005) suggest that feedback in a peer coaching relationship should take the form of “No Praise, No Blame.” What is your understanding of this?
- The peer coach has a specific role to play in a peer coaching relationship. Discuss this role and outline possible problems that may arise between the teacher and the coach.

## Conclusion

This chapter outlined three different arrangements in which language teachers can collaborate to reflect on their teaching. The three collaborative arrangements are critical friendships, team teaching and peer coaching. The main idea of entering a critical friendship is that two (or more) teachers can gain from having a trusted other comment on their teaching in a non-judgmental manner. The main purposes of peer coaching is to support a teacher's existing strengths rather than to evaluate him/her. Peer coaching can help inexperienced teachers learn from more experienced colleagues in a supportive environment so that they try out new teaching methods and get feedback. In a team teaching arrangement usually two teachers equally share the responsibility for teaching and evaluating a class so that each teacher can learn more about the strengths and expertise of their colleague. All three collaborative arrangements follow Robbins' (1991: 1) ideas of colleagues working together “to reflect on current practices, expand, refine, and build new skills, share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace.”

## Chapter scenario

Anna and Carmen are both American teachers teaching in a private institute in Taiwan. They each teach four classes but team-teach one of them. For that class, they plan the class together. They divide up the activities in each unit of their textbook deciding who will teach which exercises and which exercises they will present together. They plan each of their lessons to determine their roles within the lesson. They are both present for every lesson and share the teaching time. They both enjoy their team-taught lessons and feel that both they and their learners benefit from them. The following example shows how Anna and Carmen planned an intermediate level reading class:

### Lesson Objectives:

- To teach the students to skim to find the main idea of a passage.

### Prior Knowledge:

- Students have learned how to locate information by reading and finding the main sentence of each paragraph. This lesson is to practice increasing their reading speed within scanning and skimming for information.

### Materials:

- Reading materials—a passage from their textbook on sports plus supplementary materials.
- Overhead projector.

### Lesson Plan:

- **Stage I:** Opening (5 to 10 minutes): Introduction to the topic sport. Anna activates students' background knowledge on sports and asks students to suggest as many different kinds of sport within 3 minutes. Anna asks students to rank their favorite sports in order of importance. As the students call out their answers Carmen writes them on the board.

- **Stage II:** Anna distributes handouts on sports schedule from the newspaper and worksheet. Carmen asks the students to read it quickly and answer the true/false questions about it within 3 minutes. Carmen goes over the answers. At this stage of the lesson Carmen wants to focus on the concept of skimming for general gist with authentic materials.
- **Stage III:** Carmen discusses skimming to get the general meaning or gist of a passage. Anna asks students to turn to a text on sports in the textbook. Anna asks the students to read and answer the true/false questions within 5–7 minutes. Anna asks students for answers and writes them on the board.
- **Stage IV:** Closing: Carmen summarizes the importance of reading a passage quickly first in order to get the gist. Carmen gives homework of reading the next day's Newspaper front-page story and writing down in four sentences the gist of the story.
- **Follow-up:** Carmen and Anna meet briefly after class in order to evaluate the lesson they just taught.

## Post-Lesson Discussion

- Carmen and Anna discussed their lesson in the staff room immediately after class. They decided to look at what they thought went well and what they were unsure about. Both were pleased at the way the students were able to follow their instructions and directions. Anna, however felt that Carmen's instructions for the skimming phase of the lesson were a bit fast, as some of the students near her did not do what was required of them until they asked Anna for clarification. Carmen had not realized this. They also realized that the changeover from Carmen to Anna to use the text in stage III did not go smoothly. So they decided to make two changes for the next team teaching session: (1) to back up oral instructions with written instructions on the whiteboard in future so there would be fewer misunderstandings and (2) to decide on one of them to take responsibility for each stage with the other teacher acting as a resource person like distributing handouts, or writing answers on the board (as happened in stage II). This way, they hoped the students would not become confused about who was teaching them and who to answer when asked questions. Overall, though, they were very pleased with the way the lesson went and looked forward to the next session.

## Reflection

- What do you think about this team teaching arrangement?
- Think up a different possible post lesson discussion between Anna and Carmen.
- Try to experience a similar critical friendship and/or a team teaching arrangement and/or a peer coaching arrangement with colleagues in your school or district.
- How can a school/institution best support a critical friendship arrangement in a school?
- How can a school/institution best support a peer coaching arrangement and/or program in a school?
- How can a school/institution best support a team teaching arrangement and/or program in a school?
- What would be the main concerns of the teachers in a school where a team teaching and/or peer coaching program was implemented by the administration?
- How can the administration best address these concerns?

# Concept Mapping

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## Introduction

Concept maps are “a visual representation of knowledge” (Antonacci, 1991:174) and show relationships among concepts within a specific field of knowledge (Novak, 1990). Concept maps show relationships between concepts in a type of network where any concept or idea can be connected to any other and as such are a useful indication of what people know about a topic. The technique of concept mapping originally from the field of cognitive psychology, has now been used by both teachers and students as a means on reflecting on teaching and learning. This chapter outlines and discusses how the technique of concept mapping can be a very effective tool to assist second language teachers reflective on their teaching.



## Concept mapping

Concept mapping has been defined by Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard (1999) as a “technique for capturing and graphically representing concepts and their hierarchical interrelationships” (p. 62). For language educators according to Mergendoller and Sachs (1994: 589), concept mapping can be “useful for measuring cognitive change resulting from participation in academic courses.” In addition, for students wishing to reflect on their learning, Van Bruggen, Kirschner, and Jochems (2002) have suggested that concept mapping can be a very effective way to relate new concepts to a person’s current knowledge and can encourage more involvement in their own learning process. This reflective learning occurs because the concept mapping activity helps both teachers and students communicate what (and how) they are thinking through visual patterns of thinking. Fischer et al. (2002) suggest that students construct their own concept maps, rather than have a pre-course map prepared by the course instructor, to ensure greater ownership of the learning process. Research on concept mapping suggests that:

- It contributes to ownership in the learning process.
- It provides a means of teacher reflection.
- It provides a means of student reflection.
- It helps students relate current knowledge to new knowledge.
- It gives an overall picture of the learning process.
- It provides teachers with information about students’ levels of learning.

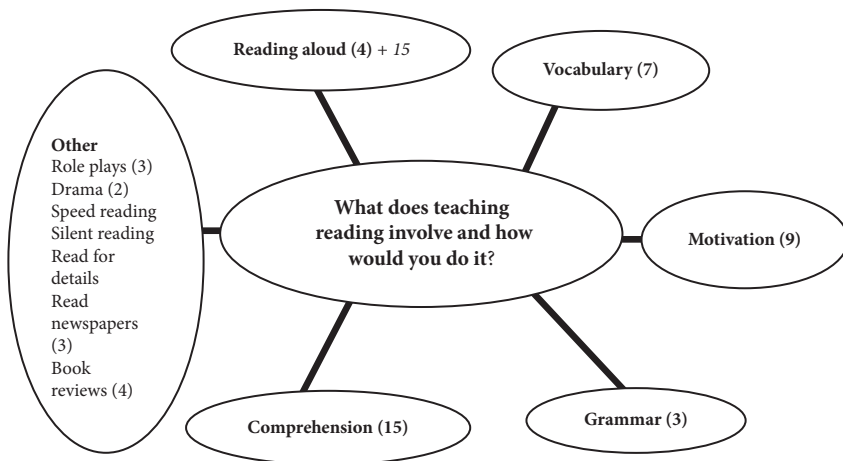
## Case study I: “What Did They Really Learn?”

The following case study reports on how concept mapping was used to gauge what students learned as a result of taking a TESOL Reading Methods course (Farrell, 2006d). The course consisted of nine classes (18 hours of class time over 9 weeks) of instruction on reading theory, teaching strategies, and current concepts. The course emphasized the following concepts in current reading theory: schema theory, the role of prior knowledge, psycholinguistic theory and reading, metacognition and self-monitoring techniques, text structure, techniques to promote the use of effective reading strategies, vocabulary teaching, and actual lesson plan writing and critiquing.

On the first day of class, twenty students were asked to construct a concept map of the reading process and the teaching of English reading. The first maps created were for diagnostic purposes, to give the instructor an indication of the students' beliefs about their prior knowledge. They all received the same written (and orally explained) directions, together with an example of a concept map. At the start of the following class, the instructor presented a pre-course group concept map drawn from all the individual maps (see Figure 13.1a).

Figure 13a illustrates that the group had no shared understanding of what it means to teach reading. On the final day of class, the teachers were again asked to construct individual concept maps showing their understanding of the reading process and teaching reading. When class members completed their post-course maps, their individual pre-course maps were returned for comparison. They were asked them to write comments about any changes they noticed and the reasons for these changes. Figure 13b shows the post-course group concept map constructed from these individual maps.

Overall, the post-course group concept map was more extensive and more complex than the pre-course group concept map. The new topics in the post-course map included extensive reading, teach reading strategies, text awareness, lesson planning, and metacognition awareness. During random interviews with some of the students it was discovered that talking to the teachers about their maps was an important addition to this technique because many students became more aware not only of their own



**Figure 13.1a** Pre-course group concept map showing frequency of topics.



**Figure 13.1b** Post-course group concept map showing frequency of topics. (Key: Number in parentheses shows how many teachers included that topic in their concept maps).

conceptions of teaching reading but also of some knowledge gaps and inconsistencies in their construction of the post-course concept maps.

## Case study I reflection

- One important reason for undertaking this case study was to find out if the course had any impact on the learner teachers. Do you think the

course had any impact based on the differences between the two maps? If yes, why? If not, why not?

- Do you think that local culture can have any impact on the way our students respond to such concept maps? Explain.
- How do you think concept mapping could help you as a language teacher reflect and at the same time your students reflect on their learning?
- How do you think the interviews may have enabled the students to critically reflect on the concepts they used.
- Construct your own concept map about how to teach each skill such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar and compare your inclusion and exclusion of concepts with what you find in various methodology books.

## Case study II: Mapping conceptual change

Participants come to teacher education courses with prior experiences, values, and beliefs and with specific expectations about the subject matter they will learn. These beliefs have been accumulated from a variety of sources including their past experiences as students in the school system and may act as filters to what they have been exposed to in the teacher education program. Hence, differences are likely to exist between what teacher educators may think is important for the participants to learn and what they actually learn as a result of taking a course. Bearing this in mind, it is crucial then for educators to be able to establish a reliable means of gauging the effectiveness of their courses. One method available to language teacher educators interested in tracing participants' conceptual changes, or any changes in participants' preconceptions or initial intuitive ideas as a result of taking a course, is the use of concept mapping. I used this method to map the conceptual changes of MA students (Farrell, 2009b).

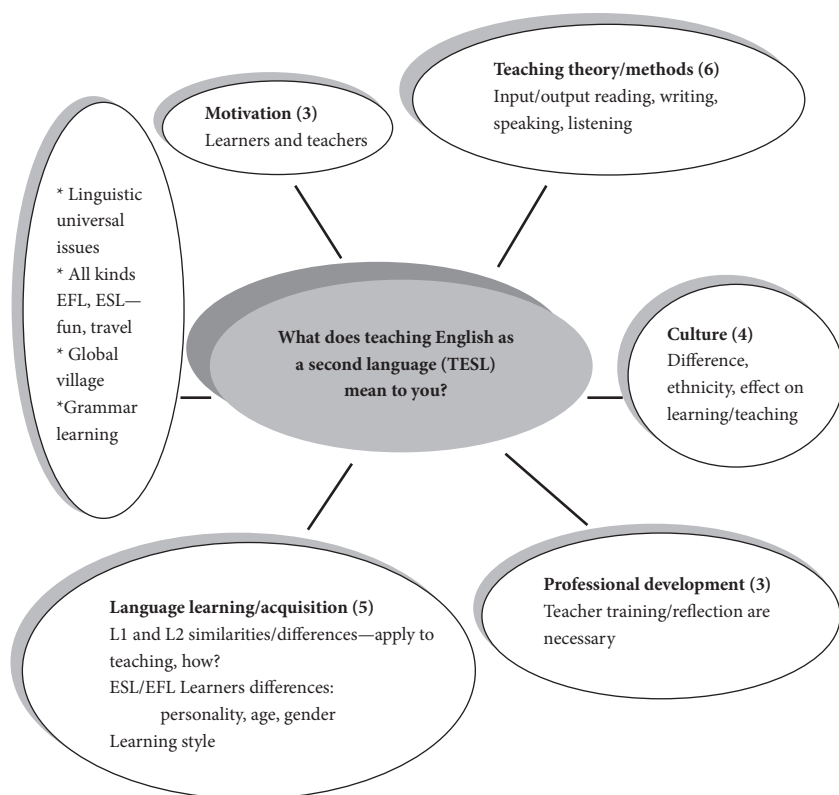
The seven participants were each asked on the first day of class to construct a concept map concerning the topic ("What does teaching English as a second language [TESL] mean to you?") placed inside a circle with several nodes, or spokes, emanating straight from that circle like a bicycle wheel. These pre-course maps would be used for diagnostic purposes by the

instructor to gauge the extent of the participants' prior knowledge and beliefs. On completion of the maps, the participants were asked to share their answers during a peer group discussion and reflection session.

