

A Critical Reflection on Undergraduate Teaching Practice: Applying Brookfield's Four Lenses

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Abstract

Critical reflection provides educational practitioners a useful gateway into continually examining and modifying their own attitudes, beliefs, approaches, and teaching practice. While much has been written around critical reflection and reflective practice in general, there seems to be much less research in English published around model-based reflection (especially regarding English language pedagogy). In particular, there is no other known study that applies all of Brookfield's Four Lenses model in a single self-study in any field. To help fill this gap, this research detailed a cross-sectional self-narrative critical enquiry via reflection on-action. Further, to narrow this still broad focus, an advanced undergraduate business English elective class was used to show how critical self-reflective practice had influenced both the instructor, course design, and student outcomes. Results of this experimental approach indicated that although some specific issues with applying Brookfield's model arose, there was also a meaningful push towards a more balanced and non-linear approach to reflection, alongside a strong sense that a deeper and more meaningful reflective impact on the overall example course was evident. The nature of this unique model-driven approach should provide useful insights to other language instructors undertaking similar enquiry, particularly those teaching classes in similar contexts.

Key terms: critical reflection (CR), critically reflective practice (CRP), reflective practice (RP), Brookfield's Four Lenses model, experiential learning (EL), business English (BE)

1. Introduction

Nager (2017), citing Mezirow (1990), defines reflection as “a process that includes the assessment of assumptions and beliefs to better determine their value and usefulness in solving internal, or external, conflict” (p. 28). Reflective practice (RP), critical reflection (CR), and critically reflective practice (CRP) represent an important centrepiece of effective teaching practice in the 21st-century, particularly as a way of critiquing one's core beliefs and practices. RP, as a process, is “something which developed in disciplines such as teaching, medicine and social work as a way to learn from real life experiences” and later broadened into areas such as education (Cambridge University Libraries, n.d., What is reflective practice?, para 2). It inhabits a field of thought that includes various similar and overlapping constructs such as critical incident analysis; CR; CRP; critical thinking; developmental insight; experiential learning (EL); experience-based learning; and transformative learning. As such, CRP reinforces a wider held valuative perspective of reflection given that “scholarships of learning and teaching in higher education strongly advocate that critically reflective educators are excellent educators who continually improve the worthiness of their teaching by repeated refining of their pedagogical approach” (Kamardeen, 2015, p. 63).

For Brookfield (2017), CR “is quite simply the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions” and that CR “teaching happens when we identify and scrutinize the assumptions that shape our practice” (p. 3). He identifies these assumptions as: paradigmatic–global structuring assumptions; prescriptive–what people think ought to be happening; and causal–how the world works and conditions for change. Together, they represent dominant ideology–concepts accepted as normal and commonsense (given that power roles and responsibilities can often be framed in cultural, institutional, linguistic, or national terms). These concepts also represent a move from implicit (as an understanding of underpinnings) to explicit values (such as codes

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of conduct, frameworks, or teaching guides) which help practitioners become more aware of hegemonic assumptions which occur because of one's personal perspective limits (Brookfield, 1998). For Brookfield, CR transfers rationalism into teaching practice (and adds a sense of rigor and logic), but it also involves taking risks when challenging these assumptions, potentially complicating situations, and undermining standpoints, perspectives, and confidence. As a form of professional practice, CR can be done at any time: before commencing an action, in real time during an action (*in action*), after an action (*on action*), and after a series of repeated actions.

Inspired by several CR models over the last half-century (as detailed below) educational practitioners continue to seek insights and shared opportunities to help better develop their own teaching and learning processes. Without realising it explicitly, and while seeking the theoretical language to express and contextualise these processes for this article, the author became increasingly centred on another framework model of CRP first detailed by Brookfield (1995; 1998). His Four Lenses model differed from previous examples in that it was not innately linear or circular, more naturally reflecting the often unstructured and fractured nature of RP. By using all these lenses as a baseline template for reflective self-analysis, the author ultimately explores a unique cross-sectional form of critical self-reflective narrative, one that does not appear to exist elsewhere in the current English-language literature. By doing so, this article seeks to partially address this gap and, by using an advanced business English (BE) class as a representative pedagogical example, endeavours to guide and challenge other instructors into more effective self-RP actions when considering their own pedagogy, power paradigms, teaching contexts, and course designs in similar circumstances.

2. Literature review

In preparing for this article, the author examined literature primarily related to CR in general before focussing on RP models in more detail, the nature and background of Brookfield's Four Lenses model in particular, and literature available regarding examples of the use or self-application of his model. The following overview is therefore divided into these sections and is not meant to be an inclusive or exhaustive critical overview of these topics but rather a lead-in for readers to better understand and rationalise the context within which the Four Lenses framework was applied. Understanding the general detail of RP models available in this way is further insightful in that CR is often self-driven based on unique and personal situations and different models may hold differing appeal and varying potential to each individual reader.

