# UNDERSTANDING STUDENT TEACHERS' EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH JOURNALS AT AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING DEPARTMENT: A TURKISH UNIVERSITY CASE

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**Abstract** – *This paper focuses on a case study of twelve student teachers' experiences about 'Teaching Practice' through teaching journals in an English Language Teaching (ELT) department in a university in Turkey. Data were analysed qualitatively through eight thematic categories, namely, 'teaching topic', 'teaching techniques', 'problems in teaching', 'dealing with problems', 'successful parts in teaching', 'unsuccessful parts in teaching', 'changes in the plan' and 'possible future change in teaching'. 'Timing', 'classroom management', 'giving instructions' and 'planning' are identified as the problematic areas in teaching. The emergent data underline the importance of teacher knowledge, teaching skills and competencies focusing on a more effective school-faculty partnership and effective teacher education. The implications of the study's findings are discussed at the end of the paper.*

## Introduction

It has become increasingly clear that the 'quality' of education has come to have an important place in any discussion about educational improvement and change. Within developing world contexts, early concerns were about 'quantity'. Now, the concern is not just about getting more students into schools, but also about the quality of the education that they might be expected to experience while they are there. Central to this learning experience is the teacher, and a good deal of discussion and research concerning the effectiveness of the teacher has dominated educational writings during recent decades.

Turkey is no exception to this development. For example, there have been rapid changes in initial teacher education in Turkey relating directly to issues concerning the improved effectiveness of new teachers. New national policies have stipulated the expansion of the period of compulsory education – known in Turkey as Basic Education – from five to eight years. A consequence of this was a re-organisation of education faculties to provide the necessary numbers of suitably qualified teachers of quality. In the early 1990s, primary teacher education courses were extended from two to four years, automatically qualifying

such courses for graduate status. Courses for teachers in Basic Education were re-thought and considerable work was done to improve the teaching practice of the initial teacher education course, to produce new curricula in the methodology of teaching in each subject area and to develop working relationships between faculties of education and the practice schools in which they place their students.

The Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK) was also concerned to improve subject teaching for students in secondary education and for those in the last years in Basic Education. The main work objective here was to focus on a sound academic understanding of the subject base through an undergraduate programme lasting three-and-a-half years, followed by postgraduate training in pedagogical and school-based practice lasting one-and-a-half years. This system shares some similarities with the UK model of a first degree followed by a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

The main reasons for the 'restructuring programme' undertaken in 1998 were the insufficient teaching practice and the gap between theory and practice (see YÖK, 1998). The situation could certainly be said to have improved somewhat as a result of this. However, in my view there are other fundamental issues, such as, definition and content of the roles and responsibilities of partnership between practice schools and education faculties and its actual practice. I think the roots of the ongoing problems are in the perceived communication gap between the Ministry of Education and the Higher Education Council (YÖK) (see Gürsimsek, Kaptan & Erkan, 1997; Altan, 1998; Küçükahmet, 1999). In Turkey, the perceived problem in the system, namely the gap between theory and practice in teacher education courses, is fundamental to the policy makers' thinking about improving the effectiveness of teachers.

However, the meaning of theory and practice, their nature, relationship, construction and ownership are not addressed either implicitly or explicitly in the Language Teacher Education (LTE) programme. The theory-practice divide remains unarticulated. I subscribe to van Lier's (1996) view that, in general, theory might be defined as received knowledge, data gathered from research and a collection of hypotheses. This interpretation of theory can be identified as 'public theory'. Drawing on this definition, in the Turkish context, the gap between theory and practice derives from the transmission of the so-called 'public theory' without application to educational settings.

Bridging the gap between 'public theories' and practice may be achieved through adapting van Lier's (1994, 1996) understanding of 'theory of practice' and 'theorising'. The point made is that 'theory of practice' is located in classroom practice and experiences, where practitioners become more familiar with 'public theories' and make them personal by 'theorising' them through process-oriented pedagogical interaction. In this way, practitioners construct their own theories

through 'theorising', and these theories become 'personal theories' (see Kumaravadivelu, 1999). Consequently, it is crucial for practitioners to examine their own theories by making them explicit, and in doing so rationalise the meaning and reasons of pedagogical decisions. Therefore, there is a need to know what makes an effective teacher in an attempt to explore teachers' public and personal theories through decision making process, their actions and some problematic issues regarding teacher education.

In this context, my main goal in this article is to focus on student teachers' understandings and experiences through journals which they keep while they are teaching in their practice schools as a compulsory requirement of their degree. I believe that the data gathered from the post teaching journals enables me to understand my students' theories (public and personal) and actions, and the relationship between them within the framework of teacher effectiveness. As a teacher educator and tutor I have to be well informed of the current needs of my students if I am to help them become effective teachers. Toward this end, I believe that journals are useful tools to explore how public and personal theories are transformed into actions through decision-making processes, teaching skills and competencies.

