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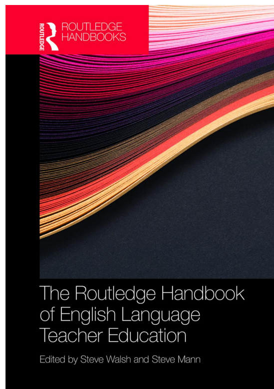

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Reflective practice in L2 teacher education

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3

Reflective practice in L2 teacher education

Thomas S.C. Farrell

Introduction

Second language teacher education (SLTE) programs that basically consist of foundation courses followed by a teaching practicum are designed to prepare learner teachers for a teaching career. However, when they begin their teaching careers, what usually happens is that many soon realize there is something of a mismatch between the contents of their SLTE programs and their lived experiences as novice teachers (Farrell, 2012, 2015a, 2017). They discover that some of their theory focused SLTE courses have little to do with practice and some of their methods (or practice) courses have not enough theoretical conceptualizations of teaching and learning a second/foreign language (Farrell, 2016). Thus, many learner teachers have a difficult time adjusting to life in real classrooms and feel that they have not been adequately prepared for the reality of their teaching careers. Consequently, SLTE programs must be able to prepare teachers, as noted by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005: 359) to 'become professionals who are adaptive experts within the context in which they teach.' One way of nurturing learner teachers to become adaptive practitioners is to develop teachers as reflective practitioners who can make their own informed decisions about their practice based on such reflection (Farrell, 2015b).

This chapter discusses how SLT educators can encourage learner teachers to become reflective practitioners. The chapter outlines how SLT educators can make use of technology, critical friendships, team teaching, peer coaching, dialoging, service learning, writing, action research and analysis of critical incidents to encourage learner teachers to engage in reflective practice. The chapter first discusses the concept of reflective practice and second language teacher education and then outlines the reflective activities that can help teachers to reflect on their practice. In addition, it should be noted that the reflective activities outlined in this chapter should be viewed from a collaborative, cooperative, sharing, personal experience and peer-feedback dialoguing position rather than practiced in isolation; as Dewey (1933) noted, reflective practice is best practiced in the company of others.

Reflective practice and SLTE

Over the past 30 years or so SLTE programs worldwide have developed courses that are designed to prepare language teachers (L2 teachers) for future teaching careers. However, early research

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(e.g. Freeman, 1994; Tarone & Allwright, 2005) cautioned that we may not be preparing L2 teachers for the reality they would face in real classrooms, yet over the ensuing years, L2 programs have continued to deliver academic and theoretical content in courses that were arguably not serving the needs of the teachers (Faez & Vaelo, 2012; Wright, 2010). Indeed, as is often the case, when learner teachers are presented with any new teaching innovation in SLTE, they are slow to incorporate these when they enter real classrooms; as Tang, Lee, and Chun (2012: 91) noted, 'there is often a disparity between the suggested new practice [in SLTE] and its quality and frequency of use in the real classroom.'

This issue remains a major challenge for SLTE programs today and as Johnson (2013: 76) has noted, it is the responsibility of SLTE programs to present concepts they think are important to teachers, 'but to do so in ways that bring these concepts to bear on concrete practical activity, connecting them to everyday concepts and the goal-directed activities of everyday teaching.' Recently a number of SLT educators have begun to take notice of this theory/practice gap in their programs and have suggested that reflective practice can provide a context whereby learner teachers can make these connections between theory and practice. SLT educators can incorporate various reflective activities so that both pre-service and inservice language teachers can engage in self-reflection in order examine their prior beliefs and practices so that they can begin to question these and (re)consider what is best for their students' learning (Tang et al., 2012). As Tang, Lee, and Chun (2012: 105) point out, 'through self-reflection and questioning of the old practices, new ideas will be able to emerge.'

