

Reviews

Reflective Writing for Language Teachers

by Thomas S C Farrell
Equinox 2013
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Reflective Writing for Language Teachers is directed at both new and experienced ELT practitioners, with the aim of helping them to harness writing as a means of supporting reflective practice, something which nowadays is itself considered to be key to teacher education and professional development.

To me, this book seems to be a rich project to be undertaken, rather than something simply to be read from cover to cover: each of its seven chapters contains various tasks to perform, tasks which encourage teachers to question and discuss their own beliefs and practice, and which guide them through the process of evaluating these critically, through the medium of writing. The tasks could be tackled alone, with a colleague

or as a group activity for continuing professional development (CPD). Teacher educators might also wish to incorporate this book into a module on their training courses.

It is interesting to see a book with such a narrow focus: reflective practice and, within that, reflective writing. What results is an in-depth, detailed coverage of this area. The book follows a logical outline, from broad themes, such as the role of professional development in language teaching, to narrower focuses, such as reflective practice activities, different formats for writing reflectively, and the use of journals and narrative writing, then connecting this back to the bigger picture by demonstrating how it fits into the different stages of one's development from novice teacher to experienced professional, and finally taking the whole concept a step further: to the possibility of doing 'reflective research'.

One potential drawback could be that working through this book alone, alongside a full teaching timetable, might prove rather a tall order. Any teacher attempting this might find that their motivation would dwindle too early for any benefits to be reaped. In addition, a teacher using it for self-study would miss out on the value of the discussions which are encouraged regularly throughout the book. However, if you have a receptive staffroom, a keen group of teachers and the stamina to persevere with it, this book may provide the possibility for a really useful thread of extra professional development.

Writing is certainly a powerful tool, so it is good to see a book that recognises this and tries to help teachers harness it, to the benefit of their practice and, ultimately, their careers. I think it would be very interesting to see a range of

reports written by teachers who have worked their way systematically through all the activities offered, comparing the outcomes they have experienced with the intended outcomes of the book.

Lizzie Pinnard
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Storytelling with Our Students

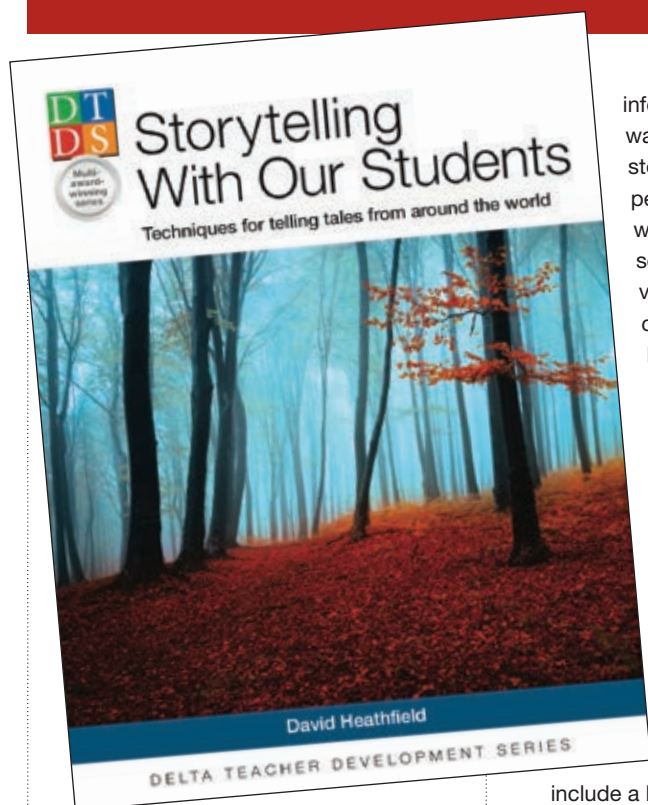
by David Heathfield
Delta Publishing 2014
978-1-905085-87-3

This is a welcome addition to the already popular Delta Teacher Development Series. It comes from one of the best-known storytellers in ELT, so my expectations were high – and I was not to be disappointed.

The book follows the standard, three-part format for the series. Part A is in two sections. The first offers a historical overview of storytelling, ways of relating storytelling to teaching, and what teachers can do to incorporate stories into their lessons. It also details the benefits to learners, both in terms of their language and their personal development. This is followed by a very useful overview of the chapters in Part B of the book. In this way, the prospective user can see at a glance where to find sections focusing on voice, use of the face and body, repetition, and so on.

Part B constitutes the bulk of the book. It comprises three chapters: *The teacher as storyteller*, *Creative ways in and out of stories* and *The student as storyteller*. Chapter One focuses on the skills and techniques teachers need to become effective as storytellers: use of the body and voice, various ways of using repetition, and suggestions for engaging with the listeners through interaction. Chapter Two moves on to suggest some imaginative ways of getting into a story – and getting out of it – including prediction activities, active response and





exploration of metaphor, mental imagery and meaning. Chapter Three offers techniques for involving the students as storytellers on their own account. These range from re-telling, through story-mapping and various forms of performance, to the creation of new endings and entire new stories.

Part C is the shortest of the three. It aims to take the teacher further into the exploration of storytelling. There are three sections: *In the classroom*, *Beyond the classroom* and *Joining forces*. In the first section, we are offered suggestions for working with stories across lessons (using longer stories); across the curriculum (ways of integrating stories into other subjects, which will be particularly relevant for CLIL teachers); and across languages (for students who share the same L1). There are also more ideas on involving the students by asking them to bring in their own stories, and the collaborative creation of stories. In *Beyond the classroom*, there are suggestions for moving storytelling outdoors, online storytelling, bringing in people from the outside world to tell stories, and involvement in festivals and community events. *Joining forces* contains useful

information for teachers who want to develop their storytelling further, through peer workshops, training workshops and courses. The section concludes with a rich variety of *Sources* teachers can draw upon, including books, videos and contact details for storytellers and associations.

The stories in Part B are laid out on two facing pages, or on a single page in two columns, for ease of use – you never have to turn a page to get to the end of a story. On the left are detailed suggested procedures, notes and ideas for classroom use. These

include a brief description of the technique, rehearsal suggestions, and what to do before, while and after telling the story. Finally, there are suggestions for follow-on activities. On the right is the story (or stories) to be used.

There are 40 stories in total. They are unfailingly delightful, and draw on a wide

variety of traditions, ranging from trickster stories, Nasrudin stories, wisdom stories, folk myths and fairy stories. David Heathfield has generously shared his encyclopaedic knowledge of stories worldwide to offer us a selection of engaging story material, which he has used successfully with language students of all ages. The book is worth buying for the stories alone. But, additionally, the compendium of techniques offers teachers an indispensable toolkit for getting the best out of storytelling.

This book adds substantially to the resources available to teachers who wish to incorporate storytelling into their classes. And it reminds us of the extraordinary power of stories to engage learners and teachers alike. The world is a fabric made of stories, and each of us carries a unique network of personal stories. We should celebrate this more than we do in education – and this book will help us to do so.

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