

## Practicum: Microteaching for Non-Native Speaking Teacher Trainees

For many teacher training programs in countries where English is the official language, a practicum is a “course (usually in the Applied Studies area) with a substantial amount of supervised, discipline-related time in an actual work setting” (Athabasca University 2007). Students in a TESOL certificate program spend part of their practicum course teaching an actual class, which allows them to apply the approaches and methods they have learned in a real context.

The practicum course is more difficult to implement in countries where the official language is not English. This is the case in the TESOL post-graduate certificate program at Sookmyung Women’s University (SMU) in Seoul, Korea, where many local schools fear that the non-native speaking trainees are not competent enough to teach their students. There are other probable reasons that institutions do not cooperate and invite teacher trainees from a private TESOL certificate program to their schools. Perhaps the teachers think the

trainees will upstage them, or maybe they feel an outsider group is evaluating their techniques and approaches. Nevertheless, when public or private schools do not permit trainees to teach their students, the trainees miss out on the practical experience necessary to become an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher.

This article will discuss how the SMU-TESOL program handled this situation by designing a practicum course that included *microteaching*, which is a procedure through which teacher trainees practice their instructional methods with their peers. At the end of a microteaching lesson, the peers and the teacher trainer give detailed feedback on the trainee’s performance. This article will outline the steps of microteaching employed by the SMU-TESOL program and will describe the distinct roles of the teacher trainee, the peer observers, and the teacher trainer.

The goal of microteaching is to give future instructors “confidence, support, and feedback by letting them try

out among friends and colleagues a short slice of what they plan to do with their students” (Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning 2002, 1). In some programs, microteaching occurs spontaneously and in an informal manner. For instance, after describing a language teaching method, a teacher trainer will sometimes request that students start practicing the method in groups, with little instruction about feedback and who is to do what.

In contrast, at SMU-TESOL, microteaching is a major component of the practicum course and has a well-defined structure. On their first day at SMU-TESOL, students receive a formal introduction to microteaching and specific guidelines on how to provide feedback for microteaching presentations. The microteaching occurs on a regular schedule, and trainees are never asked to spontaneously start practice teaching. Once a week, students come to the practicum prepared to either present a microteaching class based on what they have learned in their EFL methodology course or to observe and provide feedback of a microteaching lesson taught by a fellow trainee. All practicum coursework consists of either presenting a class and receiving feedback or observing a class and providing feedback to others. The trainees are assessed on their willingness to present a microteaching lesson and on their willingness to support and provide feedback to their fellow classmates.

Since the practicum is an adjunct to the TESOL methodology course, there are no out-of-class assignments. Nevertheless, every microteaching lesson has definite guidelines for the roles of (1) the microteaching presenter, (2) the peer observers, and (3) the teacher trainer.

#### **Guidelines for presenters**

1. The presenter must be prepared to teach for five to ten minutes; requiring short presentations allows more students to present their microteaching lessons.

2. The presenter must be mentally prepared to teach on the scheduled day. The teacher trainer gives the presenters advance warning that they will teach in front of the class. This is fair and necessary, as it reduces the amount of complaints and prepares students who might suffer from stage fright the first time they stand up in front of a whole class.

3. The presenter must use English to teach. The purpose of using only English is to improve the presenter’s English proficiency and *teacher talk*, which is the ability to give clear and correct instructions and explanations in the classroom. Using one’s native language to teach English is not allowed in the SMU program, although students are told that one’s native language can be beneficial in teaching and learning a second language.

#### **Guidelines for peer observers**

1. The students who do not present on a given day must play the part of EFL students and provide feedback to the presenter. Practicum students soon realize that providing feedback is usually more difficult than actually presenting a microteaching lesson. One reason for this is that students have to make a legitimate critique of the performance while being tactful in their feedback. In addition, they have to process these higher level cognitive thoughts in English.

2. During the first two weeks of the practicum course, students receive sample models of feedback and are coached on providing quality feedback. Quality feedback is important because the “participants find that, along with what they learn from their own experience practice teaching, they can also pick up many helpful ideas from observing their fellow microteachers” (Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning 2002, 1). Figure 1 from Margolis (1995, 170) is an excerpt from the handout the students receive on how to provide quality feedback.

#### **Figure 1: Guidelines for Providing Feedback**

1. Focus on BEHAVIOR rather than on the person.
2. Focus on OBSERVATION rather than inferences.
3. Focus on DESCRIPTION rather than on judgment.
4. Focus on “MORE” or “LESS” rather than “either/or.”
5. Focus on SPECIFIC rather than abstract behavior.
6. Focus on SHARING IDEAS rather than giving advice.
7. Focus on ALTERNATIVES rather than solutions.
8. Focus on BENEFITING THE RECIPIENT, not the person giving feedback.