2.1 An overview of CR models

The general pedagogical origins of CR modelling are often considered to begin with theorist John Dewey and his influential 1938 short book *Experience and Education*, where he outlined an experience-linked critical thinking-based reflective model of education alongside progressive educational themes. Perhaps the next best-known attempt at providing a CR model was Borton's (1970) *What? So what? Now what?* framework (later redeveloped by Driscoll (1994)) where, starting with a critical incident (an event of personal significance), a person can then consider its overall importance and then consider next steps. As a simple continuous group facilitation model, it could be easily understood and followed, although, as a framework, it lacked enough detail to easily guide participants into deeper or more nuanced reflections by itself. Another relevant model was by Kolb and Fry (1975) who proposed a four-step process (an experience; observations and data collection; analysis and feedback; and integration and behaviour modification) leading to their four-step holistic EL model (feeling; watching; thinking; and doing) as a response to research also done in the 1930s. In their paper, they sought "to more systematically elaborate the scientific and practical implications of the experiential learning model first formulated by Lewin and his colleagues" (p. 56). Kolb (1984) then went on to propose another EL model where four cyclic and linear stages were defined (concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualization; and active experimentation).

EL models received further attention from Argyris and Schön (1978) who helped differentiate RP based on the idea of reflection-on-action (past and in hindsight) and reflection-in-action (present and in real time) as well as the concept of single-loop (formulaic) and double loop (responsive) learning. These ideas paralleled Schön's (1983) reflective theory—a cyclic pattern of experience and conscious application of lessons learnt where EL can be implicit (unconscious) learning or CR/critical thinking. In essence, RP here represented the ability to reflect on one's actions to engage in a process of continuous learning. Gibbs (1988) proposed another circular model, this time the six-stage reflective cycle (description; feelings/reactions; evaluation; analysis; conclusions (general; specific); and action plan) to provide further structure and detail to EL and CRP. The primary feature of the model is the fronting of Feelings in making the reflection around affect more explicit than implicit, as well as an increased attention to the process of evaluation. This model is of particular relevance to group discussions, which he describes as Debriefings, to guide structured reflection linearly from the description through to the action plan stage, in varying ways (e.g., individual reflection, pair work, and teamwork), as time allows.

Finally, Smyth (1989) provided his own four-step sequential model (describe; inform; confront; and reconstruct) and related questions (What do I do?; What does this mean?; How did I come to be like this?; and How might I do things differently?). According to Smyth, the model (which, he claims, had its broad origins inspired by Paulo Freire) can be understood that in order to address the forces that tend to limit and restrict their effectiveness, and work towards changing those conditions, teachers should take these four specific actions regarding their teaching. Each of the steps are contextualised in some detail for the reader, with Confront providing a list of seven additional questions to help practitioners more carefully consider the themes of challenging power, assumptions, and beliefs.

Following the expansion in the number and granularity of available CR models, as briefly detailed above, the use of RP as a general EL tool also broadened across disciplines such as teacher education, healthcare, and management. Naturally, broad reflective modelling does not end with those examples outlined above, nor with Brookfield's specific model as explained below, and various other newer or modified RP models have been suggested as well (e.g., Goldman et al. (2023); Jasper (2013); Kamardeen (2015); Redfern & Bennett (2022); and White (2021)). However, in terms of commonality, CR models often start from a point of noticing, when some event, activity, or incident is identified as requiring further contemplation. They then transition into a phase of exploration, where explanations, rationalisations, and insights are either made or sought. Finally, there is an application phase where the new ideas are applied in an existing situation with an expectation of a positive change being enacted. This process then often becomes a form of iterative RP, leading to a perceived virtuous cycle of continuous development and improvement.

2.2 Brookfield's Four Lenses model

Brookfield (1995, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2012, 2017), in the decades reviewed above, also wrote extensively on the topic of CR, which he defines as “a process of inquiry involving practitioners in trying to discover, and research the assumptions that frame how they work” (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197). In response to the challenges of CRP, Brookfield (1998) also explained the need for the teacher to integrate as many CR perspectives as possible into their practice to broaden their own understanding and be open to improvement. For Brookfield, the best way to challenge oneself, he suggests, was with his Four Lenses model, lenses which can provide new perspectives to identify and challenge the assumptions inherent within a given teaching context. As a framework, this model seems to have been well-received and subsequently largely adopted in universities as an overarching RP guide (Kamardeen, 2015). For the author, unlike many of the models described above (which were often iterative, linear, and circular) Brookfield suggested a model that was more discrete, autonomous, and non-linear, and it was this unstructured format's appeal to the author's reflective instincts which represents the rationale for the centrality of this model here. Therefore, given the critical importance of

these lenses for the next section of this paper, as the basis for an applied on-action teacher retrospective, they are briefly outlined below (primarily as described by Brookfield (1998), with some additional later notes from Brookfield (2017)).

