

‘Bending Back’ To Move Forward: Contemplating Reflective Practice In TESOL

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Abstract

Reflective practice has been around the field of TESOL for some time now, with most educators in agreement that some form of reflection is desirable. However, there is still not much agreement of what reflective practice is or how it should be operationalized within the field of TESOL. The danger is that because it has reached a status of near orthodoxy, it may have become a ritualized and mechanical method far different than its original intention to empower teachers. Such is the motivation for this Special Issue devoted current applications to the concept of reflective practice in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). I begin with a trip down my own memory lane as I reflect on reflective practice to see where we are with the seven papers included in the issue, and where we should move forward with this interesting, yet complex topic of reflective practice in TESOL.

Keywords: Reflective practice, Reflection-in-action, Reflection-on-action, Reflection-for-action, Special issue

‘Bending Back’

‘Reflection’ as a concept can be traced back to ancient times and various religions and of course Socrates’ famous quote: ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’. The term ‘reflection’ itself comes from the Latin word ‘reflectere’ made up of the prefix *re-*, ‘back,’ and *flectere*, ‘to bend’ (from Latin Dictionary Net <<https://latin-dictionary.net/>>) and generally means “to bend back” (Valli, 1997, p 67) or to look back and become more aware of a past event or issue or to think about it. First, I ‘bend back’ my reflections on my experiences with reflective practice, followed by a reflection on the seven papers that provide current applications on reflective practice in TESOL, and try to place this information with a look forward to what we can do with this interesting yet complex concept in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

I remember the first time I really had to ‘bend back’ my teaching because of an incident that occurred in my own classroom in my first year as a novice teacher in Ireland. At that time, I had never heard of reflective practice, and it had not come up in my higher diploma in Education course (taken the year after I had obtained my degree) I was taking to become a qualified teacher in Ireland. The higher diploma in Education program required that I teach in

a school each day (I was allotted 3 unpaid hours) while also attending courses in the late afternoon and evenings the same day back at the university. This lasted for one academic year and the 'teaching part' in the classroom was quite distinct from the 'theory part' during the various courses taken at the university. During the 'teaching part' (i.e. the placement) I was allotted a 'supervisor' from the university (i.e. the 'theory part') who was 'supervising' my teaching in the school (from a 'theory perspective'). I was not allotted any school mentor, nor did I have any formal or informal induction into the school. So, my only 'reflection' on my teaching was supposed to come from my 'supervisor'.

My 'supervisor' 'appeared' in my classroom on three unannounced occasions during that academic year and each time she was seated at the back of the room when I entered at 9am, the start of each school day. To this day I still do not know her name (I could not make out the signature at the end of a form that was sent to me at the end of the academic year) as she did not say a word to me except for a smile when I entered the classroom as she engaged in copious writing while 'looking' at me during the class. On that same form at the end of the academic year, I saw that I was 'awarded' a 'D' grade (which was a bare minimum 'pass') for my teaching. The system at that time was if you 'failed' the teaching part you were not allowed to do the 'theory part' examinations in the university, so I was 'lucky' to pass as I later also passed those examinations. This 'experience' took me some time to get over and I was only able to reflect on it when I wrote a paper called "'The Look': Some observations on observation" in the excellent journal, *The Teacher Trainer* in 1996 (see Farrell, 1996), seventeen years after. I was also later to learn from other teachers who had read my paper that my 'experience' was unfortunately, all too common within the language teaching profession (and beyond). One lovely memory I do have of my observed lessons is that all my students were on their best behavior during these lessons, even the students who were usually very 'vocal' in my lessons (see below).

