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Reflective practice for language teachers

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Introduction

I have spent the past 40+ years reflecting on reflective practice, and I am still learning about what it is for language teachers. In this book, I summarise my current reflections on reflective practice for language teachers. I assume readers have no prior knowledge of reflective practice and so I present the book in terms of why it is important to reflect, where reflective practice came from, and what it is. I also present a framework for reflecting on practice I designed especially for language teachers to engage in reflective practice, together with an example of an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher's reflection using this framework. I then outline the various reflective tools that teachers can make use of as well as the characteristics of reflective teachers. Throughout each chapter, I also provide you with some *Reflective breaks*, so that you can step back while you are reading the book and reflect on your own thoughts about what you are reading. You can write your answer to these, or you can talk to a peer/colleague or a group of colleagues depending on how you are most comfortable in your reflections, as you will read in the chapters that follow. Of course, you may skip any and all of these breaks if they do not suit your personal approach to reflective practice. Indeed, you can skip any chapter and go direct to the chapter that interests you most as this book is for you. I know you are busy teachers and I address this issue at the end of the book after I outline and discuss reflective practice in detail so that you can decide what is best for you and your professional development.

Happy reflecting!

Chapter 1
Why reflect?

This chapter outlines some reasons why reflection is worthwhile.

Why reflect?

Remember the excitement you felt when you walked into the classroom and saw your first set of language students after your teacher education programme? Sure, you may have been a bit frightened because there was no longer a structured practicum experience where you were given some help with your teaching. Now, you are amongst your students as their teacher, so they depend on you to provide opportunities for them to learn. This experience may stay with you for your entire career, and you may even feel the same type of excitement when you enter your classroom each day. Indeed, many teachers of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) remain enthusiastic through most of their careers; however, there are times when some may begin to lose this enthusiasm as teaching no longer holds the initial excitement it once did. As one well-qualified (BA, Cert TESL, MA) and very experienced college ESL teacher in Canada said to me, 'I feel like I've plateaued professionally ... gone a little stale' (Farrell, 2014a). She said she was feeling the 'teaching blues' as she noted that she felt not fully engaged in her teaching, and she worried that she was not providing full opportunities for her students to learn as a result of her own perceived 'slump'. This is not an indication that this teacher does not care; far from it, it is a declaration that she needs to reflect on what she is doing, and perhaps many, if not all, teachers will reach such a plateau at some time in their teaching careers.

I still remember my first day as a teacher all those years ago in Ireland and the joy (yes, and the fear) I had when I first entered a classroom. I still retain that joy when I enter a classroom, but I am also human because I know that I too 'plateaued' a few times and needed to step back and take stock about what I was doing, how I was doing it and why, and what I should do in the future. I was lucky, though, as I could take a sabbatical and reflect, but many practising language teachers do not have this luxury to step back during a sabbatical to reflect, nor do they know how to reflect, or what reflective tools and techniques are available for them to reflect, and so on.

Reflective break 1

- Do you still feel excited as you enter each class?
- Do you think it is normal for teachers to plateau at some time during their careers?
- If yes, did your teacher education programme prepare you for this?
- Have you ever felt that you have plateaued at any time during your career?
- If yes, what did you do? How did you handle this?
- Did you talk to colleagues about what you were feeling?
- Have you ever heard of reflective practice?
- If yes, what does reflective practice mean to you?
- Where do you think reflective practice came from, and why did it come about?

Chapter 2

Where did reflective practice come from?

This chapter provides some background to the interesting yet complex concept of reflective practice. The chapter outlines and discusses where reflective practice came from to set the scene for what reflective practice is.

Origins of reflective practice

Humans have probably always reflected as they walked the earth, and for over 2,000 years philosophers such as Socrates, who became famous for his adage, 'the unexamined life is not worth living', was just one of many who advocated that people should reflect on their existence. In addition, the concept of contemplation and its awareness-raising effects has long been a part of many great religions and philosophical studies where we humans are encouraged to practise mindfulness.

In more modern times, perhaps the two most famous philosophers associated with the concept of reflection are John Dewey (1933) and Donald Schön (1983), in that order. In fact, Dewey first discussed reflection in terms of student learning (rather than for teachers), as he suggested that routine thinking and decision-making by students in educational settings limit their ability to learn critically. He later extended this idea of routine decision-making to teaching, and maintained that teachers can become slaves to routine decision-making if they do not engage in reflection. When explaining such reflection, he first discussed what it is not, and for this, he asserted that it is not just mulling over something or engaging in what I would call 'navel-gazing'. Instead, Dewey maintained that reflection should be systematic and intentional. Dewey (1933, p. 9) defined such reflection as, 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads.'

Reflective break 2

- Do you think that teachers should follow routine in their teaching? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Are you aware of any routines in your teaching? For example, do you start your classes the same way each day? Do you end your classes the same way each day?

As Dewey suggested, reflective practice is not just thinking about what (may have) happened after class on the way home on the bus; rather, he said it should be intentional and so he developed a systemic approach to reflection that he called *reflective inquiry.* Reflective inquiry has five main phases of reflection that teachers should follow, according to Dewey. These five phases are: *suggestion,*

intellectualisation, guiding idea, reasoning and hypothesis testing.

The first phase is called *suggestion*, where a practitioner is faced with a puzzling situation or a problematic issue in his or her teaching that needs more reflection. In many cases, when teachers face problematic situations, the urge is to try to solve the problem immediately. However, Dewey suggested that teachers should hold off with any immediate attempts to find a solution and instead engage in what he calls *intellectualisation*, the second phase of his reflective inquiry. Dewey maintained that we can have an initial emotional reaction to any problem we encounter, and such a reaction can limit our ability to solve the problem. Thus, he suggested we intellectualise the problem rather than 'feel' the problem. One way of doing this is to ask more probing questions about the problem; as he noted, a question well asked is half the answer already. After asking such deep questions, the practitioner is now poised to attempt to gather as much information about the problem as possible and thus enter into the third phase of reflective inquiry called *guiding idea*.

There are many different sources teachers can use to gather information, but I recommend they consider Steven Brookfield's (1995) idea of looking at a problem through different lenses: the teacher's lens, colleagues' lenses, students' lenses, and a literature review lens. For example, teachers can gather their own information about their practice by recording their lessons, and/or writing a journal. They can also ask a colleague to observe them teach and get their opinion about the problem. They can also ask their students' opinions as students know more about their teachers than anyone else because they observe them each day teaching in their classroom. Finally, teachers can read some of the research findings related to the problem at hand to see what others have done before. All of these will be further discussed in the chapters that follow.

In such a manner, teachers can begin to make more informed decisions based on these multiple perspectives about the problem and enter Dewey's fourth phase called *reasoning*, where the teacher attempts to come up with a tentative solution based on all the information gathered thus far. The practitioner makes a tentative plan that he or she does not know will work at that time when he or she moves into the fifth and final phase called *hypothesis testing*. After deciding the plan, the practitioner tests it by action and observation to see if it works; if it does not work, the practitioner attempts to generate different solutions and tests these in a similar manner.