2.2.1 Critically Reflective Lens 1: Our autobiography as a learner of practice

As the initial, or first listed lens, it refers to reflection on one's own positive and negative experiences as learners (including impressions and experiences with power dynamics and authority). It allows people to think about and record their own experience (as notes, journals, blogs etc.) and, as he framed it, represents one of the most important insights into RP to which practitioners have access. As such, however, it can also be prone to becoming subjective and impressionistic, but journalling ideas in this way can also lead to identification of relevant aspects and critical events in practice. He continued by stating that one's own experiences as a learner strongly (and often unconsciously) frame teaching practices too, especially when dealing with ambiguity or when framing unfamiliar approaches. Motivationally, Brookfield also conversely encouraged practitioners not to take everything personally if things after such CR are not, or do not seem to be, working well.

2.2.2 Critically Reflective Lens 2: Our learners' eyes

This lens, as described by Brookfield, refers to the observations and impressions of the teacher of class performance (from classroom activities, assignments, and assessments), as well as feedback and insights on practice from learners, particularly in relation to how students are experiencing the classroom. For the teacher's viewpoint, it can confirm if learners are interpreting teacher and class actions in the same way as they were intended, given that there are many ways individuals can perceive them (i.e., within a diversity of individual physiological and cognitive factors). For some students, for example, major teaching points can be entirely overlooked but, for unknown or unclear reasons, minor ones can become fixed or primary in their minds. Given this uncertainty, true learner perspectives are often hard to determine as they do not often tend to honestly challenge authority, which creates the need to ensure that safe and anonymous channels of critique are regularly made available to them.

2.2.3 Critically Reflective Lens 3: Our colleagues' experiences

This aspect often occurs in the workplace with coworkers, via dialogue, observations, feedback, staff development, team teaching, support or reflection groups, mentoring, and similar professional development activities. This is valuable since, as Brookfield (1998) stated, "participating in critical conversation with peers opens us up to their versions of events we have experienced" (p. 200). As such, it allows practitioners to check, compare, reframe, define, question, enquire, and challenge critical aspects regarding both sets of experiences. This also helps practitioners to see some of their own areas of blindness, bias, or narrow perspectives more clearly. As with the students' lens, there can be some fear of being too honest or open, particularly in the face of power differentials due to concerns of possible future consequences based on previous critical experiences.

2.2.4 Critically Reflective Lens 4: Theoretical literature

This lens refers to research, philosophical, and narrative descriptions of teaching in higher education that promote new ways of thinking. As a deeper and more cognitive process, it is most likely to occur after CR of the other three lenses (via critical insights achieved through accessing casual or more formal forms of research, either in printed, online, or audio or video formats). This can help practitioners through the identification and naming of concepts or processes, or by grounding their practice by having to prepare their own research presentations or thoughts for publishing (as was the case for this paper). It can, therefore, help frame knowledge within broader processes or allow for wider emerging perspectives and insights.

2.3 Research focus

With Brookfield's model in mind, as detailed above, the next step in this research was to self-apply the lens framework retrospectively and in its entirety and to the author's current experience. In essence, this process examined what can be captured by a single on-action reflective cross-section of how CRP had influenced a single educator over time by considering the author's own perspectives of themselves via the Four Lenses. This has not, to the author's current knowledge, been documented in English-based academic literature before, either as a direct or indirect analytical tool (although notable examples from others who have partly applied elements of Brookfield's lenses, on themselves or on others are available (as listed in part 3 of Appendix 1)). Nager (2017) confirms this observation when she stated that "although the literature references his work regarding Critical Incident Questionnaires often, there is a dearth of research implementing his four lenses model for becoming a critically reflective practitioner" (p. 155).