Subsequently, as a novice teacher I was left alone to fend for myself without a mentor-supervisor whom I could reach out to (this was pre-internet, and I was not provided with any phone number), nor was I allotted any school mentor apart from one sentence from one senior teacher: "Hi Tom, here's the book, go teach the class." So, off I went into that new frenetic classroom environment to 'learn' how to teach on my own by trial and error, rather than on any real reflection. One incident that occurred early in the first month has stayed with me for my whole teaching career (now nearly 50 years) happened suddenly in one of my lessons when a student suddenly shouted out: "Teacher you are stupid!" I was astonished, as I had no idea at that moment how to respond. Although I was in shock for a few moments, I remember that I said to the young student that he could and should not say this to me, his teacher or any teacher, and that he should write a letter of apology to me before I would let him back to my class. I then asked him to leave for the remainder of that lesson. In that moment I think I remembered my mother saying something to me as a child that probably triggered my response in my first 'apprenticeship of observation' moment (Lortie, 1975). Just before class on the following day he handed me a letter which he said he wrote an apology. In that letter (of which I still have today) he wrote the following reason for saying what he had the previous day: "Teacher, I called you stupid because you were stupid because you gave us the same homework the day before and that is why you are stupid."

When I read that note, I realized that he was correct as I had mistakenly given the class the same homework before the previous class. I also realized that even though we may think that our students may not be listening to their teachers, in fact, they are. Unfortunately, the student who made statement was actually deemed a 'problem' student by his regular teachers, in that he was always at the center of any class activity that the teachers had difficulty controlling;

however, I had always had a good relationship with him probably because he reminded me of when I was a student at his age, and as my own teachers can attest, I was not a difficult student.

I have never forgotten that early ‘critical incident’ when the student called me stupid, as well as ‘the look’ my supervisor gazed at me during my lesson observations, as these and other early experiences were to shape my future academic research focus on reflective practice as I realized that the contents of the teacher education program had nothing really to do with my experiences in the classroom that first year of my teaching life. I survived because of the help of one friendly colleague in that placement school who allowed me to ask him questions about my experiences rather than the ‘supervisor’ whom I never had any discussions with before, during or after each classroom observation that all occurred unannounced that year.

Later, I began to slowly realize that my first year(s) hectic classroom experiences, referred to as “hot action” (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore & Montie, 2006, p. 2), can lead to teachers developing, as Eraut (1985, p. 128) explains, “habits and routines in order to cope; and [that] self-awareness is difficult as there is little opportunity to notice or think about what one is doing.” That was me! I had unknowingly developed various habits and routines from my first year on until during my PhD degree I ‘discovered’ a new concept (at least new to me) called reflective practice in general education studies. Thanks to my supervisor, Jerry Gebhard, a teacher’s teacher himself, I was allowed to focus my dissertation on this new, interesting but also complex concept called reflective practice as I attempted to make it relevant for the emerging field of TESOL at the time. I discovered that reflective practice could provide TESOL teachers with more opportunities to articulate and work through their experiences in a constructive manner learning from the positives, while also recognizing the challenges as they attempt to develop as language teachers as I wished I had in my early career years.

I decided at that time to enter this new academic world (i.e. I stopped teaching English to speakers of other languages although I really enjoyed meeting all my students over the years) with my PhD in hand, in order (in my mind) to better serve TESOL teachers by attempting to act as a ‘bridge’ between theory and practice, and for the betterment of pre-service TESOL teacher preparation and experienced TESOL teacher professional development. In those early years I learned about a distinction between a ‘weak’ and a ‘strong’ form of incorporating reflective practice. In its weakest version, reflection was said to be no more than ‘thoughtful’ practice where language teachers sometimes, as Wallace (1996) suggested, “informally evaluate various aspects of their professional expertise” (p. 292). However, as Wallace also pointed out, this type of “informal reflection” does not really lead to improved teaching and can even lead to more “unpleasant emotions without suggesting any way forward” (p. 13). A more ‘stronger’ form of reflection was also proposed where language teachers were encouraged to systematically collect data about their teaching and use the information from that evidence to make more informed decisions about their practice (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). I preferred this more evidence-based approach to reflective practice which led me to develop two frameworks that I considered important to operationalize this approach: my first reflective practice framework for language teachers. This framework (see Farrell, 2004) of reflective teaching is composed of five components: (a) a range of opportunities and activities, (b) ground rules, (c) provision for four different times or categories of reflection, (d) external input, and (e) trust. The most important aspect of this early framework is to encourage reflection and to give teachers the opportunity to reflect, and I believe this framework is still relevant today: I have used this framework successfully and very recently with experienced TESOL teachers in a teacher reflection group in Canada (e.g., see Farrell, 2014), and it is still worthwhile for teachers wishing to reflect on their practice and especially with a group of teachers.

