Title

Charting Our Course: Why the Practicum Continues to Matter to Us in TESOL

Authors

Santos, Maricel G.
Olsher, David
Abeywickrama, Priya

Peer reviewed

MARICEL G. SANTOS
DAVID OLSHER
PRIYA ABEYWICKRAMA
San Francisco State University

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The practicum, referring to "a course in teaching practice" (Crookes, 2003, p. xi) is a ubiquitous component of TESOL teacher-education programs, although the content, design, and duration of practicum courses may vary across teacher-education contexts. With the emergence of new theories and research on teacher cognition (e.g., Borg, 2006; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015) and teacher identity (e.g., Cheung, Ben Said, & Park, 2015; Kanno & Stuart, 2011), increasing globalization of language-teacher education, and the expanding presence of online training of TESOL professionals, our expectations for the practicum course are also shifting. These expectations reflect expanding beliefs about the capacity of the practicum experience to fuel and transform teacher growth.

At the heart of this special theme section of *The CATESOL Journal* are questions we have been deliberating in our own TESOL graduate program: What is the role of the practicum course in a teacher's development of practice? How should the scope of our practicum activities and course content change if we are to keep step with new thinking about teacher cognition, teacher identity, and the contextualized nature of teacher practice? While the "social turn" in TESOL teacher education (Johnson, 2006, 2009) has yielded an exciting and growing body of theory and empirical work, the literature base on the practicum course, in particular, remains relatively small, not having advanced much in size and scope since Graham Crookes (2003) argued, 12 years ago, that the practicum context merited more scholarly attention. Notable exceptions include a framework proposed by Kumarvadivelu (2012) and studies of student teacher perceptions of the practicum (Kim, 2008; Lee, 2007), student analysis of their own teacher discourse (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2007), and teacher development in the context of national EFL curricular reform (Ahn, 2011).

This special theme section aims to promote dialogue and reflec-

tion about the practicum experience as a unique growth activity. In this spirit, the title of our introductory essay—"Charting Our Course: Why the Practicum Continues to Matter to Us in TESOL"—features a double entendre on the meaning of "charting course" to emphasize two reasons why we believe intentional conversations about the practicum are significant to our field. First, we need opportunities to exchange and discuss ideas for charting our practicum courses, meaning the process of organizing these courses. Such open deliberation of our course syllabi is essential for the dissemination of innovative designs. Furthermore, including our students (current and former) and their mentor teachers in these discussions is critical to improving alignment between practicum expectations and actual workplace environments, and to promoting communication between university faculty and receiving teachers.

Second, we need opportunities to "chart a course" of action, referring to the need to collectively work toward a vision of what high-quality practical training can and should look like in TESOL teacher education. To some, the word *vision* implies a loosely articulated, romanticized perspective on teacher development, but we argue that, in light of the current sociopolitical climate encasing the English-teaching profession, we must develop a shared, very clear picture of what high-quality teacher training looks like, refine that vision in a variety of classroom contexts, and be able to communicate those commitments to multiple stakeholders. We can imagine that, in response to that last statement, many teachers working in the trenches might respond skeptically, "You want me to do *what?*" If it is asking too much of already overburdened working teachers, then how can we cultivate a vision of teacher professional development that is shared across our professional community? As teacher educators, we see the teaching practicum for preservice teachers as one of the most viable opportunities for this work. The practicum is a venue in which we can, through reflective practice and grounded dialogue about professional development, facilitate the development of such a vision that our graduate students may carry forward as they join new communities of teachers. If we are true to the values of teacher agency and teacher learning as socially constructed, then charting a vision of effective practical training is not the domain of "expert" teacher trainers, but ultimately the work of the greater community of trainers, apprentices, and mentors.

Charting our course also entails a discussion of future directions in theory building, research, and advocacy work related to the development of teacher practice, paying attention to those areas that are, in fact, *undercharted territories*. Research on teacher cognition, for example, has largely been carried out with teachers working in universi-

ty-based, academic settings (see Borg, 2006). Less studied is the development of teacher practice in community-based literacy programs (in which teachers often work with English language learners with little formal schooling (cf. Vinogradov, 2012, 2015) or in countries, such as China and Korea, where nonnative speakers of English teach in large classrooms of learners (cf. Ahn, 2011).