On the final day of class, the participants were again asked to construct concept maps on the same topic and following the same written and explained directions as on the first day of class. When the participants had completed their post-course maps, they were given their pre-course maps for comparison and asked to write comments about any changes they noticed between the two maps and the reasons for these changes. Each participant was also interviewed in order to discuss and reflect on the changes that had occurred in these maps and any further perceptions they had of the course they had just completed.

The pre-course group map is shown in Figure 13c. This illustrates the issues (in order of frequency) as follows: *Teaching theory/methods* (6), *Language learning/acquisition* (5), *Culture* (4), *Professional development* (3), *Motivation* (3), and another category, which included many diverse items. *Teaching theory/methods* was present in six maps without any further explanation. In the class discussion that followed the first class, they said that they thought the MA program would give them many teaching methods and that was what TESL was for them. The next concept, *Language learning/acquisition*, was present in five maps and included learners' differences especially in terms of their personality, age, gender, and learning styles into this category. *Culture* was the next concept (present in four maps) and included issues such as culture difference, ethnicity effect on learning and teaching styles, and culture shock. The group discussion that followed indicated that the participants were drawing on not only their prior experiences as students in the school system but also their own language learning experiences (stated by two of the seven) and from their experiences as students in their initial language TESL teacher certificate courses (stated by five of the seven participants); in fact, many of the results of the initial map may be attributed to some of the participants' experiences in previous certificate courses as many of the concepts seem to represent the subject matter of these courses. Thus, the pre-course group concept map gave the instructor some indication of these participants' prior beliefs about, and experiences with, TESL.

The post-course group concept map is shown in Figure 13d. Several new concepts appeared in the post-course concept maps that were not on the pre-course maps such as *Critical reflection/Self-awareness* (23), *Research and theory* (9), and *Curriculum design* (8). In addition, it should be noted that

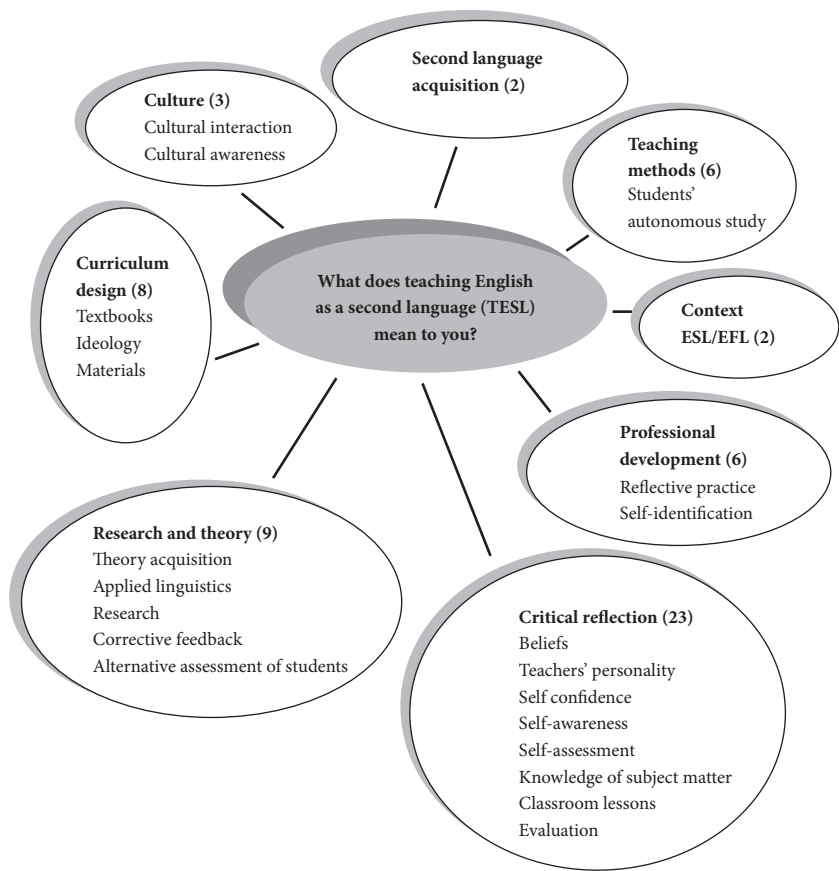


**Figure 13.1c** Pre-course group concept map.

some concepts appeared in more than one sphere, indicating possibly that the participants were attempting to make connections between the concepts.

Critical reflection was the most popular concept in the post-course group concept map and was subdivided into teachers' personality, self-confidence, self-awareness, self-assessment, knowledge of subject matter, classroom lessons, and evaluation. Next came research and theory, further subdivided into theory acquisition, applied linguistics—especially how, research theory and practice are linked—can anything be proven, corrective feedback, and alternative assessment of students. This concept was followed by another new concept curriculum design with subdivisions of textbooks, ideology, and materials.

All participants wrote that they had noticed a major new concept of critical reflection in the post-course maps. In addition, critical reflection enabled them to note that the post-course maps showed a different understanding of the concept "method" that allowed for a move away from



**Figure 13.1d** Post-course group concept map.

a focus on looking for the *correct* method when constructing the pre-course concept maps. These two findings are important because both concepts were new and different from what the participants had said they “believed” to be true for TESL before they had taken the course.

## Case study II reflection

- One important reason for undertaking this case study was to find out if the course had any impact on the learner teachers. Do you think the course had any impact based on the differences between the two maps? If yes, why? If not, why not?

- Why would learner teachers' prior beliefs about teaching in general be important for the instructor to know before teaching a teacher education course?
- How can concept maps help the instructor to gauge participants' prior beliefs and experiences before taking a course?
- How can concept mapping help the learner teachers to reflect on their prior beliefs?
- How can concept mapping help the learner teachers to reflect on their learning after taking a course?
- Why would critical reflection be a new realization for learner teachers after taking a teacher education course?
- Why do learner teachers come to a teacher education course with the idea that they will learn the "correct" method to teach?
- Did you come with such a belief?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

Concept maps can be used by both teachers and students to reflect on their teaching and learning. Concept maps can be used as a type of meta-language by teachers to document and analyze their beliefs and by students to describe their learning. They can be used not only for communication but also synthesizing what a teacher is thinking and what a student is learning. They can also be used to show how the learner is thinking about course content, and teachers can use them to evaluate what students know and more importantly *how* they know what they know. Concept mapping can be used by individual language teachers and by facilitators of language teacher development courses. They can be used by individual language teachers to gauge their personal understandings of a particular topic because concept maps help provide a visual means of how they store words and ideas about a topic until they decide what to do with them.

Language teachers can use concept maps with their second language students for example, at the beginning of a new lesson in order to gauge how much their students have learned from previous lessons and/or to discuss any misunderstandings that may have occurred about the content of previous lessons. Zaid (1995) has maintained that teachers can use concept mapping



within a lesson in three places: as pre-activity for diagnostic purposes for the teacher and/or as a way to get students ready for a particular topic. They can also have students use concept maps during lessons as a record of what they are learning and teachers can later look at these maps to see if both are on the same track. Finally, teachers can use concept maps as a post-assignment in lessons to see how their students understood concepts presented in the lessons. Of course, students also benefit for this type of reflection as they can see (literally) what they know before, during and after the lesson. In order to implement a concept mapping activity, Zaid (1995) has suggested several useful procedures for using concept maps in classes, three of which are the following.

- *Introduce topic.* The teacher introduces the topic by drawing (on whatever surface the teacher usually uses in his or her classroom) a large circle and placing the topic inside that oval. Next, the teacher draws several nodes, or spokes that move straight from that oval like a bicycle wheel.
- *Brainstorm topic.* The teacher then asks students to generate ideas about the topic within the oval and writes whatever responses related to the topic they tell him at the end of each spoke that come from the oval.
- *Categorization:* Next the teacher attempts to get the students to make links between all the responses and as a result forms “category clusters” (Antonacci, 1991: 174) and puts these within circles, one circle for each category related to the central topic. These circles are said to exist at a secondary level and of course can proceed down to other levels depending on the amount of detail provided. If students have any difficulties identifying categories, they can be asked Wh questions (Who, What, When, Where, How) as prompts.

This can be accomplished through the use of individual student concept maps or the have students work collaboratively in pairs or groups to complete a concept map. Teachers can also compile a class group concept map from these individual maps, as was utilized in the case study reported on in this chapter. When educators use concept maps they can change the manner of discourse in the class as they change the way they talk to their students as they use words such as *think*, *classify*, *sequence*, *brainstorm*, and *reflect* and in turn students can actually *use* these words which also represent cognitive processes. Thus concept maps help language educators teach cognitive processes to students as well as course content as these words of reflection are woven through ongoing conversations about the students’ understanding of concepts provided during the course. In addition, educators should

realize that learning is individual and that individual students internalize information presented in courses in different ways and that concept mapping supports internal dialogue as they mediate thinking between students and teacher. For educators pre-course concept maps encourage them to identify the goals and purposes of a course and each lesson before actual instruction and as such they can determine what kind of thinking will be involved throughout the course. Similarly for students, before they begin a lesson they can, by looking at their concept maps, especially if they construct a concept map for each lesson, ask themselves what learning and thinking may be necessary for completion of the lesson.

When used in a teacher development course, concept mapping can provide an impetus for teachers to begin to consider alternatives about what they hold to be true about a topic as they can change the way teachers talk to each other as they use the language of their map. In order to use concept mapping effectively for teachers to develop their self-understanding of their knowledge, facilitators of a teacher development course should first provide a *sample concept map* because this technique may not be familiar to all teachers and they will thus benefit from an illustration of what is expected. While providing an example of the concept map, the facilitator can model reflective thinking of such a map by *thinking aloud* about the construction of the map as the facilitator puts his or her concepts of a particular topic as represented on a visual concept map into verbal thought. The preparation of clear written instructions is also essential at this stage to ensure that all respondents have a comparable understanding of the task they are being asked to complete; if this is not the case (e.g., if vague instructions mean that teachers interpret the requirements of the task in different ways) conclusions based on comparisons across teachers will be questionable. One idea to make instructions clear is to include some kind of *brainstorming* of the topic in focus to generate a preliminary list of related concepts and then this can be followed by creating a diagram (concept map) which shows the participants understandings of how these and more concepts they want to add are related. During the brainstorming sessions it is important to encourage that all ideas are welcome and acceptable but that they must be provided within a given time frame. The final stage is the actual construction of the concept map.

One of the findings of the case study reported on in this chapter was that it may be important to have an opportunity to talk about the contents of the concept map the teacher constructs. Novak and Gowin (1984) maintain that because concept maps are an externalization of what teachers think, they may

not always be a reliable guide to this thinking, so it is difficult to judge how accurate the representation is. For example, during the interviews conducted during the case study outlined above, the maps allowed the teachers to see what they were thinking and made it easier for them to retrieve language to express that knowledge in a clear and organized way. This may be very important for second language teachers and students who thus far may have struggled to find a voice to express their knowledge of a particular topic and may have decided to remain silent rather than to suffer the pain and frustration of expressing their thoughts. As a result of explaining their own conceptions, the participants in the case study reported that they have gained a greater conceptual clarity for themselves. This is a major prerequisite for change, because by becoming aware of one's own conceptions, knowledge gaps and inconsistent reasoning can be considered as important conditions for conceptual change, because they may have resulted in a type of cognitive conflict.

