

Understanding and Exploring Signature Pedagogies for TESOL Teacher Education

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Disclaimer

The authors declare no conflict of interest with this work.

Note about previous publication: This report is a companion piece to a previously published work, *Signature Pedagogies for E-learning in Higher Education and Beyond*, which is cited in full in our references. Some of the content from the companion piece has been included in this report for ease of reading.

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to elevate the collective understanding of what it means to be and become a TESOL professional and what differentiates “TESOLers” from other teachers. We have intentionally prepared this report as an Open Educational Resource (OER), so it can be freely shared with an international audience.

Methods: This report synthesizes literature relating to signature pedagogies, teacher training, and educational technology.

Results: We explore the surface, deep, and implicit structures of three signature pedagogies of TESOL teacher education: (a) developing the TESOL knowledge base; (b) cultivating reflective practice; (c) engaging in a TESOL practicum. We also situate TESOL within a technology, content, and pedagogical content (TPACK) framework as a means to further understand how and why TESOL teacher education can and should incorporate technology in a variety of ways.

Implications: TESOL is a relatively young discipline and has come of age during a time when technology has emerged as an essential element of teaching and learning. As such, TESOL teacher education programs must address technology as a key element of teacher preparation for the profession.

Additional materials: Contains 1 table, 1 figure and 81 references.

Keywords: signature pedagogies, English as a second language, TESOL, teacher training, teacher education, TPACK

Preamble

This work is the result of our continued collaboration, which began during the “Technology in English” event held at The White House in November 2016. The event was a joint effort between The White House Office of Global Engagement and the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language Programs. The event was part of the inter-agency English for All initiative, announced by President Obama earlier in 2016 (United States Department of State, 2016a, 2016b). The authors of this report were among a group of scholars, practitioners, and industry leaders invited to take part in the 2016 event. As a result of that experience, we have continued our collaboration with this resource for TESOL trainees and teacher-educators.

Sharing Our Work as An Open Educational Resource

Our purpose with this study was to offer a high quality and freely available resource that would be accessible to TESOL professionals anywhere in the world. The decision to share our work as an Open Educational Resource (OER) was a deliberate one. We wanted our work to be widely available, without cost or access posing a barrier to prospective readers.

As we have pointed out elsewhere (Eaton, Brown, Schroeder, Lock & Jacobsen, 2017), one of the most often cited definitions of OER comes from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation: “Open Educational Resources are teaching and learning resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use...” ([The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation website](#)). In keeping with the intention and spirit of OER, we offer this report free of charge to educators, learners, and researchers everywhere under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. We invite you to use it, cite it, share it with others and share your feedback about the report with us. We welcome your feedback.

Introduction

TESOL remains a rapidly growing and expanding field. There is an increasing number of English language learners (ELLs) in public and private schools across the United States and Canada, and this trend has increased the need for skilled TESOL-trained educators to fill the positions within these institutions (Lindahl, 2017; Li, Myles, & Robinson, 2012). According to the United States' Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), the need for adult educators who are qualified to teach ELLs is expected to grow approximately 9% by the year 2022 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

What is it that teachers of English as an additional language do that is special to our profession? What makes us different from teachers of other subjects or content areas? What makes us unique? In contemplating these questions, we discovered that our answers extend beyond classroom practices. Those who dedicate their professional lives to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) often have combined expertise in the areas of second language (L2) acquisition, linguistics, language teaching methodology and pedagogy, among others. In this paper, we explore “unique characteristics and characteristic pedagogies” (Gurung, Chick & Haynie, 2009, p. xvii) of TESOL teacher education, endeavouring to describe and reflect on the distinguishing features of teacher preparation, but within the discipline specific context of TESOL. Our purpose is to elevate our collective understanding of what it means to be and become a TESOL professional and what differentiates TESOL from other disciplines. Effectively, we wanted to dive deep into the notion of what makes TESOL professionals inherently unique.

We begin by situating TESOL inside its historical context within broader academic and practitioner circles. We acknowledge the quest for legitimacy and recognition of TESOL as a profession. We explore the notion that the quest for legitimacy has characterized the profession itself and remains a topic of discussion among “TESOLers”.

In the next section, we offer a broad overview of what signature pedagogies are broadly, drawing from the work of Shulman (2005a, b) and others. Then we move on to describe some of the methodological signature pedagogies that characterize TESOL as a profession. This leads to a further discussion about notions of teacher education within the TESOL field, with a focus on how traditional notions of teacher training have evolved in recent decades with options now being available in blended and online formats, in addition to brick-and-mortar classrooms.

Our discussions and explorations led us to recognize that the emergence of TESOL as a profession has aligned chronologically with significant advances in learning technology. In addition to exploring some of the signature pedagogies that characterize TESOL teacher

training, we further situate TESOL teacher education within the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) framework to show how these elements are key components of the profession.

We recognize that one of the characteristics of TESOL itself is that it has come of age as a profession during a time when technology has become inextricably infused with teaching and learning. We argue that TESOL professionals must address this professional reality from the very beginning of their training to be competent TESOL teachers. We conclude with a reflection about what the implications of the intersections of TESOL and technology mean for the field as it continues to mature as a profession.

This report is intended for both emerging and established TESOL professionals who are interested in better understanding hallmark approaches to teaching and learning in our profession, as well as those faculty who instruct in TESOL teacher education programs. Finally, the report may also be of interest to those interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) who are eager to understand how the concept of signature pedagogies applies within the TESOL field.