## Thinking about effective teaching

There is no doubt that the immediate response to questions about what are the determinants of effective teaching would be that the teacher is the most essential of these. However, thinking for a few moments raises questions about what effective teaching is, how it can be defined and if it can be measured. Some educators

> ' … claim that good teaching cannot be defined because the criteria differ for every instructional situation and every teacher. They conceive good teaching as being so complex and creative that it defies analysis.' (Braskamp & Brandenburg, 1984, p. 1)

However, this view has not stopped educational researchers and writers from considering the issue. Looking at the literature, it would seem that much writing has focussed on discovering what teacher characteristics are associated with good teaching. The result of this line of inquiry is lists of teacher characteristics, which may be used to define the ideal model of the 'effective teacher'. Perrot (1982) summarised effectiveness as 'hardness of the head and softness of the heart' (p. 15), but other educators have produced much longer lists of teacher effectiveness. For Harris, Jamieson & Russ (1996), the components of effective teaching are:

‘• Effective planning
- Meaningful learning
- A positive inter-personal climate
- Cognitive matching (Matching content or knowledge to students’ stage of intellectual development)
- Translation (Breaking up subject content into comprehensible parts for the learners)
- Effective teaching time
- Quality of instruction
- High teacher and learner expectations
- Enhancing motivation
- Monitoring and assessment
- Reflection and evaluation’ (p. 74)

Broadhead (1987), on the other hand, pulled together a blueprint for the effective teacher. This model contained 41 items under five headings (i.e., ‘professional behaviour’, ‘personal characteristics’, ‘organized attributes’, ‘perceptive qualities’ and ‘information-gathering skills and evaluative skills’). An example of the detail can be seen in the ‘organized attributes’ which include: (i) engaging in long and short-term lesson planning; (ii) gaining access to teaching aids/resources for both self and students; (iii) being skilful in class management and the grouping of students; (iv) making use of a diversity of subject matter within the classroom; (v) selecting and presenting subject matter that will engage students’ interest; (vi) developing students’ main skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening; and (vii) being able to communicate the assessment of performance to individual students.

The list of headings compiled from the documents by Broadhead (1987) is detailed and very prescriptive, and although all the items might not be attainable by every teacher, it identified thinking about what teachers should aspire to. On their part, Hopkins & Stern (1996) provide a useful synthesis on ‘effective teaching’ that highlights the key characteristics of high quality teachers. Such teachers are endowed with ‘commitment’, ‘love of children’, ‘mastery of subject content’, ‘multiple models of teaching’, ‘the ability to collaborate with other teachers’ and ‘capacity for reflection’. This constitutes, in my view, a more holistic view in comparison with Broadhead’s blueprint.

One issue concerns differences about the actual role of the teacher in the educational process. Borger & Tilemma (1993), for example, consider that the teacher has not only to acquire relevant knowledge and skills, but also has to bring that knowledge and those skills into action in the classroom practice. Essentially, this means that, for Borger & Tilemma, effective teachers transfer the theoretical knowledge into application, taking into account the situation and changing

demands of the classroom. This is a decision-making process that relies on teachers' knowledge base, both public and personal theories, the particular conditions, an understanding of teaching and experience, and a conception of teaching models.

## Conception of two models of teaching

Cooper & McIntyre (1996) mention two contrasting models of the curriculum and teaching to illustrate their point. One model is what they call the 'national curriculum model', which sees the teacher as a pedagogical expert. The other is the 'educator model', which sees the teacher as a scholar and critic. The national curriculum model regards the curriculum as a body of knowledge and a set of values that are prescribed by subject experts and delivered by teachers. However, the knowledge itself is generated and selected by expert scholars.

In the educator model, however, the task of teaching the curriculum is less prescriptive. In this model, guidance from expert scholars can be welcomed, but the actual curriculum decision-making in terms of what is to be taught cannot be separated from decisions about how it is to be taught and to whom it will be taught. This model implies that there is an interaction between teachers and students, which is a basis for generating the curriculum rather than a transmission of curriculum content decided elsewhere and without the necessary direct relevance to a particular audience. In the educator model, it is essential that teachers should have subject expertise and the capacity for critical curricular thinking which will enable them to decide what should be taught. Their effectiveness comes from doing this well. From just this example, we can see that the criteria for making judgements about what is an effective teacher can be very different and are dependent on views of what the teaching process is supposed to be about.

In the educator model, the teacher is more of a decision-maker. The skills of an effective teacher in this model depend upon the teacher's ability to make decisions based upon a different range of pedagogical skills, rather than those required to follow the prescriptions of others. We could say that these decisions are based not only on the knowledge that the teacher has about the subject base, but also on the skills that enable the teacher to establish an effective teaching context.

