

“Class Is Like a Family”: Reflections of an Experienced Canadian TESOL Teacher

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This paper presents a case study that examined the principles and practices of one experienced English as a second language (ESL) teacher as she reflected on her practice after teaching in Canada for 13 years. More specifically, this qualitative study sought to contribute to the discussion of the perceived interdependent influences of English as a second language (ESL) teachers' thoughts and behaviors through five stages of self-reflection using the Farrell (2015) framework for reflective practice. Overall, the findings suggest that the teacher's stated philosophy, beliefs, and theory are aligned with her classroom practices. In addition, the teacher exhibits many of the habits of expert teachers. Readers will find the positive experiences of this experienced teacher's reflections encouraging for their own teaching careers in a time when we all need some uplifting examples.

Keywords: reflective practice, ESL teacher development, teacher philosophy, beliefs, theory, and practices

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, reflective practice has been established as an important concept within the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), and within language teacher education, it has become “ubiquitous” (Mann & Walsh, 2017, p. 4). Indeed, Farrell (2015) points out that the impact of reflective practice can be felt across the majority of a teacher's professional life, from early teacher education programs to professional development programs for experienced educators. Freeman (2016) maintains that reflective practice offers a way into the less “accessible aspects of a teacher's work” (p. 208). Despite its prominence, however, scholars in the field of general education have continued to struggle with how to implement or operationalize reflective practice, especially for language teachers (Mann & Walsh, 2013). To tackle this lack of application within the field of TESOL, Farrell (2015) developed a holistic, evidence-based approach that includes reflection not only on behavioral aspects of practice but also the spiritual, moral, and emotional non-cognitive aspects that are missing in other approaches. This paper uses the Farrell (2015) framework as a lens through which to explore the reflections of an experienced Canadian ESL teacher as she reflected on her philosophy, principles, theory, and practice and critically reflected beyond practice.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Although there is not an accepted definition of what reflective practice is, generally speaking it suggests that teachers examine all aspects of their professional practice both inside and outside the classroom so that they can make informed decisions about their practice (Farrell, 2015, 2018a, b). Scholars maintain that reflective practice is central to a teacher's development because, as Zwozdiak-Myers (2012, p. 3) pointed out, it helps them "to analyze and evaluate what is happening" in their classes so that they can become more aware of what they do, why they do it, and as a result, provide more opportunities for their students to learn. Since its re-entry into the field of general education in the 1980s through the wonderful work of Donald Schön (1983), it has also been warmly welcomed within language teaching as being a desirable concept to instill in learner teachers and in-service teachers. However, it still remains a "fuzzy concept" (Collin & Karsenti, 2011, p. 570) because of its "problematic" (Walsh & Mann, 2015, p. 351) implementation in that most approaches take a "post-mortem" (Freeman, 2016, p. 217), "reflection-as-repair" notion of the concept. In addition, reflective practice has recently been reduced to a ritualized application of filling out predetermined checklists of desirable teacher qualities where the "person-as-teacher" has been omitted from the process (Farrell & Kennedy (2019). As Farrell and Kennedy (2019, p. 2) have pointed out, the "teacher (or person-as-teacher) has been separated from the act of teaching, and the act of reflective practice has become 'routinized,' as teachers are encouraged to only answer retrospective questions about their practice (such as what happened, why did this happen, what comes next) in order to 'improve' their teaching." In order to address this separation of the teacher from the process of reflection, Farrell (2015) developed a holistic framework to reflective practice that acknowledges the inner life of teachers and where language teachers are included in the process of reflection for all aspects of their practice.

Reflective Practice Framework

The Farrell (2015) framework for reflective practice provides teachers with the opportunity to gain awareness and understanding of the origins, meanings, and impact of their actions within the classroom by reflecting on five interconnected and recursive stages: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and wider implications beyond practice.