After a further 20+ years researching this complex, yet interesting topic, I realized that many novices and early career TESOL teachers perceived that they were not well prepared for the real world of the classroom, or how to reflect on their challenges (e.g. see Farrell, 2016, 2025). This led me to consider developing a more holistic framework for language teachers wishing to reflect on their practice. This framework for reflecting on practice (Farrell, 2015) has five different stages of reflection: philosophy; principles; theory; practice; and beyond practice. The framework has been used successfully to generate more holistic and detailed evidence-based reflective practice data/information for TESOL teachers over the preceding years (e.g., Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Farrell & Macaplinac, 2021; Farrell & Avejic, 2021; Farrell & Stanclick, 2023; Farrell & Moses, 2023; Farrell, 2025).

Now as I ‘bend back’ over the past 40+ years, I realize that I have been so lucky to work with so many excellent pre-service, novice, and in-service TESOL teachers worldwide on a wide range of issues and I have learned so much from these wonderful professionals about reflection. For example, I have learned more about topics such as novice language teachers transition in first year (Farrell, 2003, 2008, 2016, 2017a, 2021, 2024, 2025); the importance of RP in TESOL teacher education programs (Farrell, 2016, 2012a,b); international perspectives on ESL teacher education (Farrell, 2015); expectations and reality during the practicum (Farrell, 2017a; Richards & Farrell, 2011); teacher identities (Farrell, 2017b; 2021); competencies and teachers’ expertise associated with effective teaching (Farrell, 2015, 2018); framework for TESOL professionals (Farrell, 2015, 2022a); teacher development groups and collaborative discussions (Farrell, 2014); reflective writing (Farrell, 2013b); teaching the four skills (Farrell, 2012b); Dewey and Schön’s contributions to my RP framework development (Farrell, 2022); RP in action for busy teachers (Farrell, 2004); RP in both research and practice (Farrell, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2022a,b,c), to name but a few. I have also been so lucky to meet such great scholars as Jack Richard, David Nunan, Donald Freeman, Jerry Gebhard, Dan Tannacito, Zia Tajeddin and many more wonderful teachers’ teachers who have kept me on track over the years and taught me most about my favorite topic, reflective practice.

This Special Issue

Reflective practice has been around the field of TESOL for some time now, with most educators in agreement that some form of reflection is desirable. However, there is still not much agreement of what reflective practice is or how it should be operationalized within the field of TESOL. The danger now is that because it has reached a status of near orthodoxy, it may have become a ritualized and mechanical method far different than its original re-emergence into the field of general education studies in the 1980s to ease increasing feelings of teacher burnout because of adherence to teacher assessment via endless mind-numbing checklists. However, it seems that the current reflective moment in many cases has also been reduced to encouraging teachers to ‘reflect’ via sets of prescriptive techniques and/or recipe-following checklists. Indeed, Zeichner and Liston’s (1996) seminal work suggested that a broader, more critical approach to reflective practice is required that moves beyond questions of our practice working or not. Thus, I was curious to learn how other colleagues currently implement reflective practice within the TESOL profession worldwide that led to the development of this very Special Issue. In this special issue we have seven excellent papers on various applications of the concept of reflective practice in worldwide language teaching contexts.

