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T. S. C. Farrell, *Reflective writing for language teachers* (Sheffield, Equinox. 2013. PP. X, 163).

Reviewed by Chan Narith Keuk (Linguistics Department, Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquarie University)

Thomas S. C. Farrell's thought-provoking book, *Reflective writing for language teachers*, provides English language teaching (ELT) professionals with a new way of improving professional practice through teachers' self-reflective writing on their teaching. Reflective practice has recently drawn attention in the field of ELT. Farrell could be seen as a prominent scholar leading and promoting this discipline, especially with regard to teachers' writing about, and critically analysing and reflecting on their teaching to improve practice. This aim is evidenced in this book. ELT teachers will find this book to be a practical guide for self-improving the quality of their teaching. The book is set out in seven chapters. Each chapter of the book supplements the main content and discussion with a preamble, which provides readers with relevant and contextual background to the chapter, and various reflection journal activities in order to familiarise readers with reflective writing practices.

In Chapter 1, Farrell introduces readers to his motivational statement which encourages teaching professionals to engage in reflective writing, and discusses some important issues about professional development. Such issues comprise whether teaching is perceived as a job or a profession; which type of professional development to engage in, top-down or bottom-up; and, which reflective tools professionals can use to self-reflect on their practice. Farrell provides five stages of self-reflection: (1) teachers examine their beliefs, values, and assumptions for teaching and review their goals for personal and professional development; (2) teachers reflect with their students by paying special attention to all students and observe how they learn, how they interact with each other and what they think about teachers; (3) teachers reflect with students and their colleagues; (4) teachers' reflective practice includes administrators; and (5) teachers' reflection is undertaken with and within professional organisations (i.e., TESOL).

In Chapter 2, Farrell defines a notion of reflective practice and discusses two forms of reflective practices: weak and strong. While the weak form refers to "reflection at descriptive level", the strong form refers to reflection that is based on "hard evidence" (p. 36). Chapter 2 provides reflective activities that teaching professionals can employ to engage in a systematic self-assessment of their practices.

The activities include action research, teaching journals, concept mapping, teacher development groups, classroom observation, teacher metaphors, teacher maxims, teacher beliefs, and critical friendship.

Chapter 3 discusses the benefits of writing about and reflecting on current practices for teaching professionals. The chapter also highlights two approaches to writing: writing as a product and writing as a process. Drawing on Farrell's experience of engaging in reflecting on teaching practices, the chapter outlines how one can begin reflective writing practices.

Chapter 4 introduces readers to reflective teaching journal writing, which, as Farrell argues, is an effective approach to reflecting on one's own teaching practices. Writing reflective teaching journals help teachers reveal their beliefs about teaching and learning, better understand actual practices, and critically reflect on them for further actions to improve their practice. This chapter offers a framework for journal writing, and makes suggestions as well as cautions for language teachers to reflect on teaching. The chapter also provides a brief account of a case study undertaken to explore three language teachers' reflective practice through journal writing. The findings of the case study reveal that ELT teachers, when writing reflective teaching journals, face some issues of concerns, such as "the act of writing" and "level of anxiety related to reflection" (p. 93). For reflective practice to be achieved and when journal writing is used as a reflective tool, Farrell suggests that teachers should be actively engaged in systematic reflection.

Chapter 5 provides further suggestions for teaching professionals to integrate narrative writing into the teaching of journal writing. That is, teachers write their teaching stories in journals by following a narrative framework and analysing the stories, critical incidents in teaching and case studies related to their teaching. The chapter also discusses the benefits ELT teachers can gain from narrative reflective writing: Teachers can gain a clear understanding about their practice by way of developing a "new perspective, insights, and a sense of self-renewal" (p. 109); teachers can become more attentive to the value and beliefs that underlie teaching practices; teachers can also develop more awareness about "their underlying assumptions and beliefs about the complex relationship between teaching and learning a second or foreign language" (p. 112).

Chapter 6 of the book examines the constraints that beginning ELT professionals encounter in the early stage of their teaching profession. They need to build collegial relationships and socialise with new school (or institution) cultures. As Farrell argues, beginning language teachers encounter all kinds of emotions such as frustration, anxiety, enjoyment and excitement. Farrell asserts that novice teachers need support so that they can progress in their profession. The chapter also provides a brief account of a reflective group involving six ELT teachers stating their beliefs and actual practices.

In the last chapter of the book, Chapter 7, Farrell encourages ELT professionals to engage in formal research on their own practice using systematic language teacher research, a framework of which was suggested by Freeman (1998) and Borg (2009; 2010; 2013). The chapter provides a brief analysis of teacher research projects undertaken by language teachers in six continents — Europe, Middle East, Africa, Americas, Australia and New Zealand, and Asia — and published in the Language Teacher Research series. These exemplars are used for a discussion about the kind of research activities that the language teachers are involved in. The analysis focuses on research topics, research methods, results and implications, reflection, and research settings. This chapter, therefore, offers some perspectives, as well as some practical models, concerning the kinds of reflective writing practice that is achieved through teachers' active engagement in systematic language teacher research.

The book concludes with the author's last words on reflection, stating that despite the difficulty one might encounter when self-reflecting on teaching practice, entering into a systematic reflective writing practice will make teaching professionals aware of their own teaching and students' learning, and more confident about taking initiatives for further action to improve professional practices. Therefore, novice as well as experienced language teachers are encouraged to be actively involved in reflective writing practice.

The book makes a significant contribution to a new way that language teaching professionals (whether novice or experienced), especially non-native English speaking professionals, improve teaching practices by engaging in systematic reflective practice through writing, analysing, and reflecting on teaching stories, critical incidents in teaching, and case studies concerning the teaching practices. After reading this book and actively completing various teaching journal writing activities provided in each chapter, one will find themselves familiar with and enthusiastic about reflective writing practices and will be encouraged to adopt this practice as a tool to improve their quality of teaching and learning.

References

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