## Reflection

- How might construction of a concept map on a particular topic aid you in your teacher reflections?
- What difficulties do you foresee when attempting to construct concept maps?
- How can these difficulties be overcome?
- Do your students reflect on their learning regularly? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Why is it a good idea for teachers to get their students to reflect on their learning?
- How do you think concept maps can measure conceptual change as a result of taking a particular course of study?
- When educators use concept maps they can change the manner of discourse in the class as they change the way they talk to their students as they use words such as *think*, *classify*, *sequence*, *brainstorm*, and *reflect* and in turn students can actually *use* these words which also represent cognitive processes. Explain how you think this process may work.
- Brainstorm a topic for reflection with a group of other language teachers and then construct concept maps about that topic. Compare your concept maps and explain each individually. What did you learn from this process?

## Conclusion

Concept mapping allows language teachers to have a visual of the concepts they “see” as being important for a particular topic. As a result, teachers can reflect on their meaning and how these maps represent their underlying beliefs about the topic in focus. Teachers can also use concept mapping in their course to gauge current knowledge about concepts under discussion and in order to trace the participants’ conceptual change as a result of taking the course. In this way, both teacher and student are forced to reflect on the content of a course as both engage in evaluative reflection.

## Chapter scenario

Although concept mapping may seem to be a complex and time-consuming way to look at cognitive changes in teacher thinking, I have used concept mapping to stimulate teachers’ reflections even when there was no prepared list of concepts. With this approach, teachers were asked to generate concepts related to a topic and they have reported that it can facilitate their reflections on their beliefs and knowledge about a particular topic. Recently I have used this technique of concept mapping in my MA courses in Canada and can report that concept mapping (pre-course and post-course) is useful because it encourages both the teacher and students to reflect before, during, and after the course. In the context of my courses in Canada, I asked teachers who were taking a Foundations in Applied Linguistics and TESL course to construct concept maps about their understanding of TESOL and Applied Linguistics so they could then become more aware of their understanding of the course material before and after the course and thus take more charge of their own meaning-making about the field of Applied Linguistics. Pre-course and post-course concept maps were elicited from the teachers who were also asked to write short descriptions of changes (and the reasons for these changes) they observed between their pre and post-course maps. All participants were also interviewed about the contents of their individual concept maps. Preliminary results indicate that the course had some impact on the teachers’ prior beliefs and experience about applied linguistics and TESL and especially in fostering a new sense of critical reflection about the profession. The teachers all wrote that they noticed a major new concept present in their post-course maps that was not present in the pre-course maps, that of critical reflection.

For example, in his post-course reflection one Canadian teacher realized that he just accepted all he was presented with even when he was taking his TESL Certificate at a different university some years previous; he continues:

There were moments, in my teaching profession, until now, where I've done something 'cause that's the way I've done it. And, if someone asked me, I would say "well, this is-this is, like the way to do it because it's effective." But without really questioning the context that I was in and not . . . Without really questioning what was going on.

Another interesting strong pattern that emerged in the post-course maps was a different understanding of the concept "method" as the participants noted that they now tended to move away from a focus on looking for *the correct* method as they did when constructing the pre-course concept maps. For instance, one teacher from Asia said that she now realizes "that there is no correct method." So for me, concept mapping was a quick and efficient way of gauging the extent of the impact of my course on these graduate students. I agree with Novak and Gowin (1984: 40) that the maps did not give a complete picture, but they did provide a "workable approximation" and when backed up by interviews, they can as Wilson (1998: 8) maintains, "promote class discussion, correction of student misconceptions, and learning and retention of complex concepts and principles."

## Reflection

- Now might be a good time for you to construct a concept map, which has as its central concept place within the circle: "What does teaching English as a second/foreign/subsequent language mean to you?" Draw several nodes or spokes coming from the center circle and see can you make category clusters.
- How many secondary categories were you able to construct?
- What difficulties did you have (if any) when constructing this map?
- What information does this map tell you about your knowledge of this general question?
- If you do this activity with other teachers, compare your concept maps and discuss the contents of each map.
- Did you uncover any misconceptions about the topic as a result of discussions and comparisons with other teachers?

# 14

## Online Reflection

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### Introduction

Most of the chapter of this book so far has presented reflective practice for language teachers as either a solitary teacher seeking self-reflection, or with a critical friend, or reflecting with a group of teachers together the latter of which involves face-to-face discussions. Now with the advances in technology, however, language teachers are increasingly participating

in online reflective communities for their professional development. Such online communities are said to provide teachers with supportive and collaborative reflective discussions in which they can share teaching techniques, and explore new ways of teaching as well as pursue their individual interests related to their own professional development. This chapter explores the issue of how language teachers can communicate digitally, online in various digital formats as a means of facilitating their reflections on practice.

## Online reflection

First, it is important to point out the advances in technology that have allowed teachers to become members of online communities which signifies the second generation use of the internet rather than the “old” first generation usage when this book was first written. This second-generation usage allows teachers to create and share knowledge on the web by making use of Web 2.0 technology, whereas the first generation of Web 1.0 only allowed presentation of information (McLeod and Vasinda, 2008). As McLeod and Vasinda (2008: 260) explain: “Web 1.0 was one-way communication, a lecture or a monologue . . . . Web 2.0 can be compared to a dialogue, an engaging class discussion or two-way communication.” So Web 2.0 has allowed any teacher with a computer to set up such communication modes as blogs, social networking sites, and wikis without much knowledge of technology. Thus in general education, research has indicated that the development of Web 2.0 online communities offer opportunities for teachers, as Hutchison and Colwell (2012: 274) have noted, “to connect teachers in ways that encourage them to deepen their professional knowledge, offer support to one another, to mentor and be mentored, and to engage in professional dialogue.”

With developments in technology now language teachers have at their disposal such online modes of communication to facilitate their engagement in reflective practice as blogs, chats, forums, online discussions (Chik and Breidbach, 2011; Farr and Riordan, 2012; Yang, 2009). Chik and Breidbach (2011) examined virtual discussion board exchanges (via wiki; Facebook; videoconferencing) between pre-service teachers and language learners in cross-cultural contexts. The discussion board topics focused on language learner experiences and the forums helped in promoting identity development

and raised the participants' awareness of the teacher roles within the classroom. This method of communication proved advantageous in that the pace of exchanges allowed more time for reflection and analysis. Farr and Riordan (2012) also noted the different degrees of reflection when using online chats and discussions forums to encourage reflection in post-observation discussions. In their study, discussion forums were found to have comparatively low interactivity and little reflection while online chats were highly interactive and more reflective.

Yang (2009) used blogs to encourage reflection in post-observation discussions and after analyzing 1,000 messages (high and very active participation among pre-service teachers) discovered that blogs could facilitate reflection and the development of a community of practice among student teachers. Yang (2009) also noted the important role of a facilitator for some intervention in order to stimulate critical reflection among student teachers.

Arshavskaya and Whitney (2014) studied the effectiveness of dialogic blogs between a pre-service teacher and such a facilitator. Through the dialogic blogs with the facilitator, the novice teacher learned more about second language learning and teaching and how to apply it in her practice. Additionally, the novice teacher gradually shifted from simply receiving mediation from the facilitator to eliciting and engaging with the feedback. Overall, these results demonstrated the critical role that supervisors have in mediating novice teachers' growth especially for pre-service teachers.

Murugaiah et al. (2010) examined the effects of blogging by in-service teachers. They discovered that blogs created a community and provided a common emotional outlet. This community elicited more information and interaction amongst the teachers. In addition, the teachers developed and improved upon their Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) skills. Consequently, research on language teachers' use of online formats to facilitate their engagement in reflective practice has revealed the following about such online formats:

- It combats teacher isolation.
- Teachers can discuss identity, beliefs, theory.
- Teachers can discuss practice and new ideas for practice.
- Teachers can share emotions as it allows for the socioemotional dimension of a learning community.
- Can experience sense of camaraderie.
- It promotes collaborative learning.



## Case study I: Blogging with preservice teachers

Blog technology has become one of the most dominant online modes of publishing content and for fostering reflection under the advances of Web 2.0 technologies. Deng and Yuen (2011) making use of such technological advances in blogging sought out to develop an empirically grounded framework for educational blogging within teacher education. They developed a working framework that highlighted four areas; self-expression, self-reflection, social interaction and reflective dialogue, as well as conducted a study to examine the framework by involving two groups of student teachers during their teaching practice. By highlighting those four areas (self-expression, self-reflection, social interaction, and reflective dialogue), it was found that the blogs had many qualities. For example, blogs were found to be “socially oriented which enhanced the social presence and socio-emotional dimension of a learning community” (p. 450). Additionally, blogs transformed personal narratives into a “social process of strengthening connections and fostering mutual support” (p. 450). Therefore, blogs were a fusion of both personal narratives and critical reflection. In terms of the social and emotional effects of blogs, they created a sense of community when student teachers read one another’s blogs and blogs were seen as the exchange of social support. As for the reflective effect of blogs, they “enabled student teachers to capture, eternalize, and inspect their feelings and thoughts” (p. 450). Additionally, the student teachers could stimulate reader’s reflection, which amplified the reflective community. Overall, the student teachers had positive feelings towards blogging. They valued the social and emotional support, as they allowed for deeper connections with their peers. In addition, the blogs allowed for personal expressions and ability to document experiences. Lastly, the student teachers felt they could learn from one another by reading each other’s’ blogs. Overall, the results indicated that blogs provided powerful organizational forums for online expression as they can activate prior knowledge and thus transform that knowledge through interaction and “discussion.”

## Case study I reflection

- What is your opinion of the use of blogs to facilitate reflection?
- Have you ever used blogs to aid your reflective practice?

- How do you think teachers can create a sense of community when reading one another's blogs?
- Are you comfortable with the idea of someone reading and responding to your blog?
- Are you comfortable with the idea of reading another teacher's blog and then responding to it?
- How can readers stimulate reflection with such blogging?
- Do you think teachers can be honest in responding to such blogs?
- Can you think of any other ways teaching beliefs and classroom practices can be investigated and compared than was discussed in the case study above?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

There are now many methods (too many to cover in this chapter) online formats that language teachers have at their disposal when looking for facilitation for their reflections on practice such as blogs, social media (Twitter), and podcasts.

### Blogs

Blogs are probably the easiest to set up by language teachers with little expertise in technological skills and are a way for teachers to express and share their thoughts, emotions, opinions, and reflections online with other professionals. Any teacher can create a blog with an MS Word document and without any knowledge of web scripting. We covered teaching journals in Chapter 9 and a blog is really an online journal but instead of being fixed when written as in journal writing, blogs can be easily updated when the teacher wants to add further thoughts, opinions, and reflections. Again unlike journal writing, teachers can add photos and audio files when they want to emphasize their reflections. Although there are dialogic journals as mentioned in Chapter 9, blogs can also be interactive as it is easy for other teachers and their students to respond to.

Teachers can really write what they like about any particular issue or event within their professional (and personal) world. Teachers can use blogs for self-expression and self-reflection and such expression can help

relieve emotional stress they may be feeling as a result of some teaching event and can expect a response from other teachers so that they can further reflect on that event or issue. Some teachers can read other more established blogs to help them in their reflections such as Michael Griffin's wonderful blog: *ELT Rants, Reviews, and Reflections*. Michael states that in his blog he is "hoping to share and develop my thoughts about ELT and teacher development" and after reading some of his entries, I think he has more than accomplished this.

Language teacher educators are now using blogs in teacher education course more often to help student teachers to reflect on theory and practice. One such teacher educator, Sun (2010), has twelve pre-service teachers enrolled in a TESOL Master's program participate in a blogging project for the teachers to reflect on their knowledge gains in terms of theory and practice. The pre-service teachers were required to complete thirty blog entries as well as thirty comments by the end of the semester. There were also face-to-face in-class discussions regarding their blogging experiences. Additionally, this blogging process had changed their beliefs and practices about second language teaching. The results of blogging were largely positive in that blogs provided powerful organizational forums for online expression and most pre-service teachers were willing to continue blogging.

Although blogs have begun to wane somewhat in ELT since the early 2000s, they are nevertheless still used by teachers and teacher educators as a means of self-discovery and reflection and still an important means of pursuing and continuing professional development.

## Twitter

Social media has taken the world by storm as well as the ELT world (especially since this book was first published) with many language teachers in different countries having their own Twitter accounts (which I still do not have!). Twitter is fast becoming very popular as a form of communication (bites of information that appear usually in one or two sentences with a maximum of 140 characters in a tweet) and interaction for language teachers in many different contexts. Most teachers seem to communicate with teachers who hold similar opinions on particular issues related to language teaching and often encourage each other by retweeting each other's comments and even thanking each other for such retweeting

(thanks for the RTs). Teachers also use Twitter when seeking advice about a particular way to teach one of the skills or to undertake research or to find out if others had similar experiences with a particular method of teaching. Twitter has brought many language teachers from all over the globe together and can be a positive means of pursuing professional development for teachers but I believe it is not without its problems as outlined in the case study that follows.