Significance: TESOL Entangled with Technology

It is noteworthy that during the same decades that TESOL has been emerging as a profession, with its members advocating for legitimacy in the academy and beyond, there has been a parallel and simultaneous shift in teacher training itself. The quest to establish the legitimacy of TESOL as a profession began to emerge as a strong dialogue among those working in the discipline in the 1990s (Jenks, 1997). At the same time, dialogue began to emerge among teacher training professionals in general about how to meet the needs of aspiring teaching professionals in blended and online environments (Yildirim & Kiraz, 1999). In other words, as TESOL began to come into its own as a profession, so too, did traditional notions of teacher training also begin to shift. Moreover, as TESOL professionals began advocating for legitimacy as professionals, so too did innovators in teacher education also began to advocate for new ways for aspiring professionals to earn credentials and learn how to become expert teachers in their respective disciplines.

It could be argued then, that while members of long-established professions such as law and nursing had their roots in brick-and-mortar classrooms, there is now an entire generation of TESOL professionals who have only had training in blended and online environments, be it in North America or global contexts.

Although TESOL may be a “young” profession, when compared with traditional fields such as law, history, nursing and so on, it has evolved during a time of extraordinary technological advancements in terms of teaching and learning. This “coming of age” of the TESOL profession during a period in history when teacher education itself is transforming, is one of the unique aspects of TESOL that differentiates it from other disciplines. How we think about TESOL has, almost since the beginning of the profession itself, included conversations about how we think about and incorporate technology into the teaching and learning of English as an additional language.

Foundations of TESOL as a Profession

Situating Ourselves within Historical and Professional Contexts

Whether TESOL or English language teaching (ELT) can be considered a profession has been open to debate. Breshears (2004) highlighted the significance of exclusion in the sense of “knowers” (the professional group) and “non-knowers” (lay people) and relates this to “standards and processes for entry and licensure” (Freeman, 1992, as cited in Breshears, 2004, p. 27). For the field of TESOL, this has long been a murky area. Firstly, the native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992) and traditional notions of native speaker status and the sufficiency of this to be an English teacher still hold sway in many areas of the world. Secondly, Breshears (2004) pointed to the lack of control over standards and certification by teachers themselves and suggests that this is largely controlled by the business sector. Over the years (even decades) the debate has begun to shift (Jenks, 1997, Jenks & Kennell, 2012). TESOL professionals are now claiming their position within academic and scholarly circles as legitimate contributors to classroom practice, as well as applied and theoretical research.

The notion of certification and qualification itself has evolved within the TESOL profession. There are different ways in which a teacher can be “certified”. For example, certificate programs, such as the Cambridge ESOL Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) or the Trinity College London Certificate in TESOL (Cert TESOL) are pre-service, relatively short intensive programs of approximately 120 hours (Brandt, 2006). Diaz Maggioli (2014) stated that approximately 20,000 new teachers are certified every year by these two examination bodies and that such programs generally aim to equip the student-teacher with a set of standardized skills that are, to some extent, context free and can thus be used in any teaching context. Diaz Maggioli (2014) also noted some critical issues with program quality and suggests that improvements could be made in terms of a more learner-centered approach and more authentic and developmental opportunities for the student-teacher.

As authors of this report, we work in North American higher education contexts and this has shaped our lived professional experience in terms of how we work with aspiring and novice TESOL professionals. As a result, this report focuses on EAL (English as an additional language) teacher education that is situated in university or higher education contexts in what Wright (2010) has termed “Anglo-Saxon second language teacher education (SLTE),” primarily in the BANA (Britain, Australia, North America) countries. This route into the profession is via a Bachelor of Arts or a Master’s degree in TESOL. Maggioli (2014) suggested that learning to teach in these contexts includes a greater focus

on becoming familiar with academic research compared to certificate programs, with the teacher educator seen less as a transmitter of knowledge and accreditor of the standard skills and more as an “intellectual and scientific mentor” (Diaz Maggioli, 2014, p. 189). Additionally, in such programs, there is a greater potential for teaching technology skills to novice TESOL professionals given the relative ease of access to technology resources/the Internet.

The focus in this paper on university programs is by no means a comment on the relative benefits of a bachelor’s or master’s degree vs. a certificate (or other type of) program. The focus on the North American context should also not be taken to indicate any primacy of English language teacher education here compared to other parts of the world. However, we have limited our scope to reflect our own professional and personal experiences, and also because we think that the concept of signature pedagogies can be productively applied to the North American university context.

Overview of Signature Pedagogies

Signature pedagogies are the “types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions” (Shulman, 2005a, p. 52). Shulman’s work focuses on the professions as a starting point for signature pedagogies, noting that a key feature is how novices are instructed in a particular discipline to build their understanding of the profession. In this case, we are examining the case of novice teachers of English to speakers of other languages.

Shulman (2005a) noted three dimensions of instructional strategies of signature pedagogies:

1. Surface structure;
2. Deep structure; and
3. Implicit structure.

Surface structure involves the *operational* elements of teaching and learning, how lessons are organized and how teaching is done within a particular discipline. Deep structure delves into the *assumptions* educators make about how knowledge is best learned and how a developing practitioner learns to think like a professional. Finally, the implicit structures include the *moral aspects* of teaching and learning in a given discipline (e.g. TESOL), including beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Shulman (2005a, 2005b) conceptualized his notion of signature pedagogies around professions such as law, medicine, nursing, and engineering. Within the field of TESOL, there has been a long-standing advocacy to position TESOL as a profession (Breshears, 2004; MacPherson, Kouritzin, & Kim, 2005). Our work starts with the assumption that TESOL has legitimacy as a profession as much as law, engineering, nursing, or any other respected discipline.

