Supervising TESOL Practicum at the Adult ESL Community Outreach Program

JELENA COLOVIC-MARKOVIC
West Chester University of Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

In this article, I reflect on my experience as a TESOL practicum course professor supervising MA students who undertook service-learning-based practicum at the Adult ESL Community Outreach Program (COP) I organized and offered in conjunction and concurrently with the course. Having explained how I followed Perren's (2013) Strategic Step framework for service-learning projects, I describe the roles I assumed (supervisor, mentor, and course professor), reflect on challenges I faced and how I overcame them, and note the benefits I incurred specifically those related to video-mediated post teaching reflections. I conclude with recommendations for teacher educators interested in offering service-learning-informed teaching practicums.

Keywords: *TESOL teacher preparation; supervising practicum; video-mediated post-teaching observation conferences; service-learning, community-based ESL program*

Introduction

My office was on the second level, but this evening like most other evenings over the last six years, I relocated to a hallway or an open classroom to be closer to the classrooms where my TESOL practicum students would be teaching their adult ESL community classes. With a list of participants in hand, I was standing behind large double doors scrutinizing everyone walking through trying to discern, in the waves of crowd, those coming for ESL lessons. I had met most of them during placement testing, but the several who completed the assessment with my students were new to me. The incoming

> learners would give themselves away by their wandering eyes surveying the building entry and the hallway unsure which way to go. Once their gaze rested on my nametag and their eyes signaled they recognized my name, I would extend a welcome and show them to the classrooms where my practicum students were waiting. They were given a basic structure to follow, needs assessment administration, getting- to-know-you activity, a mini lesson on some language aspect that stood out in the placement tests, an introduction of a weekly packet with out-of-class tasks, and the freedom to decide how to go about creating and delivering each stage in their lesson. Despite this, the first day of class brought a mix of excitement and nervousness. Knowledge that they would be co-teaching with one or two other classmates did little to quell their anxiety. However, as more learners started filtering in and my students began to interact with them, it was noticeable that their nerves gradually settled and positive emotions took over. (from research notes, Spring 2018)

This article reflects on my experience as a TESOL practicum course professor supervising MA students who undertook their compulsory course fieldwork at the Adult ESL Community Outreach Program (COP). This community-based ESL program is described in Author (2023), and its key features are summarized in this paper. This experience differed from other teaching practicum programs in which the instructor of record for the practicum course observes the student teachers (STs) at their placement site or has the observation task delegated to an adjunct or part-time mentor and in which STs are placed in existing classrooms to work with a mentor cooperating or to work independently with an established curriculum in settings such as Intensive English Programs on their home university campuses, community colleges, adult education settings (Farelly, 2019). In our case, I, as a teacher educator (TE), set up the adult

ESL community program as a field site for the students enrolled in the course, we shared the responsibility of conducting placements of program participants, and STs had a sole responsibility of developing and teaching their own 90-minute lessons once a week for 10 weeks.

The program design was informed by the service-learning pedagogy (e.g., Cooper, 2002; Lin, 2007; Perren, 2013; Rosenberger, 2000) viewed as "action and reflection integrated with academic curriculum to enhance student learning and to meet community needs." (Rosenberg, 2000, p.24). Specifically, I followed Perren's (2013) Strategic Step framework, a set of seven empirically grounded guidelines for planning, implementing, participating in, and evaluating service-learning projects that derived from research in intensive English courses for ESL students. Although the TESOL MA practicum course was situated in a different context, Parren's model was useful in helping ensure the service-learning practicum model was consistent. I followed each step outlined by Perren, but my procedures diverged because of my student population, their goals for the service, and the absence of community partner organization. While the proposed framework was directed at ESL students in an intensive English program who were undertaking service-learning projects offered by community partners to improve their English language skills, the Adult ESL COP was created by the practicum course professor for ESL STs who were developing their English language teaching practice. Table 1 presents how the practicum experience at the Adult ESL COP was structured with reference to Perren's seven steps for implementing service-learning.

Before each Adult ESL COP iteration, STs were informed that the program had been created in response to a community need for affordable ESL classes and a student need for additional options for the practicum course field experience requirement. They were introduced

to the program features and requirements. For practicum at Adult ESL COP, STs were to focus on developing learners' communicative language skills and development of learner autonomy, one of the essentials for successful language learning (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). To that end, STs were asked to create lessons that integrated the skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing and had clear language targets and included instruction in language learning strategies. They were tasked with selecting a minimum of one book for extensive reading and creating weekly packets that participants completed outside of class. In terms of content, the weekly packet tasks were reviews and extensions of the previously studied material, previews of the subsequent lessons, and reflections on extensive reading. STs were informed that, in addition to planning and delivering lessons, they would create an instrument for a needs assessment and a situational analysis (Richards, 2017) for their class; design a course syllabus that drew on the results of the needs and placement assessments; integrate extensive reading, and create, select, and/or adapt instructional materials based on he needs of and resources available to their learners. STs agreed to submit their lesson plan outlines and weekly packets for my review two days before teaching and, need be, to make revisions before using the materials in instruction. They had the option to request copies from me a day before their ESL classes.

Classes were offered in the evenings and started the sixth week of the semester after key lesson planning concepts (e.g., backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe 2005)), principles of instructed second language acquisition (Ellis & Shintani, 2014), and curriculum design (Richards, 2017) had been reinforced. They concluded the final week of the semester. Not everyone in the practicum course was teaching in the Adult ESL program, but those who did received training in administration and interpretation of the results of a placement test used in the Adult ESL COP and review fundamentals of teaching adult ESL learners (Graham & Walsh,

1996; Murray & Christison, 2020). As STs were teaching their adult ESL classes, our lesson topics centered mainly on reflective teaching, ESL teachers' and student beliefs, classroom management, instructional modeling, collaborative learning and grouping structures, and professionalism.

