

# **Fly them to the moon and back: Reflective practice in freshman writing classes**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores one process of reflective practice and how teachers can observe their own practices and make decisions about interventions that may potentially improve their classes. In this paper, the author describes her own process of reflective practice in the form of journaling, observations, and examining student data. By focusing on four main interventions, she examines how and if they were successful or not. In sharing her experiences with reflective practice, she hopes to demonstrate the necessity of actively reflecting and intervening in one's own practice by means of a systematic reflection process.

## **Background**

I was not sure what to expect with this new crop of freshman, particularly the K8 class. For the second year in a row, I was assigned to teach the highest-level class of English majors for freshman. The previous year did not go so well with K7, the highest-level class. Perhaps, there was a variety of reasons, the most obvious being that I was a novice EFL teacher at the tertiary level, having taught at the secondary level for many years previously. I was using a prescribed textbook that I did not like. In addition, I was only teaching the writing skills of the four strands. Furthermore, the general atmosphere of the class was a bit "off" right from the start. They were quiet, subdued, mixed level, and clearly, some students had been misplaced according to the placement tests in April. In my view, there were more unfortunate events that may have led to a rocky year. For instance, we were assigned to a large lecture-style classroom, so students naturally spread out and banded together, despite some of these groupings being less than ideal for the cooperative learning environment I had planned to cultivate. Attempts later in the year to have them switch seats only resulted in heavy sighs and sloth-like movement coupled with very little communication in the newly-assigned groups. Moreover, I sensed a bit of pride and competitiveness amongst the ranks, which meant that some students would not admit they needed help from their peers or from me. A few students did indeed improve over the year, but this seemed to depend on which groups the individuals had aligned themselves with during the first weeks of class.

I decided to prevent these issues in my second year by focusing more on cooperative learning, but I worried that this would be a difficult task. A lot would depend on the class atmosphere. Fortunately, the new K8 class evoked a very different atmosphere to that of the former K7 class in that the students seemed more positive and outgoing. They seemed happy to be in K8, and not nervous about being placed in the top-level English class. Our classroom is tiny, and perhaps that also helped to create a cozy atmosphere from the start. Based on my reflections at the end of the last school year, I made several major changes to my approach for the following year. This paper will outline how and why I made these decisions and the outcomes of such interventions by examining journal entries from my teaching journal, correspondence with other teachers, and student data.

## Literature Review

### *Reflective Practice*

In the past, language teachers have been expected to learn about teaching by reading theory rather than by examining their own practices; however, Farrell (2015) maintains that teachers should “be producers of knowledge rather than just consumers of knowledge” (p. 122). According to Farrell (2008), “The use of reflective practice in teacher professional development can improve their own teaching by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences” (as cited in Farrell, 2013, p. 35). Farrell (2015) defines reflective practice as “a cognitive process accompanied by a set of attitudes in which 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” (p. 123).

Professional development “is an evolving process of learning, growth, and change and is based on a teacher’s personal experiences and reflections of teaching” (Farrell, 2013, p. 20). Informal reflective practice is self-directed and motivated by teachers wanting to update one’s knowledge or improve some aspect of their lessons, working environment, relationships with learners/colleagues, etc. (Farrell, 2013b). A bottom-up informal approach refers to “professional development through reflective practice is a teacher-initiated approach based on the belief that both experienced and novice language teachers can improve their understanding of their own teaching by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching experiences” (Farrell, 2013b, p. 179). This approach also allows teachers to feel empowered to implement changes within their own practices (Farrell, 2013). Rather than rely on top-down mandates prescribed by a school administration, the government, or supervisors of a program, teachers can make a practice of reflecting and implementing changes independently “in order to construct their own theories of teaching and learning” (Farrell, 2013, p. 15). Most teachers are reflecting on a sub-conscious level as they attempt to improve their lessons but a systematic approach refers to collecting data teaching experiences to examine one’s own attitudes,

beliefs, and assumptions and then comparing them to teaching practices. “Teachers can make informed decisions about their teaching based on the data they have collected” (Farrell, 2013b, p. 179). Examples of methods and tools used for reflective practice include field notes, journals, course evaluations, narratives, pre- and post-tests, questionnaires, interviews, self-assessment, self-audio/video, and classroom observations.