## Teacher knowledge bases and essential teaching skills

A good example of such an approach is that discussed by Shulman (1986) who emphasises the basis of knowledge that teachers must have. According to Shulman, effective teachers are teachers who have an understanding of how to

promote learning among students. The seven areas identified by Shulman are:

> ‘• Content knowledge: referring to the amount and organization of knowledge in the mind of the teacher. This includes both substantive and syntactic structures of a subject, i.e. the variety of ways in which the basic concepts and principles of the discipline are organised and the ways in which truth or falsehood, validity or invalidity, are established.
> • General pedagogical knowledge: with special reference to those broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organization that appear to transcend subject matter.
> • Curriculum knowledge: with particular grasp of the materials and programmes that serve as ‘tools of the trade’ for teachers.
> • Pedagogical-content knowledge: that form of content knowledge that embodies the most essential aspects of content regarding its teachability. It includes, for any given subject area, the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations. In other words, the way of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others.
> • Knowledge of learners and their characteristics.
> • Knowledge of educational contexts: ranging from the workings of the group or classroom, the governance and financing of schools, to the character of communities and cultures.
> • Knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values, and the philosophical and historical grounds.’ (Bennett, 1993, p. 7)

No area stands alone; this is a more holistic view of effective teaching. All the individual knowledge bases are to be taken along with all the other knowledge bases, which the teacher has to understand and implement. This view is more compatible with the educator model and, I feel, provides a more integrated model of teaching, appreciating different teaching skills, competencies and knowledge bases. In this model, an effective teacher has a clear understanding of how these types of knowledge interact with one another depending on certain conditions.

Within current thinking in Turkey concerning the education of teachers, a knowledge base is seen as fundamental to teachers’ effectiveness in the classroom and considerable effort has been spent on developing new curricula. However, as mentioned earlier, the main recognised problem in the old model of initial teacher education was the identified gap between what teachers knew about the subject area and how they were going to manage student learning in the classroom.

Consequently, elements were built into the new curricula that help to focus the teacher on how learning is to be achieved in a more positive way. The issue now is to focus on teaching skills in the classroom as much as on the content of what is to be taught.

Kyriacou (1991) observes that planning, presentation and monitoring, and reflection and evaluation are major skills for the teacher. However, planning covers all these things because all the other aspects mentioned by Kyriacou need to be thought about by the teacher at the planning stage. To be effective, the planning stage must take into account the potential level of student attention, motivation, their mental effort and the desired educational outcome. This links planning to the notions of 'preparedness' and 'purposefulness' for both the teacher and the students (Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1996). Harris, Jamieson & Russ (1996) say that to be more effective, the expected outcomes of lessons should be set out clearly and shared with students. This is all part of the 'advanced mapping' that takes into account the context of the lesson, the type of student, the room layout, time of day as well as the content and learning activities in relation to students' previous knowledge and understanding.

Lesson presentation is part of the focus of developments in Turkey that relate to more effective classroom practice and as well as the planning, which has already been mentioned. There is the need to monitor how the lesson is going, how time is monitored, how relevant is the task, and how the presentation is (i.e., teacher's tone of voice and manner). Effective teachers should try to see the learning experience from the students' perspective as well as the teacher's, taking into consideration students' problems, difficulties and errors, and the effect of these on learning and self-confidence. Harris, Jamieson & Russ (1996) state that effective teaching is strongly linked to effective monitoring, which implies the routine assessment of the progress of the lesson and students' learning. It is a circular process really, because the context of the lesson, the learning content, the teaching approach adopted, the range of student abilities, and the tasks carried out will influence the type of monitoring that the teacher chooses. For example, teachers may use tools to assess progress (such as questions, quick tests, essays, and checking work) in addition to reading the facial expressions and general behaviour of students. Feedback concerning student progress, either individually or collectively, is another tool that teachers may use. This view is compatible with the classroom assessment cycle that spreads over four phases, namely 'plan the assessment', 'gather evidence', 'interpret the evidence' and 'use the results' (see Buhagiar, 2006). Such an assessment method is highly related to the educator model of teacher education, as all phases are interactive with each other, giving space to teachers to make critical pedagogical decisions.

As well as monitoring for effectiveness in the lesson, a review of the success of the lesson in the light of planning and the lesson experience is also necessary. Robertson (1981) suggests that reflection and evaluation after a lesson involves: (i) checking whether the lesson has been successful; and (ii) assessing and recording the educational progress of the students. It could be said that there is a difference between evaluation and reflection. Evaluation could be seen as the systematic collection of evidence and judgements, whereas reflection could be seen as less systematic but no less valuable. In the content of initial teacher education courses, teaching skills and competencies are understandably closely related to each other, since the teacher must constantly question, adapt and modify his or her skills and competencies.