3. Methodology

The analytical approach undertaken here was one where the author narratively self-examined elements, from each of the lenses, based primarily on a response to the descriptions detailed above. The scope of this research, with the author as the central and primary agent, did not permit a general examination of their entire teaching history, or even a detailed classroom one, so the primary narrative analysis here often focussed on the author's model-led reactions in recalling experiences of their overall teaching approaches and methodology. However, to provide more specific contextualisation, the author also restricted this general focus to the context surrounding themselves, their BE teaching in general, and to a single representative BE class in particular. In understanding this specific research background and scope, the following should provide further granularity and specific participant contexts for readers:

Teacher's context: After working in tertiary administration in Australia, the author first began formally teaching English in Japan in 2001 at the junior-high school level as an assistant language teacher on the JET Program. In 2004, with the end of their contract period, they then commenced teaching at *eikaiwa* and business schools alongside earning two post-graduate degrees in TEFL and TESOL. Using these experiences, they then began language teaching at the university undergraduate level in 2012, which involved teaching primarily standard but also advanced track (AT) classes. They also began teaching elective BE classes in 2015, leading to an emerging research interest in business skill development and intercultural business communication. For much of this time, in a personal capacity, they also were an active member in a Japanese teaching association while also an officer there in various roles at the local and national levels.

Class context: The specific representative class being examined here refers to a combined undergraduate AT elective BE class called *English for Business I/B* (EfB1/B). In 2024, the class body consisted of 5 domestic and 20 international students enrolled in two separate classes (11 students in EfB1 via the 2017 curriculum and 14 students in EfBB via the 2023 curriculum). Although there was a high level of complexity and diversity in the composition of this class (arguably, the highest for any English language class held at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU)), further unique distinctions of this cohort, while important, stretch beyond the narrow scope of this article. The reason for choosing this class as an example course was primarily that it was the most recent one taught, the most radically modified over time, the most *progressive* (in terms of teaching approach and methodology), and the one the author considered as most representative of CRP both in- and on-action.

4. Results

In this section, in addressing the research focus, the author self-applied the literature review descriptions of the Four Lenses to briefly and narratively critically reflect on elements of their own teaching concepts, context, and practice as described above. The reader should note that any conclusions given here represent part of the author's inner voice

within the CR process being undertaken and that they, therefore, should not be conflated with the overall conclusions of this process that appear in the discussion section.

4.1 Critically Reflective Lens 1: Our autobiography as a learner of practice

Brookfield's first lens is indeed extensive, in that it can cover all the teacher's life and any learning experiences up until the time in which CR takes place. For the author, this covers education up to and including four university degrees, as well as nearly four decades of employment experiences. Perhaps the most foundational one here, business wise, was the decade spent working in an administration section of an Australian university. In terms of CRP, it has had a profound impact on the way the author views professional skills and behaviours in the workplace, especially given their eventual role there as a staff trainer (positive experience). This eventually led to work in Japan as a BE school teacher, which was overshadowed by the economic effects of the *Lehman Shock* on the school (negative experience) which led a drive to undertake a master's degree and to engage in university teaching (positive experience).

For the author, regarding their teaching philosophy for BE classes, this is largely expressed in the class syllabus. For them, based on actual workplace experiences, a BE class should primarily not replicate standard non-elective language class elements, and that they should avoid simply applying common academic features such as model dialogues, wordlists, pronunciation guides, vocabulary, grammar, or reading tests, essays, and activities such as reading or listening comprehension. Instead, more practical task-based workplace skills more clearly linked to business situations should be fronted through the choice of materials (as perhaps best evidenced in the four different Cambridge Business Skills textbooks (n.d.)) that thematically teach elements such as meetings, networking, business writing, and negotiating. They can also be fronted through a class *work ethic* modelling more realistic professional behaviours that students may currently be asked to perform in a part-time job (such as punctuality, preparation, team focus and responsibility, and business-like attitudes).

In terms of reflective classroom practice, as described by Brookfield, the author has no specific analogue behaviour recording personal experiences in journal or blog form, but in terms of notetaking, that is indeed an active and central part of practice-based Lens 1 behaviour for them. Each of the courses taught by the author uses a Japanese-style notebook within which lesson plans are drafted for each lesson, and where previous class notes and reminders (often in red pen) can be very easily reviewed. For the author's teaching, this *old-school approach* is a highly effective and interactive visual method since it is very easy to page back days, weeks, months, and semesters (for classes that were retaught) and review the in- and on-action insights of their past self. In addition, the front and back pages of the notebook also end up being covered in suggestions for their future self, often jotted down in moments of critical classroom incidents, regarding the efficacy of broader overall methods and approaches, and ways to adapt BE course materials in future iterations.