Reflecting on *philosophy* is the first stage of the framework. This initial stage, considered by Farrell (2019) as a "window to the roots of a teacher's practice" (p. 84), enables teachers to examine the *teacher-as-person*. The second stage of the framework entails reflecting on *principles*. Throughout this stage, teachers explore their deeply held assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions of language teaching and learning. The third stage, *theory*, requires teachers to reflect on theories that underlie their practice; how they plan their lessons; and choice of activities, techniques, and methods. The fourth stage of the framework involves reflecting on *practice*. This stage provides an opportunity for teachers to develop a more in-depth understanding of their own teaching practices by systematically collecting and analyzing information about their teaching, such as through audio and video recordings or peer observations. The final phase, *beyond practice* or *critical reflection*, explores the moral, political, emotional, ethical, and social issues that impact teachers' practice both inside and outside the classroom.

METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 2009) to gain further insight into reflections of an experienced ESL teacher in Canada. Most commonly used by qualitative researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982), the qualitative case study approach emerged as the most suitable method of inquiry for this study due to its consistency with the descriptive and heuristic nature of reflective practice (Maxwell, 1992). Additionally, the goal of reflective practice stated by Farrell (2018a, b) is not necessarily “improvement,” but rather to gain insight, further supporting the benefits of this research method. For these reasons, and because qualitative methods have been employed in many successful case studies in the field of TESOL (e.g., Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Farrell & Yang, 2019), the qualitative case study approach was the most optimal means for obtaining the required data.

Participant and Context

The participant in this study is a female ESL teacher, Robin (a pseudonym), a Canadian who teaches English within the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program at a large school in Ontario. She holds a bachelor’s degree in applied linguistics with a focus on TESOL as well as Ontario Certified English Language Teacher (OCELT), Internationally Certified Teacher of English as an Additional Language (ICTEAL), TESOL trainer of methodology, Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) Bootcamp, and Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA) certifications. At the onset of this study, Robin had been teaching for 13 years and had experience teaching English to students of varying ages, from kindergarten to adulthood, as well as educating pre-service TESOL teachers in grammar methodology. Robin expressed an interest in this case study after discovering reflective practice during her graduate studies and hoped that engaging in reflection would not only lead to personal and professional development, but also potentially allow her to pinpoint areas for improvement within her institution.

Robin teaches ESL classes in the LINC program at a large public school in Ontario. At this institution, language classes are offered at several time points throughout the day, and students can opt to attend or not attend depending on their availability. Robin taught two classes daily from Monday to Saturday starting at 9 a.m., one focused on reading and writing, and the other focused on listening and speaking. Each class was approximately 2.5 hours in length. Robin’s current students were of diverse ages and language backgrounds and had all been assessed at a language proficiency level equal to CLB 4. At this benchmark, students can read and write short, simple paragraphs about topics of which they are familiar, understand simple formal and informal communication and conversations about familiar topics, and give simple information about common everyday activities (CIC, 2011). Due to the nature of continuous intake class attendance can fluctuate, and Robin sometimes taught classes of up to 40 students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection period for this case study was approximately five weeks long and included written reflective tasks for the philosophy, principles, theory, and beyond practice stages of the Farrell (2015) framework, semi-structured interviews, and two 2.5-hour non-participatory classroom observations. Following the receipt of each written reflection, a semi-structured interview was conducted to explore the participant’s responses in a more in-depth fashion. In total,

six semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded via a video conferencing platform: an initial interview to clarify and collect basic background information and five follow-up interviews pertaining to each stage of the framework. Additionally, the teacher submitted two 2.5-hour-long audio recordings of two of her Level 4 reading and writing classes via a video conferencing platform by using a small lapel microphone to collect data regarding her actual practices within the classroom. Prior to these observations, the teacher informed students that the focus of the study was on her actions and behaviors and not concerned with those of the students themselves.