Overview of Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK)

While signature pedagogies characterize the types of teaching and learning within a discipline, it is important to acknowledge TESOL's chronological development that parallels the emergence of educational technologies as part of teaching and learning. Teaching is a complex process that relies on and draws upon different types of knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). We propose to use the technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) framework to further understand the relationship of TESOL to – and with – technology. TPACK components consist of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge, and while these sectors are independently important for teachers, the combination of these areas is increasingly important for developing good teaching and best practices (Koehler, 2012).

Content knowledge is the teacher's knowledge of the subject and what is to be taught (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Historically, content knowledge was the foundation of teacher knowledge and education (Shulman, 1986).

Pedagogical knowledge is the teachers' knowledge about the process and practice of teaching and learning (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Recent trends in teacher education have changed its focus from content knowledge to pedagogical knowledge, emphasizing general classroom pedagogy apart from the subject matter being taught (Ball & McDiarmid, 1990). The combination of content and pedagogical knowledge has now permeated the field of education and teachers are trained for both subject matter as well as pedagogy, blending the separate concepts (Shulman, 1986).

Technological knowledge is the knowledge of working with and applying technological tools and resources in order to assist in achieving a goal (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). With the increase of technology in the workplace and life, education and teacher training has blended a third knowledge into the mix: technological knowledge.

Here is a visual representation of TPACK:

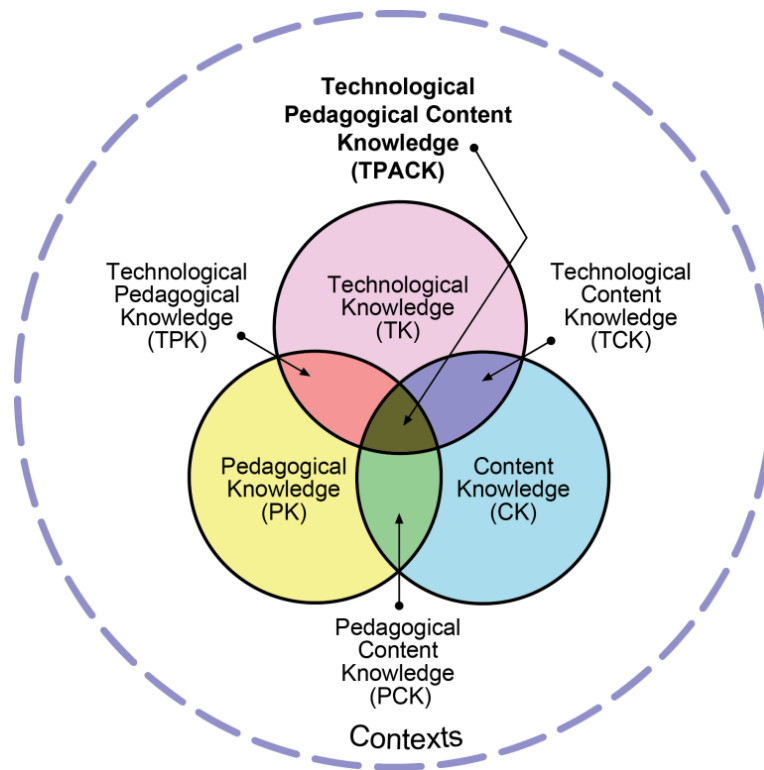


Figure 1: TPACK – Reproduced by permission of the publisher, © 2012 by tpack.org. Retrieved from: <http:tpack.org>

The combination of the three areas of technological, content, and pedagogical knowledge has multiple points of intersection and interplay on areas of knowledge, all of which can be applied to learning and teaching in a variety of ways. “TPACK is the basis of effective teaching with technology, requiring an understanding of the representation of concepts using technologies; pedagogical techniques that use technologies in constructive ways to teach content; knowledge of what makes concepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the problems that students face; knowledge of students’ prior knowledge and theories of epistemology; and knowledge of how technologies can be used to build on existing knowledge to develop new epistemologies or strengthen old ones” (Koehler & Mishra, 2009, p. 66).

The following table illustrates examples of each type of knowledge, which trainees are exposed to as part of their TESOL teacher training:

TPACK element	Examples (Not an exhaustive list)
Content knowledge of TESOL	Second language (L2) acquisition, linguistics, grammar
Pedagogical knowledge of TESOL	Methodology, lesson planning, assessment
Technology knowledge of TESOL	Computer-assisted language learning (CALL), mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) technologies, Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), as well as other learning technologies to support student learning

Table 1: TPACK contextualized for TESOL teacher training

In the section that follows, we show how TPACK and signature pedagogies of TESOL teacher training align, intersect and at times, overlap.

Signature Pedagogies of TESOL Teacher Training

Although the concept of signature pedagogies has been applied to various aspects of the teacher education field, Kiel et al. (2016) suggest that the overall pedagogic signature of this field has to be supplemented with subject or context specifics. One example from the language teaching field is by Parra (2014), who puts forward a proposal for signature pedagogies for the teaching of Spanish as a Heritage Language (HL). Parra states that a particular signature pedagogy is relevant for Spanish HL because it enables a focus not just on “the goals and means ... of teaching a subject” but “also on our role, hopes and values as HL teachers serving a specific population and community” (p. 216).

Ham & Schueller (2012) point out that “although language teaching and learning are steeped in tradition, the discipline embraces its evolutionary nature and capacity to transform learners in profound ways” (p. 38). Their work refers to the teaching of second languages in general, making it relevant to TESOL, but it is also worth noting that because their focus is primarily on teaching foreign languages (i.e. in teaching a language in a context where it is not the language of wider communication, such as the teaching of French in the United States), it differs from TESOL, which covers the teaching of English as a foreign language (e.g., the teaching of English in China) and as a second language (e.g., the teaching of English in the United States or Canada).