Any teacher can engage in reflective practice, and the following researchers found the necessity of it in their research of teachers who engage in varying degrees of reflectivity. Fatemi et al. (2011) cite Valencia (2009) who conducted qualitative, descriptive-interpretive study to describe the way the knowledge-base of five in-service teachers had been constructed and found that the components of a teacher’s knowledge base should not be built merely on pedagogical understanding but also on a teacher’s learning and teaching experiences. According to Florez (2001, as cited in Fetemi et al, 2011), reflective practice is a flexible, practical, and professional approach to developing oneself as a teacher and maintains that even teachers who are “pressed for time” can adapt the constructs of reflective practice in their own professional lives. Fatemi et al. (2011) compared the reflections of 100 EFL teachers with their student writing scores. They found that “highly reflective teachers reported higher levels of motivation than low reflective teachers” (p. 179). Fetemi et al. (2011) concluded that teachers who systematically engage in reflective practice will benefit greatly career-wise.

### ***Reflective Writing***

Maintaining a teaching diary is a common method used by reflective practitioners to collect data about their own practices in and out of the classroom. The following are common questions and answers from the literature pertaining to this method.

Farrell (2013b) maintains that writing helps you gain distance from your immediate experiences because it allows you to step back from a situation. After several diary entries, you may notice a pattern, which could offer insights to your beliefs, approaches, and possible solutions to dilemmas. In addition, writing regularly allows teachers to explore their own beliefs and monitor their practices while becoming more self-aware about teaching styles, attitudes, habits, etc. (Farrell, 2012).

Several frameworks for teacher reflection exist, and for this paper, I have chosen to use one of the more recent frameworks by Farrell (2015). *The Framework for Reflecting on Practice* has four areas: Philosophy, Theory, Practice, and Beyond Practice. Philosophy refers to the notion of how being aware of one’s own philosophies (assumptions and beliefs) about teaching and learning helps teachers to be more mindful in their practice. Self-knowledge can be accessed by exploring one’s heritage, ethnicity,

religion, socio-economic status, family and personal values – all of which will influence teachers in their own practice. Theory considers the theories behind teachers' practices, and Farrell's (2015) reflective framework proposes that teachers reflect on what/how to teach, what official theories from the literature they put to use in practice, the unofficial theories that teachers formulate on their own through their experiences, and the descriptions of specific classroom techniques, activities, and routines they use or intend to use in their lessons. Examining one's own practice involves observing one's own actions as well as students' reactions. Farrell (2015) suggests that teachers take notes before, during or after a lesson, and then go to their teaching journals and write up a longer entry later in the day or week. Other ways of observing one's own practice include self-monitoring, talking with colleagues, inviting a colleague to observe a class, and video or audio-recording yourself. Beyond practice could be considered the final component of the reflective framework proposed by Farrell; however, the framework is composed in a circular fashion, so one can begin their reflective process at any point. Reflecting beyond one's practice refers to the social impact that one's teaching may have on students, colleagues, the community, and even society. In other words, a teacher might ask herself if her philosophies, principles, theories, or practices are "socially relevant or restrictive" (2015, p. 30).

## Methods

For three semesters in a row, I kept a teaching journal where I wrote fairly brief entries about my experiences in all of my classes. I made the decision to focus more attention on my writing class (K7) because I was experiencing the most frustrations there. At the end of the second semester, after saying good-bye to the members of K7, I wondered how I could improve this course in order to prevent many of the frustrations on both the teaching and learning sides. I compiled all my journal entries and the emails regarding this writing class into one document, and after reading it over several times, I inserted comments using the comment function in MS Word. By doing this, it was as if I were having a dialogue with myself. In doing so, I was beginning to see some areas that needed to be improved, and most importantly, I began formulating some specific changes and wrote about these ideas in my journal.

In traditional action-research projects, a teacher chooses one very specific aspect of his/her class to improve upon, observes the intervention for a number of classes or over the course of a year, and then reports on the outcomes. In my case, I felt I did not have time to make only one small change.

Based on my reflections, I chose four aspects of the class in which to make changes: time management, vocabulary study, classroom management, and process-writing. The four areas are outlined in the next section with some extracts from my journal. In addition, I realized after actually

meeting my new students (K8), I was dealing with an entirely different group of individuals, and I needed to continue journaling about lessons so that I could evaluate whether my interventions were successful or not. The next section will outline these before/after interventions as well as the outcomes at the half-way point of the second school year.