Data analysis mainly consisted of addressing the main research question: What are the reflections of one experienced Canadian ESL teacher as articulated through her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice? This guiding question informed all data collection and analysis procedures undertaken in this research project. The collected audio recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using methods adapted from Merriam (2009). Throughout the process of analysis, the data were examined, repeatedly sorted, and compared against the research question to ensure complete accuracy and thoroughness. Methodological triangulation was utilized as a strategy to more fully comprehend patterns of convergence and divergence which emerged from the participant's data (Mathison, 1988), effectively augmenting the validity and reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are reported according to how they emerged within the five stages of the Farrell (2015) reflective practice framework: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflection.

Philosophy

Robin's philosophy has been shaped by three traits: empathy, leadership, and a desire for ongoing education. Robin described herself as an empathetic individual, primarily due to her work experience. She explained that she has been teaching refugees and newcomers to Canada for the past five years and that often these individuals are in "really difficult situations" that could impact their performance in the classroom. She said,

I think that [we] forget that we are teaching pretty vulnerable people and instead of being empathetic, [we] are sympathetic. I think being empathetic is more important so the students see you not as a superior but as someone they can trust in the class. I think that when they trust you, they are more willing to come to you with issues that are stopping them from learning English, or participating in class, and then also come to you with other challenges.... When you have that other attitude, students close off and they're not as open with you or honest about things that are happening.

Robin recalled an important experience that occurred while she was teaching in which a student had suddenly become very emotional and left the room during a writing class. She articulated that her empathy, coupled with the trust that she had built with her students, allowed this student to feel comfortable in revealing to her the childhood trauma that the written assignment had triggered. She said, "I think showing students that you are empathetic towards their situation,

that you care about them, is so important” and that in the case of this example, “it allowed me to figure out what was stopping my student from participating in class.”

In terms of leadership, Robin explained that from a young age, she took the responsibility of organizing activities for her family members, and it is because of this that she said she knew that she would always be a teacher in some capacity. She said, “I was always one of the most outgoing members of my family. I would organize all the activities for my cousins during family gatherings. I used to always be the teacher in my activities with my family, so I guess I have always known I would teach something to someone at some point.” Indeed, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, she volunteered her time to host professional development sessions for her colleagues that were designed to introduce them to the tools needed to teach English online. She said, “I began to train dozens of my colleagues in how to use online tools like Zoom and Google Drive” and that the reason she did so was to “support my fellow colleagues during a challenging time. I wanted to be a person that they knew they could trust and turn to during uncertain times.”

Robin also described herself as a learner and articulated that the opportunities to travel that she was provided when she was young developed her desire to continue learning and discovering new things throughout her life. She said, “traveling at a young age really sparked my curiosity. I loved being able to visit historical places and learn about them and the people who lived there.” Robin remarked that she had a renewed sense for continued education return after encountering several teachers in the first few years of her career that she believed were doing a disservice to their students by being resistant to learning about new teaching methodologies and practices. She further explained that she used those individuals as examples of the type of teacher that she did not want to emulate. She said,

I think all teachers need to constantly be learning and willing to learn. I find so many teachers that are like, “oh, but I’ve always taught this way, it’s always worked, why do I have to change?” and I think that it’s really unfair for the students and for themselves. To me, that is not an ideal ESL teacher.

Robin also expressed that she enjoys learning about her students and their diverse cultural backgrounds. She said that she reduced her time teaching abroad because she “got to meet more people from different places teaching in Ontario.”

Principles

This section presents Robin’s reflections on her principles. These principles are categorized into three themes: language teaching, language learning, and teaching L2 speaking, as outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Summary of Robin’s Teaching Principles

Theme	Belief
Language Teaching	Consider students’ needs. Be flexible/adaptable. Be honest.
Language Learning	Provide a positive learning environment. Requires building confidence.
Teaching L2 Speaking	Enable learners to use the language. Provide limited corrective feedback. Allow learners to discover grammar rules.