We explore the “types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated” (Shulman, 2005a, p. 52). TESOL programs in the United States and Canada tend to attract a wide variety of students in terms of incoming backgrounds and future destinations, particularly in general track master’s programs (i.e., those programs that do not lead to K-12 state certification in the U.S., or provincial certification in Canada). For example, given the permeability of the entry requirements for practitioners, programs often attract EAL teachers with years of practical experience but no previous formal teacher education experience, as well as those completely new to English language teaching. Students’ future teaching contexts are also varied, and may include community adult ESL programs, private or charter schools, intensive academic English programs, or international schools or universities. TESOL programs can thus be expected to differ depending on the types of students they attract. However, there are core characteristics that programs tend to exhibit, and for this report, we focus on the key similarities.

In the next section we explore four signature pedagogies that we consider to be foundational in TESOL teacher education. There are others, of course, but we present these for illustrative purposes and to help generate further reflection and dialogue. The four we have chosen to align with the TPACK framework:

1. Developing the TESOL knowledge base (Content knowledge)
2. Cultivating reflective practice (Pedagogical knowledge)
3. Engaging in a TESOL practicum (Pedagogical knowledge)
4. Educational technology for TESOL (Technology knowledge)

We analyze each of these from the perspective of the surface, deep, and implicit elements of signature pedagogy.

Signature Pedagogy #1: Developing the TESOL Knowledge Base

Content knowledge

For much of its history, L2 English teaching was seen as a predominantly practical, skills-based endeavor. It was not until the 1960s, with the development of applied linguistics as a disciplinary field, that content knowledge, what it is that ESL and EFL teachers need to know about language itself, became salient (Richards, 2010; Tsui, 2011).

Surface structure

The contribution to and influence of applied linguistics on the knowledge base of L2 teacher education is still clearly reflected in the type of courses offered across TESOL Master's programs, as well as in the faculty who teach them. Courses that are typically offered include content relating to foundational linguistics, phonetics and phonology, semantics, syntax/pedagogical grammar, second language acquisition/development, assessment, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, multilingualism/multiculturalism, and discourse analysis. However, Tsui (2011) argues that the conceptualization of L2 teacher education and development as a separate field of inquiry came subsequently in the late 1980s with a greater recognition and incorporation of theories and issues from the field of general teacher education, for example, critical reflection, action research, and teacher learning.

These areas are represented in second language teacher education (SLTE) programs today through explicit courses such as practitioner inquiry, and through the reflective orientation taken in many teaching practicums. Thus, the scope of the knowledge base for L2 teachers is increasingly broad and deeply cross/interdisciplinary in nature. For ESL teachers, in particular, advocacy for their learners and understanding the socioeconomic and sociopolitical climate in which learners and organizations are situated have become pressing concerns.

Deep structure

There has been a long-standing debate in the field over the relative status and nature of the relationship between theory and practice. Richards (2010) suggests that this is partly due to a lack of distinction between disciplinary knowledge: that is, “the circumscribed body of knowledge that is by the language teaching profession to be essential to gaining membership of the profession” (p. 105), and that, as noted above, has traditionally come from applied linguistics and related fields as well as pedagogical content knowledge; that is, the “knowledge that provides a basis for language teaching” (p. 105), such as classroom management, curriculum planning, and reflective teaching (cf. Shulman, 1986). He gives a clear example of the difference between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge by comparing two books: Ortega’s (2013) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, and Lightbown and Spada’s (2006) title, *How Languages are Learned*. Ellis and Shintani (2014) also see a difference between “research-based discourse” aimed at researchers and “pedagogic discourse” aimed at teachers (p. 2), but they acknowledge that the distinction is not clear-cut.

Few would disagree that both aspects of content knowledge are important for language teaching professionals. What seems to be debated is their relative importance. Freeman and Johnson (1998), in calling for a reconceptualization of the knowledge base of SLTE, delineate the scope of the field as being “primarily concerned with teachers as learners of language teaching rather than with students as learners of language” (p. 407), a distinct move away from the language learner focus of SLA (second language acquisition) and applied linguistics. As Tsui (2011) notes, there has been pushback by applied linguistics researchers who argue that there is direct relevance of SLA findings to L2 teaching. Arguably, the degree to which such research findings can be applied to practice in the classroom may be limited, and indeed, many teachers and teacher-educators would take issue with the implication that the key directionality is *from* research/theory *to* practice. For example, Tsui (2009) highlights bidirectionality in the relationship between theory and practice in suggesting that the abilities to practicalize theoretical knowledge and theorize practical knowledge are central in the development of teacher expertise.

Implicit structure

The move to a more cross/interdisciplinary perspective on the scope of SLTE is indicative of a number of values. Firstly, the sharpened focus on the act of teaching and the teacher’s own learning indicates a greater understanding of the complexity and nuances of what makes an effective teacher. In other words, effective teaching is not just about how much a teacher knows about language or the language acquisition process, but also about taking account of factors such as teacher cognition, teacher learning and professional development, as well as teacher identity.

Secondly, in the current sociopolitical climate, advocacy is an increasingly salient factor for many L2 teachers (Haneda & Alexander, 2015; Linville, 2016). Advocacy is an integral part of TESOL's Standards for Adult ESL teachers. Standard 5.b.5 calls upon TESOL professionals to: (a) "advocate for ELLs' access to academic classes, resources, and instructional technology," (b) "...understand the importance of advocating for ELLs," (c) "...share with colleagues the importance of ELLs' equal access to educational resources," and (d) "...serve as advocates and ESOL resources to support ELLs and their families as families make decisions in the school and community" (TESOL International, 2010, p. 68). However, although this seems an important value to the TESOL community, its advancement and realization within SLTE programs is an under-developed and under-researched area.