Table 1

Adult ESL COP Procedures Using the Strategic Steps Framework (Perren, 2013)

Step	Project Specific Tasks
1	Planning and Logistics
	Scheduling (Time and Location) and Parking • TE scheduled the program to fit STs' class and community members' (work) schedules. • TE identified, connected with, and sought assistance from a staff member (within a home college/department) knowledgeable about university structures and able to help with securing classrooms. • TE collected information from the university parking services about free parking for community participants. Advertising • TE created flyers for electronic and paper advertising that include the information about when the program is offered, who the ESL instructors are, how to register for the program, and how to contact the program supervisor. • With assistance of STs, TESOL MA program alumni, departmental colleagues, university faculty, staff, and marketing services, TE advertised the program using traditional and digital strategies (e.g., distributing electronic and paper flyers on campus and through local public school ESL programs, libraries, non-profit organizations, churches, cultural and medical centers, and personal connections; using university digital signage, event calendar, and employee weekly newsletter; maintaining presence on the department website and making posts on the department Facebook page) Funding • TE sought administrator's assistance with cost center creation and/or program funding

2	Obtaining Materials and Developing Background Information

For the Community Participants

- TE drafted correspondence for the prospective community participants (e.g., general program information; scheduling placement testing; parking information, etc.).
- TE obtained a campus map and marked the location of classes and parking lots (available free of charge) for distribution to community participants.

For the STs

- TE revised practicum course syllabus to include Adult ESL COP as a practicum field site.
- TE inquired about interest in the program from the TESOL MA candidates.
- TE collected teaching resources (textbooks and online materials) and made them available to STs at her office and through the course learning management system.
- TE selected, collected, created, and organized sample materials: needs assessments, lesson plans, weekly packets and weekly packet checklist

For both aforementioned groups

- TE adapted and created placement test and evaluation criteria.
- TE built a list of extensive readers and sample items for the extensive reading library.

3	Preparing for Field Experience

Preparing Community Participants

- TE communicated about the program to the prospective participants (e.g., lessons taught by volunteer ESL instructors who are graduate students, cost, location, time, placement testing, lessons, parking) and STs (adult learners' characteristics, program requirements: planned lessons, weekly packets & extensive reading; team teaching).
- TE registered community members for classes.

Preparing STs

- TE communicated about the program to the STs (adult learners' characteristics; program features: planned lessons, weekly packets & extensive reading; team teaching; program requirements: submission of lesson materials for professor review prior to teaching).
- TE discussed professionalism development including providing professional service to the community
- TE trained STs on how to administer the placement test and interpret test results.
- TE planned integration of assignments and reflective practices into field work
- STs reviewed program requirements, resources, sample materials, and extensive reading principles.

4	Implementing Field experience & Civic Engagement

Team teaching

- TE formed teaching teams based on STs' preferences and at random, facilitated team collaboration

Placement Testing

- TE and STs shared the responsibility of placement testing: STs administered one or more placement tests whereas the supervisor administered all the remaining placement tests. Both reviewed placement test results and made placement recommendations.

Needs Assessment

- STs created and administered needs assessments under the mentorship and supervision of TE.

Planned lessons and Weekly Assignment Packets

- STs planned lessons, created weekly packets, and submitted both to TE for review prior to teaching. Need be, STs revised the aforementioned materials based on TE's feedback.
- STs made their own copies of lesson materials or requested them from TE.

Extensive Reading

- STs selected a minimum of one book for extensive reading to integrate in instruction and included readings in the weekly packets.
- Using the program fee and/or program funds, TE purchased extensive readers for the classes.

5	Reflecting and Connecting

- TE integrated ongoing reflective assignments to connect the course content and teaching practice at the Adult ESL COP: in-class discussions and reflection on field experience; (online dialogue) post-teaching reflections; two video-mediated post teaching reflections, one conducted during a post- observation conference and the other through a written report (i.e., teaching demonstration analysis paper); and an end-of-program reflection.
- TE collected feedback on the ESL classes from community members and inquired about their interest in returning the following year.
- TE reflected on the feedback received from the STs and community members to make improvements to the next Adult ESL COP iteration.

Another distinct feature of the program was its integration into the schedule for the TESOL practicum course. In the first five weeks of the semester, STs attended the practicum class for the full three hours. Starting the sixth week, they attended the class for the first hour and taught their ESL classes for the remaining 90 minutes.

Student Teachers

Between Spring 2015, when it was established, and Spring 2025, the Adult ESL COP has been offered to eight ST cohorts, that is, eight times, in spring in conjunction and concurrently with the TESOL practicum course. Out of 55 STs in the eight cohorts, 44 used the Adult ESL COP to fulfill the practicum course field requirement. To date, five cohorts (Spring 2018, 2019, 2023, 2024, 2025) comprised of thirty STs were asked to allow me access to their course-related submissions for research purposes and twenty-two agreed to participate. Their characteristics are broadly representative of the larger student group and described in the next paragraph. Illustrative samples presented in the following sections of the paper are drawn from the course work of this ST group only.

STs undertaking field work at Adult ESL COP had a range of backgrounds and teaching experience. Prior to enrolling in the practicum course, they had completed between 40 and 60 hours of course-related field experience. Fourteen earned or were on route to receiving ESL Specialist Certification, a required qualification for teaching multi-lingual learners in Pennsylvania's public schools. While most were domestic students, either American-born (n = 20) or naturalized US citizens (n = 1), there was one international student. STs spoke Arabic (n = 1), English (n = 19), Portuguese (n = 1), Russian (n = 1) as their native language. Their English teaching experience, outside the compulsory course-related field work, ranged from none to seven years, working with students ranging in age from preschool to university in ESL and/or EFL contexts. At the Adult ESL COP, they taught beginning (n=5), intermediate (n=11), and advanced (n=6) ESL classes.

