

Reviews

Review forum

This new section features two reviews of the same publication. The reviews address different points and offer contrasting angles on the same book.

Practice Teaching: A Reflective Approach

J. C. Richards and T. S. C. Farrell

Cambridge University Press 2011, 185 pp., £25.90 (paperback), £65.90 (hardback)

ISBN 978 0 521 18622 3

Experienced second language (L2) teachers and teacher educators are aware that becoming a language teacher is an ongoing, life-long process. Johnson (2006: 239) argues that the process of learning to teach is 'socially negotiated and contingent on knowledge of self, students, subject matter, curricula, and setting'. One of the most influential experiences in developing a deeper understanding of this knowledge base is the practicum teaching, namely the practicum. *Practice Teaching: A Reflective Approach* is a well-thought-of, user-friendly resource for pre-service teachers and practicum instructors to use while participating in an L2 teaching practicum, especially one that fosters observations and reflection. In promoting a reflective approach, the authors draw on current research in order to bring together a variety of topics that will engage pre-service teachers in thoughtful evaluations about what to expect during the teaching practicum and how to maximize the learning experience.

The textbook includes 12 very reader-friendly chapters with a clear and consistent layout. Each chapter includes several jargon-free, practical accounts from other practicum students and cooperating teachers (CTs). The chapters also include summary charts that review the main points, followed by a written summary, conclusion, and a list of suggested readings. Each chapter concludes with thoughtful discussion questions and follow-up activities, once again emphasizing

the reflective approach to teacher training that Jack C. Richards and Thomas S. C. Farrell promote.

The textbook can be divided into three temporal phases: (1) pre-observation/practicum, (2) observation/practicum, and (3) post-observation/practicum. Chapters 1–4 are most informative during the pre-observation/practicum phase. In Chapter 1, 'Learning to teach through practice teaching', the authors introduce two kinds of practice teaching commonly used in the field: micro-teaching and teaching. They then discuss the reflective approach they endorse: Richards and Farrell provide useful guidance in developing reflective micro-teaching opportunities that foster dialogue and reflective practices. In this chapter, they also introduce and highlight the importance of working with the CT, a key player in the practicum experience who has received limited attention in the field of L2 teacher education. In Chapter 2, 'The nature of teacher learning', the competencies and knowledge base of language teachers are examined. This discussion moves away from the notion that teacher learning involves the acquisition of a discrete set of skills. The authors also include eight dimensions of teacher learning; this discussion lays a sound foundation for encouraging practicum students to reflect on which aspects they feel are most important during this stage of their professional growth. Finally, Chapters 3 and 4 ('Understanding the teaching context' and 'Working with your cooperating teacher', respectively) look more closely at the context of the teaching practicum. Often, practicum students are unaware of the context wherein the teaching practicum will unfold and may thus underestimate the importance of knowing the 'wheres' and 'whos' involved in the practicum. Moreover, I found the decision to dedicate an entire chapter on working with a

CT to be highly valuable: practicum students will become more sensitive to different approaches to collaborating with and learning from their CTs.

Chapters 5–10 offer practicum students valuable suggestions as they participate in the CTs' classrooms. The more practice-oriented contents of Chapter 5, 'Planning your teaching' offer pre-service teachers ideas for lesson planning. In addition to providing guidance with lesson planning and course planning, the discussion examines the role of the textbook. Richards and Farrell offer practical advice for working with and modifying the contents of commercial textbooks. Chapter 6, 'Teaching an effective language lesson', focuses more explicitly on features of effective teaching outlining eight core principles central to effective language teaching. These principles and their features can guide practicum students in engaging in reflective teaching practices. In Chapter 7, 'Classroom observations in teaching practice', the authors highlight the importance of participating and engaging in meaningful observations and remind the readers that 'information you or your CT gain during an observation always needs to be clarified through conversation and discussion in order to understand the meaning of what you observed' (p. 91). In this chapter, useful observation guidelines and techniques are suggested. In Chapter 8, 'Creating an effective classroom learning environment' and Chapter 9, 'Developing learner-centered teaching', the focus shifts to what unfolds inside the classroom with the learners. They explore ways to create a positive classroom environment that places learners at the centre of pedagogy. Importantly, classroom management techniques are only briefly and succinctly discussed which I found to be effective given the number of methodology textbooks that examine classroom management issues. Finally, in Chapter 10 ('Classroom discourse and communication') the authors draw on sociocultural theory principles to discuss the nature of verbal interaction in classroom contexts. While there is some attention to teacher talk (for example speech rate, comprehensible discourse), the importance of fostering output opportunities for the learners takes a more central role in the discussion.