## Teaching competencies in effective teaching

Harris, Jamieson & Russ (1996) state that the main role of an effective teacher is to create powerful learners. This implies competencies for teachers that go beyond the relevant subject matter to include skills such as flexibility in thinking, continuous self-directed learning, creativity, good communication with students and with other teachers, and the ability to take initiative. In order to underline the relationship between effective teaching and competencies, teaching competencies can be defined as follows:

- The ability to react against a particular situation (Ashton & Webb, 1986).
- Dynamic reaction as a consequence of cognitive, behavioural and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986, 1989).
- The ability to control situations, making decisions and putting these decisions into action (Bandura, 1986, 1990).
- Feeling confident concerning the processes of effective teaching and learning (Smith, 1989; Guskey & Passaro, 1994).

Kyriacou (1991) also identifies three important teacher knowledge and competencies that cover the above definitions holistically. These are:

- **Knowledge:** Teacher's content knowledge, knowledge about student, curriculum, teaching methods and the ability to teach appropriately regarding the factors influencing teaching and learning processes.
- **Decision-making:** Teacher's thinking and decision-making process before, while and after teaching (see also Schön, 1983, 1987).
- **Action:** Teacher's set of actions either as an outcome of teaching or the ones he or she uses while teaching. These can be explicit (desired and deliberate)

or implicit (routine and intuitive). It is rather important to make the implicit action explicit through analysis and questioning of the decision-making process (see also Argyris & Schön, 1974).

These definitions underline the strong relationship between effective teaching and competencies. These competencies are also located within teaching skills, teacher knowledge and theories (see also van Lier, 1994, 1996; Selçuk, 2000; Ayas et al., 2006).

It is recognised in Turkey that if the schooling system is to be transformed, we need something more than good curricula – we need teachers who are competent to take learning beyond what is printed in the curriculum guides. These new demands necessitate a shift from teaching as a transmission of knowledge to a more transactional and transformational teaching, which accepts that learners can be autonomous, actively thinking and learning for themselves. This conception of learning as part of the learner's inner activity and initiative can be viewed as essential to effective teaching within this view and might be linked to the 'constructivist view of learning'. It leads to a different view of the role of the teacher. He or she are now seen as a negotiator, an organiser of learning situations, and one who collaborates, participates and interacts in the context of schooling rather than one who just works in his or her classroom alone with the curriculum guide.

## Competence-based model of teacher education: current situation in Turkey

As part of the late 1990s restructuring movement in Turkey, the 'competence-based model of teacher education' was established within the 'craft model' in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice (see YÖK, 1998; also Wallace, 1991). YÖK (1998) has identified four main categories of teaching competencies in a booklet called *Faculty-School Partnership*. These are 'Subject-Specific Knowledge and Teaching', 'Teaching and Learning Processes', 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Record Keeping' and 'Other Competencies' (e.g., being critical). These competencies are defined as observable and assessable teaching behaviour that can be marked by the assessor as 'needs more practice', 'acceptable' and 'well trained' in the evaluation sheet (see YÖK & World Bank, 1998). These competencies, which are derived from teacher knowledge and teaching skills, give teacher educators and school teachers the opportunity to observe and evaluate student teachers' performances in a more standardised and objective way.

Despite these advantages, educational outcomes in this model are seen as part of the production/consumption system (Wallace, 1991). Students are put into

schools, to delivery places, with master practitioners and are supposed to get related craft knowledge. After the required practice period, trainees are supposed to reach professional competence (see also Atay, 2003). This model is essentially imitative in process and is 'competence-based' in content (McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Roberts, 1998). Therefore, it potentially avoids the exploration of alternatives and ignores individual differences in trainees' beliefs, values and experiences. Teaching is reduced to a set of mechanistic competency list.

## Teaching journals

Teaching journals have the potential to give space to alternatives and different teaching and learning experiences. According to Day (1993), the first priority of new teachers is to survive, to learn coping teaching strategies and to increase teaching effectiveness in actual teaching. Day suggests that teacher effectiveness through the preparation of journals can help teachers to monitor their experience by giving them something concrete on which to reflect. The autobiographical efforts of the individual teacher are not something new. Kelchtermans (1993) offers analyses of career stories and has revealed the importance of several aspects in the professional development of teachers, which are linked to the personal assessment of their professional experience. The identified aspects include self-image, motivation and satisfaction, and self-questioning in relation to pedagogical knowledge and practice.

Journals might potentially work as a tool to bridge the gap between teachers' implicit 'public theory', teacher knowledge, skills, competencies and practice in the Turkish context. Teachers can relate their 'personal theories' with 'public theories' through questioning the underlying reasons for their decisions and actions, and reconstruct or 'reframe' them if necessary drawing on the journal data (see Schön, 1983, 1987; van Lier, 1994). This has the potential to give more ownership, control, autonomy, choice and responsibility to teachers. Such a process might also lead to reconsideration of practice, change and improvement by encouraging them to act in an explicit, conscious manner as they become researchers-in-practice. Moreover, writing empowers teachers as they become critical decision-makers by using explicit, justifiable evidence, an articulated knowledge base, 'theorised' rationale and intrinsic professional sense of purpose.

