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The TESOL Practicum: A Tale of Three Books

Introduction

The field of second language teacher education has undergone significant epistemological changes during the past couple of decades. Central to these changes is the attention directed at the transformation of its fundamental knowledge base to prioritize identity, participation, and context, and the dynamic (re-)conceptualization of language teachers as the learners of teaching and their learning-to-teach processes (Freeman, 2002; Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Collectively, these changes may be referred to as a trend, highlighting the criticality and centrality of socioculturally situated practice-oriented teacher-education efforts conducive to the contextual dynamics that (in)form (pre- and in-service) teachers' negotiation and construction of professional identities.

In this complex picture, practice teaching, or the practicum, offers a tremendously powerful intellectual and professional space where university-based teacher-education curriculum and school-based experiences meet and interact symbiotically. Moreover, it affords socioculturally situated, complex, contextualized, dynamic, scaffolded, and cognitive learning-to-teach processes and supervised experiences that foster professional socialization, and identity negotiation and construction for emergent professionals in these programs. Therefore, teacher educators involved in teaching practicum experiences are charged with the enormous and challenging task of ensuring a sustainable experience built upon a comprehensive knowledge base informed by various theoretical and practical strands.

Departing from these observations, the current review acknowledges the complex and subjective nature of the practicum experience and thereby makes a deliberate attempt in recognizing a diverse body of literature that informs the formulation, operationalization, and implementation of the entire practicum process. More specifically, it presents a systematic analysis of books focusing on the practicum experience (Richards & Farrell, 2011), language teacher development

(Farrell, 2015), and teacher identity negotiation and construction (Cheung, Said, & Park, 2015).

Readers should be reminded that although the field of TESOL has been experiencing paradigmatic shifts redefining the nature of the practicum experience and teacher development, the integration of these ideas into teacher-education materials and practices may be actualized in varying ways and degrees. Therefore, although the books examined in this review exhibit great variance in terms of integrating the shifts in theoretical/practical orientation regarding teacher identity, teacher cognition, and/or contextualized professional growth, they have been identified for being (a) recent titles, (b) directly relevant to these fundamental areas of inquiry (in)forming the teaching practicum, (c) written by renowned scholars, and (d) applicable to a wide variety of contexts.

Any discussion on the teaching practicum would be incomplete without a reference to an earlier title that has been the only book dedicated to practicum issues—*A Practicum in TESOL* (Crookes, 2003)—an intellectually stimulating reference book on the teaching practicum used in many teacher-education programs around the world. The paradigmatic shifts defining the world(s) of TESOL, and thereby teaching practicum experiences, are theoretically grounded in Crookes's work, but they can be foregrounded by and enacted only with conscious and contextualized attempts situated in practice-driven teacher-learning contexts. However, it should be noted that Crookes makes a specific contribution to the field and the conceptualization of practicum activity by integrating the reflective and practice-oriented practicum (e.g., reflective teaching, school structure(s) supporting reflection and development, teacher-development groups), creating a space for individual and contextual examination of issues situated in the socio-cultural context of the practicum (e.g., classroom management and motivation, moral, ethical, and political issues, social skills, and the classroom community), and refraining from providing one-size-fits-all answers and encouraging readers to generate further questions. Interested readers who would like to learn more about this book may be directed to Ridge (2004) or Jensen (2005) for informative reviews.

Practice Teaching: A Reflective Approach

Jack C. Richards and Thomas S. C. Farrell

Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Bringing together two eminent figures with complementary interests in the field of second language teacher education (Jack C. Richards and Thomas S. C. Farrell), *Practice Teaching: A Reflective Ap-*

proach still continues to be the most popular recent title geared specifically toward the practice teaching experience in TESOL. This book provides a reader-friendly and accessible overview of the comprehensive and complex body of knowledge informing the practicum process. By unpacking various issues within the framework of practicum experience, it effectively capitalizes on the notion of “reflective practice” as an integral aspect of teachers’ professional-development and socialization processes. This reflective approach stimulates teacher-learners to engage in a dialogue situated in their immediate teaching contexts, which consequently affords a more in-depth and reflexive understanding of the nature of second language teaching.