In fact, although not often recognised, Dewey's reflective inquiry as outlined above is the precursor of the currently popular action research approach to gathering data about teaching.

Reflective break 3

The following is a short case study of a language teacher's reflections. Read the case study and try to explain how you would use Dewey's reflective five phases to solve the problem.

- During several of her recent lessons with young learners of English as a foreign language, Dorothy noticed that some of her students were becoming a bit restless and the general noise levels of her classes were increasing although she had a rule set from day one that students would have to face consequences if they were too loud. Dorothy decided to tell her students to work more quietly, especially when she put them into groups, and although she was successful for a few minutes, the noise levels increased to even higher levels later on. Indeed, some of the boys in the groups were becoming very difficult to control, even though she told them they would have to leave the room if they continued with their disruption. Over the next week, things did not change and her students continued to be very noisy, so Dorothy became very frustrated.

There was a lull for many years after Dewey's significant contribution of the concept of reflection within education (and what some would suggest could be called revolutionary thoughts on the need for both students and teachers to reflect on their practices). This lasted until the 1980s with the emergence of the work of Donald Schön (1983, 1987) whose PhD dissertation was focused on an analysis of Dewey's 'Theory of Inquiry'. Although Schön did not refer to Dewey much in his work, I believe Dewey's philosophical pragmatism and influence led him to take a more pragmatic (rather than theoretical) approach to reflective practice (which also attracted me to his work).

Much of Schön's initial work was within organisations in terms of how practitioners in those organisations viewed their work, and especially the notion of practitioner-generated intuitive practice. Schön (1983, 1987) was convinced that professionals 'know' more than they can articulate and was interested in

getting them to articulate what they 'know' and 'do' by engaging in this process of reflection-in-action. As Schön (1983, p. 50) observed, the 'know-how is in the action'. Thus, he suggested that practitioners become more aware of what they do as they perform by observing their actions, or by reflecting-in-action. Thus, in a Deweyan sense, a temporal pause (where the practitioner attempts to reshape what he or she is doing while he or she is doing it) may be necessary between reflection and action and when making any readjustments to an action.

Dewey is widely acknowledged as the founder of the reflective practice movement in modern times, and he considered reflective practice as intentional, systematic inquiry that was disciplined and that would ultimately lead to change and professional growth for teachers (reflection-on-action). Schön built on Dewey's work and added to this the idea of a practitioner being able to reflect on his or her intuitive knowledge while engaged in the action of teaching (or reflection-in-action).

Thus, Schön (1983) encouraged the practitioner to continue to reflect during action in an attempt to reshape what the practitioner was doing while he or she was doing it. Such reflection involves a type of internal conversation in which the teacher 'listens' to the situation's backtalk that occurs in a sequence of moments. Such a sequence could be as follows: a situation develops while a teacher is teaching that triggers spontaneous, routine responses that may not work. For example, a student cannot answer an easy question related to some language skill that he or she was able to answer during a previous class. The teacher responds as he or she has always done, in a routine manner, but nothing happens, and the student remains silent. The teacher may be surprised with this silence and may explain to the student that he or she wonders why as the student already answered this question in the previous class. The teacher can then ask the student if anything is the matter, and the student may still remain silent.

Regardless of how this actually transpires, the teacher is surprised as the normal routine in action is broken and so he or she must reflect within this action, and this gives rise to on-the-spot experimentation by the teacher. The student may or may not explain why he or she is silent. The teacher may take some measures (depending on the reaction or nonreaction) to help solve the problem: ignore the situation, empathise with the student, help the student answer the question by modeling answers, and so forth (from Farrell, 2012). As Clarke (1995, p. 245) explains, 'this conversation between the practitioner and the setting provides the data which may then lead to new meanings, further reframing, and plans for further action.'

Reflective break 4

- Let us continue with Dorothy's case introduced in Reflective break 3 when she noticed that some of her students were becoming a bit restless and the general noise levels of her classes were increasing. Perhaps this has led to one student shouting out who normally would not. How do you think Dorothy would proceed through Schön's sequence of moments above as she attempted to reflect-in-action?
- Did you ever have a similar event occur in your classroom while you were teaching? If yes, how did you handle it? Do you think you went through a sequence of moments while you reflected on what you would do?

Conclusion

This chapter outlined and discussed where the concept of reflective practice originated and pointed to the two most influential scholars associated with its popularity: Dewey and Schön. Their work is very influential on my own work because of their pragmatic approach to reflection, which can be very useful for teachers. In fact, all of my work on reflective practice is really standing on the shoulders of these two giants (Farrell, 2019a); however, as you will read in subsequent chapters, I have added to and further refined both their approaches to include a more holistic approach to reflection.

Chapter 3

What is reflective practice?

This chapter outlines and discusses what I consider reflective practice to be.

What is reflective practice?

The legacies of both Dewey and Schön outlined in Chapter 2 are important because they moved the concept of reflection far beyond everyday simple wonderings about a situation (i.e., navel-gazing) to a more rigorous form of evidence-based thinking where teachers systematically investigate a perceived 'problem' in order to discover a solution. Engaging in evidence-based reflective practice allows teachers to articulate to themselves (and others) what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and what the impact of one's teaching is on student learning. Such an evidenced-based approach as Richards and Lockhart (1994, p. 1) explain, encourages language teachers to 'collect data about their teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching'. More recently, Mann and Walsh (2017) have also maintained that evidence-based reflective practice can enable them to make more insightful analysis of issues and thus gain a fuller sense of their own teaching.

That said, most evidence-based approaches to reflective practice are confined to problem solving within a classroom setting, where teachers are encouraged to only focus their collection of data to 'fix' teaching problems, but without any consideration of its impact on the social, affective, moral, or political aspects related to practice. Unfortunately, the result in many cases is that reflective practice has now become a ritualised and mechanical intellectual exercise, reduced to a set of recipe-following checklists that teachers follow as 'evidence' for reflecting on their practice. Such a one-dimensional approach has reduced reflection to a retrospective 'post-mortem' role (Freeman, 2016, p. 217). Indeed, Akbari (2007) cautioned against this because, as he noted, when reflection becomes a solely intellectual exercise, reduced to a set of techniques, the inner lives of teachers are overlooked. The main issue here is that the teacher-as-person (the affective, emotive side) has been separated from the act of teaching and the focus is on 'reflection-as-repair' (Freeman, 2016, p. 217) with the sole aim of improving problems in teaching.

Thus, reflection as it is outlined in this book, suggests that it embraces not only gaining awareness of teaching problems, but also self-awareness of the teacher as a person in the act of teaching. Such self-aware language teachers are more *integrated teachers* because they can understand who they are, what they do and how and why they do it. As Akbari (2007, p. 202) noted, 'any reflective practice which bypasses the self and its implications will not result in any meaningful change in the way teachers view their mission as educators and teachers.'