At my university ELT department in Turkey, there is also a need to make implicit teaching practice explicit and justifiable. For we hold that the keeping of journals (either as a daily or weekly record) helps students undergoing teacher

education to better understand their own decisions, theories, theories-in-action and student behaviour. This forms a basis both for their own understanding of what happens in the classroom and for discussions with other student teachers. This is also a useful experience in the kind of collaboration that is seen as a basic activity for the effective teacher. In Turkey, at least, teachers do not necessarily have the experience of sharing this information and such sharing at the training stage might lead young teachers to see this as a natural part of their professional development in schools. Indeed, Atay (2003) maintains that teacher autobiographies, recollections of past school and teaching experiences, and all kinds of reflective and argumentative essays should all be part of teachers' professional lives. With teaching continuously requiring teachers to exercise judgement in deciding how to act, one can argue that professional development and learning can never really come to an end. It is a life-long process and teachers need to be always aware of the type of educational outcomes they are trying to foster, the appropriateness of the learning experiences they set up and how all that they do can provide good opportunities to achieve effective teaching and learning.

Within this context, in order to establish a more flexible, reflective and process oriented assessment module, three ELT teacher educators (including myself) developed a three-dimensional 'Teaching Practice Journal' to be completed by the student teachers as a part of their teaching practice portfolio that contains information about the faculty-school partnership programme, teaching plans, materials, observation and evaluation sheets, and other necessary documents. This structured journal has three parts – namely 'Planning', 'Actual Teaching' and 'Post Teaching' – and contains 18 questions (10 multiple choice questions and 8 open-ended questions) (see Appendix A). The purpose for developing this journal was to propose a less mechanistic and more holistic evaluation tool, which stresses the whole process of teaching. This would then provide the teacher educator with an opportunity to know about the difficulties, the decision-making process and the reasons behind the actions of student teachers concerning before, while and after teaching. This constitutes a marked improvement, we find, on the previous practice of simply ticking the observable competencies included in the evaluation sheet developed by YÖK as either 'well trained', or 'acceptable' or 'needs more practice' (see YÖK & World Bank, 1998).

## Methodology

This study employed qualitative case study research methodology to hear the voices of student teachers' teaching experiences through their journals. The thematic categories that emerged from the data will be discussed below.

*Research site*

Final 4th year student teachers of an ELT Department at the Faculty of Education take a 5-credits ‘Teaching Practice’ course as a compulsory requirement of their degree programme. They spend 6 hours in practice schools per week (observing the school teacher during the first 2 of their 14 weeks of school placement). From the third week onward, students have turns in teaching. They teach from 3 to 6 hours per week. At times, when they are not teaching, they observe their peers teach. But this depends on the teacher’s programme, the number of trainee teachers at school and the teaching topic. Unfortunately, the faculty does not have much control here – much depending on external factors such as the head of school and the National Curriculum. Our students are also required to attend a 2-hours theoretical course at the faculty with their faculty tutors during the 14 weeks of the spring semester. In the theoretical course, they discuss school and teaching experiences, teaching plans and problems with their faculty tutors in small groups of six.

*Participants*

Twelve ELT students (2 groups of 6) participated in the study as a compulsory requirement of their degree programme during the spring semester of the 2006-2007 academic year. They kept a teaching portfolio (in which they insert information such as the teacher and peer observation forms, pertinent school documents, classroom details and their time-table) and the three-dimensional Teaching Practice Journal after their actual teaching (see Appendix A).

*Teaching practice journal as a research tool*

Twelve Students filled this form after each teaching session at school (3 to 6 hours of teaching in 12 weeks). This form is three-dimensional and contains questions about planning (before teaching), actual teaching and post teaching. The idea is to give students an opportunity to evaluate the relationship between planning and implementation in mainstream teaching, and if necessary to readjust or reframe teaching for future use. In the form there are 3 multiple choice planning questions, 7 multiple choice actual teaching questions and 8 open-ended post teaching questions. The answers are discussed with the faculty tutor during the theoretical hours.

The discussion sessions revealed that student teachers find journals useful and would keep them when they become teachers, as journals give them an

opportunity to explore the relationship between their theoretical knowledge and practice. As a teacher educator, I believe that journals contribute a lot to teaching practice since they supply context, content and agenda to the course so that we could focus on problematic areas such as planning, classroom management, giving instructions, choosing the most suitable teaching materials and improving practice for future use.

*Data collection and analysis*

The present study will focus on the qualitative analysis of the post teaching section of the journal (i.e., the 8 open-ended questions filled by the 12 participating students). Each of these students taught in a state school for approximately 4 hours per week during their 12 weeks of teaching (in the first two weeks they observed the teacher). The 8 questions below form the thematic categories of the data gathered (see Appendix A).