Technology and reflective practice

With advancements in technology, SLTE programs now have many more delivery and discussion formats at their disposal that can be used to encourage teachers to engage in reflective practice. For example, Faez et al. (2017) have noted a shift from providing solely traditional face-to-face instruction to delivering courses, or components of courses, on online interactive forums. They noted that these technology-enhanced environments are becoming a popular way of promoting discussions beyond the classroom, and increasing opportunities for languaging (or verbalizing thoughts for enhanced learning) and collaborative dialogue (problem-solving dialogue between two or more people) as participants attempt to engage in knowledge building. Faez et al. (2017) used Google Docs, an online collaborative word processor, as a platform to determine whether such a forum can provide a favorable space to facilitate rich discussions in language teacher education programs. Although they reported that they all felt that using an online platform for further discussions was a useful pedagogical tool, they also noted that such a platform did not lead to discussions that were as effective as their face-to-face communications, and concluded that it has limitations if using it as a sole means of classroom interaction in teacher education programs because although they believed that languaging occurred through their online contributions, chances for collaborative dialogue to form new knowledge were actually limited. Thus, the Faez et al. (2017) study indicates that the key to using online interactive forums effectively is finding an appropriate balance between these online collaborations and the more traditional face-to-face interactions in order to provide optimum opportunities for collaborative learning.

Advancements in communications technology also open SLTE programs to more virtual environments where mentors, instructors and supervisors participate in support with meaningful exchanges of ideas so that pre-service teachers can reflect through online collaborations. Mann (2015) outlined how supervisors can use such online collaborations when providing feedback on academic writing tasks and assignments in teacher education programs so that they become more dialogic. Mann (2015) detailed how supervisors can provide audio-feedback

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through screen capture software (in this case *Jing*). This method of providing feedback in teacher education programs he noted, allows a supervisor to simultaneously provide a visual focus and an auditory commentary that provides a more scaffolded and dialogic process. This provides a type of reflective feedback loop input (see Woodward, 2003) where their experience (receiving both written and spoken feedback) enables more dialogue and reflection by both tutors and learners and enables discussion about the process of receiving feedback in this form.

Reflection in SLTE programs can also be enhanced with the compilation of blog-based teaching portfolios because they create opportunities for discussion, inquiry, feedback and reflection in a social networking environment and enable collaborative learning and information sharing among participants (Farr, 2015; Farr & Riordan, 2017; Tang & Lam, 2014). Such blogging technology according to Tang and Lam (2014) who used them successfully in a Hong Kong language teacher education context, allows teachers to record personal voice, critical thinking and reflection which creates an online learning community (OLC). Studies of these blog-based teaching portfolios have shown positive results in scaffolding reflection, mediating teacher education reform, fostering teacher competencies, and having a positive impact on teacher professional development as well as having an overall positive impact on the institutional environment (Tang & Lam, 2014). Tang and Lam (2014) reported that as long as members of the online learning communities remain active they can obtain continuous feedback and support from peers and mentors and discussion and resources can be stored and retrieved at any time, thus providing a powerful tool for the professional development of language teachers. As Farr and Riordan (2017: 24) maintain, such blogs and e-portfolios in SLTE programs are 'good mechanisms to promote individual and collaborative reflective practices.'

Critical friends and reflective practice

Critical friends (sometimes called critical friends groups (Bambino, 2002)) are two or more teachers who collaborate in a mode that encourages discussion and reflection in order to improve the quality of language teaching and learning. Teacher critical friendships entail entering into a collaborative arrangement with other teachers '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 & Smith, 1995: 41). Farrell (2014) outlined an example of a critical friendship in TESOL where three teachers reflected on their practice over one semester of teaching as critical friends. The teachers reported that they really enjoyed collaborating with each other, and suggested the isolated nature of the job of teaching. As one of the teachers explained, 'So often you are out on your island: "Here I am by myself". Am I the only one having this issue?' However as a result of her discussions with her colleague, she began to see her colleague 'in a whole new role' as a 'critical friend'; she said that her colleague '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' (Farrell, 2014: 51). In addition, Farrell (2013: 88) has suggested that critical friendships provide teachers with opportunities to 'reflect on and consolidate their philosophical and theoretical understanding of their practices and if they desire, can even lead to further and more detailed exploration of different aspects of teaching through detailed action research projects.' Thus, teacher education programs and courses should consider adding critical friendships into various activities, tasks, joint assignment and collaborative work so that learner teachers can realize that they are not alone when they begin their teaching careers.