In their end-of-program reflections (see Author, 2023), STs from Sprig 2018 and 2019 cohorts reported that the teaching practicum at the Adult ESL COP offered a number of

affordances (e.g., authentic teaching context to connect theory to practice; own classrooms to lead, opportunities to try various teaching techniques and hone teaching skills, supervisor's support, etc.) and was perceived as rewarding on a professional and personal level, but was also accompanied by few challenges. One was inconsistent homework completion; another major challenge was that the Adult COP learners were taking the classes voluntarily. Although it was communicated to them that attendance was expected and highly beneficial considering the class meetings were limited (one per week) and lasting a relatively short time (10 weeks), some were arriving late, and few stopped attending.

My Role as Supervisor

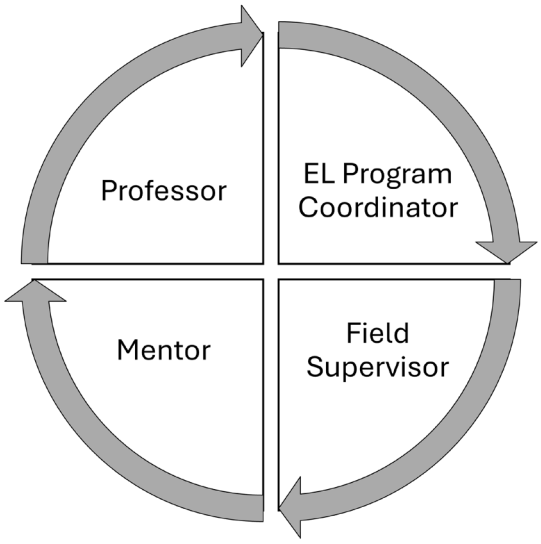
Supervision in TESOL teacher education typically includes observing a ST deliver a classroom lesson at their placement site, discussing this lesson with the ST, and making recommendations about what to continue and what to change (Baecher et al., 2024; Cirocki et al. 2020). While STs may teach their own ESL class independently (Arshavskaya, 2014; Numrich, 1998) or in teams (Golombek, 2015; Kamhi-Stein et al., 2021), they are commonly placed to work with a cooperating teacher who serves as their mentor (Farrelly, 2019; Swoyer & Lindahl, 2023; Walter, 2023). Teaching a practicum course may or may not involve supervision because the responsibility is often assigned to an adjunct or part-time mentor (Bailey, 2006; Baecher et al., 2014).

However, when supervision is delegated to university professors teaching a practicum course, the effectiveness of their work in schools and programs that serve as field placements has been questioned. In their examination of supervision in the context of K-12 teacher education, Wilkens et al. (2015) describe university supervisors' positions as "weak" with respect to field placements (and teaching) because their work takes place in schools "where they are not employed, using curriculum and materials over which they have no control,

under the day-to-day mentoring of cooperating teachers with whom they may or may not agree" (p. 332). Although gained through a review of studies in K-12 context, the insights are relevant to the area of TESOL teacher education. Similarly, professors of TESOL practicum tasked with ST supervision are likely to find themselves navigating often complicated roles between the university, school systems, and cooperating teachers' classrooms and may need to find the areas where their guidance can be applied to STs' practice.

Figure 1

Four roles of a TESOL professor supervising service-learning-informed practicum



Teaching a practicum course alongside organizing a program to serve as a field site requires professors to perform multiple interconnected roles (see Figure 1). As professor, in line with the practicum course objectives, I emphasized meeting learners' needs, reflective teaching, lesson planning, matching teaching actions with beliefs about professional trends, personal teaching philosophy, and personal values; developing awareness of how personal actions and attitudes as a teacher influence students' actions and attitudes; building personal skills in teaching ESL students; and developing professionalism including providing

professional service to the community. As program coordinator, I created flyers and marketed the program both independently and with the assistance of others. With administrative support, I secured technology-equipped classrooms and set up a cost center for payment deposit. I created a placement test and communicated with prospective participants about the program and placement test scheduling. While straddling both program coordinator and field supervisor duties, I created an ESL teacher resource library that included textbooks and online materials; an extensive readers recommendation list as well as an initial extensive reading library; and samples of needs assessments, lesson plans, and weekly homework packets. I trained STs to conduct placement testing and interpret the results. As supervisor, I monitored their lesson-planning and weekly homework packet creation, video-recorded and observed their classes, and held post observation conferences (POSs). As mentor, I supported them in identifying ways of improving ESL COP lesson content and delivery, listened to their concerns about adult learners' attendance and homework completion, and guided them in finding solutions to dealing with learners' specific needs and resolutions to team-teaching issues with their peers.

Unlike the aforementioned practicum supervision of university professors, the service-learning-based practicum afforded me supervision at a program that the STs and I created, using the curriculum and materials that we could shape, and independent of the mentorship with which we might not align. When we shared feedback and solutions to problems, they were applicable to the teaching context. Although there was no lack of areas where my guidance could be applied to STs' practice and no need to navigate between the university, schools, and cooperating teachers' classrooms, the practicum model created challenges discussed in the next section.