1. What exactly did the students learn? (*Teaching Topic*)
2. Which teaching techniques have I used? (*Teaching Techniques*)
3. Which problems have I faced? (please list) (*Problems in Teaching*)
4. How did I deal with the problems? (please list) (*Dealing with Problems*)
5. Which was the most successful part of the teaching? (*Successful Parts in Teaching)*
6. Which was the least successful part of the teaching? (*Unsuccessful Parts in Teaching*)
7. Did I depart from the initial plan? If yes, why? Did the changes work out and how? (*Changes in the Plan*)
8. If I had to do again the same teaching session, would I change anything? (*Possible Change in Teaching*)

Table 1 illustrates the categories of answers. The number of times these categories were mentioned by students are shown in the parentheses and the most frequent answers are given in bold. These categories are discussed briefly below:

- **Teaching Topic:** The topics taught by the student teachers are shown in Table 1. The student teachers taught from grade 4 to 8. The age of the children taught ranged from 10 to 14 years. 'Tenses' (simple present, simple continuous and present perfect), 'adverbs' and 'passive voice' are taught in the upper grades. 'Vocabulary' (colours, days, countries, etc.), 'simple imperatives' (come, go, open, etc.), 'personal pronouns', 'indefinite article' (a/an), ' 'wh' questions' (where, who, which, etc.), 'simple adjectives' (big, small, tall, etc.) and 'likes/ dislikes' are taught in the lower grades.

*TABLE 1: Summary of the student teachers' teaching portfolio (each student: 12 weeks × circa 4 hours teaching per week ≈ 48 hours)*

| **POST TEACHING THEMES** | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Teaching Topic** | **Teaching Techniques** | **Problems in Teaching** | **Dealing with Problems** | **Successful Parts in Teaching** | **Unsuccessful Parts in Teaching** | **Changes in the Plan** | **Possible Change in Teaching** |
| **Hours (7)** | **Question and answer (56)** | Material use (2) | Material Use (3) | **Presentation (22)** | Material use | Change in the material (2) | Group work |
| Like/dislike (6) | Demonstration (7) | **Management (25)** | Giving tasks (6) | **Material use (16)** | Exercise in the course book | Change in the student level (2) | Would use song, puzzle or game (2) |
| **Vocabulary teaching (10)** | **Repetition (22)** | Grammar point (7) | Use of tables (5) | **A particular activity (27)** | **Instructions (6)** | **Deleted an activity (20)** | Reconsider student level (5) |
| **Tense teaching (25)** | Wrap-up (8) | Memorisation | Rewriting the sentences | Warm-up (15) | **Timing (18)** | Revision (3) | Stressing revision |
| Personal pronouns | Feedback (14) | Pronunciation (9) | Reforming the questions | Question and answer | **Management (18)** | **Timing (30)** | **Timing (14)** |
| 'Wh' questions (3) | Pictures (7) | **Timing (13)** | **Timing (8)** | Student motivation | **Pace of activities (16)** | **More examples (3)** | Less activity (7) |
| Asking age | **Warm-up (21)** | A particular activity (3) | Student level (2) | Use of native language for clarification | Maintaning motivation (2) | Use of Turkish (2) | Careful planning (2) |
| Adverbs (4) | Audio-visual aids (9) | Maintaining motivation (2) | Error correction (2) | Summary (2) | | No change (10) | Use of voice |
| a/an and plural - s | Presentation (8) | **Instructions in English (10)** | **Repetition (12)** | | | | **Management (9)** |
| Reported speech in present tense | Games (3) | Use of technology | Use of vocabulary in sentences | | | | Less use of course book (2) |
| Adjectives (2) | Guessing intelligently (3) | | Use of drills (4) | | | | **Clear instructions (7)** |
| Passive voice (2) | Reading aloud (3) | | Writing unknown vocabulary on board | | | | **Checking out materials (9)** |
| Requests (2) | Grammar teaching (3) | | **Raising voice to warn students (9)** | | | | No change (12) |
| Weather conditions | Guided discovery | | Omitting an activity (4) | | | | |
| Imperatives (3) | Brain storming (3) | | Monitoring students (5) | | | | |
| | Activities | | Explaining activity in detail (4) | | | | |
| | Pair work (5) | | Summary | | | | |
| | Graphic organiser | | Use of native language (7) | | | | |
| | Group work | | Use of body language | | | | |

- **Teaching Techniques:** The student teachers stated that they used 'question and answer', 'warm-up' and 'repetition' techniques most of the time for introducing the topic, asking and giving feedback, clarification, checking out understanding and communication. The other techniques used were 'demonstration' for explanation, 'giving feedback', 'using pictures' and other 'audio-visual aids' (such as music, tapes and TV), 'games' for motivation and interaction, 'reading aloud' for clarification, 'group work' and 'pair work' for interaction and sharing. They also used semi-guided activities with upper grades such as 'guessing intelligently', 'guided discovery' and 'brain storming' for creativity and inductive teaching of grammar or vocabulary.