## Outcomes/Analysis

As I looked over my journal entries throughout the year, four themes emerged: Time management, classroom management, vocabulary study, and process writing. This section will examine each theme in turn.

### Time Management & Vocabulary Study

*We are falling behind. They had about 25 min at the end of class to write their first drafts. They have until May 9 (Journal entry, April 27, 2014).*

*This was common, and I think we always spent too much time on the vocabulary stuff. I would like to find a better way to deal with it. Their grades did not go up!! (Reflective comment, January 20, 2015).*

Soon after joining the teaching staff of Toyo Gakuen University, I was informed that I should use the official university “English Vocabulary” book to help my students build their lexicon. I took this endeavor seriously, but I realized that it used up too much class time. Throughout the year, I struggled to find ways to incorporate it efficiently. In the fall semester, I created vocabulary activities such as crosswords, word finds, and word scrambles. Students worked in groups to complete the activities, and sometimes we played whole-class word games, such as Taboo. These activities also used too much class time, and by the end of the semester, I realized that their vocabulary quiz scores were not improving. Table One shows a detailed summary of the vocabulary quiz results for both K7 and K8. While it is true that the words were gradually becoming more challenging, the K7 students did not seem to be putting effort into studying as indicated by their low average scores.

Table 1 Spring Semester Vocabulary Quiz Results

Class	1a	1b	2a	2b	3a	3b	4a	4b	Review
K7 (2014)	85	66	58	51	54	56	50	63	54
K8 (2015)		71		81		75		67	76

*\*Class averages are expressed in percents.*

*\*\*K7 quizzes were based on one-half of each step. K8 quizzes were based on a whole step.*

Table 2 Fall Semester Vocabulary Quiz Results(%)

Class	5a	5b	6a	6b	7a	7b	Review
K7 (2014)	57	54	63	54	57	51	62

*\*K8 quizzes for the fall semester have not been administered at the time of this writing.*

The low scores of the K7 students' quizzes and their general apathy regarding their scores indicated that something needed to change. My ideas for the next year revolved around transparency, learner autonomy, and better time-management. The following is an excerpt of a journal entry regarding my plans for the next school year:

*Vocabulary test results should be more transparent. I need to find a better way to motivate students to improve their scores and to improve their study strategies on their own. I have made the decision that students will earn stamps for their EEDC\* Stamp Card only if their test score is 80% or higher. I have also decided to give students more opportunities for autonomy. First, I will allow students to choose fifty words from each step, which includes between 100-200 words. Thirty of the chosen words will appear on the quiz. In addition, Quizlet words lists will be produced so that students can use them to study, if they chose to use this method. By earning high scores, it may be assumed that they are studying outside of class. Finally, I will acknowledge the students who achieve 80% or higher on the quizzes by praising them in front of the class (March 20, 2015).*

*\*EEDC stands for English Education Development Center*

The outcomes of these interventions seemed successful in my mind. According to my journal, I was happy with my new system.

*Regarding the vocabulary tests. We are on schedule, and the students are getting into the habit of studying for them. As soon as the test is finished and mostly corrected (I do the original sentences section myself), they get out their vocabulary books, work in small groups for about 10-15 minutes and they choose the words for the next step. Each group is allowed to choose 8 words and they are supposed to avoid repeating words. I always instruct them to choose words they don't know, have trouble remembering, or think might be important. To be honest, I am not sure how careful they are in choosing the words. On the tests, they DO have trouble with the dictation and the original sentences, and some of them have trouble with preposition type words, like "beyond", "within" and "throughout", and the subtle differences between each one. So, in some ways, they must be choosing honestly. One observation I have made is that while prepping the tests, I always compare them to the tests I made last year for the same Step, and I find that the words chosen by me last year are much different than the words chosen by the students now. This could mean that my predictions of words they didn't know, needed to know, wanted to know, or still had trouble with, were a lot different. The other major difference between this year and last year is that I am encouraging the use of Quizlet, and I am grateful that T [the intern] is helping with this. She takes the 50 words chosen by the students and puts them into Quizlet. I link the Quizlet folders on a Page in the class blog so students can either use the list on the page or click on Quizlet and use that (Journal Entry, June 2015).*

I was attempting to encourage learner autonomy with the vocabulary study in order to motivate the students and to manage our class time. In a personal email to T, our intern, I wrote, "I think the notion of earning a stamp for the card if students earn 24 points or more on the 30-point quizzes helps their motivation to study outside of class. I have asked students how they study, and while many use Quizlet, others have found their own techniques and they proudly show them to me" (personal email, June, 2015).