Signature Pedagogy #2: Cultivating Reflective Practice

Pedagogical knowledge

Reflective practice (Schön, 1983) is a concept that has become very popular in teacher education programs. Farrell (2015) defines reflective practice as "a cognitive process accompanied by a set of attitudes in which teachers systematically collect data about their practice, and, while engaging in dialogue with others, use the data to make informed decisions about their practice both inside and outside the classroom" (p. 123). In addition, it focuses "not only on the intellectual, cognitive and meta-cognitive aspects of our work, but also the spiritual, moral and emotional non-cognitive aspects of reflection that acknowledges the inner life of teachers" (Farrell, 2016, p. 224-225).

Surface structure

Some of the main reflective tools used in SLTE programs are: gathering feedback from learners, other teachers, and mentors (through questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, etc.); discussion and dialogue (including teacher discussion groups and post-observation conferences); retrospective field notes; journal writing; classroom observations (self and peer); video and transcript analysis; action research; narrative; and lesson study (Farrell, 2016; Murphy, 2014). The use of technology is also notable in the use of many online formats for reflection, such as blogs, podcasts, chats, and forum discussions (the role of technology is addressed later in this paper).

Deep structure

Reflective practice signals a change in TESOL teacher education practice from a pedagogy that concentrated on the transmission of decontextualized knowledge primarily from the discipline of applied linguistics (Crandall & Christison, 2016) to one that emphasizes the

student-teacher as a knower and the development of a practitioner who develops their own theorized practice and autonomous judgment (e.g., Crandall, 2000; Richards, 2004; Wright, 2010). It also recognizes the complexity of teachers' mental lives (Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 2006), particularly with respect to pre-existing beliefs and assumptions around language learning and teaching, in understanding how teachers learn to do their work, and that "teacher learning is social, situated in physical and social contexts, and distributed across persons, tools, and activities" (Johnson, 2006, p. 243).

Given that teachers are able to learn and develop from their own personal understandings of what happens in their classrooms, then self-inquiry and reflection are productive and useful tools for development that can lead to change. Indeed, from his survey of research into reflective practice by TESOL teachers, Farrell (2016) claims that "the positive impact reported in most of these studies on the increased level of awareness that is generated from such reflections seems to provide further opportunities and motivation for TESOL teachers to further explore, and in some instances even challenge, their current approaches to their practice" (p. 241).

A distinction that captures this change in the deep structure of TESOL teacher education is made between teacher training and teacher education. Whereas teacher training is seen as preparing teachers with a set of discrete skills for a particular context, teacher education is aligned with a much broader, holistic view of preparation that concentrates on fundamental concepts and thinking processes that can guide teachers to be effective in whatever context they find themselves teaching (Crandall & Christison, 2016).

Implicit structure

Reflective teaching embodies a number of values. Firstly, learning to be a reflective practitioner and doing reflective teaching is part of the process of lifelong professional development. Another aspect of this is that gaining experience of teaching (that is, the number of years put into teaching) is not sufficient to develop expertise (Tsui, 2009).

Furthermore, we see the importance of self-direction. For example, Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) reiterate time and again that the key to development is that teachers themselves must be fully engaged and invested in the process in order to ensure authentic learning.

Thirdly, although self-initiated, there is a strong current of collaboration throughout the reflective practice model. Collaboration is seen as rewarding and valuable. However, it is not difficult to see how this can be problematic in some teaching contexts. Reflective

practice may be time and energy consuming and thus needs institutional support and recognition from administrators and colleagues (Murphy, 2014).

Signature Pedagogy #3: Engaging in a TESOL Teaching Practicum

Pedagogical knowledge

The importance of the teaching practicum seems widely recognized given it is a ubiquitous and core feature in TESOL programs. McKay (2000) cites a survey by Richards and Crookes (1988) that shows practicum courses are generally compulsory and involve both indirect and direct experiences.

Surface structure

Indirect experiences include observations of experienced teachers or of peers and viewing recorded lessons. Direct experiences include tutoring, micro-teaching to peers, assisting a classroom teacher, or lead teaching in actual classes. When lead teaching occurs, the student-teacher is often assigned a mentor who observes her/him teaching and conducts a follow up post-observation meeting.

Baecher (2012) notes that the teaching practicum was often placed at the end of the program but, in recent years, there is likely to be an integration of the practicum or field experiences with coursework throughout a program, and thus there is the potential for the practical experience to be more carefully and thoughtfully scaffolded. However, Baecher also points to a number of issues that impact integration, such as the wide range of home disciplines of TESOL program faculty, the relatively short nature of some programs, the majority of field supervisors or mentors being part-time or adjunct instructors, and the fuzziness in how fieldwork hours are utilized. In addition, another aspect of integration that deserves greater attention is incorporating aspects of being a teaching professional that go beyond one's own classroom walls to the wider context of fellow teachers, the school or institution administration, parents, and the community at large through, for example, service-learning (Wagner & Lopez, 2015).

Deep structure

The integration of the teaching practicum throughout a course reflects the changing assumptions in the field about how developing teachers learn how to teach. As noted earlier, there has been a move away from a transmission model of pedagogy where student-teachers are seen as consumers of received knowledge and as technicians, and thus, supposedly "learned" teaching knowledge first in more theoretical courses and then

“practiced” the teaching in practicum sites. There has been a movement to more sociocultural, constructivist, and experiential views with greater emphasis on becoming a thinking teacher or knower who can theorize practice (Richards, 2010) and on learning from experience (Wright, 2010) within the reflective practice framework.