- **Problems in Teaching:** 'Management', 'timing' and 'giving instructions in English' were identified as the most problematic areas in teaching. Other problematic areas were 'material use', 'teaching of a particular grammar point' (such as plurals and negatives), 'memorisation difficulties' and 'pronunciation difficulties' of students, 'teaching of a particular activity' (such as listening or writing), 'motivating students' and 'use of technology' (such as the use of computers and tapes in the classrooms).

- **Dealing with Problems:** 'Repeating problematic parts', 'adjusting timing for activities' and 'raising voice to warn students' were the most frequently repeated strategies by student teachers to cope with the problems. 'Material use', 'table drawing', 'rewriting the sentences', 'reforming the questions', 'use of vocabulary in sentences', 'use of drills', 'writing unknown vocabulary on board', 'explaining activity in detail', 'summarising', 'use of native language', 'use of body language', 'error correction', 'adjusting student level' were also used for better understanding and clarification of the teaching point. While 'omitting an activity' was generally used for timing, 'monitoring students' (walking around and changing seating arrangements) and 'giving extra tasks' to problematic students were used for classroom management and to cope with misbehaviour.

- **Successful Parts in Teaching:** The student teachers stated that 'presentation', 'material use' and 'activity use' (listening, speaking, etc.) were the most successful parts of their teaching. Other successful parts were given as 'warm-up' (introduction to the topic), 'question and answer', 'maintaining motivation', 'making use of native language for clarification' (i.e., Turkish) and 'summarising' the lesson.

- **Unsuccessful Parts in Teaching:** 'Pace of activities' (sequence of the activities), 'giving instructions', 'timing' and 'classroom management' were

indicated as the least successful parts of teaching. The student teachers had also difficulties in selecting and/or designing the suitable material, exercises in the course book and keeping the students motivated.

- **Changes in the Plan:** 'Adjusting timing for activities and drills', 'deleting an activity' for more effective use of time and 'giving more examples' for clarification were the changes in the initial plan made by the student teachers. They also changed their decisions in using 'materials' (using another material or not using the material), simplified the teaching topic according to the 'student level of understanding', made 'revision' and used 'native language' (i.e., Turkish) for more effective teaching. Ten student teachers made no changes.

- **Possible Change in Teaching:** 'Timing', 'management', 'checking out materials' and 'clear instructions' were the possible changes for future teaching. The student teachers also considered 'group work', 'use of song, puzzle or game', 'reconsidering student level', 'stressing revision', 'reducing the number of activities to use time more effectively', 'more careful planning', 'effective use of teacher voice' and 'less use of course book' as possible changes. Ten student teachers stated that they would not change their teaching plan.

## Discussion and implications concerning teacher education in Turkey

Drawing on the data, 'timing', 'classroom management', 'giving clear instructions' and 'pace of activities' were identified as the most problematic areas in teaching. These areas are considered as essential components of teaching skills – such as 'lesson planning and preparation', 'lesson presentation' and 'classroom management and organisation' – in order to meet the intended educational aims and learning outcomes (Kyriacou, 1986, 1991; Erden, 2005). The data shows that student teachers develop strategies to cope with difficulties such as student misbehaviour, lack of interest and motivation, difficulties in understanding a new topic or instructions, and following the initial plan. Some of these strategies are listed as 'omitting a certain activity or use of material', 'repetition', 'simplifying instructions or level of teaching', 'using Turkish to teach English' or using 'verbal warning', which are closely related to teachers' use of 'knowledge', 'decision-making process' and 'putting these decisions in action' (see Schön, 1983, 1987; Shulman, 1986)

These findings are of interest to education faculties preparing students to become teachers. Firstly, the faculty staff has to think about what they do in a m ore constructive manner, particularly with reference to practical teaching tasks such as planning, classroom management and the decision-making process.

Traditionally, the tasks given to students in training have often had little relevance to what they will meet when they go into classrooms. We need to exclude such tasks from the curriculum and focus our attention on more structured support that is directly related to what our students will be required to do in schools. For example, student teachers need to know about the range of abilities that they will meet in the classroom and how to cope with them. They also need to experience and appreciate how complex it is to work with children and unexpected behaviour or situation. The responsibility for tackling these issues rests with the university staff – they need to reflect on their current practices, with an eye on improvement or change, in view of what is happening in schools. University staff needs to be well acquainted with what happens in schools so that they can prepare students to be effective learners through more practical courses and training. In view of the present findings, we are planning as a department to restructure the content of the teaching portfolio. Our idea is to give more practical knowledge about the problematic issues that emerged from the data, to have micro-teaching sessions and to have closer contacts with school teachers who can possibly identify the sections in the lesson plans that would not work out in their context.