Unfortunately, within the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) we are still adopting a 'fix-it' approach where reflective practice is operationalised as a retrospective exercise (reflection-on-action) after a lesson, mainly with the use of checklists of pre-determined reflective activities, and with the almost total exclusion of considerations of the person who is doing the reflection and the moral, social, and ethical

consequences of what they do. Farrell and Kennedy (2019, p. 2) recently summarised this problem within the field of TESOL when they said:

> The teacher (or person-as-teacher) has been separated from the act of teaching, and the act of reflective practice has become 'routinised', 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 some instances, engaging in reflective practice has become routinised, as teachers are provided with checklists of ritualised questions to answer related to practice 'working' or 'not working'.

I view the concept of reflective practice more holistically in this book because I believe it can build on what both Dewey and Schön (and others) have suggested and outlined in Chapter 2 by defining reflection as multi-dimensional and including reflection on the moral, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects of our practice. In other words, I do not discard what both Dewey and Schön have presented; rather, I add to this by encouraging teachers to reflect on their philosophy, principles, theory, practice and critically reflect beyond practice. I call this approach 'the framework for reflecting on practice' (Farrell, 2015) and I outline this holistic approach in more detail in Chapter 4.

Reflective break 5

- Have you ever used checklists to reflect on your practice?
- If yes, did they help you reflect?
- Do you think the teacher can be separated from the act of reflection?
- What would be some problems of only focusing on the classroom when reflecting?
- Going back to the case of Dorothy in Chapter 2 where she continued to encounter problems with her students shouting out and her classroom being very noisy, do you think Dorothy herself may have some personal issue with noise, and thus she could benefit by reflecting on her philosophy, principles and theory rather than just on her practices?
- Read Chapter 4 for more details on all these questions.

Conclusion

This chapter has pointed out that although I value Dewey and Schön's approaches to reflective practice because both took a pragmatic, evidence-based approach to reflection, I believe they are somewhat limited in focus. Both approaches can be considered as ends-based models because they are generated by problems that must be solved regardless of when they occur (*in-action* or *on-action*). In other words, there is no room for uncertainty. As many people know, life is full of uncertainty and sometimes we encounter problems that cannot be easily solved, if ever, and I believe that is fine as long as we keep asking questions. In addition, it seems that the teacher who is reflecting is not really included in both approaches; as if he or she is detached from the problem. I believe it is impossible to separate the teacher from the act of teaching. These constraints prompted me to develop a more holistic approach to reflective practice for language teachers that is outlined in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Framework for reflecting on practice

This chapter outlines and discusses a framework for reflecting on practice for language teachers. I also include an example of an EFL teacher reflecting at each stage of the framework. After reading the example of the teacher's reflections at each stage, you will be invited to write your own reflections.

Framework

The holistic framework that I present in this chapter is different from many other approaches to how reflective practice has been operationalised both within and outside language teaching. This is because the framework not only focuses on the intellectual, cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of practice that many of the other approaches focus on, but it also explores the spiritual, moral and emotional non-cognitive aspects of reflection that acknowledges the inner life of teachers so that language teachers can become more aware of their philosophy, principles, theories, and practices, and how these impact issues inside and beyond practice (Farrell, 2015). This evidence-based framework to teacher reflection includes five interconnected levels: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice. As I explain each stage, I also include an example of a real teacher, Francine (a pseudonym), a female English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher, who has been teaching for four years.

Philosophy

The first stage of the framework, *philosophy*, examines the *teacher-as-person* because a teacher's basic philosophy has developed since birth. This stage can be considered a 'window to the roots of a teacher's practice because a philosophy of practice means each observable behavior has a reason that guides it even if it is implicit' (Farrell, 2019b, p. 84). By talking about past experiences that may have shaped their philosophy, teachers obtain self-knowledge by reflecting on their background (i.e., heritage, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, family, and personal values) (Farrell, 2015). Teachers can simply write an in-depth autobiography, about these early experience as they attempt to answer, 'Who am I?'. Philosophy includes the teacher in a personal manner because teaching is multidimensional and it matters who the teacher is.

Reflective break 6

- Reflect on Francine's philosophy:

  Francine describes herself as a leader and someone who loves working with people. Francine said, 'I don't see teaching as I want you to learn something, but rather I want to help you learn something.' Francine does a lot of volunteer work in the community. She said that she is happy to work with many underprivileged groups 'even if it means working on a Friday night.' Francine stated that her compassionate nature was inspired by her family who are all educators.

- Write your reflections on philosophy. The following questions may be of help:
  - Why did you become a language teacher?
  - Was teaching your first career choice (see Francine above)?
  - What is the meaning of *teacher* for you?
  - Do you think your upbringing (heritage, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, family, and personal values) influenced you in any way(s) to become a teacher?
  - What memories do you have about your school years and your approach to learning?
  - Do you think that your students are your life, as Francine mentioned above?
  - What will your legacy be as a teacher when you retire?

Principles

The second stage, *principles*, encompasses a teacher's reflections of assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions about teaching and learning – *reflection-on-practice*. According to Farrell (2015), assumptions are ideas that we accept as being true despite a lack of evidence. Although assumptions are somewhat difficult to articulate, they can be described as having intuitions about what makes 'good' or 'bad' teaching. To access assumptions, teachers can reflect on teacher *maxims* as these guide instructional decisions (i.e., maxim of empowerment – give learners the control). In contrast to assumptions, beliefs are accepted to be true by an individual, can be unconsciously held, originate from a number of sources, and may or may not converge with practice. To articulate beliefs, teachers can use images, metaphors, or choose statements that best reflect their beliefs about teaching and learning. When teachers reflect at this stage of reflective practice, they have an opportunity to explore whether their values are transferable to practice.

Reflective break 7

- Reflect on Francine's principles:

Francine described herself metaphorically as a 'doctor' who must 'find the medicine to make students proficient in English.' Francine also added that 'doctors are not immune' and require checkups and medicine through various training, consulting with other colleagues, and learning from their students. Francine described her students as 'patients' who have 'different backgrounds, stories about learning English, abilities, conditions, and learning styles' which impact language learning. For learning English, Francine said that she takes a 'rule-based' approach especially towards L2 speaking and pronunciation. When Francine notices that her students are struggling with a specific item of pronunciation, she 'sets aside a specific amount of time and explains it because it's processed completely differently.' Although Francine adapts a rule-based approach for L2 speaking, she is 'against the belief that you should talk like a native-speaker' and encourages her students 'not to lose their accent because it's who they are.'

- Write your reflections on principles. The following questions may be of help:
  - What are your beliefs about teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language?
  - What metaphor or maxim do you use for your role as a teacher?
  - Has your use of this metaphor or maxim changed over time since you became a language teacher?
    - If yes, what differences have you noticed?
    - What experiences have led to the change you noticed?
    - If no changes have occurred in your metaphor usage, what experiences

have resulted in this confirmation of your original metaphor usage?

- What metaphor or maxim do you use for the role of your students in your classes?
- Has your use of this metaphor or maxim changed over time since you became a language teacher?
    - If yes, what differences have you noticed?
    - What experiences have led to the change you noticed?
    - If no changes have occurred in your metaphor usage, what experiences have resulted in this confirmation of your original metaphor usage?