Alongside this, the role of the teacher educator has shifted from an all-knowing expert to a facilitator and mediator of student-teacher learning. Experience and expertise are still valued as evidenced by the continuing importance of observations of others and being observed and mentored by others, but not purely for their value as models of effective teaching. For example, Faez (2016) shows that a teacher educator, in addition to modeling effective teaching strategies in her class, was also able to create a supportive learning community and a culture of caring, paying attention to issues of social justice and equity, as well as providing language and cultural support for immigrant teachers.

Implicit structure

One key value mentioned in the discussion of deep structure is that teachers are not simply technicians who implement tasks or activities in the classroom. Teachers have multifaceted identities, and it is partly through the teaching practicum that this sense of teacher identity is developed. For example, Kanno and Stuart (2011) argue that “becoming an L2 teacher requires the commitment of the self, not just playing an assigned role in the classroom” (p. 239). A familiar refrain from practicum instructors to student-teachers is “fake it till you make it”, underscoring the importance of taking on the “mantle” of teacher and the centrality of this to developing a teacher identity. Kanno and Stuart take this further, claiming that “the central project in which novice L2 teachers are involved in their teacher learning is not so much the acquisition of the knowledge of language teaching as it is the development of a teacher identity” (p. 249).

It is also important to note that what is distinctive to teacher identity in the realm of L2 teaching is that the majority of L2 teachers worldwide are non-native speakers of English, and thus have been ELLs themselves. The persistence of the myth of the superiority of the native speaker as a language teacher (i.e., one who is, *a priori*, a superior teacher of English by means of being born “into” the language) is an unfortunate challenge within TESOL. It threatens the perceived legitimacy and identity of non-native English-speaking teachers and is a continual source of “conflict and struggle” (Tsui, 2011, p. 34) for many, as well as a source of discrimination in hiring practices in many countries.

Signature Pedagogy #4: Educational Technology for TESOL Teacher Training

Technology knowledge

In many TESOL programs, student-teachers are introduced to technology and may know how to use it for task-like purposes (e.g., submitting assignments, creating lesson plans, communication, or tool analysis). They may be asked to identify and discuss the different modes of technology. Although student-teacher awareness of technology may be raised, these types of tasks may not lead to a deep understanding of how to effectively implement the technology or to recognize and realize the potential for innovative technology use in EAL classrooms (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2011), nor is technology infused within the program's curriculum as a whole (Arnold, 2013). Many TESOL professionals struggle in their own classrooms with the technological issues and planning that they have had little training or preparation with (Kessler & Plakans, 2008). It is incumbent upon current programs to offer hands-on practical experiences for teachers, modelling how to use technology in pedagogically sound ways (Pawan, Wiechart, Warren, & Park, 2016).

Because there is a difference in planning, instructing, and classroom management with technology, situational learning opportunities for logistical planning, "in the moment" technology issues, troubleshooting, technology use and engagement training, and trial and error must be included through authentic modeling and practice in each educational program, regardless of context, platform or style of content delivery (online, on ground, synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid, flipped) (TESOL Technology Standards, 2011).

Surface structures

For the TESOL educator's classroom, as with most educators, surface structures consist of lesson planning and the organization of content.

When we look at integrating technology into the EAL classroom, teachers need to be educated about the why and the how of using technology (Reinders, 2009). They need to be exposed to a variety of tech tools that can be used. Incorporating tech tools into TESOL training programs in a way that demonstrates usage of the tool and that maximizes its learning potential is crucial. In the face-to-face setting, this may be demonstrated, for example, using cell phones, tablets, or apps. The teacher can demonstrate the classroom management aspects of classes with technology and allow for micro-teaching demonstrations to take place with the student-teachers.

In online settings, the technology capabilities change. It may not be as logistically easy to model and give chances for student-teachers to practice using technology from a teacher's perspective. In order to include this surface knowledge and experience in the online classroom, the assignments and discussion boards will need to change to adapt according to the needs and logistics. By replacing the traditional discussion board question response format, it is possible to incorporate different tools and apps within the discussion boards, giving increased opportunity for student-teachers to use and become confident with various technology tools on their own, prior to teaching (Gallardo et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2011). An example, drawn from our professional experience, includes creating a voicethread to answer the question, respond to others, and present information. Instead of learning about the tool, the student-teachers are able to actually use the tool in a similar manner as they would in a future class (online or on-ground) and use it to demonstrate knowledge.

Deep structures

TESOL educators assume that student-teachers need ample realistic opportunities to practice with the use of traditional teaching techniques, as well as with the implementation of technology tools in order to develop a confident and competent practice that will unfold once inside their own classroom. Echoing sentiments noted earlier in this paper, Rankin and Becker (2006) state "a model of teacher development based on knowledge transmission is, at its core, profoundly inadequate" (p. 366). Therefore, learning *about* technology and instruction (e.g., solely via the reading of articles and one-sided modeling) needs to be expanded upon to include practical and realistic opportunities for *use* and *integration*. The incorporation of technology in the EAL classroom is a double-edged sword—the teacher must teach the fundamentals of the English language as well as the use of the technology, but the technology is more of a means to an end. It is not the ultimate goal of the language classroom. In order to be able to do this, the new teacher must gain confidence and agility not only with the language content, but with the tech tools as well, selecting, evaluating, and integrating technology (Al-Seghayer, 2017). This confidence is garnered through competence, which is gained through practice and incorporating feedback from the TESOL educator, peers, and students. The developing practitioner eventually learns how to think like a TESOL professional through this sequence of practice opportunities and incorporation of feedback.