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The usual composition of critical friends as a pair of teachers reflecting together outlined above has been extended to a Critical Friends Group whose composition is ultimately decided by its members and can consist of two to 12 members. Dunne, Nave, and Lewis (2000: 9) define the goal of critical friendships as 'to identify student learning goals that make sense in their schools, look reflectively as practices intended to achieve these goals, and collaboratively examine teacher and student work in order to meet that objective.' These groups meet usually with the help of a facilitator who manages the reflective process. As Johnson (2009: 101) has noted, 'Critical Friends Groups although differing in the way they form or are used, all share common elements: sharing the question or dilemma, inviting questions from the participants, giving and receiving feedback, and promoting self-reflection.'

Research by Vo and Nguyen (2010) has noted the sensitivity of culture on Critical Friends Groups as they reported the learner teachers were initially hesitant to offer any criticism for fear of hurting others, but as the participants gained more trust, they became more comfortable contributing to the group. Vo and Nguyen (2010: 210) observed that Critical Friends Groups offered novice TESOL teachers 'opportunities to learn from colleagues' as they developed a sense of community and this ultimately led to improvement in their teaching. In a similar conclusion, Lakshmi (2014: 200) also links the collaboration involved in such arrangements as beneficial to their overall empowerment as teachers: 'Teachers realized the need for collaborative work, and sought advice from their senior colleagues to solve their classroom problems and for their self-evaluation'.

Team teaching and reflective practice

Team teaching is another type of critical friendship arrangement whereby two or more teachers cooperate as equals as they take responsibility for planning, teaching and evaluating a class (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Team teaching moves reflection beyond the usual practices adopted in many teacher education programs during the teaching practice (or field experiences) components such as student teachers observing lessons before obtaining the responsibility to teach a class alone. Team teaching involves developing a collaborative partnership between two or more teachers in order to develop a lesson to teach and evaluate, thus moving reflective practice from an individual pursuit to a more collaborative and dialogic process (see below for more on dialoging). Typically in such a collaboration the 'team' share responsibility for planning a class and/or course, then teaching the class/course, completing follow-up work (i.e. evaluations/assessments), and making various decisions and outcomes. Teachers usually cooperate as equals, though some elements of coaching (see below) may occur (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2015; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Such team teaching collaborations better prepare the teachers for the transition to real classrooms. Central to team teaching collaboration is the sharing of experiences and reflective dialoging (see Mann & Walsh, 2017, and below for more).

Implementing team teaching in SLTE during field experiences can occur within five different models: the *observation model*, the *coaching model*, the *assistant teaching model*, the *equal status model* and the *team teaching model*. In the *observation model* one teacher observes (with a pre-agreed observation protocol) the other teacher teaching and collects information about the lesson and has no interaction with the students. Both teachers analyze and reflect together after the lesson (Badiali & Titus, 2010). In the *coaching model*, besides observing as in the previous model, the coach is expected to provide suggestions, assistance and support in a kind of mentoring capacity (Goker, 2006). In the assistant team teaching model, one teacher takes the lead, and the other teacher becomes an assistant, providing support to learners when necessary during the lesson (Badiali & Titus, 2010). The *equal status model* as the name suggests is a collaborative team

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teaching arrangement where both teachers have an equal status with all aspects of planning, delivery and evaluation (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). Finally, in the *team teaching model*, both teachers work collaboratively and share planning, delivery and evaluation equitably; however, unlike the models above, here both teachers are in front of the class together taking turns leading a discussion, while the other demonstrates something in front of the learners (Badiali & Titus, 2010). This model is more elaborate than the other three as it takes more time to set up as both teachers need to learn more about each other's teaching style (Badiali & Titus, 2010). Thus a wide variety of team teaching models (many of which can be combined) are available that promote reflection in SLTE.