## **Case study II: “Prob with reflective practice is that it often ends up in the teacher’s head, not shared”: Reflecting on TESOL Twitter Bites!**

The following case study details my own thoughts and reflections on how language teachers as authors and readers of Twitter entries should take care to make sure they are not shortchanging their readers or themselves in terms of quality and complexity of teaching and learning a foreign language (from Farrell, 2017b).

Recently a friend alerted to a Twitter comment that one of the main speakers at a major conference made (which is also the title of this paper although I added full words); the comment that was widely shared is: “Prob with reflective practice is that it often ends up in the teacher’s head, not shared.” The friend asked me what my reaction to this comment was. Of course I realize that this is but one sentence and decontextualized and so I wondered what the context was that the sentence was plucked from. When thus prompted, my friend then gave me further background that the speaker provided in the talk but not the Twitter comment, that a “problem” with reflective practice is the problems of teacher isolation and that the discoveries in reflective practice seldom went beyond the individual teacher and according to my friend, the speaker’s main presentation centered on teacher learning communities. I have several reactions but my two main reactions are first, the danger of Twitter bites of information that emanate from conferences but this is my lesser reaction. My second reaction is more detailed as it impacts some of the ignorance that surrounds what reflective practice and can do for language teachers.

Twitter seems to be a powerful social media networking mechanism and for that reason alone is very useful in instantly connecting language teachers from around the globe. It also seems an excellent form of self-promotion and many businesses are successfully using it in such a manner to promote their products. There are many more advantages of using Twitter for language teachers I am sure but from my (limited) observations the limitation of 140 characters has probably led to my main worry with this new form of “communication” for language teachers and that is the decontextualized nature of the comments and thus the need to come up with sensational type one-liners about teaching and learning such as the tweet I am about to address below. However, those who have been involved with teaching and learning a second or foreign language know how complex this is in terms of teaching and learning and I believe they do not do justice to all the research that is ongoing that proves there are not simple cause-effect solutions nor answers to complicated issues such as teachers reflecting on their practice.

Looking at this tweet bite (and not the context that was provided as it was not provided in the original tweet I was shown) one reads immediately that reflective practice has a big problem: *it often ends up in the teacher's head* and is not shared. I am not sure if the speaker really understands why engaging in reflective practice is important for individual teachers but it (i.e., self-reflection) *should* end up in the teacher's head. Teachers engage in self-reflection with the idea of gaining self-understanding and self-knowledge, which is in *itself* a valid means of knowledge generation because the resulting self-awareness will provide such knowledge (Farrell, 2015). Some may say that such self-reflection is self-indulgent (as the tweet perhaps may be alluding to?) but as Palmer (1998: 3) correctly notes: “The work required to ‘know thyself’ is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge; it is a secret hidden in plain sight.” Which brings me to my final point about the importance of such self-reflection it never really just stays in a teacher's head because it goes beyond the teacher to his/her *STUDENTS* and who better to benefit that our students. I think in all the discussions related to encouraging TESOL teachers to engage in reflecting on their practice we have somehow forgotten that the main reason for this is that our students will benefit as we become more aware of our practice so we can provide more learning opportunities for our students. Yes, we can share our reflections with other teachers but what we share now as a result of self-reflection is a strong sense of personal identity that infuses our work.

I have cautioned that although Twitter may be a wonder means of networking and promotion with other teachers worldwide, we in the TESOL profession must be careful of always looking for sensational type of one-liners (because of the limit of 140 characters) that are decontextualized and may be misleading to others reading them. I used one particular recent tweet that was brought to my attention because it was related to a perceived “problem” with reflective practice in that it ends up in a teacher’s head and thus may not be useful. However, I have attempted to point out that the result of such self-reflection will not just stay in a teacher’s head because his or her students will be the ultimate beneficiaries of such engagement in reflective practice. As Palmer (1998: 2) relays: “knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.”

## Case study II reflection

- Have you ever used Twitter?
- What is your first understanding of the tweet: “Prob with reflective practice is that it often ends up in the teacher’s head, not shared.”
- After reading the case study above, has your view of the tweet changed or not? Please explain.
- What are issues language teachers should be aware of when using Twitter?

## Podcasts

In their recent book, *Podcasting and Professional Development: A Guide for English Language Teachers*, Lowe, Schaefer, and Turner have written extensively about the use of podcasts as an important means for language teachers to engage in personal reflections and if they want to share these reflections with a worldwide audience. They suggest that teachers can individually or in collaboration with what they call co-podcasters, record their thoughts online as a means of promoting self-reflection and professional development.

According to Lowe, Schaefer, and Turner teachers can use podcasting for the purposes of professional development, some of which are—improve teaching ability—improve teacher talk, and develop reflective learners.

## Improve Teaching Ability

Teachers can try put different methods of teaching and make a podcast in which he or she tries out different activities before actual teaching in a classroom. In such a manner teachers can obtain feedback from colleagues that are invited to view or others online to obtain less threatening and less judgmental feedback. They can also according to Lowe, Schaefer, and Turner invite some learners to view and get their reflections before actual implementation in a real classroom. In this way teachers can reflect-for-action or engage in anticipatory reflection before teaching actual classes. Perhaps too this can replace the controversial practice of implementing microteaching in teacher education courses. In such a manner teachers can improve their perceptions of what they want to accomplish lessons before they actually teach them. Teachers can get feedback from others on all aspects of their teaching and then make more informed and reflective decisions about how they want to develop their teaching further.

## Improve Teacher Talk

Podcasts can provide a platform whereby language teachers practice particular aspects of their teaching such as what they say in terms of their teacher talk. This can include teachers writing their instructions and then practicing them and their exact phrasing of instructions. Podcasts can help familiarize learners with a teacher's voice, helping to improve ease of understanding in the classroom. The reasoning is that teachers, as most experienced teachers already know, do not get many second chances to repeat lessons and so they try to get them "correct" with one delivery. This takes experience for most teachers and so podcasts allows teachers to listen to themselves and make the necessary changes before teaching. This can be particularly helpful for nonnative speaker teachers for all aspects of their classroom communication.

## Develop Reflective Learners

Reflective practice really means reflective teaching and reflective learning and as such podcasts can help language learners become more sensitive to different types of language including different proficiency levels of listening and usage of grammar and vocabulary. Thus learners can get to know their more about their actual listening ability. Learners can also get feedback from podcasts. As Lowe, Schaefer, and Turner point out, unlike the real-

life classroom, podcasts provide a less face-threatening space for learner listeners to voice what they enjoy or do not enjoy about a teacher's approach, or to express changes that they wish to see.

## Popular Podcasts

They note that the word Podcast is from the “pod” in “ipod” and the “cast” in “broadcast” and the “act of podcasting” is the practice of recording an audio version of a blog entry and putting it on the internet for all to listen. They have created their own podcast called *TEFLology* and I was honored to have been interviewed by the authors when I was in Tokyo recently: <https://teflology-podcast.com/2015/08/19/tefl-interviews-13-thomas-farrell-on-reflective-practice-in-tesol/>

Another popular podcast is Darren Elliot's *The Lives of Teachers* that is produced in both audio and video formats, and features interviews with well-known figures in the field of language teaching. I had the honor of being interviewed myself a few years ago by Darren when I was in Japan at the JALT conference.

## Case study III: The lives of teachers—An interview with Thomas Farrell from Darren Elliott on Vimeo: <http://www.livesofteachers.com/?s=thomas+farrell&submit=Search>

Reflective practice is a way for professionals (in education, social work, medicine, and many other fields) to assess their work and manage their own development. Even if you do not know it by name you may well have engaged in a form of reflective practice in formal or informal training programs. In this interview we discussed reflective practice, what it is, what it is not, and where it is going.

I have done quite a lot of these interviews now, and everyone I have spoken to has been gracious and thoughtful. Some of the interviewees I knew little about before I spoke to them but in preparing for, and then conducting, the interview I have become interested in their work. On the



other hand, Thomas Farrell is someone whose work I have been interested in for a long time. What would he be like in real life, I wondered? I enjoyed a long conversation with the charming Dr. Farrell at the JALT conference in Tsukuba, Japan last autumn. Both his plenary and his workshop demonstrated that academics do not have to be dry to be rigorous.

Dr. Farrell hosts an excellent website, where you can read more of his work. If you are looking for a book to start with, I think “Reflective Language Teaching: From Research to Practice” published by Continuum is a very accessible introduction. His latest book is on my list when the next budget allocation arrives in April . . . .

## Case study III reflection

- After reading Daren Elliot’s introduction above, listen to Farrell’s *Lives Of Teachers* Interview at: <http://www.livesofteachers.com/?s=thomas+farrell&submit=Search>
- Listen to Farrell’s *TEFLology* interview at: <https://teflology-podcast.com/2015/08/19/tefl-interviews-13-thomas-farrell-on-reflective-practice-in-tesol/>
- After listening to the two podcasts, what is your view of reflective practice?
- One of the responses (from Daren Elliot’s webpage) to my interview with Daren Elliot was as follows. Read it and comment:
  - What a gem this interview is!
  - I’m really interested in the whole “reinvention” of reflective practice. How the capacity to be a reflective practitioner is kind of everywhere, even identified in job specifications for example and in descriptions of teacher training courses. However, for a time I’ve felt a bit of a tension between being a reflective practitioner and doing the things required in order to be identified as a reflective practitioner. Are they the same thing? I think not. Don’t you feel like RP sometimes gets treated as something of a tick-box exercise? That it is possible to be an experienced teacher who can pull some effective reflections out of the bag when they need to but actually that reflection is not something they carry with them constantly but more an element they switch on and off like writing a detailed lesson plan for observation purposes. It is very easy for institutions, in wanting to assess how reflective an individual is, to encourage a less insightful and holistic version.

- I don't know if this is true but I do wonder about it.
- I love the idea of a “Your First Year in Teaching” module with case studies of real teachers. Should be compulsory.
- Reflection in teaching is a phenomenally interesting and important subject and I thank you for taking the time to get this interview and post it.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and discussed the use of online tools to facilitate and promote reflective practice for language teachers. The chapter outlined some of the most common of these tools such as blogs, chats, Twitter from social media, and podcasts to name but a few. Many of these can be used in conjunction with the other modes of reflection already outlined in the contents of this book such as online journals, online communities of practice with teacher group “discussions” to share, discuss, evaluate, reflect and promote professional development of language teachers. Such an online community of teachers can extend reflective practice beyond the normal face-to-face interactions and trigger reflection within a wider community of practice that has a global reach. In such a manner these online reflective interactions can further challenge language teachers to clarify and enhance their practice as they reach a wider audience of likeminded professionals.

## Chapter scenario

John, a teacher in a language institute attached to a university was interested in getting more colleagues to collaborate and reflect on their practice but he could not get many teachers to meet regularly as they were all busy. So he decided to try to get a group of teachers to “meet” online instead by writing blogs. For this group on teachers, a blog is like an online journal for them to write in their own words about issues that arose that week in their lessons and if they could get permission, they said they would try to record a lesson and also post it with their blog. In addition, they said they would make their blogs interactive so each teacher could respond when they had time. The only rule they made was that they would post at least one entry for each week over a 12-week semester and try to meet at the end of the semester face to face to sum up their experiences.

So they implemented their blogs and posted regularly about issues that occurred in their lessons. The main topics they discussed were about their students and what they did or did not do during their lessons. They also had a lot to discuss about their administration but mostly negatively. However, they did not challenge each other very much and mostly used their blogs to let off steam. In addition, they did not comment much when they did comment and only agreed or gave another example from their experiences. They did not discuss any theories of teaching and kept the discussions centered on their problems of practice rather than their joys or successes of practice. They did offer some suggestions to each other when they were asked for such.

Overall, their reflections seemed to be more descriptive than critical in terms of their profession overall. They sensed that such blogging was positive and felt that they had created a community of practice in that they were now members of a blogging group. The only problem with this however, it that it tended to fizzle out towards the end of the semester with a lot less comments and a few teachers did not post any blog nor did any teacher record their lessons and post them with their blog. The teacher said they found the blogging easy and comfortable up to mid-term and then they said that some lost a bit of interest or became distracted with their work and could not find time to keep up. Regarding time, they all noted that blogging allowed more flexibility with their time as they could do it whenever they wanted although this also led to some “forgetting” and of course the ultimate fizzling out.