The first paper by Farahnaz Faez, Michael Karas, and Yu Yang, is a fitting start to this special issue as it gives us a snapshot of where we are in terms of the relationship between reflective practice and language teachers’ self-efficacy (LTSE) beliefs. The authors conducted a systematic review of ten empirical studies primarily from Asia (and Iran in particular) between

the years 2010 and 2024. Specifically, were interested in investigating how the concept of reflective practice has impacted LTSE beliefs. Their findings indicated an overall positive relationship between reflective practice and LTSE beliefs, confirming that engagement in reflective practices tends to enhance teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Indeed, they maintain that insights from their findings highlight the depth of reflection as a transformative process, providing teachers with valuable opportunities to enhance their teaching effectiveness and confidence, thus confirming Farrell and Farrell's (2025) recent review findings that, overall, engaging in reflective practice has a positive impact on language teacher development. They also concluded that it is essential that language teacher education programs intentionally incorporate reflective practice(s) into their curricula as well as providing full support to pre-service teachers in developing their reflective capacities (see also my comments below on this topic). The papers that follow in this special issue all report on how reflective practice was incorporated into various programs worldwide.

Aintzane Doiz and David Lasagabaster's paper is one such example of how a second language teacher education program attempted to introduce reflective teaching to help English-medium instruction (EMI) teachers reflect on their teaching philosophy, beliefs and practices with a view to making their teaching more effective. Their particular focus was on feedback conferences between designated 'supervisors' and four EMI teachers (none of whom had English as their mother tongue) after they watched video excerpts of their classroom performance. Although they discovered that the benefits, while overall very encouraging, varied somewhat as their reflections were impacted by the teachers' teaching situations, personality traits, and personal teaching styles. What is significant in this study is that the 'supervisors' were not in a 'power over' position as the developed a more equal footing with the teachers in a 'power with' type of 'side-by-side supervision'. The authors note that, and unfortunately, the actual implementation of reflective practice as a feature of teacher professional development in EMI contexts is not supported thus far in any teacher training initiative. However, they hope this situation will change with the results of their study of the benefits that reflective practice, not only as regards EMI teachers' teaching practices but also regarding EMI students, who will ultimately benefit from more effective teaching.

Mino Alemi, Zia Tajeddin, and Zahra Maleknia noted the paucity of research on collaborative reflection-based research on teacher identity. To bridge this gap, they (the three co-authors acting as facilitators similar to Aintzane Doiz and David Lasagabaster's paper above) initiated a collaborative reflection focus group consisting of two novice non-native speaking teachers (NNSTs) and two experienced NNSTs who negotiated and reflected on their beliefs about their non-native teacher identity with the idea that such reflection can raise NNSTs' awareness of their status as non-native teachers of English. The result of these collaborative reflections with the three authors highlighted the teachers' recognition of native speaker teachers (NSTs') high(er) level of fluency and accuracy and consequently higher level of language proficiency but that this proficiency does not guarantee teachers' instructional competence and that NSTs are not necessarily highly qualified teachers simply because English is their native language. Indeed, the reflecting NNSTs in the study pointed out that their past experience of learning, their role as previous language learners, and sharing the same culture with their students, is a facet of their identity that NSTs (although they perceive the NSTs as still "privileged when it comes to the linguistic knowledge") do not possess. The results also confirm what Dewey (1933) encouraged about the social aspect of engaging on collaborative reflection with other teachers rather than engaging in reflection alone. As Dewey (1933) noted, reflection is best carried out in the company of others.

While also noting the paucity of collaborative-based reflective practice research as the authors above, Katsuhide Yagata explored collaborative reflective practice using journal writing (see

also my comments on writing as reflection below) as a reflective tool with a group of in-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Japan. Using the journal as a dialogical meaning making process, the author discovered that the EFL teachers tended to use similar set phrases he called 'rote in nature', and the refrained from making any critical comments to each other choosing to praise each other rather than offend. This could well be the result of the context of the study that can present some challenging sociocultural aspects of EFL teacher collaboration in any form be it through collaborative writing or dialogue in teacher groups. This finding has enormous implications for encouraging reflective practice that involves culturally diverse teacher groups, in that language teacher education programs should not only discuss what reflection means in in-service programs but also the teacher educators should scaffold the more challenging sociocultural aspects of collaboration (see also my comments below on this topic).