The textbook concludes with two chapters that encourage practices leading to continuous professional growth. Chapter 11, 'Exploring your own teaching', introduces reflective teaching techniques such as written accounts of lessons, teaching portfolio, and critical incidents. While this chapter

can be treated as a stand-alone chapter, practicum instructors can divide the chapter into distinct parts and encourage students to experiment with different reflective practices throughout the practicum. By engaging with these various techniques, students may identify the ones that are more in line with their individual learning styles. Finally, in Chapter 12 ('After teaching practice') readers are introduced to the reality beyond the teaching practicum. Some dissonance between the training and actual experiences is presented. The significance of this chapter should not be overlooked as many of our future teachers will underestimate the challenges of being a novice teacher.

Overall, *Practice Teaching: A Reflective Approach* is a useful text to accompany a teaching practicum course. Despite the many positive qualities, some issues need to be addressed. In the first instance, discerning the best audience for this text is problematic. The authors designed this text for diploma, undergraduate, and graduate work; however, given the diversity of contexts and practicum course designs, the information is at times very general and superficial. Second, theory-oriented discussions are quite brief. Instead, there are numerous testimonies from teachers and practicum students that simplify the technical and theoretical discussions. This may be unappealing to some as it undermines the theory behind L2 pedagogy. To overcome this, practicum instructors will need to include outside sources. Another caveat with the inclusion of numerous testimonies is that it becomes tempting to skip over these. Finally, there are several typos in the text and more importantly in the citations, which can lead to some confusion.

Despite these criticisms, the textbook has been a very useful resource to the graduate students involved in an observation-based teaching practicum. The practical, jargon-free readings enable students to critically reflect on their experiences as teachers. I would recommend this book to practicum instructors who endorse an observation-based teaching practicum and who are going to engage with the discussion questions and follow-up activities.

Reference

Johnson, K. E. 2006. 'The sociocultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education'. *TESOL Quarterly* 40/1: 235–57.

The reviewer

Caroline Payant is an Assistant Professor in the MA TESL Program at the University of Idaho.

She received her MA from the Universidad de las Américas Puebla and her PhD in Applied Linguistics from Georgia State University. Her areas of interest include cognitive and sociocultural aspects of language acquisition as well as teacher education. Prior to joining the University of Idaho faculty, Caroline taught in the Applied Linguistics Program and ESL classes in the Intensive English Program at Georgia State University. She has also taught French, Spanish, and English language courses to children and adults in Mexico and Canada.

Email: cpayant@uidaho.edu

doi:10.1093/elt/cct028

Practice Teaching: A Reflective Approach

J. C. Richards and T. S. C. Farrell

Cambridge University Press 2011, 185 pp., £25.90 (paperback), £65.90 (hardback)

ISBN 978 0 521 18622 3

This useful recent publication brings together two well-known experts from teacher education and reflective practice, Jack Richards and Thomas Farrell. They have written for a public that is often not addressed in this way in the more academic literature: trainee teachers, and indeed their work reads more like a manual than a book. The authors describe it as 'written for language teachers in training at the diploma, undergraduate or graduate level'. They have homed in on the teaching practice component of teacher training programmes and tried to describe what is usually a purely experiential process which trainees go through by pinpointing and discussing certain key aspects of teaching practice from the point of view of the teacher trainer as well as, at the same time, giving a voice to those who are going through, or have gone through the experience: the trainees themselves.