## Reflection

- What do you think of John’s idea of creating his community of practice?
- Would you have chosen blogs or some other online mode of reflection?
- Do you think he was successful with this method? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the group reflected at a descriptive rather than critical level?
- Why do you think they did not add any lesson recordings to their blogs?
- Why do you think the blogging eventually fizzled out?
- What could they have done to maintain this online mode of reflection?
- Do you think they created a community of practice?

# Professional Development Through Reflective Practice

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## Introduction

The need for ongoing teacher development has been a recent recurring theme in the field of second language teaching, not a reflection of inadequately trained teachers but a response to the fact that not everything a language teacher needs to know can be provided at pre-service level, and also that the knowledge base of teaching is constantly changing (Richards and Farrell, 2005). This chapter outlines and discusses how second language teachers engage in self-renewal and professional development through reflective language teaching.

## Professional development

Research suggests that teachers who are better informed about their teaching are also better able to evaluate what they aspects of their practice they may need to adjust because they are more aware of what stage they have reached in their professional development (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). Professional development for second language teachers, defined as the “process of continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers” (Lange, 1990: 250), has more often than not, consisted of district or administration mandated courses and one-stop workshops conducted by outside “experts” in a top-down approach to the dissemination of knowledge in which teachers are subsequently expected to translate into action in order to improve their practice (Clair, 1998). While suggestions for improving practice with such a top-down delivered system may be well intentioned, its real impact is limited because teachers may find that many of the ideas presented are often conceptually and practically far removed from the reality of their particular classrooms. In fact, throughout their careers, many second language teachers have been expected to learn about their own profession by studying the findings of outside experts, but not by studying their own experiences. Johnson and Golombek (2002: 3) however, have recently called for a new approach within second language education that recognizes teachers as “legitimate knowers, producers of legitimate knowledge, and as capable of constructing and sustaining their own professional practice over time.” In addition, and as the contents of this book suggest, much can be learned about teaching through self-inquiry rather than drawing solely on experts’ opinions or theories.

One of the key themes, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, of second language teacher development research is that it is a process of articulating an inner world of choices “made in response to the outer world of the teaching context” (Mann, 2005: 105). Mann (2005) has further proposed that detailed accounts are needed about experienced language teachers’ existing beliefs, assumptions, values and knowledge concerning their work so that we can acknowledge this personal conceptualization within the knowledge base of second language teacher education. This bottom-up approach to reflection starts from the assumption that teachers, not methods or expert opinions, make a difference as they explore the nature of their own decision-making

and classroom practices. Bottom-up professional development of this kind can be accomplished when language teachers collect information about their practice, either alone or in collaboration with other colleagues, and where a “good” teacher is seen as one who accesses the needs and possibilities of his or her particular context and teaching situation. That said, Senior (2006: 67) has noted that the exact pattern of each teacher’s development will be different and unique in that “some teachers develop quickly, others more slowly.” Senior (2006) also suggests that teachers identify a range of different catalysts that lead them to a change in behavior and likens professional development of language teachers as a journey, which starts with inexperience, then undergoes further study until the teacher gets the feeling of having arrived as a professional. The arrival phase is characterized by a recognition that they themselves must be able to judge their own teaching because they may not have opportunities of being observed and so must be able to monitor their own teaching regularly.

Research has also shown that many experienced teachers have been routinely applying classroom strategies without much reflection, and although experience as a teacher may be a good starting point for development, it is necessary to examine such experience systematically in order to learn from it (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). Wajnryb (1992: 9) also links reflective practice to professional development in that she considers reflective language teachers those who are “discovering more about their own teaching by seeking to understand the processes of teaching and learning in their own and others’ classrooms.” As mentioned in Chapter 1 Hoover (1994) noted that although the concept of reflective teaching has been seen as promising to many educators over the years, he also pointed out that little research had been conducted as to its validity. In the past 15 years, the results of my own research (much of it outlined in this book) and research conducted by other second language educators now suggest that language teachers who engage in reflective language teaching can develop the following:

- A deeper understanding of teaching.
- Evaluate what stage they are at in their professional growth.
- More skills in self-reflection and critical thinking.
- More complex and clearer schema about teaching.
- More coherent personal approach to classroom teaching.
- More elaborate pedagogical reasoning skills.

- More informed decision-making skills.
- More proactive and confident teachers.

## Case study: Tailoring reflection to individual needs

The case study reports on the reflections of one non-native English speaker Korean teacher (Heesoon, a pseudonym) of EFL in Korea and her preferred mode of reflection among three different types: group talking, classroom observations, and journal writing (Farrell, 2001a). Heesoon said that she joined the group because she was seeking to become a better teacher. She continued: “I must also be able to find myself as a teacher by systematically looking at what I already know and do, examining all the ideas presented and then answering [Heeson’s] own problems on the basis of [my] own experience.”

Throughout all the group meetings Heesoon was a very active participant. She tried to get involved in many of the discussions that the other members had initiated and was always nonjudgmental in her comments. During the group discussions, Heesoon was interested in talking about her personal theories of teaching and her students’ level of motivation. Also, Heesoon talked a lot about her students’ level of motivation. However, Heesoon was did not show the same level of participation in the other two modes of reflection: classroom observations and journal writing. In fact, Heesoon stopped after two classroom observations because she said that she was not ready for “that level of scrutiny by an outsider.”

Heesoon used her teaching journal infrequently for reflection. Out of a total of six entries, she wrote mostly about her class procedures. Heesoon said that she did not feel comfortable writing about her teaching; she felt that she could not achieve reflection through the medium of writing. At the last group meeting she revealed the extent of her lack of enthusiasm for writing: “I always felt that I had to write something down, but I didn’t have anything to write.” So Heesoon considered writing a teaching journal a serious task. However, during the group discussions Heesoon found support offered by the other members of the group that she said was missing in the “lonely work of having to write about teaching.” The conclusion of this case study is that reflection should be tailored to an individual teacher’s needs and preferences.

## Case study reflection

- In the above case study, Heesoon said she was comfortable in a group situation talking with other teachers. Why do you think she liked to talk with other teachers about her teaching?
- Why do you think Heesoon did not want to write about her teaching?
- Why do you think Heesoon did not want to be observed by others while teaching?
- Discuss how you think you would react to each of these three modes of reflection.
- Hoover (1994) has noted that reflection is a learned activity. In what ways can teachers be prepared to talk effectively with a group of other teachers, to write about their teaching and to observe and be observed by other teachers?

## Practical applications for TESOL teachers

I now present a framework that language teachers can consider if they want to engage in reflective language teaching. The framework attempts to bring together all of the topics discussed so far (although I also recognize that each chapter can be treated as a self-contained discussion of a specific aspect of reflective teaching). The framework has five core components, and all five elements are interconnected in that one builds on the other and all need to be considered as a whole. The five components are given as follows:

- 1 *Provide different opportunities for reflection.*
- 2 *Build in ground rules.*
- 3 *Make provisions for time.*
- 4 *Provide for external input.*
- 5 *Develop trust.*

## Opportunities for reflection

The first and most important component of the framework involves providing opportunities for language teachers to reflect through a range of



approaches that have been outlined and discussed in this book. These include exploring one's beliefs and classroom practices, classroom communication patterns and interaction, critical incidents, language proficiency, and teachers' metaphors and maxims. These can be explored by the use of journal writing, classroom observations, group discussions, action research projects and concept mapping. Many of these approaches can be used alone by teachers or they can be used in combination with each other. For example, writing in teaching journals can assist teachers to focus on specific aspects of their development, and these can be used with or without classroom observations all of which can be used to document the teachers' beliefs and later compared with their theories-in-use. While use of a collaborative group of language teachers can create opportunities for sustained concentration and discussion in which mutual understandings can be constructed through talk. These groups can decide to collaborate in journal writing where they each keep journals, read each other's entries, and later discuss the contents as a group. These discussions can also be recorded and later analyzed for what issues occurred most frequently in discussions and the journals.

That said, individual teachers may have preferences for specific modes of reflection as was indicated in the case study discussed in this chapter. Heesoon showed a clear preference for talking with other colleagues in a group situation but did not really want to write about her teaching or have anyone observe her classes. The group was a forum for her to share her ideas and problems about her teaching life. The group atmosphere was light and a lot of humor was in evidence. Talking was sociable and enjoyable for Heesoon but writing was very stressful for her as was being observed, and as the conclusion to the case study suggested, we must decide what modes of reflection best suit our individual context and needs. Providing these opportunities for teachers to reflect is only the first component of this model of reflection. In order to establish an atmosphere where reflective practice is encouraged, several conditions must be met. These conditions include the following: negotiated ground rules, providing for different types of time, use of external input and providing for a low affective state.

## Ground rules

Language teachers should now negotiate a set of built-in-rules or guidelines that each teacher should follow in order to focus their reflections. For example, if teachers decided to reflect with a group of teachers, they must decide who

will chair the group meetings. One answer might be a different chairperson for each meeting with a resulting level of responsibility (e.g., to provide a site and refreshments, and set the agenda and length of the meetings). For classroom observations, certain understandings need to be negotiated ahead of time and teachers should remember that reflection involves a three-part process of the event itself, recollection of the event, and review and response to the event (Richards and Lockhart, 1994). The case study reported in this chapter did not negotiate any specifics of the classroom observations ahead of time and this may have led to the teacher's eventual withdrawal from these observations. So, it is best to discuss specifics of each classroom observation ahead of time. For example, an actual teaching or learning episode can be a starting point for such classroom observations in order to stimulate reflection. Next the teaching event must be recollected in some way by the teacher and peer and/or group and preferably without judgment or evaluation. Events can be recollected through classroom observations, and teaching journals. In addition, teachers who are observed by peers must also decide what the responsibility of the observer is, and if the class will be audiotaped, videotaped, or not. The final stage involves the teacher was observed returning to the event in order to examine its meaning for that teacher. Of course, all of the above activities and built-in guidelines cannot be accomplished quickly; like all valuable things, they take time. This introduces the next important component of the model: time.

## Time

For practicing teachers to be able to reflect on their work, time is a very important consideration and considered one of the main impediments to engaging in reflective teaching. I suggest teachers consider four different kinds of time and define each type before entering into the reflective process. These four are: *individual time*, *activity time*, *development time*, and *period of reflection time*.

- *Individual time.* Practicing teachers are very busy in their daily teaching and other related duties, and the amount of time any one teacher is willing to invest in his or her professional self-development will naturally vary. This can create a dilemma for the group if all the participants do not attend all the group meetings or participate fully in the activities; group cohesion may be harmed. Therefore, a certain level of commitment by individual participants in terms of time availability should be negotiated by the group at the start of the process.

- *Activity time.* Associated with the time each participant has to give to reflection is the time that should be considered when reflecting using specific activities. For example, for classroom observations, the number of times a class is to be observed should be negotiated ahead while also taking the first notion of time (individual) into consideration. The journal also needs time: time to write and time to read. In the case study reported on in this chapter this type of time was not negotiated ahead for the classroom observations or journal writing.
- *Development time.* Another aspect of time that is important for teachers to consider is the time it takes to develop both individually and as a group (if reflecting in a group). Simply put, some teachers need more time to develop than others and some teachers may not be ready (psychologically) to reflect because they have not reached that point in their life or career. In addition, other teachers may not want to reflect because they treat teaching as a job and not a profession. Perhaps Heesoon in the case study discussed in this chapter needed more time to develop especially when this reflection concerned looking closely at her classroom teaching and as such, the observation process could have been delayed until she was ready. Analytical reflection, therefore, takes time and can only progress at a rate at which individual teachers are ready to reflect.
- *Period of reflection time.* The final aspect of time concerns the time frame for the reflective period as a whole that teachers are willing to commit to. Teachers (individually, pairs, groups) should consider how long they want to reflect? It is important to consider this for two reasons. When considering this aspect of time teachers should remember that critical reflection on one's teaching takes time, so the reflective period should be correspondingly long rather than short; otherwise, it might be time wasted. In addition, when teachers commit to having a fixed period in which to reflect, they also now know the exact period they can devote wholly to reflection. In the case study discussed in this chapter, the participants knew that it would last for one semester and so also knew when it would end.