In my first year, students had to complete crossword puzzles or word searches in order to receive stamps on their stamp card. This is an official part of the Freshmen English course curriculum in which students can earn stamps to show they are taking steps to learn autonomously. After reflection on this system, I had elected to experiment on my own to encourage active preparation for my vocabulary tests. In my new system, students could only receive a stamp if they had earned 24 points or more on their 30-point quizzes, which is directly related to their grade. In addition, they also received public praise. I wrote the names of the students on the board so that all of their classmates would know, and they had to bring their stamp cards up to the lectern so that I could stamp them during class. The availability of a Quizlet set, just for their class, also helped to encourage students to

try out self-study, many for the first time. Some students used Quizlet, as I had hoped, but others explained that they wrote out the sample sentences many times, created columned sheets, or read the book repeatedly. Learner autonomy was encouraged when students were expected to choose 50 words and then use their favorite method, or even better, experiment with a variety of methods, to prepare for the tests. The gradually improving results and the number of high scores in each test speaks for itself. The format of my vocabulary quizzes had not changed in any way between the two school years. Table 3 shows the results of a survey conducted in K8 at the end of spring semester to determine how many students received stamps for their vocabulary quizzes and how they usually prepared for them. Fifteen out of twenty-four students responded to the online survey.

**Table 3 Survey Results about Study Methods for Vocabulary Quizzes**

	Q1: Do you feel that your vocabulary knowledge has improved since April?	Q2: How many stamps did you receive for your stamp card in the vocabulary section?	Q3: How did you study for the Vocabulary quizzes?*				
			Q	F	R	A	W
S1	Yes	6	1	0	1	0	1
S2	Yes	5	1	0	0	0	0
S3	Not sure	5	1	0	1	0	0
S4	No	5	0	0	1	0	0
S5	Not sure	5	1	1	0	0	0
S6	Yes	4	1	0	1	1	0
S7	Yes	3	1	0	0	1	0
S8	Yes	2	1	0	0	0	1
S9	Yes	2	0	0	0	0	1
S10	Not sure	0	1	0	0	0	0
S11	Yes	Not sure	1	0	0	0	0
S12	Yes	Not sure	1	0	0	0	0
S13	Yes	Not sure	1	0	0	0	0
S14	Yes	Not sure	1	0	0	0	1
S15	Not sure	Not sure	1	1	0	0	0
Totals			13	2	4	2	4

\*Q = Quizlet; F=Flashcards; R=Reading wordlist repeatedly; A=Completing activities such as crossword puzzles and word scrambles; W=Writing words/example sentences repeatedly

The survey results show that some students were trying out various methods for vocabulary study, including Quizlet, which was new to them at the beginning of the year. In addition, of the 15 students who responded to the survey, 66% felt their vocabulary had increased within the preceding four months. However, it is clear that students who practiced a variety of study methods, such as S1, S3, S5 and S6 did well on their quizzes. It should be noted that the previous year's K7 students were



also made aware of Quizlet, but I did not create a special folder for them, and I also did not use a Class Blog that included links to the Quizlet lists. I also did not conduct a survey about their study methods, and therefore, have no indication of how many/if any students made use of Quizlet. In a future study, I would like to find out whether there is a clear connection between motivation, learner autonomy, and the potential to earn stamps for the stamp card.

In addition, time management issues were resolved under this new system because I had been able to use class time efficiently for choosing the words, administering the vocabulary quizzes, and announcing the results. After one quiz, students began to understand what was expected of them: Work in groups, choose some words, check the blog on their own time, and study for the quizzes on their own time. Thus, more class time could then be spent on writing.

### **Classroom Management & Process Writing**

This led me to reflect about the teaching of writing. In our university's Freshman English Courses, Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening are usually taught by four different teachers, who each meet the students once per week. I am using the highest level Q: *Reading and Writing* (McVeigh & Bixby, 2011), textbook, and I am only required to teach the writing component. The timing and choice of units requires some cooperation with other teachers who are involved in teaching the Speaking, Listening and Reading components of the course, but my intention is to teach process-writing.