4.2 Critically Reflective Lens 2: Our learners' eyes

Viewing the classroom from the students' perspective is something that good practitioners know and endeavour to monitor and maintain but can sometimes overlook in the daily bustle of managing and delivering multiple classes alongside their other tasks, duties, and responsibilities. In endeavouring to discern the in- and on-action RP at play in the EfB1/B class, there are several feedback avenues available for students. For example, students have the formal opportunity to provide on-action feedback on teaching practice and student experience via the institutional end of semester survey. Similarly, other regular in-class surveys (directly between the teacher and students), either as class activities or for research, are also similarly valuable tools. One major example of this was a research survey conducted by the author at the end of the Spring 2024 semester as a means of gathering student perspectives on the EfB1/B syllabus. Such tools provided another valuable opportunity for feedback, not only in direct student responses but also

for the author, in terms of contextualising the need for a survey, rationalising its content, in designing its flow, and in anticipating the participant responses. Other standard methods of feedback in this class also include email, office hour consultations, shared language management systems, and shared online files and drives that can be continually edited and modified to include the latest information.

In classes such as EfB1/B, learner perspectives are also directly facilitated and built into the course assignments in two primary ways: audio journals (alternatively, audio diaries) and a course recommendations assignment. For the author, an audio journal represents a short 3-, 4-, or 5-minute monologue recorded on a smartphone and uploaded by the student onto an official yet privately shared online teacher/student folder. The topics are always related to some summative aspect of evaluation or analysis in the course, such as *Provide a formal summary of your group's meeting today.* or *What advice would you give someone next semester when preparing for Individual Project 2?*. In contrast, the course recommendations assignment is usually the last group activity of the class, and teams are given time, over a series of classes, to *Bloom* (i.e., remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, and create) a formal presentation for the teacher highlighting aspects of the course that they think should be modified (along with supporting background justifications, and explanations on any expected future impacts to learning). One particularly noteworthy outcome of this assignment was the common recommendation by 2023's EFB1/B class to not have a class textbook (and one that the author adopted for the 2024 class).

4.3 Critically Reflective Lens 3: Our colleagues' experiences

In the author's workplace, there are numerous and frequent opportunities to interact with coworkers in general (although the Covid-19 and post-Covid period has seen a marked reduction in teacher traffic in the shared teacher's room, and a diminishing of informal interactive opportunities). For the author, however, specific opportunities to discuss BE classes in general at the workplace are rare. Except for short start- and end-of-semester meetings, elective course teachers often work independently within their specialised field and personal course perspective, and, from time to time, the author was often the only teacher of BE electives (apart from another teacher of a TOEIC class). Currently, the elective course coordinator is also the head of the English programme, so it is often difficult to find meeting time for focussed discourse about specific BE elective issues except for occasional brief and impromptu chats to and from the classroom.

For the author, a massive change in the collegial BE educator experience first began in 2017 when they joined the JALT Business Communication Special Interest Group (BizCom SIG)—first as a member, then as an officer. This proved to be a rich source of non-workplace BE themed professional interaction across many layers, that is, until the advent of Covid-19 and the temporary shuttering of the SIG in 2021. In its place, the author (through BizCom) was aware of the online presence of the informal International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language BE SIG (IATEFL BESIG) BE as a lingua franca (BELF) group, which has subsequently provided a rich and stimulating replacement for an active community of practice. As the only participant in the group from Japan (and often east Asia), the author is often exposed to academic insights and perspectives outside of this country and region as well as from corporate BE teaching contexts. By contributing expertise (and a Japan-based perspective) to the group, the author was also able to positively reaffirm much of their independently scaffolded approach to BE pedagogy they have been self-implementing in classes at APU (positive experience) as well as receive regular updates on BE resources in the group's social media feeds.

4.4 Critically Reflective Lens 4: Theoretical literature

In his 1998 paper, Brookfield's decision to number and order his lenses in the way he did was not explained (nor was the reordering of them in 2017) but, for the author at least, the previous three lenses seem to organically lead them to this point. This naturalistic process of CRP led to an evolution of thought for the author (culminating in the current

framing and formulation of the EfB1/B class, for example) in two ways. The first of these was the informal regular use of theory to assist with reframing pedagogical concepts and to guide teaching practice (primarily through internet searches, reading short informal online summaries of emerging themes and ideas, and especially through online imagery of diagrams and models). The second was the formalisation of these evolving ideas into output—such as this paper. Other CR practitioners may also notice this push themselves, especially when given the need to update their résumé—in the presentations, personal development, faculty development, professional development, articles written, conferences attended sections and so on.