The primary audience of this book is student teachers who are in the process of the practicum, either in a teacher-education or certificate program, because the authors “want the book to provide them with a basis for planning, learning, and understanding different aspects of language teaching” (p. 1). This notion is echoed both in the chapter titles (e.g., *Exploring Your Own Teaching*) as well as the authors’ voices throughout the book. However, it also addresses the university supervisor and mentor teachers, and it provides guidelines on how to use the book before, during, and after the practicum process. The book consists of 12 chapters with a clear and similar layout—introduction, theoretical foundation, practical guidelines and suggestions, summary and conclusions, further reading, discussion questions, follow-up activities, and appendices (when necessary).

The book offers a number of strengths as a pedagogical tool carefully situated at the nexus of theory and practice, and thus, informing the praxization process of emergent TESOL professionals. First and foremost, the authors make a conscious effort to present the needs and voices of student teachers in a straightforward manner. This notion of accessibility puts this work in a completely different league from other existing attempts that scrutinize the issues related to student teachers in teaching practica. Both the accessible language and the clear and consistent layout in the book contribute to its overall user friendliness. Moreover, the book illustrates and contextualizes both charted (e.g., lesson planning, learner-centered instruction) and uncharted territories (e.g., the network of relationship in the practicum context, exploration of one’s own teaching, action research) in the knowledge base of student teachers. Thus, it affords a meaningful opportunity for recycling the domain-specific knowledge in the context of the teaching practicum, and thereby it bears the potential to make a contribution to student teachers’ praxization processes. In order to offer a research-based, practice-oriented, and inquiry-focused approach to the practicum experience, the authors bring together several artifacts including:

1. Actual reflections and commentaries from student teachers, practicing teachers, mentor teachers, university supervisors, and teacher trainers from the field;
2. Samples of lesson plans and transcripts from actual lessons;
3. Further readings and external weblinks to sites, journals, magazines, and reports; and
4. Discussion questions and follow-up activities.

The order and organization of the chapters, which bear similarities with other Cambridge titles, are operationalized along the several dimensions: (a) from theoretical to practical (in terms of scope and discussion), (b) from broader to specific (in terms of context), and (c) in a linear fashion (in terms of the practicum process). As the authors acknowledge in the introduction, “Some chapters will most usefully be employed before teaching practice commences (e.g., Chapters 1 to 4) but can also be returned to during practice teaching. The remaining chapters can be used in the sequence that best suits your needs” (p. 2).

I believe that an inherent tension that Richards, Farrell, and authors of practicum textbooks (as well as those who use these textbooks) must grapple with stems from the notion of diversity characterizing the TESOL profession, and more specifically the practicum experience. To be more specific, despite the fact that the authors make concerted efforts to describe various aspects of the practicum experience and conceptualize it as a tripartite professional experience (among student teachers, university supervisors, and mentor teachers), practicum systems and models are defined, organized, implemented, and evaluated differently in various contexts around the world. This inevitable asymmetry between the limited representation of contexts and practicum practices in textbooks and the plethora of affordances and constraints (in)forming the everyday practices in practicum settings stands out as the biggest obstacle to the recognition and internalization of the socioculturally situated practice-oriented teacher-education efforts. Thus, this immediate need of contextualization and customization may bring an extra set of burden to all stakeholders involved in the practicum process. Another potential challenge may stem from the multiplicity of audience (student teachers, university supervisors, and mentor teachers) and time (before, during, and after the teaching practicum) addressed in the book. Therefore, this necessitates a diligent perusal of the book and the orchestration of the actors and processes involved in the entire process.