This continual shift in focus between the teacher educator and the trainee teacher does create a certain disconnect in their work and, by the end of the book, I found some of the personal testimony repetitive and not particularly useful. It could be said, however, that the jury is still out on this book, as it is not until some trainee teachers themselves have read it and given me their impressions that I would be able to say whether Richards and Farrell have found the right voice for this work.

There is a clearly stated given throughout the book, namely that the trainee teacher is working with a cooperating teacher. Unfortunately, in the context I work in, France, there are virtually no systems in place for such collaboration and teacher development inside language schools is largely absent. In this context, Richards and Farrell's book reads almost like a manifesto. It may be that teachers working in such contexts, who have never been through guided teaching practice, will find the book intriguing and will want to set up structures for collaboration and classroom observation having read it.

There are 12 chapters which weave a path through such familiar territory as lesson planning, effective classroom discourse, and creating learner-centred lessons, as well as through some maybe less familiar territory, such as the relationship

between the trainee teacher and the cooperating teacher, techniques for classroom observation, and understanding the teaching context. They have navigated the path well and the book does have a coherent structure albeit that the chapters are structured in an identical way with each one ending in a table with conclusions, discussion questions, and follow-up activities. Again, if one reads this more as a handbook which you can pick up and dip into at whatever chapter is most immediately relevant to your needs, then the format is valid and probably more easily accessible for its intended readership.

Very early on in the book there is a welcome chapter on the nature of teacher learning (Chapter 2). For a long time now, researchers such as Nias (1989: 13) have been reminding us that the 'self is a crucial element in the way teachers themselves construe the nature of their job'. Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1994), amongst others, have encouraged us to take a biographical approach in order to identify critical incidents in the development of our new selves as teachers. The use of direct testimony here by the authors works well and sets the tone for the rather journalistic approach they take throughout the following chapters. Interestingly, in a small section in the same chapter entitled 'Developing the discourse skills of a language teacher', their descriptions would be directly relevant to the CLIL teacher and, had they developed this further, the book could conceivably have had an even wider appeal. Still on the subject of teacher learning, in 'Learning to theorize from practice' one can clearly identify references to Schön's (1983) different stages of teacher learning although they do not directly cite him.

In Chapter 3, 'Understanding the teaching context', they do cite Morris' (1994) acknowledgement that there are schools where teachers work in isolation. Zeichner and Liston (1987) insist, quite correctly, that we should foster 'inquiry oriented environments' wherever we work as teachers, and Richards and Farrell certainly assume, in this chapter, that the reader is working in such an environment. Their checklist at the end of the chapter of the factors a teacher starting out should look into before signing up with a school are to the point and very practical.

In looking at the relationship between the trainee and the cooperating teacher (Chapter 4), the authors support a negotiated framework for classroom observation and, in so doing, follow

what is now accepted thinking ever since Edge's (1992: 64) plea from the trainee teacher back in 1992 that 'I can only develop from where I am, it is your role to help me see where I am in my own light'. The authors do situate the relationship within a wider context with references to more prescriptive approaches, they acknowledge the heavy institutional baggage behind the term 'supervision', and they clearly come out in favour of collaboration.

In their look at lesson planning, rather than simply providing a template, they outline the purpose behind lesson planning: 'to help you develop your pedagogic reasoning skills' (p. 59) and they provide some pertinent reflections from experienced teachers on the subject. They successfully encompass both certificate- and diploma-level training by referring in some detail to the reasons why we should adapt our plans and sometimes completely abandon them, and the section on follow-up activities at the end of the chapter is particularly well thought out. In their discussion of an 'Effective language lesson' in Chapter 6 they borrow, from Dörnyei (2001), to describe a 'pleasant' classroom and techniques for motivating students. They have useful lists of thought-provoking questions to ask at the end of a lesson and an excellent summary of what a good teacher does in the classroom.