Theory

The third stage requires teachers to reflect on theories that underlie their practice, whether those are based on hunches, teacher training, books, journals, etc., to see how they translate in the classroom. A *theory* is 'something we use to give understanding and attempts to answer the question "why?" in order to increase knowledge of practice and realign thoughts regarding this' (Farrell, 2015, p. 67). At this stage, the teacher focuses on how they plan their lessons, more specifically, their planning (i.e., backwards, forwards, or central planning) and choice of activities, techniques, and methods. By reflecting on theory, one is able to label what happens in the classroom and understand how it influences the role of both the teacher and students during a lesson.

Reflective break 8

- Reflect on Francine's theory:

Francine said that she does not plan the same way that she did when she began to teach due to factors like resources, and colleagues. Francine said that she 'must make decisions based on what I have available, not precisely according to the beliefs I have adopted from theory' and that 'many factors affect trying to apply certain practices to class.' All lessons, topics, vocabulary, and grammar structures are predetermined on a course syllabus given by the institution. Francine is required to cover the syllabus, but has the freedom to design activities to present the material.

- Write your reflection on theory. The following questions may be of help:
    - Do you ever go into a lesson without planning? If yes, how do you decide what to teach that lesson?
    - Do you follow a syllabus set by someone else?
    - If you plan lessons, how do you plan?
    - How do you plan and sequence activities?
    - How do you plan your method and approach to teaching a particular lesson?
    - When planning lessons, do you ever begin by considering the content that you will be teaching first?
    - When planning lessons, do you ever begin by considering the methods and activities that you will be teaching first?
    - When planning lessons, do you ever begin by deciding on the desired learning outcomes first?

Practice

The fourth stage, *practice*, is what constitutes the tip of the iceberg and examines observable actions while teaching. This stage is strongly connected to the first three stages, as development of awareness of the convergence or divergence between belief and practice is the start of 'a process of reducing the discrepancy between what we do and what we think we do' (Knezedivc, 2001, p. 10). The convergence of beliefs and practice can be impacted by situational constraints, experience, changes in beliefs preceding changes in practice, incompatible propositions, conflicting beliefs and tensions between core and peripheral beliefs. Classroom observations can be used to compare what a teacher says they do and what they actually do while teaching using category instruments, or audio and video recordings (see below). This stage of practice can bring to light the reasons for convergence or divergence by helping teachers draw connections between their philosophy, principles, theory, and practice to develop the ability to reflect during a lesson (reflection- in-action), after a lesson (reflection-on-action) and reflect prior to teaching (reflection-for-action).

Reflective break 9

- Reflect on Francine's practice:
  For the practice stage of reflection, three lessons (all online with Zoom because of Covid-19), all three hours in length were observed. Table 1 summarises some of Francine's observed practices.
- Francine was observed to have diverged from her original lesson plans and activities (that she shared prior to each of the lessons observed) in each of the three lessons observed. However, in all instances, this divergence was because of some unanticipated issues with online lessons that she had not or could not plan for, especially when related to providing feedback and correcting errors, which were observed in most of the lessons. In addition, it was also observed that in all three lessons, Francine did not use any drilling techniques, although she stated that one of her principles is that a rule-based approach is most effective for language learning. Francine said that she plans for a specific time for feedback in all her classes, especially with lower levels. Indeed, Francine said that she does not think that this online environment provides them with the same interaction as face-to-face classes and therefore feedback will take more time. The online environment also takes away her ability to do feedback on the whiteboard, so she said that she must resort to making recasts, such as repeating the question, repeating the word, changing intonation and the like, until her students better understand any oral mistakes. Additionally, in all three lessons, Francine diverged from her lesson plan in terms of timing due to feedback. As she said, 'Virtual is so slow.' Despite Francine's best efforts, however, some classroom management issues were observed and one incident in particular, when she encountered a student who was disruptive and making inappropriate comments. However, she did not take much action at that time because this was a new platform for her teaching (Zoom) and as such, she said she was a bit unsure how to handle the issue. However, after that particular lesson, Francine noted that had this occurred in her regular classroom (i.e., not online) she would have handled the situation much differently.
- Write your reflections on your practice. The following questions may be of help (you may also need to record some of your lessons and Chapter 3 can give you more ideas about this tool for reflection):
  - Do you start your classes the same way each day?
  - Do you end your classes the same way each day?
  - Do you stand/sit in the same place each class?
  - Do you call on the same students to answer questions?
  - Are the students required to raise their hands and wait to be nominated before asking or answering a question, or can they shout out and participate more spontaneously in your classes?
  - What level of formality operates within your class?
  - How and when are students expected to interact with other students?
  - Can students move around the room whenever they want?
  - If a student needs help with something, when and how does the student approach you?
  - To what extent are your students free to challenge what you say?

Observed Practices	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3
Follows lesson plans	N	N	N
Language taught through repetitive drills	N	N	N
Gave feedback to students	O	O	O
Correct errors	O	O	O
Clearly states instructions	O	O	O
Classroom management problems	N	O	O

Key: O=Observed; N=Not observed

Table 1 Summary of Francine's Observed Practices

Beyond practice

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. These issues are not examined much in TESOL; however, teachers deal with them on a daily basis. In fact, 'TESOL classrooms are embedded in, and reflect important institutional, societal, and global discourses in subtle and nuanced ways' (Rich and Troudi, 2006, p. 616). All teachers hold beliefs about their work, students, subject matter, and roles and responsibilities; however, this stage of reflection helps teachers understand the deeply rooted power dynamics in education and question beliefs which may have been externally imposed (Farrell, 2015). With the knowledge gained from this stage, teachers can 'contribute to social change for the betterment of students, colleagues, community, and society at large' (Farrell, 2015, p. 86), as well as reflect well beyond classroom teaching practice (i.e., on textbook, syllabus, curriculum, working conditions). This type of reflection helps transform teachers' practices in a way that responds to the needs of students and society.

Reflective break 10

- Reflect on Francine's *beyond practice*:

Francine explored how she perceives power dynamics of society related to her life as a language teacher. She stated that 'societal pressure is one of the most important aspects when considering a career as a teacher.' Francine noted that a unique challenge of being an English teacher is where the perception of identify is at stake and that speaking English means 'leaving behind your roots'. She also mentioned that some people in her home country 'reject English at all costs' and even recalled a moment at a local café where she was treated differently for speaking English. Although Francine said that she recognises that 'we are becoming a globalised society that requires its citizens to be bilingual,' she always tells her students that learning English is not synonymous with loss of identity. By looking at power dynamics at a sociocultural level, Francine realised that 'teachers are never the product of a single idea, institution, or experience, we are moulded by our social background' and that this career comes with 'great responsibility that affects the lives of students'.

- Write your reflections beyond practice. The following questions may be of help:
  - What are your viewpoints about power relations in your classroom and where do they originate from?
  - Does your school or office of education have policies in place to help differently-abled students? If so, have you been informed of these policies and your place within them as an English language teacher?
  - Have you ever been concerned about job security? If so, what prompted this concern? What actions did you take to try to protect your job, or not?
  - Do you have any conflicts between your personal morals and anything in your work context: students, colleagues, materials, administrators?