First, a potential disadvantage of the book is the limited discussion of some of the important concepts (e.g., action research, teaching portfolio, etc.). The authors might have decided to limit their accounts

so as not to inundate readers with lengthy discussions of theoretical issues and thereby damage the overall practical tone of the book. However, adequate elaborations on these matters require not only experience and expertise on the part of university supervisors and mentor teachers, but also sufficient time, space, and resources available within the broader context of teacher-education programs. Nevertheless, even brief discussions of these important ideas still offer serious potential benefits for student teachers. In closing, I consider this book an accessible and useful addition to the growing scholarship on the teaching practicum, and I believe that it will serve as a useful resource for anyone involved in teaching practicum practices.

Language Teacher Professional Development

Thomas S. C. Farrell

Alexandria, VA: TESOL Press, 2015.

As a prominent figure in the field of second language teacher education, and more specifically in the area of reflective practice, Thomas S. C. Farrell is both the author of this volume as well as the series editor in which this book appears—The English Language Teacher Development (ELTD) Series, published by TESOL Press. This series consists of 25 short resource books, each of which offers a nontechnical, accessible, and theory-to-practice approach to a wide range of issues germane to everyday practices of TESOL professionals around the world. The series explores issues and practices related to classroom interaction, classroom research, content-based instruction, cooperative learning and teaching, teachers as program administrators, classroom assessment, lesson planning, classroom management, materials development, motivation, reflective teaching, digital literacies, teaching English as an international language, for academic purposes, and to young learners, and teaching language skills including grammar, listening, pronunciation, reading, speaking, vocabulary, and writing.

Similar to other titles in the series, Farrell's book, *Language Teacher Professional Development*, aims to present a short yet easy-to-follow guide that may be digested and woven into the immediate local teaching contexts by all types of teachers of English (native, nonnative, experienced, and novice teachers) in formal education settings (pre- and in-service courses) or self-development purposes (refreshing one's practice). It outlines the major principles and parameters of the ELTD series and accentuates the vitality of a constant cycle of reflection and professional development for the members of "a profession that is continually reinventing itself and expanding its knowledge base" (p. 2). More specifically, it addresses such issues as why teachers

should develop, what professional development is, different approaches to professional development, and how teachers can sustain their professional development.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book, as well as other titles in the ELTD series, lies in the layout and organization conducive to directed and self-learning. This bite-size introductory book (around 50 pages) is clearly less intimidating in terms of scope, language, and layout and especially for practitioners who are often baffled with specialized texts bristling with terminology. The book does a fine job in terms of conveying the big picture of professional development, offering a set of straightforward models and suggestions that may easily be integrated into teachers' practices. In addition, Reflective Break sections throughout the book offer guiding questions that stimulate thought and reflection on professional development and provide opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas. Furthermore, the book may also be of great interest to TESOL professionals who are seeking some practical tips for professional development at any given stage of their careers.

Some parts of the texts may be found more pertinent to in-service professional-development contexts. Therefore, these parts may be regarded as irrelevant in the context of the teaching practicum. However, stakeholders involved in a teaching practicum may in fact reap benefits from this by treating it as an opportunity to reflect on future professional-development sites and practices. The readers or anyone interested in this book should remind themselves that this book does not promise to be a title specifically geared toward the teaching practicum. Rather, it illustrates some macro principles and strategies that might inform teachers' lifelong professional-development processes, which often start in their university-based programs, evolve in teaching practica, and grow exponentially in their actual teaching practices. Therefore, anyone who is interested in the book specifically within the context of the teaching practicum may benefit from it to a greater extent if they use it in tandem with other titles comprising the entire series. Furthermore, this certainly necessitates additional efforts to ensure a balanced and more comprehensive treatment of professional-development issues in the context of the teaching practicum.

*Advances and Current Trends in
Language Teacher Identity Research*

Yin Ling Cheung, Selim Ben Said, and Kwanghyun Park (Eds.)
Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2015.