In terms of language teaching, Robin expressed four beliefs, the first of which was to consider students' needs. She said that she endeavors to provide tasks that are relevant and level appropriate for all her students to ensure they do not become discouraged with their learning but acknowledged that it is "really, really challenging" to account for everyone as the proficiency levels and individual needs of her students are often varied. She said, "I definitely strive to have tasks that are level appropriate, and when it is challenging to do that for every single student, then this is when I provide extra support and encouragement." She also added that sometimes it is impossible to satisfy the needs of one learner as it "may be doing a disservice to others." Robin also remarked that her flexibility and adaptability have been integral in allowing her to navigate such a wide variety of student needs, as well as any "day-to-day" situations that arise, such as having no internet access. She said that teachers need to be able to improvise and "pull things out of nowhere" because "a lot of learning can happen from spontaneous situations and questions that arise during a live lesson." Next, Robin expressed the belief that teachers need to be honest with their students about what is happening in the classroom, or when they do not know the answer to a question. She recalled feeling very embarrassed as a novice teacher when she was not sure of the correct answer to a student's question and described an encounter with a high proficiency student who would "ask really tough questions" and "challenge" her answers. She said that experience made her realize that it was acceptable to admit that she did not know the answer to a student's question, and that "we make mistakes just like anyone else." Robin explained that she now uses those moments as a learning experience for the whole class and asks her students to help her find the answers; she said that this is beneficial for everyone as it is "way less stressful" for her and ensures that her students are "active in their own learning."

Robin articulated that language learning best occurs in a safe and positive environment where students are the focus and are encouraged to freely express themselves. She said, "My class is more like social time" and that she endeavors to provide tasks that allow students to share things about themselves and their cultures. Regarding this, Robin said, "They will write papers or do presentations about something they want to talk about ... because those are the things they know the most about, and they become a little bit more confident talking about that." Robin added that building confidence in using the language is integral to successful learning. She said, "I think when it comes to language, the learners don't need one thing to learn best, like a certain number of target vocab or grammatical structures, but they need some level of confidence to learn." She explained that building confidence may allow students to approach language learning with more of a willingness to make mistakes, and that those mistakes will not be as paralyzing. She recalled an experience with a student who gained confidence in her class,

I had a learner ... and she was so nervous her first presentation, like shaking nervous, and then she stayed in my class for a really, really long time. And then she did another presentation, and she wasn't shaking, and she could speak clearly. She was so proud of herself. She ended up staying in my class for another year, and she would tell all the other students, "Oh, when I joined this class, I was always so nervous. My first presentation, I was shaking, and now I speak like this" ... that's obviously the goal, right? That by the end, or class by class, they're more confident using English and doing things.

Robin said that she tries to lead by example, and by being honest when she has made a mistake or lacks an answer, she "shows that its ok to make mistakes" and that "hopefully my students won't be as scared to make them."

Regarding teaching L2 speaking, Robin primarily believes that learners should be able to use language in meaningful and functional ways and, as such, teaching L2 speaking should enable students to do so. She said, “Since I’m basically teaching life skills to my students, like how to get services or how to do a job interview, I try to give lots of practice situations for those kinds of things” and that she knows she has been successful when her students “[use] the language outside of the class for whatever reason, like ... doing a job interview.” Robin believes that the best way to help her learners to become confident in using language is to provide corrective feedback but only when errors impact the intended meaning of a student’s message. She said, “I think it’s more important for them to focus on what they’re trying to say in their meaningful communication and not how to say it.” Indeed, Robin indicated that since her program is non-academic, it is more important that her students can have a conversation and “get their point across” than it is to correct every error and “[have] that breakdown in communication.” She said that if she notices common errors amongst her students, she addresses them after a task, rather than during, as she believes that allows her students ample practice “without a lot of pressure.” Robin also expressed that regarding teaching L2 grammar she believes in allowing learners to discover grammatical rules and structures for themselves. Robin explained that her program does not allow for a great deal of grammar instruction, but that she includes it anyway as it is “just honestly what the students want.” She said, “I like students to discover the grammar on their own and work through it themselves, with classmates, or with me,” and said that she provides lots of consciousness-raising activities to help her learners do so.