In TESOL Yang (2013) conducted an ethnographic study during a graduate-level internship which included team teaching and noted that such an approach can develop cooperative working relationships, interpersonal networks and intercultural communication skills. Because the learner teachers get feedback from their co-teachers and supervisors, they can, as Yang (2013) observed, attempt to put TESOL theories learned in teacher education programs into practice as they gain practical and in-context teaching experience to improve their team teaching in the sessions that followed. The team teaching arrangements allowed the learner teachers to divide up what needed to be done and as a result, Yang (2013) reported the teachers found it more effective and easier to manage the challenges that many learner teachers initially face.

Gan (2014) also reported the positive effects of team teaching arrangements similar to a combination of the *observation model* above, for learner teachers mostly because of the impact of immediate feedback the teachers obtained from their peers and an increase in self-confidence. As Gan (2014: 136) says, 'Sharing among the fellow student teachers, most likely developed confidence in "self as a newcomer" and the timely feedback of peers contributed to valuing of personal experience in capacity to generate knowledge for teaching.' Aliakbari and Nejad (2013) explained that their encouragement of team teaching arrangements resulted in collaboration and consensus between the co-teachers as they all determined every issue of the teaching process, including evaluations at the end. However, they also note that students can sometimes become confused because team teaching is a novel approach for many given that some cultural expectations of teaching will differ depending on the context. Thus, Aliakbari and Nejad (2013) point out these team teaching arrangements will require consensus and planning and careful consideration of cultural background that includes such variables as the gender composition of the teams. Thus incorporating team teaching into SLTE programs can encourage and develop collaborative reflective practices among learner teachers.

Peer coaching and reflective practice

As mentioned in the section above in the coaching model of team teaching, peer coaching is another collaborative arrangement between teachers in SLTE that can promote collaborative reflection. Peer coaching is defined as 'the process where teams of teachers regularly observe one another and provide support, companionship, feedback, and assistance' (Valencia & Killion, 1988: 170). However, it is different from the team teaching arrangements discussed above as it is intended to improve specific instructional techniques of one of the peers, usually the observed teacher, in a supportive environment.

Within SLTE, peer coaches can enrich teaching practice (field-based programs) where peer coaches observe and record the performance of their peers, provide feedback on the observed teaching practice, and help the teacher correct any perceived deficiencies and thus improve instruction. Peer coaching is also important in inservice education whereby a more experienced peer teacher provides constructive feedback in a safe learning environment so that the observed

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teacher (less experienced) can develop new knowledge and skills and a deeper awarness of his or her own teaching. Thus the more experienced teacher can take on a mentoring role but both teachers view themselves as peers and equals. Arslan and Ilin (2013) outline the positive effects in terms of changes to their practices related to classroom management skills of a peer-coaching activity where teachers were in pairs and observed one another's lessons, exchanged feedback and repeated the process in a 3 week cycle. Indeed, they reported its success, in that the peers were willing to participate because it was tailored to their particular needs.

Thus, there are different types of peer coaching arrangements such as *technical coach* where a teacher seeks the assistance of another teacher who is experienced and more knowledgeable in order to learn new teaching methods/techniques (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Another type is a *collegial coach* where two teacher-peers focus on refining their existing teaching practices (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Yet another type of coach is a *challenge coach* where a problem arises and two teachers work jointly to resolve the problem (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Within a US context, these different types of peer coaching arrangements can also be used in combination as attested to in research by Artigliere and Baecher (2017) and DelliCarpini and Alonso (2015). Artigliere and Baecher (2017) is an example of how different combinations of co-teaching arrangements in the US can become complicated for novice ESL teachers when they have to navigate different and sometimes competing models of content-based instruction (CBI) such as a *push-in* model where the ESL teacher provides instruction inside the students' content or grade-level classroom; a *pull-out* model where students receive ESL instruction in small groups in another location; and/or a *team teaching* model where the ESL and classroom or content teacher jointly provide instruction to English language learners (ELLs). As a result, these teacher educators instituted a policy in their teacher education course where the candidates had to deliver at least one co-taught lesson during their practicum (for more on the practicum, see section below).