As a strong visual learner, the author's BE class students are often presented (or explained) ideas, models, sequences, and concepts in graphic form, as often found within generic Google image searches. A clear-cut example of this was the use in a discussion activity of an iceberg model of culture (in visual form) which, as a single image, neatly presents the concept in a form that learners can begin to discuss and collectively scaffold understanding together. Over the years, for the author, this model's use has broadened to an individual perspective too, reflecting smaller more distinctive idiocultural aspects, and how, uniquely for everyone, different elements in the model can vary in their relative depth or visibility (particularly when modelled by contrasting cultures). Two other graphics in common use in the BE classes that greatly influenced classroom practice include an active learning graphic (where *flipped learning* means in-class activities are prepared at home individually and run in class collectively) and a modified Bloom's taxonomy diagram (used as a scale to explain the lower- and higher-level behaviours either in planning class assignments or in encouraging students to engage with tasks and content more meaningfully)—both later discovered to have been sourced from Anderson & Krathwohl (2001), indicating how a reverse engineering from practice to insights to theory can organically occur.

5. Discussion

This section of the paper now leads the reader into a CR of the author's own CRP of applying a CR model—essentially a comprehensive, individualistic review of the use of a reflective model in a personal teaching context. The goal of this research was to examine what can be captured by a single on-action reflective cross-section of how CR and RP had influenced the author. By considering some of the aspects, processes, and mechanisms at play, from the author's perspective through the Four Lenses, the goal was not to simply evaluate one's own insights as inspired by the lenses model (as detailed in the previous section) but rather, and more significantly, to the ways in which the model functioned in initiating, guiding, and informing that process. This is important, given that, in using models such as these, it can be difficult for a teacher to know exactly what they are reflecting on (since it also takes time to understand any model and any anticipated or actual outcomes remain uncertain). Thus, in reflectively coming full circle, a discussion of the efficacy of the model, guided by Borton's (1970) three RP questions of *What? So what? Now what?* will now prove helpful:

What? By harnessing Brookfield's Four Lenses, the author has attempted to apply them (in an initial and general sense) to outlining elements of CRP that relate to themselves and to their teaching of elective BE classes in a university context. As a genuine personal snapshot of CR in-action, and given the individual unique nature that those perspectives imply, it is up to the reader to decide for themselves how a similar application of this process would work in their own context. This perspective is perhaps the greatest weakness inherent in a CR/RP exercise of this nature, given that an individual is (usually) the only expert of their own personal experiences, workplace specific critical incidents, and unique moments of cognitive breakthrough. Then again, the same process may, paradoxically, also be its greatest strength, in that it creates a valid, intimate, and personalised working space for the entirety of every individual's own CR experiences.

On a simpler level, for the author at least, one primary difficulty in applying the model to themselves in this way, that may also be true for others, has been with variations in terminology. As with the terms CR, CRP, or RP, there is clearly a degree of individual interpretability in what these terms probably mean and are perceived to represent. So too with the lens terminology, either for Brookfield himself or for other users and adapters of his model, such as the author. For example, Brookfield in 2017 specifies and orders his lenses differently to the way they were provided in his 1995 and 1998 texts. To highlight these differences, three sources of terminology are provided below (the 1998 version; the 2017 version in brackets; and other synonyms as encountered elsewhere during the literature review by the author):

1. Our autobiography as a learner of practice (3. Personal experience): autobiography; autobiography as a learner; autobiographical; autobiographical experiences; ourselves; personal reflection; self; self-reflection; self/teacher
2. Our learners' eyes (1. Students' eyes): community; learners; learners' eyes; student experience(s); students; student feedback
3. Our colleagues' experiences (2. Colleagues' perceptions): colleagues; colleagues' experience(s); colleagues' eyes; colleagues' perspectives; discourse with colleagues; peer; peer assessment; peer review; peers/colleagues; peer observation
4. Theoretical literature (4. Theory & research): critical literature; educational literature; engagement with scholarly literature; pedagogical scholarship; scholarship; theoretical; theoretical contexts; theory

For the author, given that the varying phraseology over time may imply either a semantic narrowing, broadening, repositioning, or evolving of the concept it applies to, there may be some confusion among other users of the model as to whether these words are implied as equivalents or inferred as nuanced modifications or refinements. In addition, the ordering (and in the case of 2017, the numbering) of the lenses can vary too. It is unclear if this variation was intended or not, and given the likelihood of users of the model to instinctively treat them linearly as presented, as was often the intention in the other more circular models described in the literature review earlier (as also noted by Redfern and Bennett (2022)), it may indeed be important for prospective users to know that they can, or should, broadly enter the model via any of the lenses. Then again, issues of terminology and sequencing may be of little relevance to the casual user of the model who has not spent enough time with it to notice such nuances, but who can still gain the benefit of an increased level of CR from it.