In order for the student-teacher to gain experience and confidence, realistic practice opportunities and reflected-upon critical incidents (Richards & Farrell, 2005) need to be provided in all three contexts: on ground, online synchronous, and online asynchronous. The same Present, Practice and Produce (PPP) model that is popular in many language classrooms can be used for teacher development activities to incorporate the use of tech

tools in the classroom. For example, the teacher educator can present the tech tool to student-teachers and demo its use. Then student-teachers can be given an opportunity to practice with it and finally produce an independent lesson that incorporates the new technology. Giving student-teachers the opportunity, for example, to create videos, surveys and quizzes, and interactive games enables them to use and implement the tools, rather than merely experiencing them from only a student's perspective. Modeling and use such as this can lead to increased confidence and logistical know-how when the student-teachers go into the classroom (Gallardo et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2011). The PPP model in this example allows for flexibility while still providing a structured approach to ongoing exploration.

Preparation, repetition, and experience can create the confidence that teachers need to be able to deliver effective lessons, especially as unforeseen elements arise during class, as they always do. To gain experience in dealing with the contingencies of teaching (with tech and without), the teacher educator can then throw student-teachers a curve ball by intentionally introducing glitches and behavioral issues that need to be addressed simultaneously during the lesson. As Farrell & Baecher (2017) note, "many (language) teacher education programs do not prepare novices to recognize such teaching dilemmas." (p. 3). Giving student-teachers hosting or administrative rights to the tech tools, and the responsibility to be in charge of troubleshooting when problems occur in the classroom, can lead to successful and professional TESOL educators who can navigate technology, stay calm under pressure, and ultimately have a plan B in mind if something goes wrong (Al-Seghayer, 2017).

In the EAL classroom, teachers need the ability to multitask and be ready for all contingencies. When novice teachers enter the classroom, it can be challenging to find the listening track, for example, while simultaneously keeping students on task. Knowing how to use new technology and guide students through it at the same time may not be second nature to a novice teacher. How can this be addressed in TESOL educator programs? In all types of programs, tools such as the Google Suite (Forms, Docs, Slides, etc.), sharing and polling tools, and game-based apps (e.g., Kahoots, Socrative) can be used. In the on-ground TESOL program, student-teachers can practice through micro-teaching demonstrations using technology and teaching at the same time to build their confidence. In online TESOL programs, synchronous courses can include practice teaching online with checking chat and verbal responses, controlling the class through muting participants with noisy backgrounds, and practice using a wide range of teaching tools in the course. In general, microteaching opportunities, especially for novice student-teachers, can boost confidence and teaching skills (Ralph, 2014). In online asynchronous programs, the practice of using and teaching with technology can be done through asynchronous activities such as video

creation and screen sharing tasks, as well as through leading forum-based discussions to promote social and teaching presence.

Overall, many of the activities mentioned above can be modified or adapted to work in all three contexts. It is important to note that the practices should be followed up with a deconstruction or reflective activity. Student-teachers can look back on their practices with a critical eye and use their experiences and knowledge from the program to determine what changes should take place. It is optimal if student-teachers have realistic opportunities to “produce” for authentic environments with real students, and even larger classes if possible, not just demo or micro-teaching lessons within the TESOL classroom. From our experience we have observed that the connection between the active (and real) and reflective practices can lead to deeper understanding and the ability to act like a professional.

Implicit Structures

“One implicit structure of all signature pedagogies in education (i.e., beliefs) is that students do not learn in isolation. Three key and interconnected elements of a community of inquiry are (1) social presence; (2) teaching presence; and (3) cognitive presence (Akyol & Garrison, 2008)” (As cited in Eaton, Brown, Schroeder, Lock, & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 15). The community that is created in online teaching and learning environments can be cultivated as a signature pedagogy when the value of creating authentic relationships between students and their instructor, as well as among the students themselves, is actively and intentionally developed.

Another implicit structure of TESOL education is that the English language and technology should be made accessible for all. These two skills are seen to be equalizers that provide opportunities for employability and advancement (Gorski & Clark, 2002). Hand-in-hand with this belief are the value and attitude of embracing diversity. Furthermore, the concept of World Englishes (Kachru, 1990) recognizes that English, like technology, is a tool for people to connect and share.

Teacher learning is “normative and lifelong, emerging out of and through experiences in social contexts: as learners in classrooms and schools, as participants in professional teacher education programs, and later as teachers in the institutions where teachers work” (Johnson & Golombek, 2003). By modeling lifelong learning, TESOL educators can inspire their student-teachers to do the same. Connected to this is the idea of the teacher as a facilitator to learning, not the “sage on the stage” (Harmer, 2007). This is particularly useful in contexts where teachers are culturally expected to be superior and to have all of the answers. It is quite liberating for teachers in these contexts to embrace the belief that no

one knows everything; we are all continually learning, and consequently, it is acceptable to make mistakes. This seems particularly appropriate for the use of technology in the classroom. While knowledge and confidence with the use of technology help teachers to feel more comfortable with its use, if they feel that they need to know everything, they may feel inhibited regarding experimenting with new technologies.

Holding student-teachers accountable for fair and ethical content use (CC BY, copyright) can instill academic maturity. Task-oriented discussion questions or assignments can begin to create awareness in materials use, and once equipped with the know-how, student-teachers are able to uphold these fair and ethical use standards. Assignments, such as creating content with American Disability Act (ADA) or equivalent, compliancy, creating materials for mobile access, or creating templates, can promote awareness, and provide student-teachers the chance to see the challenges that different contexts and regions face and how technology use (or non-use) impacts the EAL classroom.

