Reflection-*As*-Action

Introduction

For language teachers, reflective practice generally means systematically examining their beliefs and practices about teaching and learning throughout their careers. In a previous book, I outlined and discussed the "what" and "why" of reflective practice by suggesting four main principles: It is evidence-based, involves dialogue, links beliefs and practices, and is a way of life (Farrell, 2013). These four principles still hold true. I suggested that reflective practice is **evidence-based** because it involves teachers systematically gathering information (or data) about their practice and then using this information to make informed decisions. This principle remains a prominent part of the implementation of reflective practice. I also noted that reflective practice **involves dialogue** either with educators themselves as individuals (internal dialogue) or, even better, with other teachers (critical friends, team teaching, group discussions), because the collaborative process of dialoguing bolsters reflection. This dialoguing principle is also very important as teachers implement reflective practice. Moreover, I suggested that reflective practice **links beliefs and practices** when teachers examine what occurs (theories-in-use) in their practice and compare this to their beliefs (espoused theories)

about learning and teaching. This remains true when implementing reflective practice, but the framework adds reflecting on philosophy, principles, and theory to practice and beyond practice, as you will read later. In addition, I noted that reflective practice is **a way of life** because it implies a dynamic way of being inside and outside the classroom. As teachers implement reflection throughout the framework, this principle becomes very important in reflecting in, on, and, for action because teachers construct and reconstruct their own theories of practice throughout their careers.

These principles still pertain to this book on how to implement reflective practice. In this chapter specifically, I outline and discuss how teachers can implement reflection through a five-stage framework (Farrell, 2015). The chapters that follow outline each of the five stages in more detail.

REFLECTIVE BREAK

What is your understanding of each of the four principles?

- *Principle 1*: Reflective practice is evidence based.
- *Principle 2*: Reflective practice involves dialogue.
- *Principle 3*: Reflective practice explores beliefs and practices.
- *Principle 4*: Reflective practice is a way of life.

Reflection-*As*-Action

One of the persistent issues still unresolved concerning reflective practice is how teachers and programs can implement or operationalize reflection (Freeman, 2016). Within TESOL, as Freeman (2016) recently agreed, reflection offers a way into the less "accessible aspects of teacher's work" (p. 208); he also notes that the level of access actually depends on how reflection is operationalized or implemented. In the field of general education, many different conceptualizations, approaches, and frameworks for implementing reflective practice have been proposed. However, careful scrutiny reveals that many of these approaches and frameworks tend to restrict reflection to a retrospective activity and to focus solely on problems in the classroom.

This retrospective approach, or as Freeman (2016) calls it, "post-mortem reflection" (p. 217), usually consists of asking questions (such as what?, why?, now what?) that limit the focus to reflection-as-repair to solve or fix some perceived problem in a type of "reflection bubble."

Although such retrospective approaches may offer structured ways into reflection, especially for novice teachers, the danger exists that reflection can become ritualized, mechanical, and even prescriptive by reducing it to a set of recipe-following checklists and questions for teachers. These defeat the original goal of reflective practice as it reappeared in the early 1980s of avoiding such technical rationality. The "reflection bubble" I mentioned previously produces gaps between the teacher doing the reflecting, the problem perceived, and the act of reflection itself. In other words, the perceived problem to be solved is "out there," away from the person-as-teacher. Just as we cannot know the dancer from the dance—they cannot be separated—I believe the teacher cannot be separated from the act of teaching. Thus, we also cannot separate the teacher-as-person from the perceived problem or the process of reflecting.

This gap in the reflective process can be removed by considering reflection-*as*-action, where the reflective process includes "awareness of the self, the context as well as the problem to be solved" (Bleakley, 1999, p. 323). Viewing reflection-*as*-action includes the teacher-as-person in a more holistic approach to reflective practice. Recently, I developed one such holistic approach to reflective practice for TESOL teachers that not only focuses on the same intellectual, cognitive, and metacognitive aspects of reflection as many other approaches do (and limit themselves to), but also includes reflection on the spiritual, moral, and emotional noncognitive aspects of reflection (Farrell, 2015). Thus, this framework acknowledges the inner life of teachers. The framework has five different stage of reflection: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice (see Figure 1). I'll explain each of these in more detail in the chapters that follow.
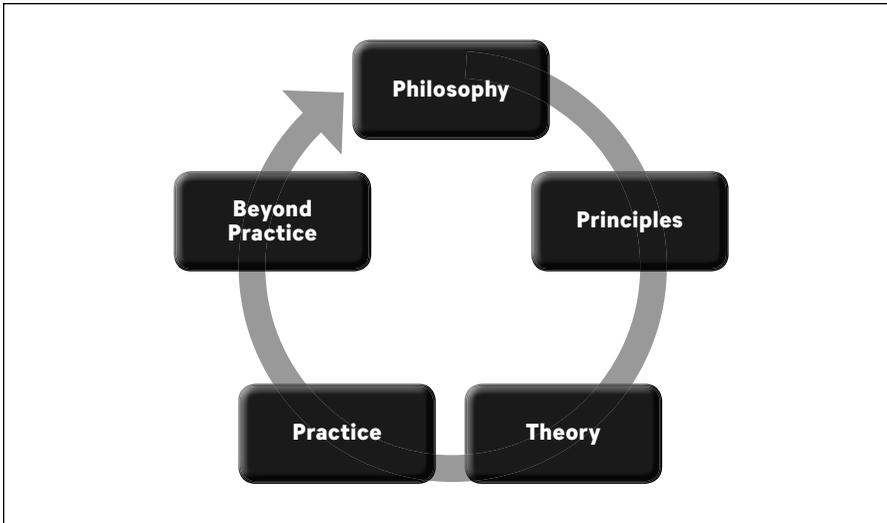
Figure 1. Framework for Reflecting on Practice (adapted from Farrell, 2015)

REFLECTIVE BREAK

What is the value of including the inner lives of teachers in the reflection process?

Figure 1 illustrates the framework as a circle, which can be navigated in three different ways: theory-into-practice, practice-into-theory, or single-stage application. Thus, the framework is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Teachers can take a deductive approach to reflecting on practice by moving from theory-into-practice or from stage 1, philosophy, through the different stages to stage 5, beyond practice. Some may say that preservice teachers with little classroom experience would be best suited to take such an approach because they can first work on their overall philosophical approach to TESOL and work their way through the different stages. They can begin with principles (stage 2) and move on to theory (stage 3); when they reach the practicum stage, they will be well placed then to reflect on their practice (stage 4); and eventually move beyond practice (stage 5).

Reflection-*As*-Action in ELT

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that the usual retrospective approaches to implementing reflective practice are too narrow because they omit the teacher-as-person from the process of reflection. However, viewing the process from the perspective of reflection-*as*-action grounds it in the belief that teachers are whole persons and reflection is multidimensional, thus including the social, political, moral, and spiritual. The chapter proposes that such an approach to implementing or operationalizing reflective practice for TESOL teachers can be accomplished through a framework with five stages: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice. As the chapters that follow indicate, throughout this reflective practice process, I encourage teachers at each stage not only to reflect but also to examine and challenge their embedded assumptions.