So what? In revisiting Brookfield's model, it becomes clear that any modelled approach to human thought is certain to remain imperfect. For example, when considering the advantages that the Four Lenses approach holds, in the author's opinion, it does seem to allow for a (w)holistic perspective for the practitioner. For the teacher, it is important to be open to considering their own experience and understanding it as fully as possible; that is, to gain insights from as many perspectives as they can. As Brookfield (2017) has also stated, CR teaching happens well when educators identify and scrutinise the assumptions that shape their own practice. The model allows and encourages that, and the argument as to whether Brookfield's choice of four lenses (versus other models' choice of 3, 5, 6, or more) is the best fit remains unresolved. That does, however, lead to some other issues with the model; firstly, whether it is indeed comprehensive or discrete enough. The holistic nature of the model means that it generally tends to focus the participant more on themselves rather than on specific in- or on-action teaching, with outcomes that tend to become more summative, more generic, and perhaps a less specific rearticulation of their overall situation. For the author, for example, a decade of teaching 21 different elective BE classes to hundreds of students cannot in any way be summarised in a few hundred words. This limited or uncertain outcome can also imply CR risks, such as insufficiently challenging established personal or institutional assumptions, and potentially undermining otherwise established standpoints, perspectives, and confidence. As conceded by Brookfield (2017), this can also eventuate into a sense of impostership; lead to cultural suicide; create a sense of lost innocence, and lead to incremental fluctuation and marginalisation as well. However, in the same passage, Brookfield also asserts that it is important to begin a shared reflective discussion from such a moment

of anxiety (a weakness) rather than with a success (a strength) as it more readily opens the reflective conversational space for others to contrast, compare, suggest, support, and advise too.

Now what? For the author, the simple process of undertaking this research will naturally have an ongoing impact on how they perceive, understand, apply, and interpret their own CR outcomes. The future nature of that impact remains unclear, and again that is an element of the nature of CRP: uncertainty. For the reader, however, the next best step is undertaking their own lens-based investigations. To assist, a ranked and annotated list of sources related to CR, and particularly Brookfield's Four Lenses, is attached as Appendix 1. The most promising of these resources, for the author at least, particularly in terms of direct relevance to their university BE classes, is undoubtedly that offered by Goldman et al. (2023). This paper, based directly on Brookfield's lenses, proposes a modified multi-lens framework (essentially by reworking students' eyes to *community*) to include work-integrated learning (WIL), which extends the classroom scope beyond academia to internal and external organisations as well (for other examples, also see Andresen et al., (1995); Billett (2009); and Freudenberg et al. (2011)). Students in these contexts can therefore benefit more generally from WIL in terms of personal development, professional skills, and in enhancing self-efficacy (Freudenberg et al., 2011). According to Goldman et al. (2023), "While there are many models of reflection, new approaches to critical reflection are needed that consider the social contexts in which students learn and work" (para. 1). This does indeed seem to be a novel adaptation of practical-based professional learning, allowing users to think more widely about organisational power, which is particularly useful for students as they transition out of academia and into corporate settings. As a proposition, this serves as personal inspiration to provide more balanced pedagogical reinforcement for the BE elective courses as contextualised by the author at APU.

5.1 Limitations and future considerations

In an analysis as ambitious as this one has become, there are naturally several overall limitations and salient points to consider. In general, there were few other examples of similar research available in English to guide or inspire this study, and of those, a number were paywalled and therefore beyond the reach of the author. More specifically, as mentioned earlier, most aspects of either the teaching or classroom practice for the selected class were not able to be explained or treated in any real intensive or comparative way. That is not to say that the process was not organically useful, but as a first attempt at a holistic and retrospective application of the lenses, a lot of time and effort was needed to get a feel for model-based CR in general, and for Brookfield's version in particular. So, in then applying the model directly to one's own practice (as a few other authors have in recent years) it was difficult, when reflecting, to know what was *right* or appropriate to include for a research paper such as this. Narrower and more directed projects would indeed work much better in the future, as would more longitudinal ones, or ones more reflective of current technological innovations (such as the impact of smartphones or AI), although they may also possibly work to somewhat artificially constrict or limit the freedom of where the CR insights could lead.