Teaching a TESOL practicum course was not a new experience for me. I had taught the course first at the undergraduate level as a Teaching Assistant (TA) during my doctoral studies and then at the graduate level as a faculty member. The novelty, however, lay in the practicum course model that brought about new responsibilities (e.g., ESL program coordination, mentoring, supervising lesson planning, etc.). Another familiar experience was undertaking teaching practicum in a community- based program. During my graduate studies, I co-taught evening community adult ESL classes at an English language center where an Intensive English Program (IEP) was held during the day. Our learners had already been placed according to their levels. The professor of record taught the practicum course, observed our teaching, and provided post-observation feedback. The mentoring role was delegated mainly to a TA for the course and somewhat to IEP skill-area coordinators. Although my memory of the specific program features was hazy, I remembered its benefits to my professional development. As the practicum course was likely to become part of my regular teaching schedule, I wanted the course field-work component to be a meaningful and valuable experience for my STs similar to the one I had. I therefore set up a track in the practicum course to be integrally twined with the Adult ESL COP and my observations of the STs' classes. Course key assignments ((online dialogue) post-teaching reflections, substitute-teacher-ready lesson plans, and two video-recorded professor observations, one followed by a post-observation conference and the other by a written post- teaching self-reflection) were integrated in their field work with adult ESL learners from the community. It was also possible to build the professional portfolio artifacts assignment (Teaching Philosophy, job-ready CV, lesson plan(s) and any additional three ST-selected relevant items), another main course assignment, using the materials developed for teaching at the Adult ESL COP.

Overcoming Challenges and Incurring Benefits

Supervising the teaching practicum at Adult ESL COP, I dealt with several challenges, both unexpected and anticipated, and incurred professional and personal benefits. The most trying difficulty was recruiting enough participants from the community to form separate classes for the interested practicum students that would sustain looming absenteeism and attrition. Despite expressed interest in the program, there were ESL adults, including those from the university community, who were unable to join due to conflicting work and/or family schedules, and among those that did join, there were some who were occasionally absent from or late to class due to various reasons most often associated with their personal schedules.

The Adult ESL COP participants, like many other learners in community ESL classes (e.g., Carter et al., 2022; Guy, 2005; Orem, 2000), faced conflicting priorities. Juggling work and/or family responsibilities with ESL classes made it very difficult to commit to a regular class schedule. Although the program followed a fixed schedule in terms of timing and frequency to allow for room scheduling and lesson preparation time, STs were flexible in permitting participants' school-age children to work silently in the same classrooms where their parents were learning English to support those with childcare needs. When adult learners tried to participate, balancing personal lives and education was challenging because their schedules often continued to affect the ability to engage fully.

While revising this reflection and reviewing my students' reflections from the first few program iterations, I began to consider the possibility that initially, the target community may not have been fully aware of the program's existence. Despite what seemed like extensive outreach and marketing efforts, it was possible that the advertising might not have reached enough of the right audience. Although we all lived in the same area, the world in which the program was marketed and the world in which many of the prospective participants lived may

not have intersected greatly. This insight is supported by a reflection from a ST who, when describing advantages of teaching at the Adult ESL COP, pointed out the difference between environments in which they and the participants lived.

> [. . .] I think the advantages were just getting to know people from the community that are ESL learners. It's nice to just get to talk with them and sharing our ideas, experiences, and stories. It is also interesting to hear about their lives in the area because it allows me to see the area that I grew up in my entire life in a new perspective. (post-teaching observation, Adult ESL COP 2018)

In the years that followed, the range of strategies for program promotion expanded from relying on social media, online presence, and flyer distribution to using personal connections and advertising through public services and businesses, among other approaches. Table 1 presents all the currently used strategies.

An additional unexpected challenge was classroom scheduling. As has been noted previously, ESL classes at the Adult ESL COP were to be integrated into the final 90 minutes of the graduate practicum class from the sixth to fifteenth instructional week of the semester. Our classroom had been scheduled for the practicum course, and we needed an additional two to three easily accessible technology-equipped classrooms nearby, preferably in the same building as my office, copier, and classroom supplies. The university provided a comprehensive web-based scheduling platform for viewing booked rooms and making requests for classroom spaces overseen by the Office of the University Registrar, but my submitting the criteria and preferences for Adult ESL COP program did not return the wanted

results: The program was scheduled outside the regular academic timetable and competing for limited classroom space during the early evening peak hours when undergraduate and graduate courses overlapped and student events were underway. The following excerpt from a post-teaching reflection gave a glimpse of the room scheduling challenge from the ST's perspective:

> [. . .] 2. Honestly, the challenges of this lesson was that we had people coming in and out of both our lessons because they though an event was happening in the room. (Someone put on the WCU website that it started at 6 when it really started at 7. Since the event started at 7 and we had planned to go over our time, we ended up having to switch rooms in the middle of the lesson. After we switched rooms, we were able to continue the lesson, but it was still cut short and I was not able to finish it completely. To make sure this does not happen again, we will have to make sure the room isn't booked after us if we want to extend our lesson time. [. . .] (post-teaching reflection, April 26, Adult ESL COP 2018)

One option I was offered was to circumvent the Registrar's online scheduling processes and reserve rooms internally at the university library. While on the surface, this seemed like a possible solution, in practice, the library study rooms, like most other rooms outside the Registrar's purview, would have been a poor fit for everyone involved. Tucked away from the main building hallways, striped of appropriate classroom technology, and located relatively far from the practicum course classroom, the rooms were unsuitable for the ESL population mostly unfamiliar with the university campus and buildings, STs whose training needed to include using and navigating classroom technology (projector, internet, technological applications), and lastly, me, their supervisor who would be hauling video recording equipment for at least two thirds of program and may be asked to retrieve classroom

supplies or make last minute copies for the ESL classes.

It quickly became clear that integrating the intended community program schedule with the academic schedule could not be carried out independently using the available online scheduling resource nor could it be handled outside the centralized university's scheduling processes. I learned that it was essential to identify and communicate program needs to a staff member within my college's chain of command who was knowledgeable about university scheduling procedures and able to request appropriate rooms on my behalf. Further, it was necessary to prioritize among my preferences, and reserving rooms in the building where my office was located was not a priority. With the help of the administrative assistant to the associate dean who later became our department secretary and knew the university structures and process well, I was able to reserve easily accessible, fully equipped campus rooms near one another, and more recently, in the same building as my office, copier, and classroom supplies.