DelliCarpini and Alonso (2015) in a US context also noted that their TESOL learner teachers were struggling with the demands of content where the content is that of the academic program in which their English language learner (ELLs) students were enrolled and where content teachers had a lack of awareness and understanding of the needs of ELLs in the mainstream classroom. They realized that this was an issue related directly to ESL teacher preparation so they devised what they call a two-way content based instruction (CBI) that extends teacher collaboration and traditional CBI. As a result they restructured their teacher education program and implemented coursework specifically designed to prepare pre-service teachers to effectively engage in Content Based Instruction that is tied to the academic curriculum through two-way CBI and teacher collaboration. Thus, 'teams' (English, Science, Math) developed and collaboratively worked from discussing relevant issues related to teaching to co-planning and actual co-teaching as the pre-service teachers learned how to develop both language and content for ELLs in both the ESL and mainstream settings. Two-way CBI promotes collegiality, alleviates the feeling of isolation, and also lowers student-teacher ratios in classrooms so that learner teachers can have more opportunities to develop their reflective skills and teaching repertories.

Dialog and reflective practice

Teacher educators can encourage learner teachers to engage in reflective dialogue either face-to-face or in an online mode. As Mann and Walsh (2017: 8) point out, reflection benefits from such dialogue because it 'is a crucial part of the reflection-action-further-action cycle, since it allows for clarification, questioning and ultimately enhanced understanding.' Reflection is

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enhanced when operated through dialogue with a peer or more experienced colleague, mentor or teacher educator (see critical friends, team teaching, and peer coaching) or groups. These can be called teacher support groups and/or development groups, and/or reflection groups, and/or online chat groups and so on, where teachers come together in a mutual aid type collaboration in which they explore various issues that either directly impact their teaching and/or their practice in general including their professional identity outside the classroom (Farrell, 2014). They can be informal gatherings and at the same time they can engage in small-scale projects (action research or the like—see below).

Engaging in discussions with other professionals increases the likelihood that teachers will learn something from each other because each individual teacher will bring a different perspective to the discussions. In such a manner, entering into a discussion with another teacher or group of teachers can result in gaining new knowledge, new perspectives and new understandings that would have been difficult for teachers reflecting alone. As Mann and Walsh (2017: 8) point out, learner teachers can 'be "scaffolded" though their "Zones of Proximal Development" (ZPD) to a higher plane of understanding through the dialogues they have with other professionals.' Mann and Walsh (2017) also maintain that discussions with other teachers can be enhanced if artifacts are included such as video analysis and other such recordings of teaching to promote more systematic dialogue.

Research in TESOL supports the use of such dialogue in groups to enhance reflection. Chick (2015) for example, looked at dialogic interaction and exploratory talk during post-teaching practice discussions and examined the ways in which such an approach may help promote long term reflective practice involved in developing pedagogic expertise. Chick (2015: 302) reported that dialogic interaction and exploratory talk provided 'the space for learner teachers to externalize their understandings of the teaching process and thus facilitate mediation by the educator.' As a result, Chick noted that the learner teachers could learn from each other as they began to uncover their implicit beliefs regarding classroom actions, probe their emerging understandings, and encourage exploration of the teaching and learning process. Chick concludes that reflective conversations can mediate the development of learner teachers as they learn to teach. In another study, Kabilan et al. (2011) looked at teacher's use of an online discussion forum/board to discuss participants' (both preservice and inservice) video recorded teaching and also reported teachers' enhanced reflections. As Kabilan et al. (2011: 110) reported, the sharing and exchanging of ideas, knowledge, experiences among students in a community of practice, 'assisted the teachers to reconfigure and refine their knowledge in a community of practice.'