Mikhail Zolotarev, Tatyana Bots, Galina Nikitina, Svetlana Shilova, and Dina Alexeeva used the critical incident technique (CIT) as a tool for reflection to collect evidence that classroom disruptions were among the most frequent cited issues by both novice and experienced TESOL teachers. They engaged in holistic reflection (similar to Farrell's 2015 framework) that incorporated personal and ethical dimensions of teaching, to address how ten experienced and ten novice TESOL teachers in Russia participate in reflective practice across multiple levels and how they make sense of their experiences within the broader social context. Although they reported that both groups outlined somewhat different coping strategies that really reflect their teaching experience (or lack of), they also noted favorable outcomes from their reflecting on these critical incidents for their ongoing professional growth. Thus, the authors conclude that such a reflective mechanism/tool as the under-utilized CIT be incorporated into teacher training programs to enhance reflective practices among pre-service teachers.

In addition, Mikhail, Tatyana, Galina, Svetlana, and Dina also provide a fascinating outline and discussion of the works of Russian education and psychology researchers regarding the concept of reflection. Their outline suggests that their views resonate closely with the views of Dewey and Schön, particularly concerning the active, systematic, and intentional nature of reflective practice. In addition, new (for me at least) thinking such as the notion of a cyclical reflective culture of the educator, as well as an active (not passive) analysis and understanding of consciousness, activity, and communication. To my knowledge, this research paper is groundbreaking because it is one of the first studies that attempted to operationalize reflective practice through CIT for TESOL teachers in a hitherto underrepresented context, Russia. I am delighted they chose this special issue in *TESL-EJ* to share their work.

Nusrat Gulzar, Mohammad Fitri Bin Ahmed, and Steve Mann investigate technology-enhanced approaches to reflective practice specifically through the use of e-portfolios and videos in pre-service teacher education (PSTE) due to their advantages for multimodal, self-regulated and dialogic features. Such an approach according to the authors is evidence-based, collaborative as well as personalized that includes self-paced learning paths. Specifically, they report on a practitioner-led approach that e-portfolios and videos create more contextualised and personalised reflection opportunities in two different cultural contexts, Bangladesh and Malaysia. In the Bangladesh case, the authors discovered that the use of e-portfolios enabled student teachers to document and revisit their experiences through multiple modalities, allowing for deeper analysis and meaning-making for themselves, while in the Malaysian case, video technology provided tangible evidence of teaching moments that could be analysed repeatedly and shared with peers. This paper has important implications to move reflective practice forward with TESOL because it outlines how e-portfolios and videos can provide a more flexible, and thus less-routinised (that has unfortunately pervaded many current

approaches to operationalizing reflective practice in general education), student-led approach to encouraging reflective practice in TESOL teacher education.

The final paper by Atsuko Watanabe and Yuko Iwata, really encapsulates the theme of this Special Issue by looking at the past to be able to move forward as professional educators. Using autoethnographic (*self-reflection* in earlier terminology) and duoethnographic (*critical friendship* in earlier terminology) approaches, both authors revisited their past selves while also engaging in collaborative dialogues with each other. The intricate interplays of the self, the co-researcher, and the past students across time brought forth multidimensional arenas for reflection as they gained reflexivity of themselves and their practice. Their brave approach to revisit and face their previous selves to understand their beliefs, values, and feelings which lead to a healing effect for both authors as they were able to find meaning and reasons for their feelings of incompleteness that they experienced in their past study. As Dewey (1933) emphasized, to make reflection authentic, practitioners need to have reflective dispositions that include the attitudes of open-mindedness, responsible, and wholeheartedness (see below for more on these). These two wonderful educators are surely role models for us all to follow while engaging in our own reflective practices. Their reflections also suggest the benefits of reflection on previous data for our continuing professional development as reflective practitioners.