Looking Ahead: The Future of the Profession

After examining a number of signature pedagogies and how they correspond to teaching with technology, it seems, the focus of technology in TESOL education is shifting away from its use solely as a tool to convey information. As technology advances, increased opportunities arise on how technology can be used to mirror the needs of EAL students and create creative opportunities for instruction.

Online practicum

The traditional face-to-face practicum already has to account for the varied contextual needs of each student-teacher practitioner. Technology has further impacted this element of the practicum due to the ever-increasingly digital environment. There are more options for online teaching, and more abundant options for observing and completing practicum teaching. Traditional practicum experiences are offered “on ground”. Student-teachers typically find, or are assigned, an observation and teaching location, then record their teaching, and may be observed by a mentor/faculty member, and finally complete reflective tasks. By shifting to an online class practicum, student-teachers may have the ability and increased opportunity to observe classes for their intended teaching context. However, it may be more challenging to get permission, be observed, or record lessons in an online practicum. We acknowledge the need for further investigations to be conducted on this topic to determine if these anecdotal observations have an empirical basis.

It can generally be assumed that student-teachers have already experienced models of on-ground teaching, whether as students or as teachers, so they may have clearer notions or a working knowledge of what constitutes quality teaching. However, there are fewer models of online synchronous courses, both in language learning and TESOL teacher education programs. For even the most experienced instructors, teaching online can be frustrating, confusing, and intimidating (King, 2002). There are various factors that may cause TESOL educators who perform well in on-ground classes to not necessarily perform to their capacity in online classes (APQC, 2013). For example, they may feel disconnected from their students or find classroom management more of a challenge. Opportunities for online experiences should be included throughout a teacher education program, and elements of pedagogy can be adapted, specifically in the digital environment, by using technological tools, lesson planning, presentations, group and pair work, critical and creative thinking, eliciting, and feedback (Brown, 2007), so that student-teachers can gain confidence for the online teaching platform. Acknowledging the differences between the on-ground and online pedagogical styles leads us to encourage inclusion of both modalities in a practicum and in a TESOL educator program.

Virtual reality

While online courses have become more prevalent since the turn of the millennium, and no doubt the online practicum is a reality that many TESOL programs will develop in the near future, thinking even further ahead, there is evidence to suggest that virtual reality will become the norm as we move ahead into the twenty-first century (Garcia-Ruiz, Edwards, El-Seoud, & Aquino-Santos, 2008; Kozlova & Priven, 2015; O'Brien & Levy, 2008).

Virtual reality is both a concept and practice that still seems futuristic for both teachers and learners, but may crystallize as part of teaching and learning practice at some point. We take this position because there is evidence to support the notion that forward-looking TESOL educators are already encouraging inquiry and dialogue on this topic (Kozlova & Priven, 2015) and we contend that others will soon follow suit. Virtual reality may well be the next big advance in learning technology for TESOL, as well as other disciplines.

Co-constructed teaching

As digital natives come into TESOL training programs, it opens a new level of mutual learning. Due to the newness of some technologies and therefore the lack of history and consecrated best practices, co-constructed knowledge of new technology tools by both the teacher educator and the student-teacher are more likely to occur, yet the teacher educator can still assume the role of facilitator and mentor by guiding the process and anticipating classroom pedagogical needs. Technology is quickly evolving, making it impossible for teacher-educators to establish best practices for each type in each context. Perhaps the potential for a deepening of co-constructed knowledge could contribute to a model of life-long learning and reflection for student-teachers and teacher-educators alike.

Conclusion

As reflective practice is one of the signature pedagogies of the TESOL profession we have highlighted in our study (based on our context), it seems apt to conclude with a contemplation about what it means for a profession to emerge during a time of significant technological advancement. It has been estimated that by 2020, fifty percent of all high school classes will be offered online (Christensen, Horn, and Johnson, 2017). Teacher education programs, including TESOL, and professional development that focuses solely on learning in a traditional bricks-and-mortar classroom may be doing a disservice to those TESOL professionals who are only at the beginning stages of their career.

No longer is language-learning technology confined to a language lab (Eaton, 2010). Technology has become intimately and inextricably linked to language learning and teaching. Online and blended learning options continue to emerge and expand across the world. Social media has been explored as a means to engage TESOL professionals in professional development dialogue (Ciancio, Hirashiki, Wagner, Eaton, Sahr, & Howland, 2017). It would not be unreasonable to speculate that socially networked ways of teaching and learning become even more infused with the TESOL profession in the coming years.

For TESOLers, rapid technological advances in learning have occurred concurrently with the emergence and development of the profession itself. This leaves us with questions about how we best prepare future practitioners and leaders of the profession, as well as how we can effectively support those with lower levels of technology literacy access or English language literacy to develop professionally. Teachers cannot be expected to immediately implement a new technology without training or time to reflect deeply on how they will use it to enhance their students' learning (Jacobsen & Lock, 2004). Twenty-first century teachers must think in new ways and not simply repeat the pedagogies that they learned by observation when they themselves were students (Jacobsen & Lock, 2014). For TESOL professionals, engaging in deep reflection about the signature pedagogies that have shaped, and will continue to shape our profession, can help us to make wise decisions about how we want to educate our student-teachers and teach language learners.

We recognize that a limitation of our work is that it is written from the North American contexts in which we work. We conclude with a call to action to our international colleagues to contribute to this dialogue by sharing their own perspectives and insights on the ideas we have presented in this report. One key point upon which to reflect is that it is critical for TESOL professionals not only to develop technology literacy that will serve them well in their teaching practice today, but also to look towards the future to understand how technology can benefit both their own teaching practice, as well as students' learning, in the years to come.

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