Theory

This section outlines Robin’s theory as she reflected on her lesson planning protocols and delivery procedures. Regarding her lesson planning and delivery strategies, Robin explained that she is not required to follow a predetermined course syllabus or course curriculum created by her school board, but rather that she is guided by her students’ needs and goals, the CLBs, and PBLA, the teaching and assessment model mandated by the school. She said, “I guess I create my own [syllabus], or maybe the students do, but it isn’t for a time period. It is based on a topic.”

Robin reported that the primary concerns of her lesson planning procedures are the needs and goals of her students. She said, “my lessons are planned based on the level of the students according to the CLB document and the topics that the students want to discuss in the class.” Robin said that she plans her lessons based on theme because its often “very, very, very hard to ask students what they want to be able to do in English” as they often give broad answers, such as “they want to improve their English, they want to speak fluently, all of those things.” When asked how she moves through the planning process, Robin indicated that she utilizes a forward planning process in that she first considers the theme of the lesson, then she finds resources related to that theme, and finally she creates tasks based on what her students are expected to be able to do at a certain CLB level. She said,

So, basically, I have to plan the whole thing just based on the theme. So, usually what I’ll actually do first is just trying to find resources, because you can’t create an assessment task or any kind of language task if you don’t have a resource. So, I’ll usually try to find resources and then base the lesson on that. So, I just found a video and watched it myself, extracted vocabulary, made a couple questions up. So, that, plus figuring out what kind of language tasks that they’ll do within all of that.

Robin articulated that her planning procedures have changed over the years as she gained experience and amassed a collection of previously utilized lesson plans. She said, “Before they were really detailed. And I think the more you teach, you are able to look at an agenda and say, ‘okay, we’re going to do A, B, and C, vocabulary work means this ...’ you already have in your mind what you anticipate vocabulary work to be.” She added that she regularly updates her lesson plans by adding in new activities and themes and removing those that have proven to be ineffective. Robin said that this was necessary as “each class is different. [Some] students don’t like vocabulary work that way. I have to do vocabulary work a different way.” She also expressed, “I know it sounds super cliché, but being a good teacher means that you go back and revamp everything for the students that you have in the moment.”

Practice

This section presents the findings of Robin’s observed practices as summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Summary of Robin’s Observed Practices

Observed Practice	Observation 1	Observation 2
Clearly stated instructions.	O	O
Diverged from original lesson plan.	O	O
Engaged in informal interactions with students.	O	O
Included small group activities in lesson.	O	N
Introduced new vocabulary.	O	O
Addressed individual learners needs/questions.	O	O
Corrected oral/written errors.	O	O
Gave positive feedback to students.	O	O

Note. O = Observed, N = Not Observed.

The theme for both observed lessons was culture and cuisine, as chosen by the students during the needs assessment performed at the onset of the semester. Robin’s most observed practices were divergence from the lesson plan, engaging in informal interactions with students, and correcting oral errors. Robin’s first lesson focused predominantly on vocabulary and also included some focus on grammar and pronunciation. However, before her first lesson, Robin was unexpectedly required to attend an impromptu staff meeting, and this disrupted her prepared lesson plans. Robin said that she had to omit the reading and group writing activities she had planned and added a much more in-depth discussion regarding vocabulary. Robin explained that her decision to focus mainly on vocabulary in the first lesson was twofold in that she felt that she “lost a lot of class time” and did not want to start a new task if she might be called away again, leaving her unable to answer any questions, and she believed it was “important they understood the vocabulary well in order to get through the readings [she] was going to assign.” She added,

That’s kind of the good thing about my work. I don’t have expectations of exact material I will get through every day. So, if I don’t manage to cover it one day, I will just do it the next. I can adjust everything to what my students want or need at that specific point in time. So, if they are having a difficult time with something, we can spend more time on that to make sure they understand.

Robin's second class also diverged somewhat from her lesson plan as students had many questions regarding the meaning, pronunciation, and part of speech of many of the vocabulary items encountered in this lesson. When asked if she regularly completes her lesson plans as written, Robin expressed that she always strives to run her lessons based on the students she currently has in her classroom and will always adjust her lesson plan based on their wants and needs.