Service learning and reflective practice

SLTE programs usually provide some kind of field experiences that attempt to give their learner teachers some teaching practice. However, some language teacher educators are now beginning to realize that candidates may only obtain a formulaic understanding of TESOL rather than have any authentic experience in real classrooms because these experiences are very limited (Farrell, 2017). Thus some SLTE programs in the US have implemented what they call 'service-learning' in order to provide more authentic teaching experiences. Service learning really moves field experiences to the 'field'; or from traditional campus-based and formulaic presentation of programs to providing more authentic teaching experiences for their teacher candidates. Service learning seeks to mutually benefit both providers (TESOL programs) and recipients (schools) and because learning occurs in a context, it provides authentic experiences for learner teachers about the sociopolitical nature of teaching. The authenticity of service-learning provides

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opportunities for teachers to reflect in, on and for action (Farrell, 2015). Service learning has the following basic principles (adapted from Tomaš et al., 2017):

- *Need*: projects or partnerships revolve around an authentic need perceived by a community-based partner—typically a school;
- *Reciprocity*: the developed service is mutually beneficial to both service provider (TESOL teachers) and the school;
- *Reflection*: service providers must reflect on the experience and connect practical experience with theoretical knowledge in order to gain maximum benefit;
- *Civic engagement*: service-learning foregrounds civic awareness and engagement.

In the US, many of these experiences attempt to provide authenticity in the form of service-learning in after school programs. Some programs have the service learning experiences embedded in the TESOL Methods course and immediately following the service-learning experiences the teacher educator conducts TESOL methods course at that school (Colombo et al., 2017). In such a manner learner teachers are better able to make sense of practice through theory and connect theory to practice because service-learning occurs in such authentic settings and in addition, the recursive nature of teachers' theorizing, and an awareness of and sensitivity to the sociopolitical issues allows the teacher candidates to notice the way the context influences teachers' decision-making (Tomaš et al., 2017). Thus when pre-service teachers engage in service-learning they can not only enhance their teaching skills, but also learn how to reflect critically about less visible aspects of teaching such as the socio-political culture of the context in which they are teaching.

Writing and reflective practice

The act of writing has a built-in reflective mechanism; teachers must stop to think and organize their thoughts before writing and then decide on what to write. After this they can 'see' their thoughts and reflect on these for self-understanding and development (Farrell, 2013). Such reflective writing can include written accounts of teachers' thoughts, observations, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences about their practice both inside and outside the classroom (Farrell, 2013). Teachers can include records of incidents, problems, and insights that occurred during lessons in order to gain new understandings of their own learning and practices. Thus, when teachers take the time to write about their practice they can express their opinions, hypothesize about their practice and of course reflect later on what actually happened during their practice and compare results.

There are different modes of writing for reflection, some of which include teacher journals, and online writing in blogs, chats and forums. When teachers are writing as reflection on their professional practice, they can either write for themselves and keep it, or they can share it after writing. When they write for themselves, they can include their personal thoughts and feelings as well as facts about their practice. They can read these for later reflection with the idea that they can look for patterns over time on the contents of their writing. When they reflect on the patterns they notice in their journal writing, they can become more aware of issues of interest in their practice.

Hernandez (2015) reported on the benefits of reflective journal writing for both preservice TESOL teachers and their teacher educators. Hernandez used regular reflective journals and a written report on an observed class to see how preservice TESOL teachers could better

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understand SLA theory and observed that reflective writing provided valuable information about the impact of course materials and class activities to raise student teachers' awareness of their perceptions on SLA and on their philosophy of teaching. As Hernandez (2015: 147) remarked: 'The use of reflective writings allowed documentation of participants' awareness of their role to bring about change in students' lives, thus confirming that personal practical knowledge has a moral and emotional dimension as well.' However, as Mann and Walsh (2017: 18) have pointed out, a common problem with writing as reflection is that 'the focus of attention becomes the actual writing itself', and one result of this is that they can be faking what they write because of the demands of a TESOL course and the grading of this writing. This is a continuous issue in TESOL courses and some teacher educators have stopped grading these journals. Golombek (2015) for example, used journals as a course requirement but the journals were not graded. The pre-service TESOL teachers were asked to write a journal each week and email it to the instructor who would respond to their individual journals via email. In this manner the instructor hoped to foster their reflections as well as learn about what they were thinking and experiencing as they wrote about their expectations of an internship they were about to take up and their strengths and concerns as they embarked on their learning-to-teach experience. Thus, when incorporating writing as reflective practice, teacher educators are faced with the dilemma of deciding how much of the writing is really critically reflective and how much is mere description. Perhaps, teacher educators will need to provide examples of what *they* consider reflective writing so that learner teachers will be able to use this reflective activity effectively.