Reflective Practice in TESOL

The above wonderful seven papers in this special issue attest to the robust application of reflective practice in the field of TESOL. However, we still have a way to go as we move forward with this concept. For example, in a recent systematic review of the research conducted from 2010 to 2020 on the practices of encouraging TESOL teachers to reflect, we discovered that there although there was an abundance of research on this concept within the field, we also noted that the majority of the studies mostly focused on ‘fixing’ problems in teaching within a classroom (Farrell & Farrell, 2025). This suggests that when TESOL professionals encourage pre-service TESOL teachers to reflect, they still pursue a technical rational approach viewing technical mastery of instruction most important for pre-service TESOL teachers to attain as evidence as being a ‘qualified’ teacher. Indeed, it was with this focus on technical rationality that has persisted within the field of TESOL that I designed a more holistic framework for TESOL teachers to reflect on their practice (see Farrell, 2015, 2022, 2025). This framework not only reflects on classroom practice, but also the broader socio-political as well as affective/moral issues that impact their practice, and as Anani Sarab and Mardian (2023) have noted “recognises ‘the inner lives’ of teachers that are missing in both Dewey’s and Schön’s approaches” (p. 769).

I believe this situation is partly due to the continued almost uncritical citations of both Dewey and Schön’s definitions of reflective practice within the field of TESOL. Although the legacy of Dewey and Schön is important because they moved the concept of reflection far beyond everyday e ‘commonsense’ reflections about a situation, to a more rigorous form of evidence-based thinking where a teacher systematically investigates a perceived “problem” in order to discover a solution; as Farrell (2022) maintains, both approaches also have limitations because they are “both ends-based models where problems must be solved so there is no room for uncertainty and the practitioner seems somewhat detached from the reflection process” (p. 17).

Thus, when introducing reflective practice into TESOL teacher education programs, we must move beyond just requiring (usually in written modes) our pre-service teachers to ‘reflect’ that usually results in learner teachers giving their teacher educators what they think they want/require. As Hobbs (1998, p. 414) noted many years ago, “I quickly learned from my undergraduate professor that in spite of my inexperience with self-examination and my

inhibitions about revealing personal thoughts to a virtual stranger, I had damned well better produce what the professor wanted to see if I wanted a good grade.”

Unfortunately, nearly 40 years on, we still ‘require’ our students to ‘reflect’ without any consideration of the pre-service TESOL teachers’ personal histories, beliefs, theories. And expectations all of which may *differ* from their teacher educators’ beliefs. In addition, as Roberts (1998, p. 59) also argued many years ago, novice teachers have still not developed a sufficient repertoire of teaching routines and are thus required to reflect “on ‘borrowed’ routines [that] requires a depth of understanding that novice teachers just don’t have.” Thus, I reiterate (and build on them below) the excellent suggestions Valarie Hobbs made all those years ago in her own words not only because they are very important, but also, they have not been really acted upon with the TESOL profession since then. thus, I urge further reading of these (from Hobbs (1998, p. 415):

1. RP should be introduced slowly, with only the barest minimum of reflection required on the part of initial teacher trainees. Being forced to reflect, particularly in the form of a substantial assignment early on, is too much too quickly, increasing the likelihood of resentment and negativity. Possibilities could include timetabled discussions with other course participants (CPs) where perhaps a one-word prompt could be introduced by a tutor who either leaves the room or monitors from a distance.
2. Given the personal nature of RP, CPs should be actively involved in choosing the format of their RP assignment. In the case of AU [a reputable university in Hobbs’ case study], the CPs resented being forced to reflect in a format they disliked and may have responded more positively to the assignment had they been given more choices like a group discussion format or a written format of their own choosing.
3. RP should never be assessed in its early stages. Individuals should be given opportunity to gain confidence and awareness in a non-threatening atmosphere; only after they have acquired significant experience with engaging in RP should any assessment be considered.