Robin often engaged in informal interactions with her students, particularly at the beginning of the class. Examples of these interactions included complimenting a student on a new hairstyle and a discussion regarding Canadian driving licenses after a student mentioned that she was going to be taking her driving test soon. These interactions demonstrate the rapport that Robin has built with her learners and that they are comfortable interacting with her. They also display Robin's interest in her students, as she asks questions about their individual lives. When asked about the motivation behind these interactions, Robin articulated that she wants her students to know that she cares about them and that it was important to her to provide a "low-pressure" classroom environment to facilitate student engagement. She said,

My classroom isn't formal at all. We can chat and joke around because those things build the relationship, right? It's low pressure. And when you have a relationship, then students are more comfortable answering questions and letting you know when they don't understand. Also, I guess I want them to know that I care about them.

In both lessons, Robin provided corrective feedback to her students, typically in the form of a recast, but only in response to their pronunciation errors regarding the target vocabulary or if an error caused a misunderstanding. Excerpt 1 provides an example of such a correction observed in the second lesson:

Excerpt 1

St: And it is named after the Mediterranean Sea which is in the area. Some Mediterranean countries are Greece, Turkey, and the is land

T: Island

St: Island, yeah. So, island of Malta. But part of France, Spain, and Italy also have Mediterranean coast... lines.

T: Coastlines, good.

Note. T = Teacher, St = Specific student.

When students' utterances contained grammatical errors, but the intended message was clear, Robin did not typically provide any correction. Excerpt 2 exemplifies this:

Excerpt 2

St: Ah, but the other main is the Mediterranean cuisine is include different countries but is varied.

T: Yes, good, yeah... What were the many countries?

St: Many countries is Italy, Spain, Greece, France.

Note. T = Teacher, St = Specific student.

Robin was observed providing students with many opportunities to speak throughout both lessons, by asking for volunteers, asking questions, eliciting responses, encouraging group or pair discussions, and by making herself available to answer questions and interact outside of the assigned coursework. She provided corrections, mostly regarding pronunciation, and offered plenty of positive feedback as well.

Beyond Practice

This section presents the findings from Robin's critical reflection beyond practice and especially her perceptions of power dynamics, both within and outside her institution, and how they impact her position as a teacher at the classroom level. Robin expressed that she felt generally appreciated and supported by the department and the school but admitted that she did perceive some issues with the way certain situations were handled. She said that while she believes her compensation is fair, she does a great deal of extra work-related tasks that are unpaid because she does not receive enough scheduled time to complete them while still making herself available for students to ask questions. These additional tasks, Robin notes, are integral to a successful, functioning classroom, and encompass duties such as lesson preparation and grading. She remarked, "I think it would be better if we were given an hour or two paid where we don't teach, where we could do all this work that's pretty important to a functioning classroom."

Robin also expressed dissatisfaction regarding her job security as every year the department goes through a "redeployment" in the spring. She explained that during redeployment, if a teacher with more seniority loses their class, then they "push out" those with less seniority in order to receive a new class. Regarding this she said,

When one teacher loses their job, even though they are a good teacher, because another teacher's class closes, I don't think this is fair. I don't think we are treated equally. In this way, we aren't even treated as competent teachers. We are treated like numbers: the year of our seniority date.

This was a significant point of contention for Robin as she believed there was nothing that she could do to alter this redeployment policy in any way.

Robin also mentioned that she believes more needs to be done to help differently abled students or those with mental health conditions. She said much like teachers are treated like numbers when it comes to redeployment season as mentioned above, students are also treated like numbers when they complete their initial language assessments. She remarked,

So, students get assessed and they're just numbers and they get put into your class. And sometimes they come, and you have no idea why they're there. They're super, super low [proficiency]. And then you observe, like, oh, I think this person might have a form of a learning disability.