In my first year, I experienced several frustrating lessons in which students arrived to class unprepared or skipped classes altogether. It was evident in my journal entries.

*Many students were absent today. They are so careless. And no contact from them asking about the assignment. Now I have to email all of them (Journal entry, October 2014).*

*Unfortunately, I was not so proud of K7, who never fails to annoy me. It's always the same people who claim to have "forgotten stuff" or that they "didn't know." And, this annoys me because it's been going on all year. What? It has never occurred to them to write things down or check with their classmates if they are not sure? I'm so sick of it. Next year, I am going to be the teacher from hell. (Journal entry, December 2014).*

Clearly, there were issues with classroom management, and I needed to find a better way to communicate my expectations to the students. The process-writing approach does not work well when students do not keep up their end of the bargain. In addition, my own practices of time-management

conflicted with my beliefs about teaching process-writing as described in the excerpt below.

*I team-taught with J. We did pre-writing and began working on first drafts. I tried to meet with each person, but could only get partway through the class (Journal entry, May 2014).*

Because I was spending too much time on vocabulary, I did not have much time to talk with students about their individual struggles. Ideally, process-writing should include time for teacher/students conferences. These short meetings could make a real difference for struggling students because the teacher can look over the student's draft and help with issues related to structure or content. The fact that I could not accomplish this in our limited time together may have led to some classroom management issues, in relation to motivation, because students who were struggling were likely to "forget" or even to feign ignorance. I needed to find better ways to motivate the students, keep them informed, and help those who were struggling. This problem bothered me all year long while I quietly tried to formulate better strategies for the following year when I could start fresh with a new batch of students.

Rather than turn into the "teacher from hell," my journaling and reflection allowed me to formulate practical ideas that would be conducive to both the students and to myself. I noticed themes in my journal entries that led me to make improvements in the following areas: Cooperative learning atmosphere, peer reviewing, and draft writing.

### **Planned Changes & Outcomes**

#### *Cooperative Learning*

One major issue was the students' inability to help each other. Through dialogue with my colleague, who taught the speaking and listening components of the class, I found that she was experiencing similar frustrations. In the fall semester, we had attempted to do a collaborative project across all three of our weekly lessons with this K7 class, and we found that most of the students enjoyed the opportunity to work together. I realized that I needed to create that atmosphere from the beginning of the year because it would help them develop a good rapport with each other, making it easier to incorporate peer editing, brainstorming groups, and other such cooperative tasks that are part of the writing process.

My colleague and I agreed to begin the year with a poster/presentation/essay project on the theme of identity to help the students get to know each other and find out what they had in common. We felt it would prevent them from forming steadfast cliques from the beginning, and they would feel more comfortable working in various groups. For me, in terms of process writing, this worked well

because I had decided to alter several aspects of the process.

Upon meeting the new batch of freshmen, I observed that most of the students were very communicative and willing to help/teach others who were less confident. Students who were less experienced seemed willing to ask for help from others. The new “Identity Unit” gave students an opportunity to reflect on and share their own life stories. I felt it was important to establish this practice of sharing experiences because topics covered later in class would require students to share their ideas and background knowledge so that everyone could benefit in their essay-writing. Not only were the students in K8 more willing to communicate and work hard, but I believe that we started them off on the right foot with a cooperative learning atmosphere.

I also decided that cooperative learning would involve grouping students together based on ability. I wanted to place someone who seemed adept at a skill (whether it be in writing, using computers, brainstorming, etc.) with students who had less ability and needed more guidance. My hope was that naturally these students would learn to rely on each other and that everyone would come to feel he/she had something to offer.

### *Peer Reviewing*

Peer reviewing of essays can be a good opportunity to allow students to share their ideas and knowledge. I believed it was an integral part of the writing process; however, in my first year, I ran into problems. Rather than group students by their abilities or interests, I merely determined the groups based on who was sitting nearby. The few times that I attempted peer reviewing, I found that students made minimal effort. They read the essays half-heartedly, commented if I forced them to, then quickly passed the essay to the next person. The comments usually consisted of one-word observations, such as *Interesting* or *Thank you*. It's not quite the critical commentary that a teacher hopes for in peer-reading tasks. However, things were much different in K8. In an email to a colleague, I wrote the following:

*Peer-reviewing is going well, and I am shocked by how successful it's been despite all these years of my attempting it in classes. I made a few changes this year, but I am not sure why it's working so well. The students are clearly more motivated, but I'd like to think it's partly because of my amazing teaching abilities. LOL (June 8, 2015).*

From the beginning, I emphasized that K8 was not a group of individuals competing against each other. We were a team, but we were all starting out at different places. However, we could each

improve gradually with everyone's cooperation. Peer reading days consisted of students reading everyone's essay in their preassigned groups. Peer reading groups were usually assigned based on subject matter or the scores of students' previous essays. I tried to mix higher-performing students with lower-performing students so that they could help each other. I felt this was important so that students with lower abilities would read some good essays, and students with high abilities would have a chance to teach/help. Peer readers had to complete an accompanying form. This form changed slightly for each essay, but basically, students were asked to give feedback about format, structure and content. Later, I decided to begin incorporating self-editing skills.

### *Draft Writing*

In the K7 class, I did not require a final draft of each essay. Instead, at the end of the school year, the students did a portfolio project in which they chose four out of the eight essays and revised them. Being that they had never had to revise their second drafts before, they were missing an important component of process writing, which is to examine one's own errors and revise them based on teacher feedback. Because I was having issues with time management and classroom management, I had decided not to require final drafts until the portfolio project at the end of the year. Upon reflection, I realized that their writing skills would improve more quickly if they had to produce final drafts for each assignment throughout the year. This meant that deadlines for various drafts would need to be set and communicated very clearly in class and on the class blog.

This leads me to the issue of managing draft assignments. In K7, I was just happy if students submitted their work at all, and I did not have the heart to lower their scores if they were late. For K8, I decided to deduct points for late submissions. I initially decided to take five points off per day, up to 20 points total. Luckily, I only had to do this once or twice.

For the same reason that I decided to publically praise students who had high vocabulary quiz scores, I decided to make essay scores more transparent in that I would announce averages, high scores, and ranges. I did this not to build competitiveness but to show improvement over time. I also attempted to make feedback more transparent. Students received individual, written feedback on their essays, but in the writing stage between the second draft and the final draft, I decided to give them specific feedback as a whole class. Using real excerpts from their essays, I projected them on Power Point to show both good and poor examples of essay format, introduction hooks, topic sentences, thesis statements, and so on. This helped my students quickly understand my expectations and the potential they had to write "good" essays in the future. The following is a journal entry about this new style of giving whole-class feedback.

*I used screen shots of portions of students' essays to illustrate my points. No names or revealing information were shown, but it definitely drove home my points. I made it into an interactive game so they could try to find the issues themselves. It also built up the momentum to the moment when I would hand back the essays. I even revealed information about how many students submitted, how many were late and would get points taken off, the average, high/low scores, and range. I told them how proud and moved I was while reading the essays and how much potential for improvement we have. How we need to cheer each on because we are the K8 Team and all of us will improve with each other's support. (May 20, 2015).*

The use of "we" shows that I thought of K8 as a team of which I was a member too. I was learning to teach better, they were building on their writing skills, and we were definitely in it together. In K7, students often received their essays back, folded them up and hid them from their classmates, never asking any questions. In fact, the previous day, I had written an email to my colleague in which we were discussing our plans for K8. I asked her advice about providing feedback publically to the students, worried that I would cause lower-scoring students to "feel bad" and "clam up" (Email, May 19, 2015). In my journal, I later wrote: "I basically really want them to be open and non-competitive about their writing and to share/cheer each other on so that everyone can improve from what ever level they are at now. That is my vision!" (Journal entry, May 19, 2015). After handing back the essays, I went on to write that the students asked a lot of specific questions about their essays and the scoring rubrics. After our first feedback session of the year, my anticipation about my new and improved writing course was clear: "To the moon and back. That's where we are going this year with K8. I am so excited." (Journal entry, May 20, 2015). Clearly, I was feeling very positive about the writing class and my interventions.