As the suggestions above indicate, it is vitally important for TESOL teacher educators to allow sufficient time to discuss and define what *they* consider reflective practice to be, and how they engage in (assuming they do) their *own* reflections (see Farrell 2021 for more details). Indeed, as the results of Yagata’s paper (in this special issue) attest to, the mere asking of teachers to reflect without such a discussion of what reflection means with the participants can lead to non-reflective outcomes. For example, it would be important to distinguish early on for any such discussion to distinguish between informal reflection that we do every day in our lives, and more formal reflection related to our teaching. The former ‘thoughtful’ reflective practice where as Wallace (1996) pointed out, teachers “informally evaluate various aspects of their professional expertise” (p. 292), does not really lead to improved teaching and can even lead to more “unpleasant emotions without suggesting any way forward” (p. 13). I have observed this phenomenon of teachers avoiding reflection because of the unpleasant realizations that they may be wrong about some methods and/or teaching practices, so they panic and maintain it is better to avoid than to participate. This situation all stems from the fact that many teachers do not know how to reflect or what to reflect on. In the worst-case scenario in some language teacher education programs, reflective practice is initiated with the sole aim to fix perceived problems in practice or “reflection-as-repair” as Freeman (2016, p. 217), named this approach. Such an approach reduces the process to a more mechanical hunting for problems in our teaching rituals perhaps by filling out predetermined checklists or answering a trajectory of set questions, thus confining reflection to a retrospective “post-mortem” (Freeman, 2016, p. 217) role. This results in a process (as Hobbs noted many years ago above) where teachers have been required for the most part to follow a set of recipe-following checklists rather than

reflection on and learning from *their* practice. Walsh and Mann (2015) have called for data-led reflective practice where teachers collect data from their practice so that they can make more insightful analysis and gain a fuller sense of their own teaching. In fact, this stance on reflection reiterates what Dewey (1933) noted about reflection when he said that “data (facts) and ideas (suggestions, possible solutions) thus form the two indispensable and correlative factors of all reflective activity” (p. 104).

In addition, when we suggest pre-service, novice and experienced TESOL teachers to engage in (or ‘do’) reflective practice, we should not assume they know ‘how’ to ‘do’ it. Within TESOL teacher education programs reflective can and should be taught and learned (Farrell, 2021).

As Alemi, Tajeddin, and Maleknia and Yagata’s studies (this special issue) suggest, any introduction of reflective practice in teacher education or development programs should be scaffolded developmentally by the facilitators. Thus, it would be important for the TESOL teacher educators themselves to reflect on their *own* practices and, in turn, model such reflections with their students. Thus, teacher educators will be better placed to be able to scaffold appropriate frameworks, methods and activities as their students begin to learn how to reflect.

Then, as TESOL teacher can in turn, as Doiz and Lasagabaster (this special issue) point out, take inform reluctant administrators of the benefits of supporting teachers’ reflections because in the end, they can point out that their students will also benefit from their teachers’ more effective teaching. Of course, such approaches to reflection will take some time in any program, but it will be time well spent as the teachers will be able to face whatever challenges that emerge in their future selves (ie. the onset of COVID-19!).

In terms of what format should be employed when reflecting, and as Hobbs (1998) noted above, it seems that written reflection still dominates in most approaches to reflection as most participants are not really given choices as to how they want to respond when reflecting (Farrell & Farrell, 2025). In addition, in Yagata’s study the act of writing itself generated another form of reflective practice that the author was not planning for when the participants commented on each others’ reflections, as this offered the teachers additional opportunities to become more aware of their own pedagogical theories, principles and philosophy that had been unnoticed and as a result could reflectively negotiate and reconstruct them. Thus, and as Hobbs (1998) noted, different formats of reflection should be outlined and discussed as not all teachers enjoy writing let alone writing about their reflections. This can and should include the option to engage in dialogue with other teachers who are reflecting in a teacher group where they have the capacity to discuss and then to deconstruct, analyze, and interpret critical professional events for individual members and for the group as a whole.

Hobbs (1998) also raised the whole notion of how to assess teachers’ reflections noting it should not be assessed in the early stages of the process because teachers have not gained sufficient experience with the whole process. In addition, what happens if the teacher’s reflections are different from what their teacher educator expectations and how to assess these reflections in a fair manner. Over the years this dilemma of how to grade or assess the reflections of pre-service, novice and even more experienced TESOL teachers has come up in many of the contexts in which I have had the honor to be invited to speak. I always answer that I think the fairest way of assessing reflections is with the use of teacher portfolios. A teaching portfolio might include lesson plans, anecdotal records, student projects, class newsletters, videotapes, annual evaluations, and letters of recommendation. A teaching portfolio is not a one-time snap shot of where the teacher is at present; rather, it is an evolving collection of carefully selected professional experiences, thoughts, and goals. This collection can be

accompanied with the teacher's written (or oral) reflection and self-assessment of the collection itself and plans for the future.