In retrospect, developing an understanding of my university's structures and learning how to navigate institutional constraints were important factors in the program's success. While learning about a home institution is something that often takes years (Seiden & Mitchell, 2017), in my case, as a result of establishing the service-learning-informed practicum option, this knowledge was gained within just a few months.

Unlike the previously noted challenges, communicating with prospective participants about the program in languages different from those I spoke was something expected. As native-Spanish speakers represented our largest target population, a former departmental colleague translated a program flyer to Spanish. I arranged with several of my departmental

colleagues teaching Spanish to interpret during phone inquiries and edit my e-mail responses put together using online dictionary and translation engines. Cognizant of my colleagues' limited time and aware of the predictability of program inquiries, I gradually began encouraging email correspondence with prospective participants and relying more heavily on online translation tools.

Supervision, among other aspects, often involves finding a balance between allowing STs the freedom to learn from experience and offering guidance to inform and refine their teaching practice (e.g., Gilliland, 2023; Bailey, 2006). This meant that my responsibility as a supervisor entailed giving STs space to search out solutions and find the processes for accomplishing goals on their own while, at the same time, stepping in when I noticed my support and guidance were necessary.

Teaching adults meant that the STs had to learn how to adapt their assumptions about teaching and lesson planning to a different set of student expectations within a particular teaching context. Most completed their previous field work observing and working in Pk-12 contexts and some were teaching their own elementary, middle-school, or high-school students. When they were assigned to a class of adult ESL learners in a university context, they quickly found that they needed to rethink their activities and materials to ensure they were suitable for the students' age and teaching context, an adaptation they perceived as an affordance of the placement site upon completion of the field work (see Colovic-Markovic, 2023). In the teaching demonstration analysis paper, STs were asked to reflect on their perceived growth during practicum, specifically between the two observation points. Upon watching the footage of the second teaching demonstration in Week 7 and comparing it to the first video from Week 4, a ST from the eight cohort noted the improvements in materials use and discussed the implications of the takeaways on his future

> [. . .] Another improvement I noticed was my choice in materials and representations in the slideshow. I made sure to carefully reflect the meaning of words and concepts with appropriate graphics, unlike when I used an elephant to describe big in the previous demonstration. I also chose a reading about an immigrant adult bus driver, whereas last time I had created a less relatable story about a 12-year-old's birthday party.
>
> [. . .] Moving forward, I would like to take these positive observations with me as I continue to lesson plan and teach in both my current foreign language classroom as well as my ESL classroom in the future. I will continue to make connections and tailor the lessons to my students' needs and interests, as it appears to be more motivating and engaging.

Most of the time, having received explicit direction, STs were able to make adjustments independently, but there were instances when I needed to provide reminders. One recurring issue, most frequently observed early in the fieldwork, was the inclusion of cute juvenile graphics and font types in lesson materials and/or weekly packets. The following email excerpt, illustrating such a reminder, was sent to one ST team as part of my feedback on their weekly lesson plan four weeks after the introductory session on working with adult learners.

> [. . .] I've reviewed the PPt and the Handout and have few comments about the materials in the PPT slides:
>
> [. . .] 2) All of the pictures in the slides need to represent adults and adult themes/activities, that is all childlike images need to be substituted. (from e-mail correspondence on 3/5/2025, Adult ESL COP, Week 2)

Teaching without a pre- selected ESL textbook or materials meant that STs needed to select, adapt, and/or create lesson materials. Although physical copies of ESL textbooks and links to vetted online resources (e.g., BBC Learning English, EL Civics for ESL Students, Voice of America Learning English, etc.) from which to draw relevant content were provided, STs had the freedom to create and use their own resources. Although they made every effort to check carefully the materials, there was a possibility of overlooking an error. At the level of lesson planning when we shared in the review of materials, I decided to step in if erroneous information was inadvertently included or when materials or activities did not seem to be appropriate for the teaching context and learners' age, as illustrated in the email excerpt below, referencing a weekly packet differentiated for the participants with low English proficiency.

> [. . .] I'm in receipt of your copy request and wanted to ask for few updates before the materials listed in A-D below can be printed and copied:
>
> [. . .]
>
> **A. Weekly Packet Low**
>
> 1) Day 1 (Friday): Daily Routines Review
>
> - First, watch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyxuPAdx460 (Youtube: Mastering Beginner Daily Routines in English)
>
> The video needs to be substituted for one that considers adults' daily routines. [. . .]
>
> (from e-mail correspondence on 4/15/2025, Adult ESL COP, Week 7)

Another, albeit less frequent, challenge was related to assumptions about our teaching context. Teachers in contexts such as public schools can usually lock their classroom to safeguard the property therein and lead students outside for lesson activities. STs did not have the keys to university classrooms. Taking participants outside would have become a major undertaking, possibly an inconvenience for all, participants who had to manage their

belongings, STs who additionally had to deal with technology, and me who in addition to balancing personal items and technology had to handle the video equipment. Teachers in other programs may also have a schedule that allows somewhat lengthy transitions between activities. STs at the Adult ESL COP, which was limited in duration as well as lesson length, had to maximize the utility of in-class time. If there were other areas that seemed needing improvement, I noted them down to reference while reviewing their post-teaching reflections, specifically the responses to questions about lesson successes, challenges, and improvement plans, and in preparation for post-observation conferences (POCs).