This priority-setting work must also build on scholarly advances in teacher development. In particular, we ask how current research is pressing us to abandon conventional wisdom about teacher development and reframe the work that goes into actually becoming a language teacher. During the past 20 years, evolving perspectives have led to increasingly dynamic and social views of teacher learning. Citing Borg (2003), Freeman (1996, 2002), Freeman and Richards (1996), and Johnson (2006), among others, Golombek (2011) explains that language-teacher educators have come to view teacher learning as a result of "participation in the sociocultural practices and contexts of teaching … grounded in the professional thinking and activities of teachers" (p. 121). Viewing the practicum as a site of teacher learning through socialization, agency, and negotiation demands that we rethink its forms and practices in critical and creative ways.

Finally, as we contemplate the future of practicum courses in TESOL teacher education, we also believe that there is a need to attend to the local economic and academic trends in higher education. For example, drops in student-enrollment numbers in California's teacher-preparation programs (see Sawchuck, 2014) have forced programs to cancel underenrolled courses, a difficult situation that has affected the consistency with which a program can support practicum experiences. The future of practicum courses also rests on our ability to account for the real-life working conditions that shape the teaching/learning environment and influence a teacher's career decisions about where to teach. In this regard, we need our professional discussions to educate others about the need for positive working conditions that support and reward doing good work in teacher development. By heralding the work we do in the practicum, we promote recognition of the complex, practice-oriented expertise of quality teaching that is so often lost in political discourse on education reform.

In sum, in "charting our course" in the context of the TESOL practicum, we recognize that our work is both practical and imaginative. Through work on this issue, we reminded ourselves that the practicum course remains perhaps the most tangible, most visible reminder of the interdependence of universities and "real-world" classrooms in TESOL teacher education. This collection also prompted us to critically examine the history of the TESOL practicum for insight

into the issues facing language-teacher educators today. In this regard, our opening article by Robert Oprandy, "Refashioning the Practicum by Emphasizing Attending and Reflective Skills," provides readers with a valuable chronicle of the practicum in teacher-preparation programs. Oprandy, now based at the University of the Pacific, provides an overview of traditional and alternative practicum structures, drawing insights from K-12 as well as TESOL teacher-preparation programs, enabling the reader to understand the wide range of possibilities for promoting teacher growth.

Attending and reflecting processes are at the core of Oprandy's insights into the teaching practicum; he argues that attending to the live and recorded experiences of classroom environments is essential for the reflection that leads to teacher development. Growth in the teaching practicum, Oprandy asserts, results from student teachers' attending "intently and intentionally on what they do as a means of forming … teacher identities" (p. 110).. Especially useful is Oprandy's overview of the many options for honing student teachers' attending skills and cultivating their desire to reflect deeply and systematically on practice. Oprandy describes a wide array of practicum structures and activities (e.g., group discussions, observations, journals, teaching portfolios, shadowing a mentor teacher, practice in ethnographic note taking, teacher reflection on own life histories, video-mediated reflection on teaching, teacher reflection on life histories in response to critical incidents) to illustrate the rich diversity of creative options available for the practicum. Throughout his article, Oprandy underscores the need for well-structured, guided opportunities that enable student teachers to develop their awareness of the principles and decision making behind effective teaching as well as a shared vocabulary for discussing the teaching process with others. On a more global level, Oprandy suggests that the practicum be liberated from its traditional placement in the final phase of teacher-training programs and instead be woven into the entire course of a program. Taking the stance that teacher learning and pedagogical theory are driven by authentic classroom experiences, Oprandy argues that this premise is in fact aligned with the spirit of TESOL's legacy.

Showcasing the influence of technology in the practicum context is Kathy Howard's article "Beyond 'Empty Verbalism': How Teacher Candidates Benefit From Blogging About a Tutoring Practicum." This empirical study examines the tutoring practicum component of an online course on reading pedagogy, with a qualitative exploration of the socialization processes and spontaneous community that emerged among peers through sharing and commenting on one another's tutoring reflections. Howard, based at California State University, San

Bernardino, highlights the ways that community among practicum students is extending beyond the formal classroom environment, as well as the ways that the mentor teacher is able to cultivate virtual community that deepens student teachers' engagement with the classroom experience. Comparing student work in blogs, discussion boards, and reports submitted individually to the instructor, Howard sheds light on how distinct ways of configuring online reflections and community resulted in constraints and affordances in teacher learning and the implementation of new instructional practices.

