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The Reflective Cycle of the Teaching Practicum

REVIEW

Summary

The Reflective Cycle of the Teaching Practicum, written by Fiona Farr and Angela Farrell, is the 8th installment in the Reflective Practice in Language Education series, edited by Thomas S.C. Farrell. This volume delves into the implementation of reflective practice (RP) in teaching practicums (TP), sometimes known as teaching placements, which play a pivotal role in the context of English Language Teaching Education (ELTE), specifically in the MA in TESOL program at the University of Limerick.

The text is meticulously crafted to be approachable and relevant, catering not only to readers new to the concept of RP, including Master's students who are both subjects of inquiry and the book's primary readership, but also to teacher educators. Strategically interspersed segments labeled "Reflective Break" prompt readers, especially students, to contemplate every section's content and establish connections with personal opinions and experiences. This approach enables the assimilation of elucidated concepts in a meaningful and personal manner.

The extensive references, presented in a user-friendly manner, make for an easier continued reflection. Cited authors are precisely contextualized, and new concepts come with further reading recommendations and theoretical discussions. This book is a relevant introduction to RP for student teachers and a valuable resource for experienced teacher educators seeking to implement RP in teacher education.

The first chapter serves as a theoretical introduction to RP, exploring its origins, impacts (positive or negative) as discussed through evidence-based literature, as well as an introduction of the PENSER approach (from the verb *penser* in French which means "to think"), an adaptation of T. Farrell's RP framework (2019) specifically designed for student teachers.

The second chapter provides an in-depth exploration of RP and its applicability within the context of teacher education. This discussion delves into literature encompassing various RP theories and perspectives deemed particularly valuable for teacher educators. It includes a substantial reflection on the implementation of the RP cycle in teacher education settings, with a specific focus on, though not limited to, the University of Limerick. The chapter critically addresses key questions, such as the rationale behind incorporating RP in these contexts and the methodologies employed. As a result, this chapter serves as a practical resource for teacher educators.

Chapters Three to eight discuss how this approach was implemented by the authors at the University of Limerick. The third chapter examines the community dynamics within the teacher education environment, encompassing interactions among peers as well as between a student and their mentor, who typically are experienced teachers. This section specifically addresses two aspects of the mentor-student relationship: in situations where the student teacher observes their mentor, and when they undergo observation (and assessment) by their supervisors.

The subsequent four chapters (4 to 7) depict the experiences of ten student teachers enrolled in a TESOL MA as they engage with the PENSER reflective cycle during their TP. The fourth chapter details how they transform their questions or difficulties into “puzzles” related to lesson planning. Chapter 4 incorporates numerous extracts from the PENSER corpus, providing the reader with precise examples that illustrate the implementation of RP in the teacher education course.

The fifth chapter addresses puzzles associated with classroom management (CM) as experienced by student teachers. Following an extensive literature review on the scope of CM in ELT in the 21st century, an examination of excerpts from the PENSER corpus illustrates how certain issues are examined by student teachers as part of their reflective journey. These issues go from teacher anxiety, student engagement, and intercultural relationships, to the integration of technology in the classroom.

The sixth chapter focuses on the reflective journey of student teachers with regard to the linguistic content they are required to teach. Unlike the preceding chapters, it presents three distinct case studies, each tracking the reflective progression of individual MA students in their instruction of grammatical, lexical, and phonological aspects of the English language. This is particularly relevant for readers who are student teachers or teacher educators seeking to incorporate such reflections into teacher education programs.

The seventh chapter explores student teachers' reflections on teacher talk and teacher-student interactions in the ELT classroom. Initially, it addresses the student teachers' concerns about speech pace, language alignment with the students' levels, and corrective feedback. It then delves deeper into the types of English taught, considering local varieties or register. This facet of the student teachers RP under the PENSER approach is supported by the use of corpus linguistics tools, facilitated by the teacher educators. These tools enable students, for instance, to scrutinize how they, or the observed teachers, communicate with students in the classroom.

The eighth chapter focuses on the post-observation feedback between student teachers and their tutor in the form of dyadic exit discussions. It examines conversations a teacher educator has with two different student teachers — one experienced before the MA in TESOL and the other more novice. Using discourse analysis, the chapter offers a comparative interpretation of the two discussions and underscores the significance of such conversations between student teachers and teacher educators the teaching practicum reaches an end.

The concluding ninth chapter serves a dual purpose in synthesizing and contextualizing the content presented throughout the book, while also introducing new perspectives for future research. It outlines the benefits derived from engaging in RP during the TP, encompassing academic success, professional development, and personal growth in terms of identity. The proposed research is positioned as a springboard (p. 187) for subsequent investigations into RP in English Language Teaching Education. It underscores the necessity for comparative RP-based studies across a diverse range of contexts, including the continuous professional development of in-service teachers. The final section of the book provides succinct guidance for teachers to initiate a reflective process through principles (from Farrell, 2019) and easily implementable habits.

Evaluation

This book explores the implementation of Reflective Practice (RP) with student teachers in a pre-service context. Tailored for a student audience, it articulates concepts clearly and accessibly. However, it doesn't solely benefit students; teacher educators can engage in reflection regarding pre-service teachers' education and classroom preparation. The book's strength lies in its dual appeal—accessible content for novices and reflective relevance for experienced readers.

Although the introductory chapter serves as a theoretical initiation to RP, tracing its origins to the seminal works of Dewey and Schön, it transcends mere repetition of the previous volumes of the series. Despite reintroducing the RP concept, its theoretical contribution is intricately woven into the fabric of language teacher education. This contextual framework acts as a prism through which the concept of RP is rediscovered.

The case-study chapters provide a structured RP journey, guiding student readers through various questions and "puzzles," addressing issues for inexperienced pre-service teachers reflectively and meaningfully. They provide tools for readers to address their own challenges. These chapters also offer insights into how one university organizes its Teaching Practicum (TP) cycle, with data-driven, evidence-based research conducted by researchers who are also teaching in the studied program. As a teacher educator, this book prompted reflection on how I deliver course content for pre-service teachers.

The text unfolds as an invaluable resource for educators, offering practical insights into the intricacies of implementing RP in the University context. The clarity with which it navigates complex RP theories ensures accessibility for educators from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the book provides a bridge between theory and practice, offering concrete examples that resonate with the everyday experiences of both novice and seasoned educators. This bridging of the theoretical and the practical enhances the book's applicability, making it a useful guide for those navigating the dynamic landscape of language education.

Ultimately, the book serves as a catalyst for pedagogical introspection, challenging educators to reassess their instructional methods and embrace a reflective paradigm. The case studies not only shed light on the challenges encountered by student teachers but also offer a

roadmap for addressing these challenges with a reflective mindset. The fusion of practical guidance and scholarly research positions this work as a cornerstone for educators striving to enhance the reflective dimension of their teaching practices.

The strength of this book lies not just in imparting knowledge but in instigating a transformative process. The presented case studies inspire educators to embark on their own reflective exploration. *The Reflective Cycle of the Teaching Practicum* becomes a valuable companion, encouraging continuous reflection, adaptation, and refinement of pedagogical approaches. With its fusion of practical guidance and scholarly research, it stands as a testament to the enduring power of reflective practice in shaping language education.

References

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About the reviewer

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