Although in class meetings, STs discussed successfully the critical role of contextual factors in student engagement and learning, during lesson planning, some tended to prioritize lesson topics and instructional strategies over the use of age-appropriate materials and consideration of instructional setting. This tendency emphasized the STs' need for opportunities for explicit feedback as well as time to apply their theoretical knowledge in authentic teaching situations (Arshavskaya, 2014),

I knew that when faced with the realities of teaching adult ESL classes, STs would likely encounter situations for which their previous experiences did not prepare them. To facilitate the process of finding solutions to problems, while also managing my time effectively, I set up post-teaching reflections as online dialogue journals where STs could share their own and respond to their peer's teaching challenges and successes as well as discuss their plans for navigating challenges. I kept a close eye on their weekly contributions and was able to relate with their struggles to make sense of their adult ESL classroom but continued to evaluate carefully when to stand on the sidelines silently cheering them on and when to intervene offering assistance.

Having taught the practicum course, I learned that for the benefit of the learners and

STs, when the STs' instruction needed to undergo major improvements, these changes needed to occur quickly and be maintained throughout the program duration. Highlighting the role of reflection as a cornerstone of experiential learning, Posner (2009) stated the following:

> We do not actually learn from experience as much as we learn from reflecting on experience. Reflection on an experience, to put it most simply, means to think about the experience, what the experience means, how it felt, where it might lead, what to do about it. (p. 21).

To facilitate learning from experience, I incorporated multiple forms of reflection into the practicum course syllabus even before the Adult ESL COP which included regular written post- teaching reflections, oral reflections on lesson plan and delivery during in-class discussions, and reflections on two observed lessons, one as part of post-teaching observation conference with me and the other as a summative reflective paper. Additional opportunities for reflection were afforded through writing two substitute teacher ready lesson plans and teaching philosophy when STs were asked to make revisions/improve to the assignments based on their practicum teaching experiences. Each of the reflection forms continued to be implemented, but with the offering of the Adult ESL COP, regular post-teaching reflections changed to online dialogue entries and the observed lessons video-mediated reflections (Baecher et a., 2014), reflecting the collaborative, process-oriented, and current nature of the course. Although each of the practices seemed to have afforded STs with an opportunity to improve teaching practice, one that appeared most successful was a video-mediated POC conducted after the first teaching observation. In keeping with the conditions for a successful conference (Bailey, 2006), STs and I discussed the goals and procedures for the video-recorded observation and video-mediated POC prior to observations. In an attempt to achieve balance between maintaining structure to and consistency in the feedback while at the same time fostering

agency in STs, I used a feedback form to guide the POC discussion (Avineri & Martel, 2015). The form was presented to STs at the start of the semester. This was a scoring rubric that included two sections, one related to the procedures for observations (scheduling of the observation and post-observation conference, lesson plan outline and materials submission) and another focusing on the areas of lesson objectives; lesson plan stages; activity design and selection; interaction, lesson delivery specifically pacing, transitions, giving directions, modeling, and teacher talk; and lesson materials. STs received feedback without scores on teacher presence (professional, supportive, confident).

During the first three weeks of the Adult ESL COP, STs scheduled their first in-class video-recorded observation and POC with me. As described in the procedures for in-class observations, they submitted a lesson plan outline at least one day before the scheduled observation including the following: brief description of the teaching context (program and participants); standards and objectives; step-by-step procedures; contingency plans; and lesson materials (including differentiation, if needed). I was in class observing, taking notes, and recording their lessons to find out how STs interacted with learners, moved around the room, and monitored their learners working; to feel the culture of the class; to partake in group work, if/when invited; to build upon my knowledge about the participants initially gained through conducting or reviewing their placement test results. Within 24 hours from the observation, I made the video recording available to the STs. In preparation for the post-observation conference, STs examined and analyzed their own performance by watching the recoding and conducting a self-evaluation using the observation rubric. Additionally, they prepared responses to the following questions: a) What went well in the lesson and how do you know?; b) What were the challenges in the lesson? How did you navigate them? How would you prevent and/or manage such challenges in the future? and c) What are your takeaways from

the experience? Alongside STs, I prepared for the POC. Rather than reconstructing the observed lesson based on my notes and memory of events, particularly if the feedback was critical, I watched the relevant video segments to pull specific evidence from the lesson for the commentary I was about to give and noted down the time stamps to facilitate rewatching, if necessary. To supplement my feedback, I compared it with the notes I had made during the review of each of the lesson plan outlines looking for patterns and revisited the information collected thought placement tests. While an hour was set aside for the POCs, they lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. The longer conversations were most frequently associated with more extensive discussions about STs own interventions for their future practice.

Each conference began with a ST interpreting their actions and in-class events in relation to the three aforementioned questions while I was taking notes on their commentary and comparing it to my interpretations. In collaboration, we then examined each area of teaching in the rubric noting effective teaching, identifying less effective teaching, and discussing options for change. During the second video-recorded observation, STs had an opportunity to showcase improvement and in a written reflection following this observation (i.e., teaching demonstration analysis paper), to reflect on the lesson and their professional growth.

Although STs were never explicitly asked to provide feedback on the POCs or the video- recorded lessons, many usually did so. In their teaching demonstration analysis paper, one ST from the second cohort credited the video-mediated POCs with helping raise awareness of their in-class activities, specifically the amount of teacher talk.