She also described a situation where she had a student who often could not concentrate or participate in class effectively due to a mental health condition. Robin articulated that there are very few supports or services available for these individuals, and that it can be difficult for her to navigate these situations as she is not trained to do so. She said,

So, we're taking all these newcomers and refugees and their first point of contact is literally an ESL class. An ESL class! Like, we don't have all those resources and if the government wants us to have all those resources, like, give them to us!

Robin expressed frustration at the number of roles she feels that she is sometimes expected to fill as a TESOL teacher as "we literally don't have time and we don't have all of the knowledge." She said, "we can only do so much, like we are literally language teachers!"

DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings suggest that the shared influence of philosophy, principles, and theory was evident in Robin's reflections. For example, her personality traits formed the basis of her principles and beliefs, which, in turn, influenced her theories. Many of Robin's reflections across all five stages of the framework appear to intersect via two common themes: building rapport and prioritizing students' needs.

Throughout her reflective journey through the five stages of the Farrell (2015b) framework, Robin frequently referenced the importance of establishing meaningful relationships and building rapport with students. This first became apparent when Robin stated that the best part of being a teacher was "meeting people and helping them" and described how fulfilled and rewarded she felt when her students described their class as "like a family" (the main heading of this paper). Robin identified empathy as integral to facilitating the development of meaningful relationships with her students and provided an example of a scenario when a student divulged that past trauma was preventing her from participating fully in class, and how approaching this difficult situation with empathy allowed her insight into how to best assist this student. Her self-described philosophy of expressing empathy in order to build trust, coupled with her gregarious nature reflects one of her primary principles: successful language learning best occurs in a safe, positive, and informal learning environment. Further, Robin's beliefs regarding rapport-building include responding honestly when encountering questions to which she does not know the answer. She expressed that handling situations in this way "makes [her] a human" and helps to lower barriers between her and the students by establishing a non-hierarchical dynamic within the classroom.

Robin's principles and beliefs have shown to influence aspects of her theory. Her belief that learning best occurs in positive and informal environments is reflected in her propensity for designing student-focused group-based lessons, such as engaging in whole-class discussions and opening the floor for anyone to provide an answer or opinion. Moreover, Robin stated that she typically incorporates pair or group activities in every lesson. These activities serve to build rapport between and among students and provides Robin an opportunity to engage with students more intimately than she is able to in the larger class environment. In practice, Robin was observed building rapport with students through lighthearted informal interactions, such as jokes or compliments, and by providing positive feedback and acknowledging exceptional answers. The relationships that she has cultivated with her students are evident, as in the first lesson Robin asked a higher number of informal questions than she did questions regarding the actual lesson materials. Through critical reflection, Robin addressed power dynamics that can often be found within educational institutions and reiterated her belief that cultivating a classroom environment where students do not feel a large power imbalance is one of the first steps in developing a strong rapport.

The second major theme to emerge throughout the stages of Robin's reflections is that of prioritizing students' needs. This commitment, first discussed in her philosophy, began at an early age with a desire to help her family members and continues to shape her practice. Robin articulated that she consistently seeks opportunities to learn, both about her students and their diverse cultural backgrounds, and through professional development opportunities, as she believes this will allow her to negotiate the needs and goals of her students more effectively. Robin's assertion that considering students' needs is a core teaching principle is likely influenced by these experiences. Further, she believes that the language skills she teaches should be directly wanted and needed by her students.

These philosophies and principles align with Robin's theories of planning lessons exclusively based on students' needs and goals. This aligns with policies within her institution, such as the mandated completion of needs assessments throughout the term. However, Robin's prioritization of students' needs extends beyond those of her institution, as she stated that lesson plans should always be flexible to account for incidental learning opportunities that often do not align with the type of class she is teaching. This provides a challenge for Robin, as she must navigate a wide range of student needs and goals while still adhering to institutional practices of separating language skills into reading/writing and listening/speaking classes. In practice, Robin demonstrated her commitment to prioritizing her students' needs over the expectations of her institution by making herself available to answer any student questions, regardless of their direct relevance to reading and writing skills. This included spending time discussing pronunciation at the request of her students. Robin further demonstrated that she emphasizes meeting the needs of students through her reflections beyond practice, where she articulated her belief that more needs to be done to assist students who require additional support systems in order to be successful language learners. Overall, it is evident throughout Robin's reflection process that prioritizing the needs and goals of students is a highly valued and integral aspect of her teaching. This is the hallmark of an expert teacher in the making (Farrell, 2013). In fact, the results of this case study suggests that Robin meets all five of Farrell's (2013) habits of expert language teachers: accommodate learners' interests yet keep learning in mind; engage in critical reflection; develop routines and strategies integrating past experiences from multiple sources; plan lessons flexibly with an eye to the "bigger picture"; and be actively involved with their learners beyond the classroom.