Writing has also been expanded to include online formats such as blogs, chats and forums in part to alleviate the above issue. Such online formats are easy to use (does not require understanding of HTML or web scripting), interactive and can be continuously updated (Yang, 2009). Indeed, some TESOL teachers report that online writing formats are better than discussions because teachers can challenge peers online easier than when discussing issues face-to-face (Yang, 2009).

Action research and reflective practice

Action research has a reflexive relationship with reflection; as Wallace (1991: 56–57) has noted, action research 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.' Action research involves some kind of systematic collection of information or data in a planned manner (some may say planned interventions), followed by some form of analysis of what is revealed by the information or data, then a formal reflection on the implications of these findings for possible further observation and then action (Burns, 2009). The general stages (cyclical) of the action research process are: plan (problem identification); research (literature review); observe (collecting data); reflect (analysis); and act (redefining the problem). Action research then for language teachers suggests that it serves to address and find solutions to particular problems in a teaching and learning situation and so it is undertaken to bring about change and improvement to a particular teaching practice.

Sowa (2009) encouraged preservice TESOL teachers to conduct action research projects together with course work in order to help them learn more about their English language learners. She reported that the learner teachers felt conducting actions such as research projects had given them 'the tools to conduct small research projects in their classrooms and to share their ideas with colleagues' (Sowa, 2009: 1029). Action research projects, as Sowa (2009: 1031) has observed, can help teachers to 'start reflecting more critically about their practice, particularly with respect to strategies they teach in the classroom to help all students learn.' In such a manner,

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learner-teachers can develop skills needed to investigate and analyze challenges they may face in their classrooms in the future (Farrell, 2018).

Critical incidents and reflective practice

No amount of study in L2 teacher education programs can fully prepare language teachers for dealing with the full range of issues that language teaching involves (Farrell & Baecher, 2017). Indeed, it is a fact that most teachers will encounter various critical incidents in their teaching. When such 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. Richards & Farrell (2011) have pointed out that some of these issues, incidents or unforeseen events may arise from working with learners of different cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds; some can result from the intrinsic difficulties learning a new language entails; and some may be the result of working with learners who have had difficult life experiences or who have pressing educational and other needs. SLTE programs should integrate more of these critical incidents and vignettes into their courses and materials so that learner teachers can get a glimpse of the real-world classroom challenges they will most certainly face when they begin their teaching careers (Farrell, 2015b).

In the field of TESOL Farrell (2013) has noted the positive effects when teachers analyze critical incidents. As he reported, teachers develop more awareness of how real practices can conflict with expectations and outcomes and as a result they can begin to explore assumptions that underlie their practice. In addition, Kiely and Davis (2010) also reported positive outcomes in TESOL when they used what they called a 'critical learning episode' from teachers' own practice (among other reflective instruments) and analyzed in a series of interactive contexts: co-analysis with a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) leader and discussion with all participating teachers in a series of workshops and in 'buddy' groups of two or three teachers. Kiely and Davis (2010) concluded that the experience for the teachers was overwhelmingly positive (in the context of a CPD program) with the collaborative analysis of these critical incidents because they developed greater awareness not only of teaching but also of social and interpersonal dimensions of the classroom.