In addition to a general feedback session, I have considered incorporating teacher/student conferences in the fall semester. Three units into the spring semester, I was already seeing a need for more individual sessions as some students were beginning to fall through the cracks. An entry in my journal indicates that while things were going well, I had to admit there were a few pitfalls:

*Now, we are into Unit 2 Colors, and I am excited to see what the students come up with. However, just before I began writing this entry, I received a Unit 1 first draft from a student who was absent on Friday. In her email to me, she wrote: 時間がないとか面倒くさいとかそういう問題ではありません。私の能力の限界です。全文翻訳機にかければもっと長くできますが、そんなことするくらいならば短くても自分の力で書いたものの方が適切であると思いますのでこのまま提出させていただきます。 I take this to mean that she got stuck and wasn't sure what to write. I want*

*to believe it's because she didn't do the pre-writing steps properly, perhaps she was fooling around in class, but it could be that this really is beyond her ability. I know there are a few more students like her. More consultation with me would help a lot. Then, on Friday, a few students missed class, and it so happened that all of them had not yet submitted their first drafts...except for one. M came to class and we applauded her courage (literally, we praised and clapped for her) and while other students were peer-reading, I sat with her and talked about what was up with her paper. She explained she had gotten stuck, didn't know how to continue. She handed me her hand-written and I read it. It was good so far. She had stopped just before the end of her first subtopic. I gave her some praise and guidance, and she went on her way. I think she'll be okay. All it takes is some courage to ask for help! (June 30, 2015).*

In actuality, both of the above-mentioned students are still struggling though they have not completely given up. They need more one-on-one consultation with me during class, and I am in the process of trying to figure out how to accomplish the task of meeting with 24 students in a 90-minute period while keeping all of them busy. I know that other teachers do this successfully, and I think the best way is to ask around for advice on this matter before attempting it again.

## Discussion

In reflecting on my own teaching practices in the writing class, I used Farrell's Framework for Teacher Reflectivity (2015). The following is a brief discussion in relation to this framework.

### *Philosophy*

Previously, I published a paper describing three of my core beliefs in regards to teaching and learning (Yoshida, 2015). Having explored these philosophies thoroughly in the past, I am pleased to see that they play an important role in my writing class. These core beliefs have presented themselves in journal entries about the writing class: The prominence of vocabulary study, my emphasis on output which will lead to opportunities for me to assess students' progress, provide feedback and create an on-going dialogue between us, and my concern for students' learning styles and preferences.

### *Theory*

After reviewing my journals, notes and emails during the course of my K7 writing class, I wrote longer journal entries about my intentions for the K8 class. In this way, I expressed theories I had formulated about what my failures were and how I could make changes in order to improve the classroom atmosphere, time management, approaches to process-based writing and vocabulary study.

In addition, I had to combine information from my past teaching and learning experiences, TESOL literature and conversations with colleagues in order to make decisions about the changes.

### *Practice*

I monitored my own practices by journaling about my classes afterwards and by creating dialogue with colleagues who were familiar with my students and our situation. In doing so, I could begin to determine if my interventions were successful or not.

### *Beyond Practice*

Going beyond the practice involves questioning the relevancy of one's beliefs and practices in the big picture. Indeed, in my journal entries and in conversations/emails with colleagues, I often ask myself the following questions:

1. Are the topics my students write about interesting, relevant, and inspiring?
2. Are my students ready to learn about essay-writing?
3. Do they need essay-writing skills in the future?
4. Are my colleagues also concerned with teaching essay-writing?
5. If not, am I creating a large gap between our student groups by teaching such skills when it is not expected nor necessary?

These are questions that I ask myself on a regular basis as I attempt to build lessons that will not only allow my students to learn at their own pace, but also to gain some real-world knowledge in my classes. Though I worry about some of these questions of which I have not fully explored yet, I have confidence that I am doing the best I can for my students. In addition, with this year's crop of freshmen, in my K8 class, I feel especially inspired to do what most teachers dream of doing with their students: Fly them to the moon and back. Show them what they can do with all their potential and let them see aspects of themselves and the world that they may never have considered prior to joining this class.

Active and systematic reflection about my practices in this particular class allowed me to make changes and then monitor if they were successful or not. The caliber of the students and their class atmosphere may have affected the successes in K8. The interventions also contributed to the successes in all four aspects of time management, classroom management, vocabulary study, and process writing. My methods of reflection included journal entries, emails and conversations with colleagues, and collection of data, all of which helped me evaluate my beliefs, practice, and the need for interventions. It was especially helpful to collect all of my reflections into one document in order to see some patterns and ideas emerge. By continuing to monitor myself in the same way throughout the

second year, I could see that my interventions were succeeding. In the future, I hope to continue reflective practice for all of my classes, especially those that seem dissatisfactory in some way.

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