Like Robert Oprandy's opening article, Netta Avineri and Jason Martel's article, "The Evolution of a Practicum: Movement Toward a Capstone," also provides a historical perspective on the practicum but through the specific lens of teacher assessment. Avineri and Martel, reflecting on their work as teacher educators at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, discuss changes in their MA TESOL program that repositioned the practicum as a core course and "elevated to capstone status" (p. 157). Avineri and Martel are resolute that "to legitimize the 'teaching' nature of a MA TESOL degree, the development of teaching proficiency should be a principal programmatic goal" (p. 157). The changes highlight how faculty responded to evolving student needs and curricular changes through time. In the analysis of their redesign, the authors emphasize that their philosophies about effective teaching shaped their deliberations about "how teacher identity can be fostered through a balanced approach to both structure and agency" (p. 157) in the practicum. The authors also reflect on the use of rubrics, the pass/fail evaluation system, and feedback processes, including washback of assessment practices in cultivating teaching proficiency. By conferring "capstone status" to the practicum, Avineri and Martel observe, their graduate program is able to demonstrate that "teaching proficiency" is equivalent in importance to knowledge of applied linguistics theory and research. Additionally, their redesign of the practicum to include a dossier of teaching documents that undergo a revision process furthers teacher learning in ways consistent with portfolio-based measures commonly used to assess teaching effectiveness (see Johnson, 1996; Meeus, Van Petegem, & Engels, 2009; Zeichner & Wray, 2001).

Another article in this special theme section focused on teacher assessment is "Where Practicum Meets Test Preparation: Supporting Teacher Candidates Through EdTPA" by Beth Clark-Gareca, a lecturer in the TESOL/Applied Linguistics Program at Teachers College. As one of the articles in our "Voices From the Classroom" section, Clark-Gareca's article reflects on her own experiences as a mentor teacher and the experiences of three of her ESL student teachers with edTPA,

the performance-based teacher-assessment system for English as an Additional Language (EAL) certification in the state of New York. As highlighted in Clark-Gareca's article, the student teachers found that the edTPA benefited them professionally, but they also cited the challenges of completing edTPA around their course work and student-teaching responsibilities in the public school setting. In the current accountability climate, our decisions about how to evaluate teacher practice and teacher growth, Clark-Gareca argues, are "intrinsically connected to perceptions of the validity and reliability of the test in question" (p. 219). As such, this article compels us to reflect on how our own practicum practices fulfill "the responsibility of TESOL faculty to strike the delicate balance between *test* preparation and *teacher* preparation in graduate programs" (p. 219).

Adding empirically derived insights from an activity theory perspective on the teaching practicum is Bedrettin Yazan's contribution, "'You Learn Best When You're in There:' ESOL Teacher Learning in the Practicum," which explores the teacher learning of five student teachers engaged in a practicum within elementary and secondary schools. This study adds to an emerging body of research using activity theory to better understand teacher learning across a range of teachers and contexts by focusing on the complex system of the teaching practicum and providing insights into the ways student teachers "construct their own learning and adjust or extend their instructional values, priorities, and beliefs within their teaching contexts" (p. 171). Drawing on Engeström (2008) and Lantolf and Thorne (2006), Yazan, based at the University of Alabama, invites us to view teacher learning as a mutually adaptive process in which student teacher and mentor teacher come to understand one another, working through inevitable tensions, such as differences in teaching philosophy. In analyzing the practicum as an "activity system," Yazan is able to characterize teacher development in several important contextualized ways, including the ways in which teachers navigate the school context, build relationships within the teaching community, use tools of teacher learning, and understand English learners. As such, this study provides evidence drawn from the student teacher perspective that the practicum facilitates scaffolded opportunities for experimentation with teaching practice, socialization into a teaching culture, and emergence of teacher identity.

While Yazan's article helps to expands theoretical and methodological horizons for understanding teacher learning in the practicum, Betsy Gilliland's contribution expands our horizons in terms of the cultural contexts of the practicum. This article provides a valuable addition to research on teaching practica in EFL contexts (e.g., Ahn,

2011; Kim, 2008) by reporting on a US-based MA TESOL program with its practicum carried out in an international EFL context. Gilliland narrates her experiences of leading graduate students on a two-month teaching practicum in northern Thailand in her article "Perspectives From the Classroom: Supervising an International Teaching Practicum," an article appearing in the "Voices From the Classroom" section. She discusses how cultural, academic, and personal issues can affect the smooth running of such a program and highlights how leading a practicum, especially in an international context, requires the instructor to play multiple roles: professor, supervisor, mentor, and cultural mediator. One of the benefits Gilliland notes of supervising an international practicum is how the graduate student teachers had to learn to adapt their assumptions about teaching and lesson planning to a different set of student expectations. She also mentions a unique aspect of the practicum in an international context—being far from home results in personal involvement of both graduates and the supervisor in forming a new learning community to support each other.