Reflecting on reflections

Francine explored what has shaped her professionally, including her socioeconomic background, ethnicity, family and personal values, and how all of these have influenced and impacted on how she got to where she is now. In other words, reflecting with the framework allowed Francine to become more aware of her philosophy and what has shaped her as a person. As Palmer (1998, p. 3) asks, 'Who is the self that teaches?' Parker continues, 'Good teaching requires self-knowledge.'

Francine then moved on to explore her principles, which are closely linked to her philosophy, as teaching and learning beliefs are also shaped by an individual's background. Indeed, the divergence between Francine's stated principles of the effectiveness of rule-based approaches and her actual classroom practices that were observed can be traced back to her own second language education experiences where she was taught prescriptive English grammar mainly through drilling and a rule-based approach, and as a result, she may have believed that it is important to do the same in

her own English language teaching. However, during and after the practice stage, Francine began to recognise that these methods and approaches related to prescriptive grammar teaching were not conducive to a positive language learning environment for her and her learners.

For Francine, for the most part, her lesson plans and delivery strategies are dependent on a predetermined course syllabus created by the institution where she works, and she has no real influence on how these are determined. This may account for her divergence from each of the lesson plans she presented before the observed lessons as she reflected on her students' struggles to achieve academic outcomes based on materials and lesson plans that were developed by others who do not know her students.

During the final stage, Francine reflected on the socio-political aspects of teaching English as a foreign language and said that she recognises that teachers are influenced day to day by society and so in order to create a safe environment, she said that she does not discuss sensitive topics.

Reflective break 11

- The purpose of encouraging teachers to reflect on their practice is not to look for best practice; rather it is to get a holistic view of oneself as a TESOL professional. From the above analysis of Francine's reflections, read through your own reflections on your philosophy, principles, theory, practice and beyond practice critical reflection and if you can see patterns emerge, try to interpret your reflections.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined and discussed a five-stage framework for language teachers to reflect on their work. The stages covered were philosophy, principles, theory, practice and beyond practice critical reflection. In addition, the chapter detailed the reflections of one EFL teacher, Francine, as she journeyed through each stage of the framework and then how I interpreted these reflections. Of course, these reflections can be articulated orally to oneself or others, and/or in writing (such as in a teaching journal), and/or online. Chapter 5 provides more details about how language teachers can reflect using the framework.

Chapter 5

Tools for reflective practice

This chapter outlines and discusses various tools that language teachers can use to engage in reflective practice. The chapter first discusses how teachers can reflect and then outlines various tools to aid their reflections.

How to reflect

Language teachers can engage in self-reflection, peer reflection, and group reflection, as well as in online communities of reflective practice.

Self-reflection

Language teachers can engage in self-reflection to become more aware of who they are as teachers: their philosophy, principles, theory, practice and critically reflect beyond the classroom (see the framework presented in Chapter 4). When self-reflecting, teachers may want to consider their personal biases in what they 'see' and what they 'want to see'. Language teachers can engage in more objective self-reflection if they document their reflection in all of these stages. This will provide them with the data that will give them more insight into making informed decisions about their teaching.

Peer-reflection

Another way to get more of an outside perspective is to reflect with the help of a peer. Reflecting with a peer can be done with a critical friend, in a team-teaching situation with a peer, and/or with a peer coach. The idea of collaborating in all three of these arrangements is (among other benefits), to not only reflect on current teaching practices, but also to expand, refine, and possibly build new teaching skills, as peers help each other develop. For example, when teachers reflect with a critical friend, they collaborate to encourage each other to reflect through discussions, questioning, and even challenging, while at the same time, providing support for each other.

Team teaching is also a type of critical friendship arrangement whereby two or more teachers cooperate as equals as they take responsibility for planning, teaching, and evaluating a series of classes or even a whole course. Team teaching arrangements can promote recognition and appreciation of alternative methods and techniques of teaching and evaluating lessons.

Although similar in many ways to both critical friendship and team teaching, the aim of peer coaching is for one teacher to help another improve some aspect of practice that the coach may be an expert in. In a peer coaching arrangement, there is no evaluation, no supervising, just a professional collaboration in which one teacher wants another peer to observe his/her class in order to obtain feedback on one specific aspect of teaching or learning. As such, the 'coach' provides feedback on an area of his or her expertise, and then gives specific suggestions that the teacher may or may not follow.

Group-reflection

Language teachers can also reflect with a group of three or more teachers. Teachers from a school (or teachers from different schools) can come together in such groups to improve their teaching and their students' learning. This means that the group is seen

as a place where all participants can openly discuss and experiment as they discover who they are personally and professionally. When language teachers come together in a group, they can foster more of a sharing attitude with each other and can help each other to articulate their thoughts about their work so that they can all grow professionally together. A teacher group provides an opportunity for language teachers to help each other face and overcome dilemmas related to practice in a supportive environment. Once a group of teachers decide that they want to form a teacher development group they must then figure out how they want to operate in terms of members, roles, topic setting and general rules of the group (see Farrell, 2014b).

Online reflection

Language teachers can also engage in discussion in online reflective communities. Such online communities are said to provide teachers with supportive and collaborative reflective discussions in which they can share teaching techniques and explore new ways of teaching, as well as pursue their individual interests related to their own professional development through communication modes such as blogs, chats, forums, and online discussions. Blogs, chats, forums, and online discussions are easy to set up by language teachers with little expertise in technology and are a way for teachers to express and share their thoughts, emotions, opinions, and reflections online with other professionals. Language teachers can also use podcasts as a means to engage in personal reflections and/or they can collaboratively share (with or without co- podcasters) these reflections with a worldwide audience.

Reflective break 12

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in self-reflection?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of reflecting with a peer?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of reflecting with a group of teachers?
- Have you ever reflected with a critical friend where you have complementary skills and collaborated to reflect on each other's practice? Try to find such a critical friend that you trust to help you reflect on your practice. Perhaps this friend can take you through the framework outlined in Chapter 4.
- When arranging a team-teaching situation, both teachers of the team take equal responsibility for every stage of the teaching process and trust each other throughout. Then, as equal partners, find a teacher that you can create materials with, teach simultaneously in the classroom, and later evaluate as you reflect together.
- A peer-coaching arrangement takes place so that the observed teacher can develop new knowledge and skills that the coach possesses. Try to find a teacher at your school that has expertise in a particular area of teaching or curriculum and request to enter a peer-coaching relationship with this person in order to reflect on your practice.
- Form a teacher group and after deciding the roles of each member (e.g., leader/facilitator, minutes scribe, monitor to keep the group on track), decide on a topic to focus on. All participants can brainstorm a topic together and then identify specific questions to explore at the first meeting. Assign a task each week to every member in order to focus the discussion of each meeting (e.g., bring in a reading text of interest on theory or practice of a specific aspect of language teaching to share with the group).
- Have you ever used blogs, chats, forums, and/or online discussions to aid your reflective practice?
- Do you think teachers can create a sense of community when reading one another's online reflections?
- Have you ever recorded a podcast and shared it with colleagues? If not, what kind of podcast would you want to record and share?