We believe that the case study presented in this paper is a valuable account of one experienced ESL teacher's intense reflections of her practice that can benefit all in the TESOL profession as they read her journey so far through the lens of the framework for reflecting on practice. As Robin herself noted, "Talking about our profession is cathartic and reading the findings made me feel more seen and understood as [the research] put it into words that I may not have been able to find." Similar to the use of the framework in the case studies outlined in the work of Farrell and Kennedy (2019), Farrell and Avejic (2020), Farrell and Macaplinac (2021) and Farrell (2022), we took a deductive approach to reflecting on practice by encouraging Robin to reflect from a theory-into-practice and beyond mode, or starting from Stage/Level 1, philosophy through the different stages to Stage/Level 5, beyond practice. This was mostly because of convenience due to Robin's teaching schedule, but it also seemed to ease Robin into the reflective process rather than jump directly into her classroom teaching reflections as suggested for more experienced teachers (e.g., Farrell & Avejic, 2020).

The purpose of encouraging ESL teachers to reflective on their practice is *not to look for best practice*; rather it is to get a holistic view of oneself as a TESOL professional. As Fanselow (1988) has noted, "Each of us [teachers] needs to construct, reconstruct, and revise our own teaching" (p. 116). We believe that the five-stage holistic framework we used as a lens for Robin to reflect provided Robin with details about her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice critical reflection that helped her become more aware of herself as an ESL teacher. At the end of Robin's reflective journey, through the lens of the framework, we presented Robin with our findings above for her to reflect on her reflections and suggested that "without that challenge I guess I wouldn't truly be able to reflect." However, she also noted the benefits of such holistic reflections. She said that she realized that her own reflections as a teacher and the findings align with what "I have always thought to be true, which is that I put my learners' and their needs

first. So, I am happy that through this process it is quite clear that my beliefs do align with my practice.”

CONCLUSIONS

This study outlined and discussed the reflections of one TESOL teacher as she progressed through Farrell’s (2015b) five stages of reflective practice: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice. The findings suggest that Robin’s stated philosophy, principles, and theory are consistent with her practice and her reflections beyond practice, and that she prioritizes her students’ needs above her own. Though generalization is always difficult from such a case study, it has obvious limitations such as the small sample size (one teacher), the short duration of data collection, and the inability to observe teacher practices in-person, we believe that readers may find much of Robin’s reflections has relevance for their own context, practices, and reflections. We agree with Fanselow (1988) when he noted, “Here I am with my lens to look at you and your actions. But as I look at you with my lens, I consider you a mirror; I hope to see myself in you and through your teaching.... Seeing you allows me to see myself differently and to explore variables we both use” (p. 115). Indeed, in reading this case study, we believe that many language teachers may be encouraged not only to engage in their own holistic reflections, but all encouraged to see how one teacher is enjoying her teaching career. By engaging in such holistic reflections, TESOL teachers are able to construct and adjust their personal beliefs and practices to better provide optimal learning conditions for students within their classrooms. We leave the last words to Robin:

Having the opportunity to reflect on ourselves as language teachers and our practice allows us to gain a better perspective of what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. If we want to evolve and grow as teachers, then reflection is necessary. If we want to stay stagnant and move through our practice on autopilot, then reflection isn’t necessary, but this is a disservice to students – and if we aren’t doing what we do for our students, then we have a major problem.

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