### Guidelines for teacher trainers

1. The teacher trainer gives thematic suggestions for each lesson that reflect the content that students have been studying in their methodology course. Some sample themes include:

- types of classroom interactions
- cooperative learning
- productive questioning strategies
- appropriate listening tasks
- successful reading strategies
- the use of writing prompts
- techniques to teach vocabulary

With these and other options, students can then choose the student profile they would like to teach and the text they would like to use. (Since many students are unfamiliar with a wide range of texts, we provide some from various EFL publishers.)

2. The teacher trainer also gives students an evaluation checklist for each class. The evaluation checklist should reflect the theme of the course. For example, if the theme is “types of classroom interactions,” the evaluation checklist might include the following items:

- How many different students were called upon?
- Was the lesson appropriate for the target student profile?
- Did every student speak in complete sentences? Why or why not?
- How many times did students speak with each other?
- How many times did students ask the teacher a question?

Before students start microteaching, the teacher trainer reviews the evaluation checklist to make sure students understand each item.

3. After a student has presented a microteaching lesson, the teacher trainer gives as many students as possible a chance to provide feedback. After they have given feedback, the teacher trainer supplies additional feedback that the students may have missed.

4. The teacher trainer corrects any teacher talk errors. Many students believe that this feedback is more important than feedback on errors of technique or approach. Since some students may make a lot more errors than others, the teacher trainer must use time wisely by selecting the errors students may not know how to correct.

### The practicum class

Each practicum class is just under two hours in length and occurs once a week over the program’s five-month semester. Following are the four steps followed in a typical class:

#### Step 1: Warm-up (15 minutes)

- Most warm-ups consist of a group work activity to refresh students’ memories on what they have recently learned in their methodology course.
- The warm-up is learner-centered and students can choose to practice teach a group or the whole class.

#### Step 2: Preparation (35 minutes)

- The trainer chooses four or five students, or students volunteer, to present for the day.
- The trainer provides an evaluation checklist to help guide the preparation.
- Each presenter joins a group of about four or five classmates who help him or her prepare the presentation. Some groups write a brief step-by-step description of the teaching techniques. Other groups write a script of teacher talk and the expected student responses. The more experienced students write a general outline to allow more spontaneity in the presentation. It is important for practicum students to learn to be spontaneous because many new teachers panic when a lesson does not go according to plan. The trainer’s role is to help teachers-in-training learn how to proceed when this happens.
- Students prepare a lesson plan. They are not required to turn in what is written as assessment is directed towards the teaching performance. This is a major difference between the methodology course, where theory is more important, and the practicum course, where practice is more important.
- Before step 3, the trainer allows for a 10-minute break.

#### Step 3: Group microteaching (15 minutes)

- The preparation groups stay together, but each presenter moves to a different group. This prevents bias and gives the presenter a new perspective on the presentation.

- The presenters teach their new groups for five to ten minutes, which helps them overcome anxiety and prepares them to teach the whole class.
- The remaining time is allotted for feedback from the new group.

**Step 4: Whole class microteaching**  
(35 minutes)

- One presenter at a time is called upon to microteach the students, who observe and prepare to give feedback.
- During the presentation, the whole class takes notes on the strengths and weaknesses of the activity.
- After a 10-minute microteaching lesson is over, the teacher trainer gives the students the opportunity to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the presentation. In most practicum courses, the observing students offer general praise and encouragement such as “We enjoyed the lesson,” and “It was fun.” This is when it is necessary for the teacher trainer to request them to be more specific by asking: “What made it enjoyable or fun?”
- The teacher trainer provides additional feedback, including comments on

teacher talk. (To make sure that the observation and note-taking does not disturb the trainees, the teacher trainer should find a somewhat concealed seat in the classroom.)

- The average class size runs between 20 and 25 students, and usually there is only time for about three students to teach in front of the whole class. During the five-month program, all students have at least two opportunities to present in front of the whole class. However, all students have many opportunities to share their lessons in the group microteaching presentations in Step 3.

**A microteaching presentation**

To illustrate an actual microteaching presentation and feedback procedures, the table below provides a 13-point description of a teacher trainee’s lesson based on notes that I took as the teacher trainer. The left hand column describes the teacher trainee’s lesson, and the right hand column contains the students’ reactions. Observations I made during the microteaching presentation appear in parentheses.

To begin the presentation, the trainee identified the class profile as fourth grade students with novice to mid level English proficiency.