The recent advances in language-teacher identity research have broadened the theoretical and practical horizons of the investiga-

tions concerning the professional-identity negotiations and constructions of teachers at pre- and in-service levels. Collectively, these efforts make significant contributions to our inherent conceptualizations of being and becoming a TESOL professional, situated in the present-day global sociolinguistic, cultural, and political realities in the 21st century. Building upon this critical need, Cheung, Ben Said, and Park (2015) make a deliberate attempt to present the cutting-edge research on a wide range of topics in language-teacher identity research. Somewhat differently from the existing work on teacher identity available in the literature, this edited volume promises to focus on “specific debates and current perspectives on language teacher identity” (p. xiv). This approach is reflected in the deliberate naming of the title (“advances and trends”) and individual themes, namely,

1. Theoretical orientations;
2. Negotiation and reflexivity;
3. Tracing identity through narratives; and
4. Teacher identity and responding to changing times.

The intended audience of the book encompasses researchers, teacher educators, and nonexperts in language teacher education.

Recognizing the impossibility of adopting an overarching theoretical perspective, the authors operationalize the notion of teacher identity within Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning model vis-à-vis participation in communities of practice, and they see this as a common thread across chapters found in the volume. The overall aim and primary audience of the volume is twofold:

1. Presenting up-to-date research on language teacher identity, particularly for novice and established researchers and teacher educators; and
2. Offering an introduction to major themes and issues in language teacher identity, particularly for “nonexperts” in language teacher education.

The stakeholders in teaching practicum contexts need to be reminded up front that this volume does not particularly address immediate issues situated in their settings. Nevertheless, the book may still be found useful by many who are interested in the wide range of issues covered in the book (e.g., affordances and constraints in constructing, negotiating, maintaining, and imagining professional identity of teachers) and their interplay with the emergent identities of student teachers in the teaching practicum context. The substantial

repertoire of tools available for teacher identity research (e.g., teacher introspections, narratives, self-studies, critical conversations and incidents, review of instructional artifacts, teaching portfolios, etc.) offers transferable tools and skills to navigate and examine the lived experiences, worldviews, and socialization processes of student teachers in the practicum. Finally, because of the wider representation of scholars, contexts, themes, and topics addressed in the book, this particular volume also may be of interest to scholars, teachers, and teacher educators interested in teaching and learning of languages other than English.

The rather fuzzy definition of “nonexperts,” which reportedly includes the editors, consists of professionals who are

in the language teacher education area yet still need to know about theories and recent advances in the area due to various reasons including their affiliation to a teacher training institute; [who need] to participate in projects on language teacher education; [and/or who are] teaching a course for pre-service and in-service language teachers. (p. xiv)

In addition, the overall organization of the book and the presentations of individual chapters may be more familiar to scholars working along the lines of theoretical and practical accounts of language teacher identity presented in a formal and research-based format (e.g., discussions focusing on issues such as “from doctoral study to professional practice” or “a research review”). Although the book does a very good job in terms of presenting both theoretical and practical accounts and tools pertinent to language-teacher identity research, the organic integration of these issues into teaching practicum contexts necessitates handling in an careful and expert manner. Nevertheless, this book brings an important body of research to the locus of scholarship on the teaching practicum and therefore bears the potential of making meaningful contributions to teacher identity development within and beyond practicum contexts.

Concluding Remarks

In essence, the teaching practicum can be defined both as a “structure” of scaffolded and supervised professional apprenticeship/socialization for student teachers and a “process” of professional theorization of their instructional practices. Today, the diversity of contexts in which teacher-education practices occur and for which teachers are prepared necessitates a critical examination of current practices and innovative solutions and approaches as future directions in teaching

practicum experiences. Therefore, it is imperative for all stakeholders involved in the teaching practicum to recognize the vitality of integrating different streams of knowledge and inquiry and to amalgamate them as an organic part of the teaching practicum experience. Built upon this justification, this essay offers a critical review of three books that may be adopted by student teachers, university supervisors, and mentor teachers within the scope of the teaching practicum. Collectively, the books scrutinized as part of this review represent one example of such a combination of various streams of knowledge that might potentially be used to meet this pressing challenge. Ultimately, relying on multiple sources of knowledge and inquiry is believed to make significant contributions to student teachers' socioculturally constructed, contextually situated, and continually emerging sense of professional selves.

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