6. Conclusion

Guided by Brookfield's CR model, and with a desire to further challenge their own teaching practice, the author has endeavoured to summarise and journal a cross-sectional view of a personal model-driven RP session for this article. There is no doubt that increasingly structured CR such as this has had a significant impact on the author's general pedagogy, and, more specifically, on how the BE courses they have taught have been reframed, re-managed, and re-updated in ways which they now understand as mirrored by Brookfield's Four Lenses. For the author, the last few years of BE teaching (in the post-Covid-19 era) has led to new approaches, innovations, and methods unimaginable even until quite recently. The representative EfB1/B class often exemplifies that impact well. None of this shift would have been possible, however, without the cognitive willingness and investment made into RP, and the insights and lessons learnt

from this article bear witness to that. Nowhere else in the known literature has a single teacher applied the entire Four Lenses model to themselves at a single point in time in this way. This remains significant since any form of reflection, while sometimes difficult to understand or express in best terms, is often still meaningful, since any reflective light shone in this way may also help guide and inspire others in a more comprehensive and more model-structured manner. Given that each teacher is the manager of a unique teaching/learning environment and as such, inherits a degree of responsibility for it, it is hoped, therefore, that the unique journey recorded here provides meaningful and perhaps new CR insights and resources for these teachers within their own RP journey (and, more specifically, in teaching contexts similar to the BE courses reviewed here). For the author, this process remains very fruitful, particularly in terms of providing critical consciousness for several future projects, such as an imagined BE-specific modification of the lens model to suit BELF contexts for use both by both teachers *and* students (an aspect that was originally considered promising early on in this research).

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Further reading (as related to CR in general and application(s) of Brookfield's Four Lenses in particular):

[1] Critical reflection in general

- Bolton (2010) – Discusses examining practice and experiences both reflectively and reflexively, leading to developmental insights.
- Chen et al. (2018) – A basic attempt to analyse learning and teaching practice referencing three of the RP models.
- Door (2014) – Provides a useful overview of teacher dispositions (reflexive, critical, and creative) for “people who want their practice to continue to develop and evolve”.
- Institute of Leadership (2020) – Provides useful questions for the *What? So what? Now what?* model alongside a list of advantages and disadvantages of CR.
- Redfern & Bennett (2022) – Introduces “a new model which integrates, for the first time, both Western and Aboriginal Peoples’ epistemologies in critical reflection”.
- Smyth (1989) – Provides an insightful view into early CR, particularly the formative work of Donald Schön, alongside a 4-phase model for reflective practitioners to consider in their teaching contexts.
- Thant et al. (2023) – Compared program and course learning objectives directly against Bloom’s taxonomy.

[2] Brookfield's Four Lenses model in general

- Brown (n.d.) – Suggests RP advice and actions for each of the lenses.
- Center for the Advancement of Faculty Excellence (n.d.) – Provides many suggestions and questions for use with each of the lenses.
- Elliott (2024) – Provides many suggestions and questions for use with each of the lenses.
- Goedhart (2021) – Provides useful questions for each lens that help to uncover teaching assumptions for the new challenges of the remote teaching era.
- Jeffs (2015) – Offers a useful question-based RP framework incorporating the Four Lenses model.
- Kennedy (2019) – Applied Brookfield's perspectives on hegemonic assumptions in her post-graduate classroom.
- Reed (2014) – A short article that explains the lenses and how CR can assist with an individual's professional problem-solving and decision-making. He also, uniquely, models the lenses in a linear fashion.
- Stokes & Craig (2022) – Chapter 21 provides another valuable review of CR and perspective to the lenses, alongside practical classroom activities.
- University of Hertfordshire (2018) – Provides a brief review of the lenses and a useful list of reflection questions for each one.

[3] Applications of the Four Lenses model

- Akram & Mehmood (2023) – Details a narrative enquiry of four teachers and insights from brief comments they made related to each of the lenses. They also display the model as radial (CR centrally and each lens at a cardinal point around that).
- González-Acquaro & Preskill (2011) – Applied the lenses to help with determining the effectiveness of online collaborative tools.
- Nager (2017) – A thorough PhD thesis level review of Brookfield's lenses and an in-depth investigation into their applied relation to the development of CRP within inservice teacher's experiences over time through longitudinal narrative enquiry.
- Ndebele (2014) – Reviews the lenses and directly used two (peer observations and anonymous student feedback surveys) in a post-graduate course context.
- Nyamupangedengu & Mandikonza (2018) – Primarily explains how the first author used the lens of students' experiences for CR on her teaching practices, which had been influenced by a CR of her practice-focused autobiography lens.
- Pallangyo & Isangula (2023) – Applied two of the lenses (student feedback and personal reflection) to better understand issues related to an online-discussion groups for undergraduate nursing students.

[4] Modifications of the Four Lenses model

- Goldman et al. (2023) – Provides a useful list of questions by lens alongside a WIL proposed modification of the lens model.
- Kamardeen (2015) – An extensive personal study at the higher education level that used the Four Lenses framework “to create a reflective teaching practice model, which was then validated with a case study in the second phase”.
- White (2021) – Chapter 7 details another useful analysis of the lenses alongside a proposed strength-based model integrating the lenses. He presents these in a circular fashion, then adapts them into a detailed 7-phase circular model.