Teacher Trainee	Students (Peer Observers)
1. Teacher: “Could I call your attention, please?”	(Observation: Teacher speaking error while calling class to attention.)
2. Teacher: “If I call your name, please say your favorite animal.”	Student called upon doesn’t understand.
3. Teacher repeats the instruction more slowly and clearly.	Another student volunteers to help her classmate.
4. Teacher introduces the topic of weather and asks one student to ask another about the weather.	Student 1: “How’s the weather today?” Student 2: “It’s warm because spring is coming.”
5. Teacher: “Can you tell me what happens in the spring?”	Student: “Flowers are bloom. Animals are get up.”  (Observation: No error correction by teacher.)

Teacher Trainee	Students (Peer Observers)
6. Teacher asks students to name some animals they know.	Students list animals and teacher puts pictures of some of the listed animals on the board.
7. Teacher asks students to summarize the warm-up.	A student summarizes part of the warm-up. The teacher lets another student finish the summary.
8. Teacher introduces the vocabulary item <i>tadpole</i> by asking students what a baby frog is and writing the word on the board. Teacher asks students to say <i>tadpole</i> .	Students repeat the word <i>tadpole</i> three times.
9. Teacher defines tadpole and gives the following task to students: "Put the pictures of a tadpole's lifespan in the correct order."	As students perform the task, the teacher slowly does the same task on the board.
10. Teacher asks students to predict the correct order of a tadpole's lifespan.	Several students predict the lifespan in incomplete sentences.  (Observation: Teacher does not encourage students to make complete sentences.)
11. Teacher asks a student to summarize the tadpole's lifespan in order and in complete sentences.	Three students take turns summarizing the tadpole's lifespan. The teacher does not let them speak in fragments, saying "Please speak in complete sentences."
12. Teacher gives a listening task for students by playing a tape with a song about a tadpole's life. Teacher reviews vocabulary items found in the song: <i>hind legs</i> and <i>forelegs</i> .	(Observation: Students do not understand why they are listening to the tape, but they enjoy the song. The song is sung by a non-native speaker with pronunciation errors.)

### Evaluation of trainee's microteaching

After the microteaching lesson, the peer observers first offered positive feedback by praising the teacher's enthusiasm. Next, a few students offered constructive criticism, saying that the lesson's objectives were not clear. When they asked the presenter about the objectives, she could not provide them. The class then suggested the following two objectives for her presentation: (1) Students should be able to learn new vocabulary items when listening to a song about tadpoles, and (2) Students should be able to sequence the lifespan of a frog without assistance from the

teacher. Other feedback from the peer observers called attention to misspellings and the rapid rate of speech.

Next, the teacher trainer summarized the feedback. He then commented on elements of the presentation that the students either overlooked or did not mention. This included the use of an amateur recording of a song. The teacher trainer was careful not to criticize the technique of using a recording but did note that the song contained numerous pronunciation errors. He provided this valuable suggestion: "It is best to find the clearest example of English speech on a recording. Before you use

a tape or CD in class, make sure it contains the language you would like your students to use.”

The teacher trainer then wrote a few language mistakes on the board for the whole class to correct. Because the lowest proficiency level allowed in the program is intermediate, the trainees easily corrected the errors within a minute or two. After this error correction exercise, the teacher trainer ended the class with praise and encouragement by commenting on the presenter’s enthusiasm and noting that multiple listening tasks had kept the learners engaged.

### Students’ perspectives of the practicum course

One area where there are mixed reactions about the practicum course relates to the teacher trainers. Because of the instructors’ schedules, most students have one teacher trainer for the practicum course and another for the methodology course. Some students appreciate having different instructors for the methodology and practicum courses. Other students stress that they would like to have the same instructor teach both courses. This complaint arises because of the different teaching styles and perspectives on EFL methodology between two instructors. Regular meetings are held to reduce this difference, but it is recognized that every instructor is entitled to his or her own perspectives on teaching.

### Conclusion

I have been teaching the practicum ever since it has been taught in the format described in this article. And I’ve seen students’ appreciation of the course grow as

the course improves. When speaking of the course, students often mention how much they appreciate the plethora of teaching practice it provides and how they enjoy watching their peers practice. Students also comment on the notable improvement of their peers and on their own growth and improvement. Because the practicum improves students’ teaching performance and requires no additional homework, the course has become a favorite among the majority of students. Most importantly, it provides essential experience for teachers-in-training who are fast approaching the day when they will face the challenges of an EFL classroom.

### References

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## ANSWERS TO *THE LIGHTER SIDE* NATIONAL PARK SYMBOLS

1. l; 2. i; 3. f; 4. n; 5. d; 6. h; 7. a; 8. c; 9. e; 10. k; 11. m; 12. j; 13. g; 14. b