What to reflect with

When language teachers have decided how they want to reflect on each of the five stages of the framework outlined in Chapter 4, they can then consider what reflective tools would be useful for them. Some of these tools include teaching journals, classroom observations, critical incident analysis, and/or teaching portfolios to mention but a few.

Teaching journals

Writing a teaching journal provides teachers with a record of various aspects of their practice. This writing allows teachers to comment on various classroom events because they can step back for a moment and this helps them further reflect on their work. Writing has a built-in reflective mechanism: teachers must stop to think about what to write, then write while at the same time viewing their thoughts as they appear in front of them. In other words, teachers can 'freeze' their reflections so that they can reflect deliberately on them later. By writing regularly about their work, teachers can systematically accumulate lots of different information about their beliefs, assumptions, values and classroom practices that on later review, interpretation, and reflection can assist them in gaining a deeper understanding of their work. This deeper understanding can lead to a clarification of thoughts related to beliefs and practices, awareness of teaching style, and is a way of triggering insights about oneself as a teacher.

Of course, teachers can also vent their frustrations and problems in their journals and set goals attempting to solve the problems by asking themselves questions about their practices (Farrell, 2013).

Teachers can write alone or can collaborate with others while writing their journals. When collaborating with others, the journal can be a record of a teacher's teaching experiences for others to read. In addition, the internet offers more scope for teachers to share their teaching journals on a wider scale with chats, forums and blogs (see above).

Classroom observations

Classrooms are such busy places that teachers cannot hope to know what is going on all the time. However, by engaging in classroom observation, language teachers can develop more of an awareness of the principles and decision making that inspires their teaching. A teacher can carry out classroom observation alone, with a peer, and/or with a group of teachers (see above for more on these).

When teachers 'observe' their own teaching, they need to use equipment such as an audio recorder and/or a video recorder. A recorder (video and audio) can be placed in a strategic place in the classroom in order to capture as much as possible of what is occurring during the class. A microphone can be placed on the teacher's desk, and/or on the teacher himself/herself. Teachers can also place several recorders around the room. Video recordings can later be viewed alone or with other teachers. Using available technology, teachers can then transcribe the parts of the lesson they are interested in reflecting on in more detail such as the impact of their verbal instructions in their classes, the type and frequency of teacher questions, and/or how tasks are set up in their classes and so on.

In order to carry out peer observations, Richards and Lockhart (1994) maintain that when peers get together to take turns at teaching and observing, they should incorporate pre-, during- and post-observation discussions. Before each observation, the teachers meet to discuss the aim of the observation and to assign the observer a goal for the observation and a task to accomplish.

The teachers also agree on observation procedures or instruments (quantitative, qualitative, or both) to be used during this session and arrange a schedule for the observations. During the observation, the observer then visits the teacher's class and completes the observation using the procedures that both partners had agreed on and in the post-observation discussion, the observer reports on the information that he or she collected.

Critical incident analysis

While classroom observations give teachers a wide lens through which to reflect on their practices, critical incident analysis can help teachers focus in on specific and important events that happen while we are teaching. These events are called *critical incidents* because they were not planned or even anticipated by the teacher, but they are clearly remembered after class. For example, a teacher can make a sudden change in the lesson plan during a class because they perceive that the lesson may be going better than anticipated, so the teacher decides to continue with an activity until the end of the lesson because of the overall positive effect of the increased student response to the activity.

Conversely, something may happen in a lesson that can be problematic or puzzles the teacher into doing something he or she would not normally do, such as abandoning a particular activity or disciplining a student (e.g., see the critical incident Dorothy reported on in Chapter 2). By recalling, describing, and analysing such incidents, teachers can begin to explore their deeper held assumptions about effective teaching practices.

Teaching portfolios

A teaching portfolio is an album (much like a photo album) of many different aspects of a teacher's work. It tells the story of the teacher's efforts, skills, abilities, achievements, and contributions to students, colleagues, institutions, academic disciplines, and/or community. Teaching portfolios can provide teachers with opportunities to plan their own professional development journey. The analogy of a traveler on a journey is applicable to preparing teaching portfolios. Just as travellers must decide their point of departure, the course they will take, and their destination, a professional teaching portfolio encourages teachers to think about their starting point, direction, and goals for the coming year(s).

A teaching portfolio might include lesson plans, anecdotal records, student projects, class newsletters, videos, annual evaluations, and letters of recommendation. A teaching portfolio is not a onetime snapshot of where the teacher is at present; rather, it is an evolving collection of carefully selected professional experiences, thoughts, and goals. Any teaching portfolio, regardless of the specific purpose for creating it, should always include items that document a teacher's knowledge of the subject matter (as seen in units of instruction and descriptions of courses), methods of instruction (lesson plans, samples of students' work and evaluations, classroom observation reports), and professionalism (current resume, copies of degrees, certificates, awards).

Teaching portfolios can provide teachers with opportunities for self-reflection and collaboration with colleagues.

Reflective break 13

- What is your understanding of teacher writing as reflective practice?
- Do you like to write about your teaching? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Have you ever recorded (audio or video) your classroom teaching? If yes, what was your feeling? Did you find listening to your own voice strange? What other things did you notice?
- Record (audio and/or video) your classroom lesson(s). Listen to, and/or watch the recording. Transcribe the recording or parts of the recording depending on the part of the class you are interested in reflecting on. Analyse and interpret these.
- Ask your critical friend to observe you teach (you can also observe your friend teaching). Make a new list of what you or your critical friend noticed during the classroom observations.
- Identify a significant event that has occurred recently when you were teaching in your classroom. Why was this incident significant for you? Write a detailed description of what happened. Analyse why the incident happened – what is your interpretation of this incident?
- Compile your teaching portfolio by including examples from the three main areas/sections of a teaching portfolio outlined above (knowledge of subject matter; how you plan, deliver, and assess instruction; and your sense of professionalism).

Conclusion

This chapter outlined how language teachers can engage in self-reflection, peer reflection, group reflections, as well as in online reflections that can combine many of these as well. In addition, the chapter discussed how language teachers can use reflective tools to aid them in their reflections such as teaching journals, classroom observations, critical incident analysis, and/or teaching portfolios. Again, any of these tools can be used by itself or in combination with other tools such as when teachers may want to write about their classroom observation experiences in online platforms such as blogs, chats or forums to share them with peers and or groups of other language teachers.

Chapter 6 next discusses various characteristics of reflective language teachers.

Chapter 6

Characteristics of reflective teachers

This chapter outlines and discusses various characteristics of reflective teachers, such as necessary reflective dispositions, the different levels of reflection that teachers can engage in, as well as their purposes for engaging in reflective practice.

Reflective dispositions

In order for any deep and meaningful reflection to take place, Dewey (1933) maintained that teachers would need to possess a particular disposition when they engage in reflective practice. For example, Dewey suggested that teachers who want to be considered as reflective practitioners must possess three characteristics (or attitudes). As Dewey noted, knowledge of the approaches, methods, means and tools of reflective practice are not enough by themselves because as he said, 'there must be the desire, the will, to employ them. This is an affair of personal disposition' (ibid, p. 30). Thus, reflective teachers must be *open-minded, responsible* and *wholehearted* in their everyday reflections.