> Although I despise seeing and hearing myself on video, I believe that these videotaped observations are essential to improve teaching. The videotape doesn't lie; it records exactly what occurred. That is better than any post-lesson reflection that

> relies solely on memory could ever be. It records the good and the bad. Therefore, if you're like me, and you tend to focus only on the bad things that occurred, the video helps to remind you that there were some good aspects to the lesson. Being able to see what worked well will help a teacher to reflect on why it worked and how its goodness can be replicated in future lessons. However, it also helps a teacher to see exactly why
>
> something went wrong. Maybe the failure wasn't due to the material; perhaps it was just its delivery--or lack of student interaction. This brings me to the most important part of these observations--your feedback. If I had not had your honest feedback after that first observation, I would have continued to deliver mostly teacher-focused lessons because I did not realize how much we monopolized the conversation…. I realized that we needed to make it more student-centered, but I didn't realize to what extent we needed to change. However, after discussing this issue with you, my eyes were opened. When you explained that this class was one of our students' few opportunities to practice the language, I knew that we had to make a change. Our students deserved it. [. . .]

This ST's commentary resonated with what the other STs mentioned in their end-of-the-semester field experience reflections, teaching demonstration analysis papers, and/or course evaluations, and what I observed in the second part of the semester. The observations were very valuable in that they allowed STs to step back into the classroom as observers to appraise their performance which stimulated self-monitoring and motivation to improve their practice.

My experience working with STs underscored the importance of providing supervision during their teaching practicum, a notion emphasized by previous scholarship in teacher education (Capelo, 2020) and TESOL teacher education (Bailey, 2006). Through structured

collaborative reflection with peers, STs were open to seeking recommendations for improving their practice and willing to support one another by sharing strategies, offering feedback, and celebrating one another's successes. Through guided self-reflection as well as video-mediated post-teaching conferences, they were able to evaluate critically their own teaching practice, recognize the areas of improvement, and observe their professional growth.

What distinguished this teaching practicum from others I taught, participated in, and read about was the personal involvement of both STs and me as their supervisor with the practicum field site where we built a learning community. While leading their own classrooms made the practicum experience meaningful for the STs, it also added a responsibility to deliver quality lessons prompting them to work actively on improving their teaching (Colovic-Markovic, 2023). I was aware that the success of the Adult ESL COP depended on the individual success of each program iteration which was directly linked to the program satisfaction of both STs and community members. In retrospect, I believe that the gains I incurred from leading the practicum were on par with those of the STs who participated in it. Over the years, particularly with the inclusion of video-mediated POCs, my supervision skills honed and ability to elicit self- evaluation from the STs improved. Rather than relegating teachers to memory-based recall of events and my interpretation of these events, the videos allowed STs to see themselves in action, to view the lesson from the observer's vintage point, and, as needed, to rewind, replay, and reflect again.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Supervising a service-learning-informed TESOL practicum at the Adult ESL COP, a community-based program I set up as a field site for the STs in my course, has brought challenges, yet each one has helped me reflect and refine my practice to strengthen the model and improve the experience for the STs, community ESL learners, and me. Discussed in the

previous section are issues related to the planning, preparing for, and delivery of the program and my solutions to them. To illustrate how the program is operationalized, Table 1 outlines the tasks my STs and I completed, providing a reference for others who may wish to implement a similar program. Over the years, I have also learned some valuable lessons regarding the procedures that may be helpful for others who are considering a similar program, a selection of which is presented below.

For participant recruitment, spreading the word about the program widely was critical. Although many strategies were used, traditional advertising methods targeting relevant population emerged as more successful. These included distributing program details to the following:

- university units that articulated a need for ESL training (e.g., housekeeping, maintenance, food services, etc.);
- local community-based ESL programs where the Adult ESL COP was presented as supplementary to the current language training;
- personal connections who were looking for or knew others looking for ESL services;
- local ESL teachers who would pass on program flyers to their student families, and
- after the first program iteration, former program participants.

Additionally, for enrollment, maintaining the same schedule for the ESL program and consequently for the practicum course, from one year to another, seemed important. One year we lost a number of participants when the meeting day for the practicum course, and consequently for the ESL program, changed from that of the previous year. Community members, particularly previous participants, expected no change in instructional days and reported a conflict with the new schedule.

Managing communication with ESL community members and keeping a record of

everyone interested calls for organizational and time management skills. Because prospective participants' inquiries are often predictable, initially asking for general program details (e.g., day, time, location, etc.) and as the start of the program is nearing, for placement testing scheduling, class location, and on-campus parking, in terms of time-management it can be useful to create template responses addressing each of the aforementioned so that they can be copied and pasted into e-mail responses. For record keeping, one inbox folder can be designated to the ESL community program where all of the prospective participants' e-mail inquiries are collected. For facilitating e-mail communication, their names and e-mail addresses can be inputted into a separate document (e.g., excel sheet).

An essential element is the preparation for the program for the STs and community members. STs need to receive as much information about the program requirements and learn about characteristics of their adult ESL learners including the limited time for studying, lack of opportunity to use English, and possible uncertainty about how to learn English. Similarly, the community participants need to understand that their classes are taught by volunteer ESL instructors who are developing their teaching skills and are expected to follow program requirements.

Reflection is a central component in service-learning pedagogy (Rosenberger, 2000) and an increasingly important activity in second language teacher education (Crandall, 2000; Farrell, 2025; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). Therefore, in designing service-learning practicum course work, reflection was integrated with mentored and supervised teaching practice. Various oral and written reflections, done independently and in collaboration with peers and supervisor, with and without video review, enabled the STs to gain perspectives on their teaching, instilling improvement in practices and contributing to professional growth. As noted previously, among the various forms, one that emerged as very useful, was POC video-mediated reflection guided

by a feedback form. Requiring teachers to deeply analyze their own practice prior to engaging in a POC can share the work of observation between the STs and their supervisor and serve as assessment of STs' views on their teaching.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jelena Colovic-Markovic is a professor and former TESOL Programs Director in the Department of Languages and Cultures at West Chester University of Pennsylvania where she teaches courses in applied linguistics. Her research interests include teacher education, second language vocabulary development and pedagogy, and applied corpus linguistics.