## External input

The previous three suggestions utilize the idea of probing and articulating personal theories, which is the core of teacher reflection. This process includes constructing and reconstructing real teaching experiences, and reflecting

on personal beliefs about teaching. However, at this level, reflection only emphasizes personal experiences whether they are individual teachers or a group of teachers. There is also a need to compare the results of individual teachers and groups of teachers' reflective experiences to what others have discovered. Teachers need also to compare what they have learned from their reflections to what experts say in the form of theories learned from research and the literature on language teaching. So, there is also a need for inclusion of external input of some kind so the reflections can be further enriched with this input. This external input can come from professional journals, other teachers' observations and discussion especially if they have been written-up in a teaching magazine, and also through journal and book publications. Individual teachers and a teacher development group can also attend conferences and seminars and report their findings to other teachers.

## Trust

The first four components of the framework or reflective language teaching outlined above all pose some threat and associated anxiety for practicing teachers when they engage in reflective teaching for any period of time. Therefore, a non-threatening environment should be encouraged by building up trust especially where peers and or groups are observing each other and involved in group discussions. Ways of establishing low trust can be incorporated into the reflective process itself, such as emphasizing description and observation over judgment in classroom observations and group discussions. It may also be an idea for peers and all group members to sign a paper that the results of the reflection cannot be disclosed without written permission from each member.

## Holistic reflective practice

The most important aspect of the above early framework is to give teachers the opportunity to reflect, and I believe is still useful today. While I have used this framework successfully and very recently with experienced language teachers in a teacher reflection group in Canada, and it is still useful for teachers wishing to reflect on their practice, I believe it is still too general in its overall approach and only covers three ways of reflecting on practice: group discussions, classroom observations, and written reflections.

In addition, this framework may be somewhat challenging for novice teachers to enact unless they have mentors to help them.

So I was looking to develop a framework that provided more depth to reflection and that included all teachers regardless of their teaching experience. I realized that no one model provides any overall application of reflective practice that includes all teachers, from pre-service and novice to the most experienced teachers. I agree that many of the models and frameworks have admirably provided different types of structured reflection for practitioners by offering probing questions that stimulate reflection; however one criticism I have is that they have mostly guided teachers on how to tackle technical issues without looking at the person who is reflecting. In other words, many models do not look at reflective practice in any overall manner that includes the person who is reflecting (or person-as-teacher) as well as what the person is reflecting on. I was looking for a way to move the concept of reflective practice to a more *holistic* approach by providing an overall framework for teachers to reflect.

The *framework for reflecting on practice* that I developed encompasses such a holistic approach to reflection because it focuses not only on the intellectual, cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of practice, but also the spiritual, moral, and emotional non-cognitive aspects of reflection that acknowledges the inner life of teachers (Farrell, 2015). The framework has five different stages/levels of reflection: *Philosophy*; *Principles*; *Theory*; *Practice*; and *Beyond Practice*.

## Philosophy

Philosophy, the first stage/level of the framework, can be considered to be a window to the roots of a teacher's practice, because having a philosophy of practice means each observable behavior has a reason that guides it even if the teacher does not articulate this reason. This first stage of reflection within the framework examines the "teacher-as-person" and suggests that professional practice, both inside and outside the classroom, is invariably guided by a teacher's basic philosophy and that this philosophy has been developed since birth. Thus, in order to be able to reflect on our basic philosophy, we need to obtain self-knowledge and we can access this by exploring, examining and reflecting on our background—from where we have evolved—such as our heritage, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, family, and personal values that have combined to influence

who we are as language teachers. As such, teachers talk or write about their own lives and how they think their past experiences may have shaped the construction and development of their basic philosophy of practice.

## Principles

Principles, the second stage/level of the *framework for reflecting on practice*, include reflections on teachers' beliefs. Teachers' practices and their instructional decisions are often formulated and implemented (for the most part subconsciously) on the basis of their underlying beliefs because these are the driving force (along with philosophy reflected on at level/stage one) behind many of their classroom actions. One of the many means that teachers have at their disposal when accessing their principles (assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions) is by exploring and examining the various images, metaphors and maxims of teaching and learning. The images these metaphors and maxims produce become powerful introspective tools for teachers because they can be used as a lens to gain insight into their principles of practice.

## Theory

Following on from reflecting on our *principles*, we are now ready to reflect on our *theory*, the third level/stage of the framework. *Theory* explores and examines the different choices a teacher makes about particular skills taught (or they think should be taught) or, in other words, how to put their theories into practice. Influenced by their reflections on their philosophy, and their principles, teachers can now actively begin to construct their theory of practice. Theory in this stage/level means that teachers consider the type of lessons they want to deliver on a yearly, monthly or daily basis. Another means of accessing our theory is to explore and examine critical incidents. Although critical incidents are situations that actually occur during practice, the next stage/level in the framework, I include them now because they can be used to guide a teacher's theory building.

## Practice

Up to now, the framework has emphasized reflecting on *philosophy*, *principles* and *theory*, or the "hidden" aspect of teaching. Thus, we are now ready to

reflect on the more visible behaviors of what we do as teachers, our *practice*, and what actually happens in the classroom. Teachers have several different methods of accessing their reflections of *practice*. For example, teachers can engage in classroom observations (self-monitoring, peer critical friendships or group observations), and they can record (audio and/or video) their lessons and later transcribe the recordings for more accurate recount of what occurred. Teachers can also consider conducting action research on specific aspects of their practice if they think they need to improve some aspect of their teaching or their students' learning.

## Beyond practice

The final stage/level of the framework entails teachers reflecting *beyond practice*. This fifth stage/level of the framework takes on a sociocultural dimension to teaching and learning. This is called *critical reflection* and entails exploring and examining the moral, political and social issues that impact a teacher's practice both inside and outside the classroom. Critical reflection moves the teacher *beyond practice* and links practice more closely to the broader sociopolitical as well as affective/moral issues that impact practice.

The framework can be navigated in many different ways, three of which are: theory-into-(beyond) practice, (beyond) practice-into-theory or a single stage application. Thus it is a descriptive rather than a prescriptive framework. Teachers can take a deductive approach to reflecting on practice by moving from theory-into-practice or from stage/level 1, philosophy through the different stages to stage/level 5, beyond practice. Some may say that pre-service teachers who do not have much classroom experiences, would be best suited to take such an approach because they can first work on their overall philosophical approach to teaching English to speakers of other languages and work their way through the different stages of principles (stage/level 2), theory (stage/level 3) when they reach the practicum stage, they will be well placed then to reflect on their practice (stage/level 4) and eventually move beyond practice (stage/level 5). This theory-driven approach to practice where philosophy and theory have an initial influence on practice is probably a natural sequence of development for novice teachers because they do not have much teaching experience. When their early practices are observed, it is most likely that theory can be detected in their practice; however, over time, and with reflection, it is possible that their everyday

practice will begin to inform and even change their philosophy and theory and they may come up with new principles of practice. Thus continued reflection can nourish both practice and theory of practice. Experienced teachers too can also choose to begin their reflections at stage/level 1, philosophy especially if they consider their philosophy as a significant basis of their practice with principles second, theory third and so on through the framework. For experienced teachers some of whose practice can be theory-driven if they have been reading and experimenting with applications of particular theories throughout their teaching careers, most likely describe their work in terms of their overall philosophical approach to teaching English to speakers of other languages and this description probably embeds a lot of their values, beliefs, principles as well as theories behind their practice. When such teachers are observed teaching their lessons, we are likely to see that their approaches, methods and activities often reflect the influence of these theories.

## Reflection

- Reflect on all five stages of the framework above beginning at whatever stage you feel most comfortable with. You can choose a theory-into-(beyond) practice approach or a (beyond) practice-into-theory approach or begin at any stage and just reflect at that stage or then move onto to other stages.

Professional development through reflective practice as it is outlined in this book is seen as entering a process of “mental growth spurred from within” (Feiman-Namser and Floden, 1986: 523) in which teachers are supported in seeking their own direction of growth. Britten (1985) points out that the direction of this growth will depend on each teacher’s needs, previous training, length of service of the teacher, career prospects, and resources available. The experienced language teacher has already established a repertoire of teaching habits, and a relatively complex and integrated conceptual system for identifying classroom events. Consequently, any in-service program should start with an exploration of where teachers are rather than a prescription for what the course leader thinks afflicts them so that they can prevent feelings of “we’ve been here before” among the participants. With such thoughts in mind I outline two workshops I conducted with



second language teachers in Korea and Thailand, so that interested readers can explore the various topics these teachers generated for their reflections. Both workshops attempted to give ESL/EFL teachers an opportunity to find a focus to start their reflections on their own classroom practices and so that they could generate their own theories about teaching. The workshops were conducted in four phases and I explain each phase.

## Phase I

This first phase of the workshop consisted of getting groups of five participants to sit in closed circles. Participants were given a blank index card when they walked into the room and asked *to reflect on a recent teaching practice or experience in the classroom, positive or negative, that caused them to stop and think about their teaching*. They were to write this on the blank card and then share it with the other members of the group. Each group was then asked *to rank the incidents in order of importance* and to write these on one blank card for each group. For the Korea TESOL group the important items were the following:

- Using and teaching a grammar book;
- Getting students out of the by “rote” learning patterns and into a self-initiated, creative mindset;
- How do you help students think on their own; students overcoming fear;
- Is real communication activity possible in a beginners’ group;
- Students’ reading is parroting the text—are they understanding any of it and how can I tell?;
- Tardy arrival of students;
- Too many students in the classroom; student inattention—off-task behavior;
- How to give feedback from mid-term exams;
- Motivating the students;
- Maintaining interest/attention with diverse groups; and
- Control of elementary school students.

*The individual concerns at the Thai TESOL Conference were the following:*

- How can I get my students to study English? (from a Thai teacher);
- How can I get fresh ideas? (An American materials writer);
- How can we solve the entrance exam dilemma? (two teachers from Japan);

- How can I get teachers to be more confident? (a teacher educator in Hong Kong);
- What are “qualified” teachers? (An American teacher in Korea); and
- How can I get shy students from Asian countries to talk in class? (a teacher educator from the United States).

*Phase I took about ten minutes.*

## Phase II

For the second phase, the closed groups opened into one large group facing the blackboard. This second phase called for the participants to rank in order of importance five key dilemmas that they would like to discuss. I put a list of the five points pooled from each group on the blackboard as follows:

Group	A	B	C	D	E
Points					
	1				
	2				
	3				
	4				
	5				

Next, participants had to choose from the above list the five most problematic or interesting areas they would most like to discuss in detail.

*The five areas that the Korea TESOL participants chose to talk about were*

- problems of class size;
- student progress;
- student motivation;
- student fear of talking in English; and
- cultural dynamics.

*The five areas that the Thai group wanted to talk about were*

- entrance exams;
- improving teacher's confidence;
- student's lack of confidence;
- cultural problems in teaching; and
- teachers making more informed decisions.

*Phase II took about fifteen minutes.*

## Phase III

Next, five new sub-groups were set up under the five themes identified in Phase II. Participants could choose to join any of these sub-groups to discuss specific problems. A summary of the topics each group talked about were presented in the form of guidelines in phase IV, the final phase. It worked out that the participants were, more or less, evenly numbered in each sub-group with no one theme attracting more participants than another.

*Phase III took about twenty minutes.*

## Phase IV

Finally, each sub-group reported back to the main group in order to share their reflection on that theme. For example, the groups at *Korea TESOL* choose five group topics and came up with some guidelines for teachers:

- **Group 1:** Large classes. Definition: 50–70 students of different ages; guideline: do group/pair work whenever possible.
- **Group 2:** Student Progress; guideline: teachers should have sound methods of assessment and give feedback.
- **Group 3:** Motivation; guideline: Topics must have relevance to students' lives and experiences.
- **Group 4:** Student Fear of Talking; guideline: Prepare students with exposure to language that will appear in the activity.
- **Group 5:** Cultural Dynamics; guideline: avoid confrontation.

*Examples from the groups at Thai TESOL included:*

- **Group 1:** Entrance exams; guideline: Listening and speaking component should be added in the national tests of Japan, Korea, and Thailand.
- **Group 2:** Improving teacher's confidence; guideline: Opportunities for professional upgrading.