Two of our "Voices From the Classroom" articles capture the spirit of Bedrettin Yazan's observation that practicum courses facilitate teacher candidates' school-based teacher learning experiences and help them make sense of teaching and learning theories in actual instructional settings. Lina Jurkunas, a student in the graduate TESOL program at San Francisco State University, engages teacher identity theory to reflect on ways that her confidence in her teaching skills and her resourcefulness (her desire and capacity to be helpful to the mentor teacher and the students) have evolved during the course of a semester working in a community-based ESL classroom. Through reflections on impromptu teaching moments and concrete classroom management skills (e.g., use of visuals or gestures to communicate meaning to beginning-level learners), Jurkunas is able to characterize her teacher growth—initially feeling that she "was taking on a momentary teacher role" (p. 225) but moving toward "becoming more teacherlike" (p. 226), a useful, concrete articulation of what Borg (2006) would refer to as Jurkunas's "personalized pedagogical knowledge."

Another graduate student perspective in the "Voices From the Classroom" section is Alex Kasula's article "Conducting Action Research in a Practicum: A Student Teacher's Perspective," which highlights his experience as a graduate student. Now based at the La Universidad de Los Andes in Colombia, Kasula makes a case for the practicum as an opportunity for "student teachers to apply not only the theoretical teaching practices they have acquired throughout their study in a TESOL program, but also their understanding of

research methodology" (p. 230). Kasula launched an action research project in response to a critical incident in his teaching when he had to quickly adjust his lesson plan upon discovering that his classroom did not have Internet capacity and he could not project his Power-Point slides. Drawing inspiration from Burns's (2010) work on action research, Kasula captures how he became a more confident teacher as a result of his experience in the classroom, and specifically with the reflexive, iterative processes of the action research approach. Consistent with Oprandy's advocacy that we draw from a wide array of options for revisioning the practicum, Kasula provides evidence that action research is not only a tool for experienced practitioners, but also a valuable mediational structure within the teaching practicum for preservice teachers.

At the end of the "Voices From the Classroom" section, we include a short piece that differs in format from the other scholarly or empirical articles in this section. As part of our work on this special theme issue, we wanted to find out more about practicum experiences in other TESOL teacher-education programs, and thus, we developed and sent out a short questionnaire to practicum faculty/program coordinators throughout California. Our article "Reflecting on the Practicum: An Invitation to Continue the Conversation" shares comments we received in response, as well as an expanded set of questionnaire questions that we hope readers will use to champion conversations with colleagues about how to revision the practicum experience in their home contexts.

Finally, this special theme section also features a review written by Ali Selvi, a teacher educator based at Middle East Technical University, Northern Cyprus, with interests in second language teacher education, teacher identity, teacher cognition, and issues related to nonnative English-speaking professionals in TESOL. Selvi chose to review three books—*Practice Teaching: A Reflective Approach* by Jack Richards and Thomas S. C. Farrell (2011), *Language Teacher Professional Development,* also by Farrell (2015), and *Advances and Current Trends in Language Teacher Identity Research*, an edited collection by Yin Ling Cheung, Selim Ben Said, and Kwanghyun Park (2015)—in "a deliberate attempt [to recognize] a diverse body of literature that informs the formulation, operationalization, and implementation of the entire practicum process" (p. 249). Selvi examines the contributions of each book in light of the shifting paradigmatic landscape around teacher practice and teacher development. In his concluding remarks, Selvi broadens the focus of his book review by calling upon "all stakeholders involved in the teaching practicum to recognize the vitality of integrating different streams of knowledge and inquiry and to amal-

gamate them as an organic part of the teaching practicum experience" (p. 256-257). And with this important call to action, Selvi validates our goals regarding the sharing of professional wisdom about teacher practice, a perfect note of conviction with which to conclude this special theme section.

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Guest Editors

Maricel G. Santos is an associate professor of English in the graduate TESOL program at San Francisco State University. Her current research explores ways that adult ESL participation serves as a health-protective factor in immigrant communities. In collaboration with the University of California, San Francisco, she is studying the effects of peer support networks and innovative curricula on health-literacy outcomes among diverse ESL learners in secondary and community-based adult ESL settings.

David Olsher is an associate professor of English in the graduate TESOL program at San Francisco State University. His interests include discourse analysis of talk in educational contexts and other institutional settings and implications for language learning, as well as applications of sociolinguistic research to language-teaching materials. His research includes conversation-analytic studies of ESOL classrooms, tutoring centers, and doctor-patient visits, as well as qualitative study of the mentoring of student teachers.

Priyanvada Abeywickrama is an associate professor in English in the graduate TESOL program at San Francisco State University, where she

often teaches the practicum class in addition to listening and oral skills, curriculum development, and assessment. Her main research focus is in language assessment, specifically issues of validity. As a native of Sri Lanka she is also interested in varieties of English and code-switching in discourse.

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