References

Arshavskaya, E. (2014). Analyzing mediation in dialogic exchanges in a pre-service second language (L2) teacher practicum blog: A sociocultural perspective. *System, 45,* 129–137. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.05.007.

Avineri, N., & Martel, J. (2015). The evolution of a practicum: Movement toward a capstone. The *CATESOL Journal, 27*(2), 157–170.

Baecher, L., Copland, F. and Mann, S. (2024), Introduction to the special issue: Renewal and reconceptualization of supervision in TESOL. *TESOL Jornal, 15(3)*, e839. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.839

Baecher, L., McCormack, B., & Kung, S. C. (2014). Supervisor use of video as a tool in teacher reflection. *TESL-EJ, 18*(3),1–17.

Bailey, K. (2006). *Language teacher supervision: A Case-Based Approach.* CUP

Bloomsbury.

Carter, S. J., Henrichsen, L. E., & Eggett, D. L. (2022). Programme and classroom factors affecting attendance patterns for Hispanic participants in adult ESL education. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, *55*(1), 44–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2022.2055815

Colovic-Markovic, J. (2023). *Undertaking TESOL practicum at the Adult ESL Community Outreach Program: Student teachers' perceived affordances, advantages and disadvantages.* In C. Pu & W. Wright (Eds.), *Innovating the TESOL practicum in teacher education: Design, implementation, and pedagogy in an era of change* (pp. 99–119). Routledge.

Cirocki, A., Madyarov, I., and Baecher, L. (Eds.) (2020). *Current perspectives on the TESOL practicum*. Springer.

Cooper, T. C. (2002). An ESOL methods course in a Latino neighborhood. *Foreign Language Annals, 35*(4), 414-426. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2002.tb01881.x

Crandall, J-A. (2000). Language teacher education. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 20,* 34-55. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500200032

Ellis, R., & Shintani, N. (2014). *Exploring language pedagogy through second language acquisition research.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203796580

Farrell, T. S. C. (2025). *'Bending back' to move forward: Contemplating reflective practice in TESOL. English Journal, 29*(2), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.29114s1

Farrell, T. S. C., & Jacobs, G. M. (2020). *Essentials for successful English language teaching*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Farrely, R. (2019). A TESOL practicum in the United States of America. In A. Cirocki, I. Madyarov, & L. Baecher (Eds.), *Current perspectives on the TESOL practicum: Cases from around the globe* (pp. 265-288). Springer.

Gilliland, B. (2023). Context as mediator in language teacher learning during an international practicum. In C. Pu and W. Wright (Eds.), *Innovating the TESOL Practicum in Teacher Education: Design, Implementation, and Pedagogy in an Era of Change,* (pp. 143-157). Routledge.

Golombek, P. R. (2015). Redrawing the boundaries of language teacher cognition: Language teacher educators' emotion, cognition, and activity. *Modern Language Journal, 99*(3), 470–484. https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12236.

Graham, C. R. & Walsh, M. M. (1996). *Adult education teacher's guide.* Adult Education Center. Texas A&I University.

Guy, T. C. (2005). The adult literacy education system in the United States. Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life. Retrieved from: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001462/146281e.pdf

Kamhi-Stein, L. D., Jacob, S. R., Herrera, A., Seaborne, R. (2021). Linking a community-based ESL program with the MA in TESOL Practicum course: The tale of a program. *The CATESOL Journal*, *32*(1), 160–171. https://doi.org/10.5070/B5.35922

Lin, F-A. (2007). Meeting the needs of those involved: A university-based com- munity ESL program. In A. J. Wurr & J. Hellebrandt (Eds.), *Learning the language of global citizenship: Service-learning in applied linguistics* (pp. 349-377). Anker Publishing.

Murray, D. E. & Christison, M. A. (2020). W*hat English language teachers need to know Volume II: Facilitating learning*. (2nd ed.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203846292

Numrich, C. (1996). On becoming a language teacher: Insights from diary studies. TESOL Quarterly, 30(1), 131-153. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3587610

Orem, R. A. (2000). English as a second language in adult education. In A. L. Wilson & E. R.

Hayes (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (new ed., pp. 438–448). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Posner, G. (2009). *Reflecting on Experience: A guide to reflective teaching*. (7th ed.). Pearson.

Richards, J. C. (2017). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. (2nd ed.), Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024556

Rosenberger, C. (2000). Beyond empathy: Developing critical conscious ness through service learning. In C. O'Grady (Ed.), *Integrating service learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities* (pp. 23-43). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Seiden, P. and Mitchell, E. (2017). Navigating institutional culture: Building bridges and not burning them. In *So You Want To Be An Academic Library Director.* https://works.swarthmore.edu/sta-libraries/97

Swoyer Girladi, J. & Lindahl, K. (2023). TESOL Teacher candidates in residency: Practice and potential for innovating the practicum. In C. Pu and W. Wright (Eds.), *Innovating the TESOL Practicum in Teacher Education: Design, Implementation, and Pedagogy in an Era of Change,* (pp. 143-157). Routledge.

Walter, C. (2023). Undergraduate practicum design for equity-minded and culturally and linguistically responsive pre-service TESOL teacher. In C. Pu and W. Wright (Eds), *Innovating the TESOL Practicum in Teacher Education: Design, Implementation, and Pedagogy in an Era of Change,* (pp. 158-172). Routledge.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). Understanding by design (2nd ed.). ASCD.

Wilkens, C. P., Ashton, J. R., Maurer, D. M., & Smith, S. (2015). Some of this is not your fault: Imperfect placements, student teachers, and university supervision. *Schools: Studies in Education*, *12*(2), 329–341. https://doi.org/10.1086/683222