Such an approach to accessing the reflections of teachers shifts some of the responsibility from the teacher educator to the teacher because the teacher becomes responsible about what to include in their teaching portfolios. This is a more collaborative assessment of overall reflections in that both teacher and teacher educators reflect together on the assembled contents of the portfolio. Two metaphors capture such reflective discussions: the *mirror* and the *map*. The *mirror* metaphor captures the reflective nature of a developmental portfolio as it allows teachers to "see themselves" over time. The *map* metaphor symbolizes creating a plan and setting goals. After reviewing the evidence collected over time, teachers can reflect on where they were, where they are now, and, most importantly, where they want to go. Such an approach agrees Gulzar, Ahmed, and Mann's paper in this issue where they encouraged practitioner-led approach that e-portfolios and videos that create personalized reflection opportunities and ensure more self-paced learning paths,

Finally, I would like to address another important point not covered much in the literature and that is the whole idea of requiring self-examination through reflective practice, raises as Hobbs (1998) pointed out, "raises moral and practical questions which must be examined carefully" (p. 415). I would suggest that in addition to the discussions on what reflective practice is and how it will be carried out and accessed as outlined above, teacher educators should also outline what all consider the appropriateness of such self-disclosure in the reflective process. For example, a discussion should include what teachers can and cannot self-disclose (topics), for what purposes teachers can and cannot self-disclose, and what teachers' needs teacher educators should consider such as their cultural backgrounds, gender, and perhaps emotional status related to what they are willing to disclose personally and professionally. I believe such discussions can result in developing a collaborative process of encouraging reflective practice that support teachers and maximize their professional development. Perhaps, also there should be more emphasis placed on this notion both practically and in terms of research studies focused on teachers' sharing of personal and professional information while reflecting.

Such reflections lead us back to what Dewey (1933) noted, that there can be no true reflection without a teacher developing a set of attitudes that he or she must consider before engaging in reflective practice, three of which are *open-mindedness*, *whole-heartedness*, and *responsibility*. Indeed, even though this book has many strategies, methods and examples of how to reflect, I believe it is not enough to develop knowledge of these reflective methods and strategies, but also it is necessary to develop character attitudes to accompany these reflective processes. Being open-minded means teachers listen to more than one side of an issue and admit they may be wrong as they reexamine their philosophy, principles, theory and practices. Being responsible means considering the consequences of what one has done (or our actions) and what one has learned. Being wholehearted means to continually review our beliefs and actions and seek every opportunity to learn more about our practice throughout our careers. Thus, I define reflective practice as "a cognitive, emotional process, accompanied by a set of attitudes in which language teachers systematically collect data about their practice, and, while engaging in dialogue with others, use the data to make informed decisions about their practice both inside and outside the classroom" (Farrell, 2022, p. 47).

Conclusion

In this paper I have looked back to move forward and I note a personal pattern that throughout my 40+ year career, I have always advocated on behalf of TESOL teachers (pre-service, novice, early career and experienced), mostly taking a practical approach (following the work of Dewey and Schon) to not only defining, but also operationalizing reflective practice for TESOL

teachers. My overall approach when encouraging TESOL teachers to reflect was to conduct my research *with* rather than *on* teachers, and mainly by listening to *their* voices and documenting *their* views, to include *their* understandings of *their* profession, so that *they* can be generators of *their* own research rather than being consumers of others' research. Consequently, I have made it my academic career quest to engage in research that will give voice to the voiceless hardworking pre-service and novice ESL/EFL teachers as well as more experienced ESL/EFL teachers whereby *they* would benefit from the results of my research. As I've reflected, I've found a renewed hope to move forward with this vitally important concept for all TESOL teachers, teacher educators and administrators to consider in their futures.

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