

Farr, F., & Farrell, A. (2023). *The reflective cycle of the teaching practicum*. Equinox Publishing.

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The Reflective Cycle of the Teaching Practicum by Fiona Farr and Angela Farrell (2023) is a welcome volume that provides much-needed practical evidence of how a model of reflective practice can be implemented in an English language teacher education (ELTE) programme.

Clearly structured and accessibly written, the book details a staged and cyclical approach to reflective practice developed by the authors over the years of supervising teaching practicums on a pre-service MA in TESOL programme at an Irish university. Teaching practicums are crucial components of ELTE programmes where novice teachers are facilitated to cross the theory and practice divide by trying out their pedagogical and content knowledge in the classroom. The practicality of this component makes it a perfect setting for implementing reflective practice, or an ability to think purposefully and critically about one's teaching.

The main premise of the book is that the understanding of reflective practice can begin within teacher education settings in a structured and applied way. Specifically, reflective skills and tools learnt within the practicum component of the TESOL teacher education programme, it is believed, will be transferred to future teaching and professional development. The ability to reflect on one's teaching is indeed a crucial skill that ensures future teachers are adaptable to the challenges and changes in teaching, such as the Covid pandemic, during which the book was written, or the current rapid development of Generative AI. Therefore, the ability to apply critical reflection to one's teaching is a vital component in the sustainability of a teacher's career (Reed et al., 2024). Given the rapid technological and social changes of the modern world, the need to ensure student teachers develop reflective practice habits early in their education and careers has never been higher.

To exemplify how reflective practice can be used in ELTE, the authors draw on twenty years of Teacher Education Corpus, or artefacts such as feedback sessions, group discussions, online blogs, teaching portfolios and journals completed by and with their MA in TESOL students. The book is organised into bookend and substantive chapters. The authors begin by outlining the origins of reflective practice in educational philosophy of Dewey and Schön and describe the teaching practicum as representation and approximation of teaching characterised by a state of heightened reflexivity.

Chapter 2 overviews existing frameworks for reflective practice, including Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, Gibbs' (1988) reflective practice cycle and Farrell's (2015) five-stage reflective framework for TESOL professionals. A common criticism of these frameworks is that they are not data-led, and this is precisely what the authors set out to counterbalance in developing their own evidence-based reflective practice framework called PENSER (from the French *penser* 'to think'). Designed specifically for the teaching practicum stage of ELTE, the framework includes, firstly, identifying a **p**roblem or a challenge through observation and reflection. This is followed by **e**mbracing the challenge to be investigated and **n**oticing how experienced teachers deal with the challenge and documenting it in a reflective journal. After the solution to the challenge is proposed in peer discussions and implemented, it is further **e**xplored and **r**esearched, or critically evaluated in an interview with a teacher educator.

Chapter 3 is grounded in the socio-cultural theory of learning and highlights the role of peers, mentors, classroom teachers and students in the initial pre-teaching stages of the practicum. The affordances of observation and reflection cycles in advance of the classroom practice are also described.

Chapters 4 to 7 are substantive chapters that detail challenges that novice teachers encounter during their teaching practicums. These 'puzzles', as the authors call them, are

grouped into broad pedagogical themes, each a subject of the chapter, and discussed in terms of the PENSER cycle. Although relevant academic literature is also reviewed in each chapter, it is the real-life examples of reflective practice that demonstrate how the authors' student teachers make sense of the teaching practicum challenges. First, the focus is on lesson planning and preparation (Chapter 4), the most immediate concern of novice teachers embarking on their practicum and completing the first PENSER cycle of reflection. This concern is later superseded by the attention in the PENSER cycle to the classroom environment and resources (Chapter 5) and teaching aspects of the language such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Chapter 6). In the later stages of the teaching practicum, which coincide with the final PENSER cycle, the student teachers' preoccupation has been found to be with the effectiveness of their teacher talk and interactional skills in the classroom (this is the focus of Chapter 7).

In each of these chapters (4-7), the salient issues of the practicum are analysed through the PENSER framework. Areas of challenge are documented, but evidence of student teacher development is also presented. Extracts from the students' accounts demonstrate how student teachers' professional development can be supported through the various modes of continuous reflective practice, conducted both individually and in collaboration with mentors and peers.

Chapter 8 is different in orientation and uses a corpus-based approach to analysing feedback interactions between student teachers and their educators. The examples provided are illustrative of the processes involved, and how they can evolve from merely narrating the events of the practicum lesson to the abstracted theoretical reflection on one's performance and the situational factors involved. Examples in this chapter can serve as guidance for feedback providers and teacher educators. To conclude the volume in Chapter 9, the authors

discuss reflective practice as a life-long development process and express hope for more bottom-up empirical research in this area.

The theory-practice balance is an obvious strength of the book. The authors emphasise the importance of modelling and developing practical application of the PENSER framework. Each chapter is firmly grounded in classroom-oriented research and provides numerous qualitative examples that are detailed and nuanced. These examples help demystify the practicum experience for the student teachers, set their expectations and prepare them for the potential challenges and puzzles of this component of the ELTE programme.

Another notable feature of the book is the ‘pause for reflection’ sections throughout the chapters that involve the readers in active reflection on their own beliefs about teaching and reflection. In these mini sections, the authors challenge the readers, whether experienced or novice teachers, to apply theoretical concepts described in the chapters to their own settings. Readers are also prompted to investigate concepts and theories in education beyond the scope of the book. These explicit reflection sections can be used by teacher educators to provide guidance to novice teachers.

To conclude, there is obvious value in incorporating a data-informed approach to teacher reflection, such as PENSER, to ELTE programmes. The book is highly relevant to novice and early career teachers, with little experience of formal reflection, who need to prepare for the diverse needs of their students and the ever-changing nature of the language teaching profession and settings. For more experienced reflective practitioners, the book can serve as a springboard for discussion and critique around their own teaching habits. The book is also of interest to language teacher educators and may be used as a core text on practicum modules. Researchers in the fields of corpus studies and teacher education will also find the book a useful reference due to its corpus-based approach.

Developing the reflective skills and mindset early in the teachers' education is crucial for their subsequent use in-service when time for reflection is often limited. Reflective practice serves as a foundation of informed decisions teachers make to improve their teaching throughout their careers, which makes early implementation of reflective principles an essential part of any good teacher education programme. In this light, the book provides a much-needed evidence-based reflective practice framework in ELTE that can contribute to the sustainability of the English language teaching profession. It can serve as a basis for future reflective practice and professional development of English language teachers.

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