Chapter 7 on classroom observation techniques is, on the other hand, surprisingly light on techniques. It encompasses SCORE seating chart analyses based on Flanders' work (1960) and narrative summaries, but there is no mention of other classic tools, or their derivatives, such as Fanselow's FOCUS (1977) or Fröhlich, Spada, and Allen's COLT (1985). This may have been because the authors considered such references beyond the understanding of the trainee teacher, and it is true that some of them do become very complicated and unwieldy, but a passing reference to at least the variety and complexity of observation tools out there could arguably be expected. I regret that their later chapter on classroom discourse (Chapter 10 'Classroom discourse and communication'), in which they introduce IRE (Initiation by the teacher, Response by the student, and the teacher's Evaluation) analysis as an important tool in the analysis of instructional discourse, as well as introducing techniques related to turn-taking, topic management, and repair tasks, was not combined with their discussion

of other classroom observation techniques in order to give a more comprehensive and coherent picture to this fundamental question of what actually takes place during a classroom observation. Similarly, at the end of the book they touch on action research as an important tool for continuing your development as a teacher (Chapter 11). I feel that if they had acknowledged the continuum between classroom observation and action research and not compartmentalized them to the degree they have, they could have moved the book out of the straitjacket of the trainee teacher-cooperating teacher relationship and thereby appealed to a wider readership, including, for instance, teachers' groups and heads of studies.

In their discussion on 'Creating an effective classroom learning environment' (Chapter 8), they bring together useful advice from Senior (2006) on creating the right classroom environment, Silver (2008) on effective monitoring, and they draw attention to a useful concept for any trainee teacher to take away, that of 'academic learning time'. However, there is less in this chapter that is particularly new or surprising and I found the testimony a bit tedious at times. They develop a whole chapter on 'Developing learner-centered teaching' (Chapter 9) and cite from Dörnyei (op.cit.), Senior (op.cit.), and Arends (2004) respectively to support their claim, quite rightly, that we should be creating 'communities of learners'. This concept, in itself, merits a whole day of workshops, and I can only hope that someone reading this book will feel suitably inspired to do precisely that.

On balance, this book is a welcome and innovative addition to the usual reading list sent out to trainee teachers. I, for one, shall be recommending it to my CELTA trainees and awaiting their comments with interest.

References

- Arends, R. 2004. *Learning to Teach* (sixth edition). Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.
- Dörnyei, Z. 2001. *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edge, J. 1992. 'Co-operative development'. *ELT Journal* 46/1: 62–70.
- Fanselow, J. F. 1977. 'Beyond "Rashomon"—conceptualizing and describing the teaching act'. *TESOL Quarterly* 11/1: 17–39.

- Flanders, N. 1960. *Interaction Analysis in the Classroom. A Manual for Observers*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Fröhlich, M., N. Spada, and P. Allen. 1985. 'Differences in the communicative orientation of L2 classrooms'. *TESOL Quarterly* 19/1: 27–57.
- Kelchtermans, G. and R. Vandenberghe. 1994. 'Teachers' professional development: a biographical perspective'. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 26/1: 45–62.
- Morris, P. 1994. *The Hong Kong School Curriculum*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Nias, J. 1989. 'Teaching and the self' in M. L. Holly and C. S. McLoughlin (eds.). *Perspectives on Teacher Professional Development*. London: Falmer Press.
- Schön, D. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Senior, R. 2006. *The Experience of Language Teaching*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Silver, R. E. 2008. 'Monitoring or observing? Managing classroom peer work' in T. S. C. Farrell (ed.). *Classroom Management*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL Publications.
- Zeichner, K. and D. Liston. 1987. 'Teaching student teachers to reflect'. *Harvard Educational Review* 57/1: 23–48.

The reviewer

Jane Ryder holds an MA in Applied Linguistics and TESOL from Leicester University. She runs a Cambridge ESOL teacher training centre in France offering CELTA and DELTA courses and is a CELTA trainer herself.

Email: jane.ryder@esolstrasbourg.com
doi:10.1093/elt/ccto27