*Phase IV took about ten minutes.*

For language teachers wishing to conduct a similar workshop in different contexts, it is important to remember that the participants must be advised to take active role in all the activities. Also, sixty minutes should be enough time to complete the workshop. What was absent from the above workshops in Thailand and Korea was follow-up. Language teachers need to continue their focused reflections on the topics generated in the workshop with other

groups of teachers by using the methods and activities presented in this book. Groups of teachers can then compare what they have discovered and thus contribute to the professional development of all concerned.

It is evident from the diverse topics in each workshop that EFL teachers have a lot to say; the only problem is that they often do not have a forum in which they can present their ideas. The type of talking and sharing in the workshops frees ESL teachers from impulsive and routine behavior. Furthermore, this type of reflection allows the teacher to act in a deliberative, intentional manner and to avoid the feeling that theory is not applicable to their teaching lives. A group of teachers who meet and talk about teaching (as happened in the workshop outlined in this chapter) can draw on their own experiences and become more confident that what they may be doing in the classroom is theoretically and practically sound. In addition, teacher educators can use the same system to become proactive thinkers about strategies that may help them in their classrooms.

## Reflection

- Copeland, et al. (1993: 348) maintain that “The demonstration of reflective practice is seen to exist along a continuum; people vary in opportunity, ability, or propensity to reflect. Therefore, they say it may be unreasonable to expect teachers consistently to engage in reflection at every moment.” What is your opinion of this statement?
- Some teachers suggest some barriers which may be problematic for successful achievement of reflective practice such as teachers need time and opportunity for development and exposing oneself and one’s opinions in a group of strangers can lead to vulnerability. How would you address these problems?
- Which areas of your teaching do you think you need to develop?
- Start the process of self-monitoring your teaching and try to put as many of the reflections *ON* (classroom communication, metaphors and maxims, beliefs and practices, etc.) and *WITH* (Teaching journals, classroom observations, action research, etc.) opportunities as presented in this book.
- Try to collaborate with a critical friend and put as many of the reflections *ON* (classroom communication, metaphors and maxims, beliefs and

practices, etc.) and *WITH* (Teaching journals, classroom observations, action research, etc.) opportunities as presented in this book.

- Try to form a teacher development group and try to put as many of the reflections *ON* (classroom communication, metaphors and maxims, beliefs and practices, etc.) and *WITH* (Teaching journals, classroom observations, action research, etc.) opportunities as presented in this book.

## Conclusion

One question I think important to ask now is: “How would you recognize a reflective language teacher if you saw one?” I see a reflective second language teacher as one who takes responsibility for his or her own knowledge construction by engaging in reflective activities. These activities can include any or all of the following: conducting an action research project, keeping a teaching journal, video and/or audio-taping a class or classes and observing peers teaching, talking with a group of teachers, developing a teacher portfolio, and/or utilizing other methods and activities that have been covered so far in this book. A common benefit derived from all these methods is that they can provide second language teachers with support and different means for reflecting on their teaching. This form of professional development goes beyond one-day “dog-and-pony shows” that feature a motivational speaker and often rely on “quick-fix” scenarios or teachers are provided with “teacher-proof” activities to replicate in the classroom in order to improve their practice. As Kumaravadivelu (2003: 17) has suggested, second language teachers should enter into “a continual process of self-reflection and self-renewal” so that they can “construct their own personal theory of teaching.”

## Chapter scenario

A group of EFL teachers in Russia, Gallina, Gregor, and Nadia, were concerned that their students were not speaking enough English during their classes and worse still, some consistently spoke Russian during their classes. So, they decided to write teaching journals and meet as a group once

a week for a few weeks to discuss this problem. After a few weeks talking about this problem during the group meetings one of the group members, Gallina, reflected on this problem of “getting them to talk more in class” and wrote in her journal as follows: “I am unsatisfied; I had wanted them to talk more. I was not happy with [a student], speaking a lot of Russian yesterday and so I scolded him in front of the class.” Gallina then revealed to the group that she was now becoming even more concerned with the situation in her class because her students have gone silent nearly totally and do not even speak in Russian. So Gallina, together with the other group members further discussed her dilemma of trying to get her students to speak more English in her conversation classes over the following three weeks. As Gregor and Nadia had a similar but less severe problem in some of their classes they all (as a group) decided to make a general plan to observe each others’ class for a period of four weeks. The first thing they suggested was that Gallina and the other teachers should not fill in any silence in their classes and to let the students fill in any gaps in silence in English themselves. Also, they suggested that they could scaffold more during the class by providing starter answers to questions in English and to introduce more structured topics during the class so that the students would not feel intimidated when speaking English. Over time, they all incorporated these suggestions into their classes and as a result, their students began to speak more English during the classes.

## Reflection

- What do you think of the procedures the group adopted to facilitate their reflections?
- If you were a member of a teacher development group that decided to focus their discussion topic on getting students to speak more (English) in class, what procedures would you suggest the group adopt to investigate this?
- Outline a detailed plan (including a timeline) for this group to investigate the topic for critical reflection.



# The Importance of Reflective Practice for Effective Teaching

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## Introduction

Recently a lot of attention in the field of teaching English as a second language (TESOL) has been focused on the differences between a native speaker teacher of English (NEST) and a non-native speaker teacher of English (NNEST). Some administrators and teachers consider that NESTs are better teachers (without any evidence) while others consider NNESTs are better teachers (again without any evidence). As a result, a dichotomy has developed in the field of TESOL between NESTs and NNESTs with some in each camp promoting one over the other but this only separates rather than unifies our profession.

In this final chapter I would like to discuss the idea of *Critical Competencies Associated with Effective Teaching* that includes reflective practice rather



than *who* the teacher is. From the very start I want to point out that I do not believe in the dichotomy of native speaker teacher and non-native speaker teacher that some would suggest as being connected mostly to one of these groups' language proficiency. Since writing the first edition of this book, I have seen many discussions that actually perpetuate this dichotomy rather than do anything to make it better and I fear that some in our profession are using it to fuel their own academic careers. Thus I removed the chapter on teachers' language proficiency because I now believe that it fuels the divide rather than helps any language teacher. In other words I believe certain academics are playing on this and emphasizing the language proficiency issue rather than looking at teaching from an overall view of the important critical competencies associated with effective teaching (hence the title of the chapter). Hence I want to ask readers to consider the following three notions about ESL/EFL teachers' language proficiency: Can we assume that the greater the language proficiency, the better the teacher? Or that English fluency is central in classroom teaching competence? If teachers are not fluent or native-like speakers of English, they are not likely to teach at their best.

These notions if true promote the idea of "native speakerism" as a standard for all teachers. I refer to Freeman (2016) as the reason why these notions should be questioned and why I have dropped the chapter in my book because it promotes the false division of differences between native speaker teachers and so-called non-native speaker teachers. I believe you are a qualified or non-qualified teacher regardless of your L1. By continuing to have this chapter in my book I believe that I am unfairly pointing out only one particular area for a group of teachers whose L1 is different than the target language and as such contributing to the idea that teachers should model native standards only. As Freeman (2016: 37) correctly points out, "native-speakerism" is an ideological position and the view (or assertion) that English fluency is necessary for ELT teachers to do their jobs "contributes to enshrining the standard of 'native-speakerism'" and also to the unnecessary continuation of the dichotomy of native speaker teacher as opposed to non-native speaker teacher and both are a fallacy.

In this chapter I suggest that it is not in anybody's interests to continue with this dichotomy if we are to be recognized as a profession within the wider academic community and that we should be debating critical competencies related to effective teaching instead regardless if one is a NEST or NNEST. As such, I suggest that it is not *who* you are in terms of your ethnicity, culture, or race as a TESOL teacher, but what you know in terms of your effectiveness as a teacher regardless on your background.

## Language teachers

Apparently there are two main types of language teachers in TESOL: NESTs and NNESTs. NESTs are those individuals who were raised speaking English as their first language (L1) and grew up in English speaking communities. They supposedly speak the language fluently, apparently have a “feel” for its nuances and are comfortable in using its idiomatic expressions, which of course vary in different English speaking contexts (e.g., United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand). In most contexts NESTs are assumed by both students and administrators to be best able to provide (but I must also point out not necessarily able to “teach”) the target model for language learning and teaching. As Reis (2011: 140) has recently noted: “Native English speakers are the preferred teachers because they are perceived to speak ‘unaccented’ English . . . and thus they make better ESL or EFL teachers than Non-Native English speakers.” In other words the only “qualification” these administrators and students recognize is their ability to speak English (and possibly entertain the class).

In contrast, apparently NNESTs are said to be bilingual or multilingual language teachers, who speak English as their second language and teach English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) in either their own home countries where they share the same mother tongue (L1) of their students, or in English speaking countries (e.g., United States, Canada, United Kingdom) where they have a diverse student makeup with many different first languages in their classes. However, there are negative perceptions held by various stakeholders (e.g., administrators, students) as to the “quality” of NNESTs over NESTs mainly because of their status as so-called non-native speakers of English. Unfortunately this discrimination is to be found in many job advertisements with job specifications written boldly as “only native speaker teachers should apply” (see Mahboob and Gordon (2013) for more on this). Indeed, Reis (2011) has noted that this inappropriate labeling of language teachers by administrators as natives and non-natives not only adversely affects the careers of many qualified NNESTs, but also TESOL profession as a whole, as many times “teachers” seem to get hired solely on the basis of their native speaker status.

While I recognize that some “qualified” TESOL teachers who apply for particular jobs feel or are discriminated against because of their perceived L1 and/or skin color (Mahboob and Gordon, 2013), I suggest that this is an issue for TESOL/IATEFL as a governing body (such as is the case within

the medical field or any other profession) to deal with and for affiliate organizations within particular countries to challenge. No doubt much of the discrimination and racism within TESOL (Edge, 2011) also arises from clients (students and their parents) who think they need a so-called native speaker to be their teacher, even though some of these native speakers may not be *qualified* by a recognized certifying granting body. In fact, when considering terminology these people should be called “conversation partners” and rather than advertising for “Native-speaker teachers” schools should advertise for “conversation partners” for their students.

Thus, I suggest that it is time to stop this harmful NEST/NNEST dichotomy and indeed using the nonsensical terms of NEST and NNEST and to begin talking about effective teachers regardless of their first language or place of origin. I suggest that the terms NESTs and NNESTs in themselves are polarizing and self-defeating and contribute to the perception that there is a division in status and teaching effectiveness between teaching professionals in the ELT field. So it is now time that we as a profession began to talk about critical competencies of *effective teachers* and *effective teaching* regardless of that teacher’s background. In other words, it is not who you are in terms of your background, but what you know that makes you a “qualified” TESOL teacher.

## Effective teaching

What is “effective teaching” is the obvious starting point; however, because the concept of “effective teaching” is multidimensional, it is difficult to define. In addition, there have been different approaches to researching the concept of what makes a teacher effective from looking at it in terms of the relationship of teachers’ behavior and student learning or how teachers help facilitate student learning to comparing novice and expert teacher behaviors. In terms of learning outcomes or how teachers help facilitate student learning, some researchers have suggested that effective teachers should stimulate active and creative learning as well as inspire a curiosity for future learning (Muijs and Reynolds, 2001; Muijs, 2006). In addition many studies have proposed that effective teachers possess particular characteristics and knowledge such as superior subject matter knowledge, good classroom management skills, good instructional skills

and many more diverse behaviors too long to list in this article. Other approaches to research on teacher effectiveness involved comparisons of novice and expert behavior with various different criteria used to identify “expert teachers” such as the number of years of teaching experience, recommendation from peers, students and administrators, and/or student achievement scores (Berliner, 2004; Turner-Bisset, 2001).

Within second language teaching, Richards (2010: 102) has pointed out that “the nature of what we mean by effectiveness in teaching is not always easy to define because conceptions of good teaching differ from culture to culture.” Indeed, if you ask ten language teachers or teacher educators to define effective teaching, you are likely to get ten different answers, so the concept of an effective teacher is really an elusive one. As Richards (2014: 5) has noted: “The way a person teaches, and his or her view of what good teaching is, will, therefore, reflect his or her cultural background and personal history, the context in which he or she is working and the kind of students in his or her class.” To date, there are no precise benchmarks of what constitutes effective second language teaching in all settings, nor are there agreed effective strategies that teachers should implement in their classes (not to mention what exactly effective teachers would look like in a classroom).

