

Reviewed work:

Planning Lessons for a Reading Class. (RELC Portfolio series; v. 6). (2002).
Farrell, T. S. C. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre. Pp. 46. ISBN
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The Singapore-based Regional English Language Centre (RELC) Portfolio Series, available in English, Portuguese and Spanish, is designed for hands-on English teaching practitioners as well as teacher educators and teachers undertaking professional development. Thomas S.C. Farrell's *Planning Lessons for a Reading Class*, is a prominent addition to this series of accessible, readable practical resource booklets. Its focus on the identification of non-reductionist principles and their immediate application through clearly identified procedures makes the book applicable in an immediate way. The issues in the series are uncluttered by academic lexis, theory and research processes. They are designed to be picked up, read within the hour, assimilated and applied within minutes. These booklets – too brief to be called volumes – offer a technique-orientation that immediately appears to be common sense, leading the reader to think "Yes, I can do that today", rather than "Well, I might try that someday".

Farrell's booklet contains inbuilt reflective learning, encouraging teacher readers to reflect on their own practice, knowledge and beliefs about teaching reading. This is achieved via interactive questioning tasks interspersed throughout the text. The book practices what it preaches: "the reading teacher must become a reflective reader" (p. 21) and then communicate this reflectivity to learners at all levels. Farrell has taken a similar approach in two other recent books, *Reflecting on Classroom Communication in Asia* (Longman, 2004), and *Reflective Practice in Action: 80 Reflection Breaks for Busy Teachers* (Sage Publications, 2004) which are also useful resources for a teacher educator's evolving map of reflective learning.

Planning Lessons for a Reading Class is a very navigable introduction for any tutor wishing to gain instant insights into the principles and techniques involved in teaching second language reading. The booklet effectively applies Carrell's conceptualisation of "reading to learn" (Carrell 1998: ii) in 41 concise, but not dense, pages. At the heart of the ideas presented are a series of teachable reading strategies (Chapter 3: 20-21): how teachers can explain them clearly; the reasons why learners should learn them; how – as well as where and when - to learn them effectively; and ways of evaluating the learners' application of the various reading strategies.

One of the central ideas in the book is that of metacognition. Farrell discusses how teachers can demystify metacognition by giving learners a mirror of the reading process – and the process of teaching/ learning reading at the same time. The word MIRRORS is indeed the mnemonic that

essentialises the Teaching Reading Strategy: Model, Inform, Remind, Repeat, Outline, Reassess, Stress. Giving learners some of the teacher's understanding of reading can be both motivating and elucidating.

The booklet is divided into four chapters and a one-page conclusion. Defining "Reading" and illustrating top-down, bottom-up and interactive models of the reading process combines with a description of principles underpinning the practice of lesson planning to form Chapter 1. The second chapter draws heavily on Richards (1990, 1998) to present a series of principles, which teachers can apply in designing reading lessons, and also explains schema theory (particularly as outlined in Farrell, 2000). In examining "Factors to Consider when Planning Reading Lessons", it focuses on maximising learners' motivation by ensuring (i) their interest and (ii) the purposefulness of the reading interaction. This is also seen to be achieved by continually "changing teaching routines" (p. 14) so there is no set route to take but a series of alternative ones.

Farrell's distinction between reading lessons that "test" and those that "teach" (Chapter 2) is a valuable reminder: a taught lesson models, applies and evaluates a pre-identified strategy while one that tests focuses merely on the learner's location of answers. Chapter 3's focus on "Teaching Reading" is discussed above, while Chapter 4 invites teachers "to adapt and create their own exercises" in response to explanations of the key strategies: activating prior knowledge, predicting, skimming, scanning, deducing meaning, recognising text structure and type, and identifying topic and main ideas. Farrell advocates the active use of questions and the implementation of word recognition exercises that build semantic patterns and establish sense relations.

The deliberate minimalism of the booklet renders it to the reader as a map rather than a recipe book, to use another metaphor sometimes used by writers of books focussing on lesson planning. Its brevity, accessibility and digestibility are its strengths. It coexists with and complements such volumes as *New Ways in Teaching Reading* (Day 1993) that provided valuable signposts for teachers on the road to including intensive and extensive reading activities for their learners. Farrell offer a map to *Planning Lessons for a Reading Class*, that is realised in the clearest, simplest lesson plan this reader has seen in print (Appendix 2). As a practical tool for enhancing classroom practice for planning reading lessons that are motivating – and that focus on strategies – this publication should find a place in teacher resource rooms everywhere.

References

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