Conclusion

There is growing research evidence within SLTE that encouraging TESOL teachers to engage in reflection is making a positive impact on their careers because teachers recognize the developmental value and transformative potential in reflective activities. SLTE educators have various pedagogical tools at their disposal at the program and course level in order to encourage the habit of reflection. These include the use of technology, critical friendships, team teaching, peer coaching, dialoging, service learning, writing, action research and analysis of critical incidents to encourage reflection. These reflective activities need to be embedded into courses, activities and assignments in a collaborative manner so that learner teachers can be prepared to face future challenges they will encounter in their teaching careers. In addition, SLTE educators must themselves be aware of the nature of reflection and the required attitudes that go along with becoming a reflective practitioner. It is not enough to encourage reflection though as SLTE educators themselves must model reflection by examining their own practices. Indeed, recent research in TESOL has suggested that if SLTE educators want teacher learners to notice that they (teacher educators) are modelling a methodology they want their learner teachers to practice when they become teachers, then SLTE educators must make such links overt through

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modelling for this realization to take place (Hanington & Devi Pillai, 2017). I agree with Wright (2010: 267) that the goal of SLTE is to produce 'reflective teachers, in a process which involves socio-cognitive demands to introspect and collaborate with others, and which acknowledges previous learning and life experience as a starting point for new learning.'

Further reading

Farrell, T. S. C. (2015b) *Promoting Teacher Reflection in Second Language Education: A Framework for TESOL Professionals*. New York: Routledge.

Taking the concept and the practice of reflective teaching forward, this book introduces a well-structured, flexible framework for use by teachers at all levels of development, from pre-service to novice to the most experienced. The framework outlines five levels of reflective practice—Philosophy; Principles; Theory-of-Practice; Practice; Beyond Practice—and provides specific techniques for teachers to implement each level of reflection in their work. Designed to allow readers to take either a deductive approach, moving from theory-into-practice, or an inductive approach where they start from a practice-into-theory position, the framework can be used by teachers alone, in pairs, or in a group.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2018) *Research on Reflective Practice in TESOL*. New York: Routledge.

In this comprehensive and detailed analysis of recent research on encouraging reflective practices in TESOL, Farrell demonstrates how this practice has been embraced within TESOL and how it continues to impact the field. Examining a vast array of studies through his own framework for reflecting on practice, Farrell's analysis comprises not only the intellectual and cognitive but also the spiritual, moral, and emotional aspects of reflection. Reflection questions at the end of each chapter provide a jumping-off point for researchers, scholars, and teachers to further consider and reflect on the future of the field. Providing a holistic picture of reflection, this book is an original compendium of essential research on philosophy and principles, instruments used in studies, and theory and practice.

Barnard, R. and Ryan, J. (eds) (2017) *Reflective Practice: Voices from the Field*. New York: Routledge.

Barnard and Ryan's (2017) collection contains reflective practice studies of TESOL teachers (preservice and inservice) on topics such as (collaborative) lesson planning, classroom observation, lesson transcripts, post-lesson discussions, journal writing, reflection on action, reflection in action, critical friends, and focus groups. The aim of the book is to explain a range of options for implementing the reflective practice cycle in educational settings in various international contexts. Written by international academics, these studies show how reflection can be interpreted in different cultural contexts.

Mann, S. and Walsh, S. (2017) *Reflective Practice in English Language Teaching*. New York: Routledge.

Mann and Walsh's (2017) book outlines an empirical, data-led approach to reflective practice and uses excellent examples of real data along with reflexive vignettes from a range of contexts in order to help teachers to reflect on their practices. Mann and Walsh also note the importance of dialogue as crucial for reflection as is allows for clarification, questioning and enhanced understanding.

Watanabe, A. (2016). *Reflective Practice as Professional Development Experiences of Teachers of English in Japan*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Atsuko Watanabe (2016) book outlines a study of the reflective practices of seven inservice TESOL teachers in a high school setting, in Japan. Beginning with a series of uncomfortable teacher training sessions delivered to unwilling participants, the book charts the author's development of new methods of engaging her participants and making use of their own experiences and knowledge. Both an in-depth examination of reflective practice in the context of Japanese cultural conventions and a narrative account of the researcher's reflexivity in her engagement with the study, the book introduces the concept of 'the reflective continuum'—a non-linear journey that mirrors the way reflection develops in unpredictable and individual ways.

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