How does this translate into learning to teach? Richards (2014: 8) has noted that learning to teach English means “mastering a core set of basic skills or competencies that teachers make regular use of in the classroom.” Then, as teachers become more experienced, they become more flexible and can improvise more as they continue to build up and automatize their repertoire of teaching routines and strategies. In second language teacher education programs, as Johnson (2009: 11) has proposed, this knowledge base should inform at least three broad areas: “(1) the content of L2 teacher education programs: *What L2 teachers need to know*; (2) the pedagogies that are taught in L2 teacher education programs: *How L2 teachers should teach*; and (3) the institutional forms of delivery through which both the content and pedagogies are learned: *How L2 teachers learn to teach*.” Language teachers initially learn the theoretical foundations of TESOL, or the content knowledge, in their initial training programs (Richards, 2014). As Richards, (2014) has noted, this knowledge can be divided into disciplinary knowledge (e.g., SLA, Methods, Sociolinguistics, Phonology, etc.) and pedagogical content knowledge (e.g., Curriculum Planning, Assessment, Teaching Young Learners, etc.). However, and as Richards (2014: 23) has noted, “The central issue of what constitutes appropriate disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge remains an unresolved issue.”

It has also been suggested that effective teachers are expert teachers. What is an expert? Many will likely answer that it is a person in any field who performs his or her job in a seemingly effortless manner so much so that it looks automatic and comes from all the years of experience performing this particular job. However, Johnson (2005) and others caution that “the apparent ease of experts often belies immense effort” because they “work long hours . . . and they tend to set standards for themselves and others that are always at least slightly beyond reach” (pp. 15–16). Johnson (2005) suggests that expertise has something to do with a detailed knowledge (discussed above) but not “just a headful of facts” (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993: 30) about a particular topic. Johnson (2005: 13) has pointed out that in order to be an effective expert it “is the quality of knowledge that is important” in terms of possessing the “‘judgment of promisingness’ [where] the expert knows which avenues are likely to be promising and which may turn out to be dead ends.” In addition, Shulman (1987: 15) has maintained that expert teachers must not only possess many different kinds of knowledge (content, curriculum, pedagogical content, knowledge of learners and learning), all of which the teachers in this study exhibited but also have the capacity to “transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students.” However, similar to the inconclusiveness of what constitutes the knowledge base of TESOL, Tsui (2009: 190) has also pointed out that “There are as yet no established common criteria for expert teachers.” However, in a recent study on ESL teacher expertise, Farrell (2013b) identified five main characteristics (in order of their frequency) that effective teachers possess or should aspire to possess: Knowledge of Learners and Learning, Engage in Critical Reflection, Access Past Experiences, Informed Lesson Planning, and Active Student Involvement. As can be observed with these findings, many of these characteristics have been covered so far in the literature review of what effective teaching is.

However, it is not my intention in this chapter to discuss the details of the knowledge base (this is a different and possibly endless debate) outlined above nor what an expert teacher is (another long debate); rather I want to emphasize that candidates who study what is required by their credential granting organizations should be recognized as effective by what they have learned and can do in the classroom rather than who they are as individual people regardless of what their first, second or third languages are. As Ethell and McMeniman (2000: 88) suggests, there are some overall characteristics said to be essential for teachers to be competent, successful, and effective;

they must “have a larger knowledge-base from which to draw” and usually they “organize knowledge more efficiently in complex interconnected schemas and utilize it more effectively.” As Medgyes (2001: 440) has suggested, effective teachers are outstanding teachers and “all outstanding teachers are ideal in their own ways, and as such, are different from each other.” More importantly it suggests *all* teachers regardless of whether they are monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual are different from each other and as such we should eliminate the harmful terms NESTs and NNESTs.

## Teacher language proficiency

More than 15 years ago Medgyes (2001) suggested that “the most important professional duty that non-native teachers have to perform is to make linguistic improvements in their English.” This sentence alone contributes to dividing the profession again into NESTs and NONNESTs as well as a deficit view of a TESOL teacher’s competence in terms of language teaching proficiency. Professional competence for most language teachers means acquiring a knowledge of relevant subject matter (e.g., learning theory, applied linguistics, pedagogical grammar, methodology), mastering a broad range of teaching skills, learning how to develop tests, curriculum, and materials, how to use resources such as videos and computers, and proficiency in the language they are teaching be they NESTs or NONNESTs.

I believe that all *qualified* teachers of TESOL have different strengths and weakness and must keep up with their professional development throughout their careers in order to remain effective in the classroom. For example, some teachers may need to brush up on their knowledge or grammar while others may want to brush up on their oral proficiency skills, but they engage in such professional development because they want to remain effective teachers throughout their careers. I have purposely omitted the idea that one “type” of teacher over another may have a deficiency in grammar knowledge or oral proficiency because that continues the dichotomous approach with TESOL teaching that teachers can be divided by their L1. I believe that teachers are *qualified* or not and this includes all their strengths and weaknesses.

Indeed as Freeman (2016) has reminded us we still do not know beyond a sense, of how a teacher’s language use in a classroom either contributes or blocks student learning of that language, a point that echoes the question raised by David Nunan (2010: 474) in his review of the earlier edition of this book “of exactly what is an adequate command of English for teaching

purposes?” Freeman (2016: 38) maintains that if we as a profession consider that proficiency will automatically “qualify” (I do not put this word in parentheses because it does not really mean *qualify*), or that such proficiency can improve student learning, this undermines the idea of a teacher’s teaching competency and contributes to “wide-spread deficit view of the classroom teaching abilities of a majority of ELT teachers around the world.” I agree.

I agree with Berry (1990: 99) that “certain approaches to language teaching are incompatible with low levels of proficiency in teachers” such as communicative language teaching (CLT) approach to language teaching requires a relatively high level of proficiency on the part of the teacher. That said, I have met many so-called NESTs who have been teaching EFL in foreign countries for many years and because they have been typically teaching students of limited language proficiency and intentionally simplifying their own language in order to facilitate comprehension during lessons, they have in fact “suffered” some fossilization in their own language use over time. I have met many such NESTs who speak to me at a slower than normal speech rate, use simple vocabulary, and avoid complex syntax and rarely use contractions preferring to use careful (monitored) speech style. They are deprived of opportunities to develop their language proficiency. Over time due to the restricted type of English they use in the classroom and their restricted opportunities to use or hear “normal English,” their own English fails to develop. Without opportunities to stretch their output they will tend to keep using a restricted lexicon and syntax and show little improvement or development over time, since the restricted purposes for which they use English do not push them to expand or restructure their linguistic resources. This brings me back to Nunan’s (2010) excellent questions of what exactly is an adequate command of English for teaching purposes.

Freeman (2016) outlines an *English-for-Teaching* course in Japan and Vietnam, which focuses on classroom language use that seems to show promise for all teachers of English. In the Japan course for example, the teachers begin the course with a self-assessment of their confidence in performing various classroom tasks in English in which the course then presents functional English to carry out these tasks (in short classroom-based scenarios). The core of this *English-for-Teaching* course is that teachers could progress at their own pace and report that they were more confident to teach *in* English as a result (for more on this see Freeman et al., 2015). What this approach does is provide an alternative to the conventional face-to-face training of teachers to overcome their “deficit” in language proficiency thereby further entrenching the idea of native-speakerism. I agree with



Freeman (2016: 50) when he maintains that “outmoded ideas of fluency in general language use, which ultimately refer back to native-speakerism, need to be replaced with the notion that ELT teachers are ‘native’ to their classrooms.” Freeman (2016: 50) continues:

This professional definition of nativeness means that teachers know what they want to do in their teaching; they understand the purposes and uses that English needs to accomplish in their classrooms. What they are seeking is the specific language “for-teaching” to do so.

Let us now take a look at a scenario that you as a reader can reflect on in terms of teachers making their own understanding of the purposes and uses of English needs in their practice that Freeman (2016) talks about above. A group of three nonnative English speaking EFL teachers in Turkey, Axiel, Subeda, and Fazel, came together as a group to develop their English language proficiency levels. Each teacher had not been able to reflect on their particular use of English while they were teaching and wondered if they were using correct English in classroom situations. They first decided to read up on appropriate classroom language and discovered Heaton’s (1981) specific examples of classroom discourse that include speech acts and functions such as:

- *Requesting, ordering, and giving rules.*
- *Establishing attention.*
- *Questioning.*
- *Repeating and reporting what has been said.*
- *Giving instructions.*
- *Giving and refusing permission.*
- *Warning and giving advice.*
- *Giving reasons and explaining.*

They also read about Willis’ (1981:1) ideas of classroom language and her observations that teachers check their language use during the lesson as follows:

- *Getting organized: seating, books, blackboard.*
- *Checking attendance.*
- *The beginning of the lesson.*
- *Introducing different stages of the lesson.*
- *Dividing the class up: choral, individual and teams.*
- *Interruptions: late comers, things lost.*
- *Control and discipline.*
- *Ending the lesson or a stage in the lesson.*



So the group decided to observe each other teaching and reflect on their use of language outlined above. They used this first observation to work out such issues as where the peer observers should sit (they decided at each corner in the back of the room), if they should write during the observations (they decided yes), and if they should interact with the students during the class (they decided not to). After this first observation all three felt less threatened by the peer observation process. The group then decided that each peer would write down the exact type of language the teacher used during the different stages of the lesson and compare notes after the observation. Later they realized that this would be too much work for each observer so they decided to break up the observation process. For example, Axiel decided to look at all the instructions she gives during class and the type of language she used while giving these instructions. Subeda decided to examine her use of group work during her oral English classes and the type of language she used to set up and monitor groups. While Fazel decided to investigate how (the methods and results) she started and ended each class and the type of language she used to do this. They did this for two rounds of observations and then they met as a group to share their observations and discuss what they would do as a result of the findings. This latter meeting lasted for three hours and only accomplished each teacher giving an account of the classroom observations. They realized that they would have to have another meeting to evaluate and interpret these findings, and that after each teacher had a chance to digest what their peers had said. This next meeting produced interpretations by each group member and each teacher decided to make certain changes as a result of the meeting discussions. As a reader of this scenario, what is your opinion of the way this group of teachers set up their language development process with the group?

## Reflective practice: A critical competency

What we can say for sure is that teachers as professionals cannot rely on any definitive or accepted body of knowledge base throughout their careers because of the various challenges they will inevitably meet. Rather effective language teachers must be able to respond to every issue, dilemma and problem they face, thus moving beyond their initial craft skills and knowledge and be able to evaluate possible roads of action that take into

account the needs of their students, their institution and their community. As Richards (2014:2) has pointed out, teacher development for the most part, is “dependent upon the teacher’s individual initiatives and efforts, and in their willingness to participate in activities that involve reflection, monitoring, and evaluation of one’s own professional growth.” Thus, in order to become and remain effective, professional language teachers should engage in reflective practice. In other words a critical competency for twenty-first century effective language teachers along with knowledge and all that entails, experience and expertise, is their ability to continuously deliberate on their practice.

In the general education literature some scholars (e.g., Day, 1999; Zeichner, 1983) maintain that reflection is an important part of effective teaching and effective teachers systematically examine their beliefs and practices and critically reflect on both so that they can gain an understanding of what they do and why they do it. As Jay and Johnson (2002: 76) suggest: “Reflection is a process, both individual and collaborative, involving experience and uncertainty. It is comprised of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one’s thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others.”

Teachers should keep in mind that the reason for such an exploration is more effective teaching. This process involves some self-reflection. A long time ago Jersild (1955: 82) asserted that “to help a pupil to have meaningful experiences, a teacher must know the pupil as a person. This means that the teacher must strive to know himself.” I already mentioned this in Chapter 2 on self-reflection but it is not easy to know where to start when trying to know the self as a teacher. I hope the contents of this book have helped each reader to know the self and as a result each reader is now a reflective practitioner with the idea that we can provide meaningful experiences for all our students. This is at the core of reflective practice.

## Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I have argued that we in TESOL should move on from the discussions of distinctions between native speaker and non-native speaker teachers and start discussing what an effective, qualified teacher is regardless of their background, such as is present in professions such as medicine, or law—when was the last time we asked for a native speaker of

English medical doctor? A medical doctor is qualified or not and it is not *who* the doctor is, it is *how* he or she practices medicine that is most important for the patient. This should also be promoted for TESOL teachers. I have also pointed out that although the literature in general education and TESOL is inclusive as to what characteristics an effective teacher should possess; one critical competency (that keeps appearing in the literature) is that he or she continuously engages in reflective practice. I hope readers have enjoyed this revised edition of reflective practice for language teachers and have gotten some more ideas that can facilitate their own reflective journeys into this fantastic profession of teaching English to speakers of other languages.

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