To be open-minded is to have the desire to listen to more than one side of an issue and to give attention to alternative views. For example, how we interpret our findings from reflecting on the framework presented in Chapter 4 will be important, as our underlying principles may challenge our practice, or our practice may challenge our underlying principles. Open-mindedness suggests that we need to 'let go' of being right all the time and that we should question our thinking and doubts in a kind of self-observation in order to gain more insight into our actions, thoughts and learning, or as Dewey (ibid, p. 136) suggested, to 'admit that a belief to which we have once committed ourselves is wrong.' To be responsible is to carefully consider an action's consequences, especially as it impacts our students personally, intellectually, and socially. Reflective language teachers consider the consequences of whatever actions they adopt in their classrooms as a result of reflecting on and changing their beliefs, which can be very difficult for many teachers. To be wholehearted is to be able to overcome fears and uncertainties to critically evaluate themselves so they may make meaningful change. Reflective language teachers will maintain a wholehearted attitude as they reflect throughout their careers.

Reflective break 14

- Examine Dewey's three characteristics and see what degree of each you possess.
    - Open-minded (a desire to listen to more sides than one)
    - Responsible (careful consideration of the consequences of actions)
    - Wholehearted (seek every opportunity to learn)
- What levels of these characteristics do you possess as a teacher now?
- Which of these characteristics do you need to develop as you continue as a teacher?
- Can you think of other desirable characteristics a reflective practitioner should possess?

Reflection levels

Once you have gone through the framework for reflecting on practice and decided on the reflective tools (see above) that suit you best, you now must consider the level or dimension of reflection you want to engage in. Teachers can reflect at three different and hierarchical levels: *descriptive*, *conceptual*, and *critical* (Hatton and Smith, 1995).

Descriptive reflection is considered the basic level or state of reflection in the classroom. When teachers reflect at this level, they focus their reflections on their observable teaching behaviours and practices within the classroom and describe these procedures without any analysis (i.e., what I do). An example of such reflection is as follows:

> Today I started class by telling the students that we would be continuing from the previous lesson about verb tenses. I then told them to open their books on page 23 and we proceeded to complete all the exercises during the lesson.

Conceptual reflection occurs when teachers focus their reflections on the theory behind their classroom practices (i.e., why I do what I do). They not only describe their beliefs and practices, but they begin to question these, as well as seek to justify their teaching practices. At this level of reflection, teachers can also look into alternative practices (depending on their students' needs) they might prefer to use based on their descriptions and analysis of their reasons for doing what they are doing. The teacher's attitude is mindful and responsible (see above, Dewey 1933). An example of such reflection is as follows:

> When I was teaching verb tenses, I had a feeling that some students may not have been sure about exactly what we were doing. I am not sure if it was because I was leading the class and writing on the whiteboard, and I did not give them a chance to practise these tenses with me. I also wonder if I explained the rules correctly and the function of verb tenses. Now I wonder if I really understand these myself, so I think I must look up some of these verb tenses and why we use them.

The third level of reflection, called *critical reflection*, encourages teachers to justify the work they do and reflect within the broader context of society and as such, they focus on the moral, ethical, and socio-political issues associated with their practices. Critically reflecting beyond practice enables the teacher to be even more open-minded that they may be wrong in their approaches and methods (see above, Dewey 1933). An example of such reflection is as follows:

> I am trying to improve the way I evaluate my own teaching and whether my approach to teaching grammar provides opportunities for students to really learn what I am teaching or am I blocking their learning. What are they really learning in my classes anyway? Is this useful for their future lives using English? I am planning to get a critical friend to work with me in the next grammar lesson and observe and challenge me about my practice and its impact on my students' learning and overall development. After all, I am here for them.

When examining each of the above examples of the levels of reflection, we can see that the teacher begins with descriptive reflection by giving an account of the procedures of the lesson with no justifications for using these procedures. Then the teacher begins to ask why she is teaching in the way she is from her perspective at first, and then makes an attempt to seek justifications for her actions in relation to her students' learning of grammar. The teacher then begins to critically reflect on the whole process of teaching grammar and its impact on her students' lives. Although she is now more aware of what she is trying to do, she is still not sure so she will get help from a critical friend, and they will work together to critically reflect on practice.

Thus, it may be possible for teachers to reflect on different levels simultaneously, depending on the topic of reflection. New teachers (and teachers new to the reflective process) may find themselves reflecting at the descriptive level a lot because they may not have enough time or space to reflect at the other levels, and because they are just developing their schemata of teaching from experiencing classrooms for the first time.

Reflective purpose

Another characteristic of reflective language teachers is that they have a sense of purpose for engaging in reflective practice. I outline some main purposes for language teachers to engage in reflective purpose (adapted from Farrell, 2015). That is to help language teachers to develop their individual theories of teaching so that they can become generators of their own knowledge rather than consumers of others' (experts') knowledge. For too many decades, language teachers have been told what to do by others outside the profession of

teaching English to speakers of other teachers (TESOL). Engaging in evidence-based reflective practice as presented in this book will generate local knowledge of teaching based on the teacher's own experiences. The information generated from this will help the teacher provide more opportunities for his or her students to learn more effectively than if an outside expert were to advise. At a basic level, engaging in reflective practice allows teachers to reflect at the descriptive and conceptual levels (see above) which can result in allowing for any correction of distortions and errors in philosophy, principles and/or theory related to actual classroom practices. In this manner, language teachers will be able to better recognise and discontinue practices not in best interests of their students' learning. In addition, when language teachers generate their own descriptive and conceptual theories and knowledge of their practice, they can then advance theories of TESOL at a more critical level of reflection that can impact the professional, social, and political levels of our practice. When language teachers engage in such reflections, they can thus enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence through reflective practice and develop the resourcefulness and resilience required to face future challenges in their careers.

Reflective break 15

- What is your purpose for engaging in reflective practice?

Conclusion

This chapter outlines some characteristics of reflective teachers that include discussion of three different levels of reflection that teachers can engage in, as well as three different reflective dispositions of reflective teachers, and some purposes associated with engaging in reflective practice. After one conference many years ago, a participant asked me how you would recognise a reflective practitioner if you saw one. What a wonderful question, I thought, and I am still wondering how to answer this. That said, I would suggest that a reflective practitioner has a particular disposition that has all three attitudes outlined above, reflects at all three levels and has a real sense of purpose while reflecting.

Chapter 7
Final reflections

Final reflections

The goal of reflective practice is to create awareness by observing and refining practice on an ongoing basis rather than to address specific problems (this is an aspect of action research which is subsumed under reflective practice). However, most language teachers are already very busy teaching day to day, and may conclude that they do not have time for this. Indeed, time is often considered one of the main impediments to engaging in reflective teaching.

As such, teachers should be aware of and control aspects of time as they reflect. Practising teachers are very busy in their daily teaching and other related duties, and the amount of time any one teacher is willing to invest in his or her professional self-development will naturally vary. Therefore, each teacher (and, hopefully, the administration) will need to commit to whatever reflective project they become involved with in terms of time availability and make this explicit at the start of the reflective process. Teachers (individually, pairs, groups) should consider how long they want to reflect. It is important to consider this for two reasons. When considering this aspect of time, teachers should remember that critical reflection on one's teaching takes time, so the reflective period should be correspondingly long rather than short; however, it is really up to each teacher to decide how much time they want to devote to their overall professional development.

Reflective practice offers teachers a way to articulate those aspects of practice that make up part of that knowledge base in teaching, by helping them better understand what they know, and do. As Zwozdiak-Myers (2012, p. 3) has pointed out, reflective practice is central to a teacher's development because it helps teachers 'to analyse and evaluate what is happening' in their classes so that they can not only improve the quality of their teaching, but also provide better opportunities for their students to learn.

Reflective break 16

- After reading this book, do you think you are a reflective practitioner? If yes, how do you know? If no, why not?
- Do you think it is worthwhile to reflect on your practice even if you do not discover new teaching or assessment methods and just gain a better understanding of what you are doing now?
- Do you think it is reasonable to expect language teachers consistently to engage in reflection?
- If yes, how often should teachers engage in reflection? If no, why not?
- What benefits would you expect from engaging in reflective practice?
- How can teachers overcome challenges related to time pressures when engaging in reflective practice?
- Abdal-Haqq (1996) outlines five essential types of time that institutions can generate for language teachers for their reflections. How can you negotiate any of these with your institution to support your reflections?
    - Freed up time: using teaching assistants, college interns, parents, and administrators to cover classes; regularly scheduled early release days.
    - Restructured or rescheduled time: lengthening school day on four days, with early release on day five.
    - Better-used time: using regular staff or district meetings for planning and professional growth rather than for informational or administrative purposes.

- Common time: scheduling or common planning periods for colleagues having similar assignments.
- Purchased time: establishing a substitute bank of 30–40 days per year, which teachers can tap when they participate in committee work or professional development activities.

- What other challenges do teachers face when engaging in reflective practice as it is outlined in this book?

Reflective practice as it is presented in this book is more than a method for teachers to explore their teaching; in fact, it becomes a way of life for teachers throughout their teaching careers as they continuously strive to become the best teacher they can be for their students. As Oberg and Blades (1990, p. 179) have maintained, the potential of being reflective 'lies not in the theory it allows us to develop (about practice or reflection) but the evolution of ourselves as a teacher. Its focus is life; we continually return to our place of origin, but it is not the place we left.'

Reflective break 17

- Here is my final reflection for you:
  - One day a young girl was watching her mother cooking a roast of beef. Just before the mother put the roast in the pot, she cut a slice off the end. The ever-observant daughter asked her mother why she had done that, and the mother responded that her grandmother had always done it. Later that same afternoon, the mother was curious, so she called her mother and asked her the same question. Her mother, the child's grandmother, said that in her day she had to trim the roasts because they were usually too big for a regular pot.
- I have told the above story many times, at many different conferences, in many different countries, and each time I ask the audience the same question: 'Are we cutting the slice off in our classrooms without knowing it? In other words, are we following routine in the way we teach our classes without really knowing this?'

Happy reflecting!

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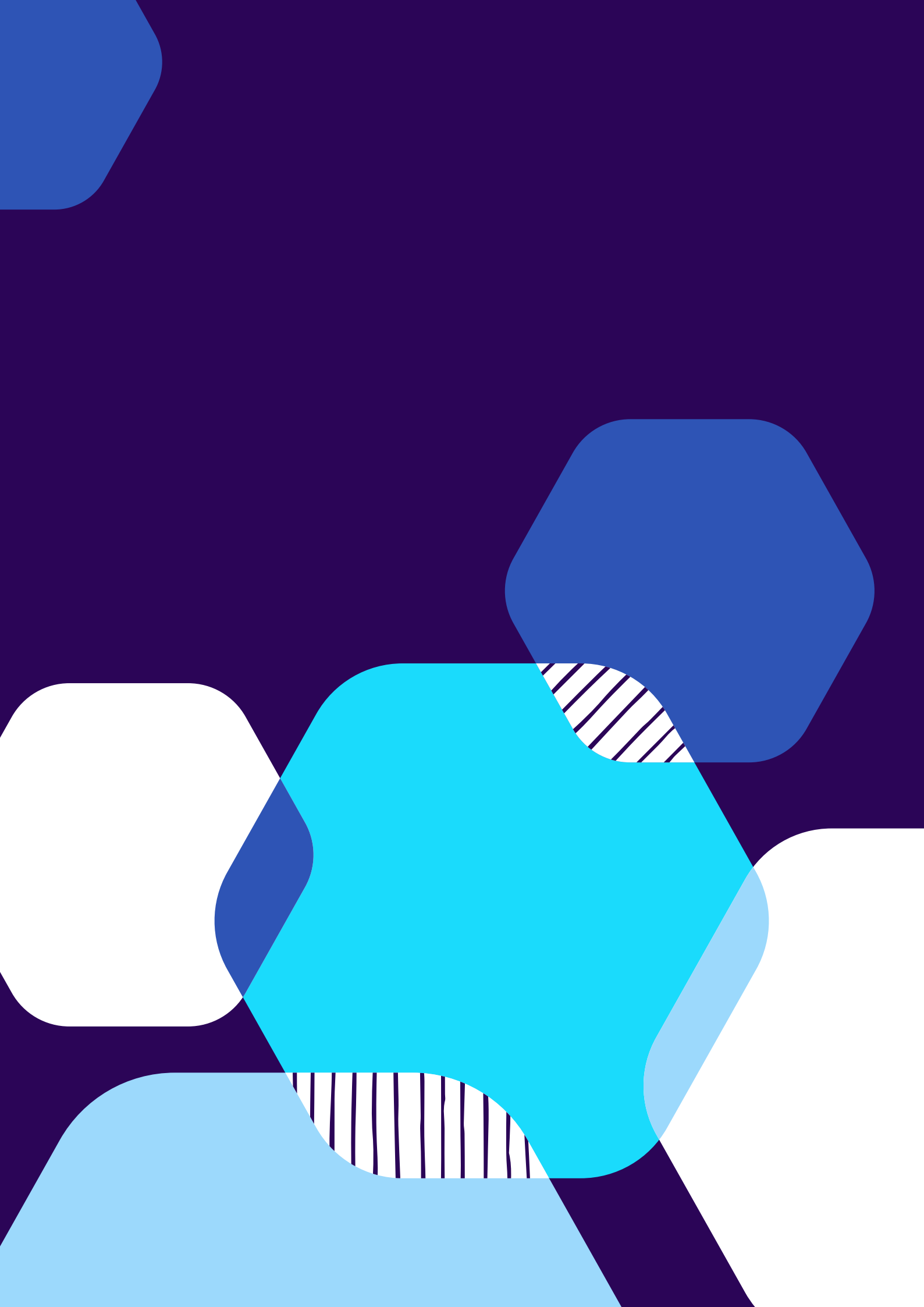

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