The present move, as part of the current restructuring period in Turkey, to broaden and systematise the teaching experience of trainee teachers on teaching practice will also bring teachers in schools in contact with university teaching departments. This closer contact offers two groups of people, who have had so far very little to do with one another, the opportunity to discuss the school and learning experience. It has already been mentioned that part of the new reform is to have closer links with schools. Part of this initiative is for student teachers to have more time on teaching practice and for tutors and teachers to work more closely together in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice. McClelland (1996) points out that successful teacher education occurs when there is a closer partnership between schools and higher education institutions, with each reinforcing the work of the other. In a genuine partnership, in which teachers also have a valued role to play in the training process, tutors visit schools regularly throughout the placement as opposed to just visiting for the student evaluation. This can give teachers and university tutors a chance to observe and discuss each other's work and be more knowledgeable about what is going on.

A longer placement in schools is useful also because it puts student teachers in direct contact with qualified teachers and gives them experience of a group of teachers whose practice, hopefully, is good. In this way they have a model of the profession to make comparisons with when they move on to teach themselves. Student teachers can gain in confidence by discussing with serving teachers what experienced teachers do, to then decide how that measures up to what they are doing in their training course. However, teachers in schools are not always eager

to take part in teacher training by becoming mentors to student teachers. Student teachers in my ELT department, unfortunately, have pointed out that some serving teachers were not ready to help in matters related to planning, selecting suitable teaching materials, activities and instruction. This brings about the issue of mentor selection and training, as mentors are important parts of teacher training because they are the real practitioners and models in schools with regard to putting teaching skills and knowledge into action.

The systematic observation of lessons, on the other hand, could be an effective research method that we could build into our university courses. We could plan, for example, to undertake such observations at three different levels involving colleagues, students and the classroom teacher. Teachers' and/or student teachers' autobiographies, case stories, portfolios and journals could also be used as part of examining what happens in the classroom. Day (1993) and Grenfell (1998) have argued that such autobiographies have a useful place in helping us to understand what happens in classrooms.

Observations, autobiographies and teaching journals are all part of training young teachers to think about what they do and to realise that teachers are different individuals. Teachers may have different backgrounds, personalities, career experiences and come from different cultures. Within our ideas about what 'effective' means, there must be room for differences between people even if we are constantly trying to establish effective teaching.

Drawing on the literature, being open-minded, interpreting the descriptive data from teaching outcomes, making judgements and evaluating them in the light of aims, values and collaboration are essential teaching aspects (see Erden, 2005). No teacher should be alone – collaboration with colleagues and others involved in education should help the individual teacher to share, clarify, compare, support, advise, analyse and refine together with others. Collaboration is still a neglected area within schools and is presently rare in Turkish schools. It could be encouraged through seminars, tutor-groups and workshops. For Turkey, at least, when it comes to issues of collaboration with other nations in today's globalised world (e.g., the EU projects and programmes such as Socrates and Leonardo), attention must also be paid to moral, ethical and political issues. This will guarantee that the professional and personal judgements can take in the whole of the changes envisaged in our schooling system.

It must be stressed at this point that reforms in Turkey have focused on initial teacher education rather than on improving the effectiveness of teachers already in the classroom. Dunne & Wragg (1994) point out the importance of in-service training to serving teachers, as it includes the opportunity to reflect on what they actually do through the analysis of their classroom practice. To have serving teachers acting otherwise might pose problems for the new teachers trained in a

different way. The climate of the school in which the new teachers start to teach is important to their development in the first years after initial education (this also applies to pre-graduation when they are in their teaching practice phase). If the teachers in those schools do not understand and are not sympathetic to what is changing, that is then likely to have a detrimental effect on new teachers. It takes a very confident new teacher to stand out against the established practice in the school where he or she has the first job as a teacher.

Finally, it does seem useful that we should encourage students to share ideas and look forward to working collaboratively when they are qualified. Cooper & McIntyre (1996) point out that it is necessary to learn about teachers' teaching of different kinds of lessons to different classes and in different circumstances. In this way, they say, student teachers as well as teachers can get more reliable and valid information about their teaching performance, about their strengths and potential weaknesses. If we can encourage student teachers to be reflective about their own practice and about the practice of others during their training, it might be that they also develop the good practice of doing this when they are qualified teachers.

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# APPENDIX A

## Teaching Practice Journal

**PLANNING:**

You may circle more than one option.

1. I made my plan concerning these items:

    a. Educational aims and objectives
    b. Course content
    c. Course book and/or teachers' book
    d. School curriculum
    e. Student needs
    f. All
    g. Other

2. I have divided my plan into sections:

    a. Warm-up
    b. Phase of activities
    c. Organising groups (pair work, group work, etc.)
    d. Course book and materials
    e. Timing
    f. All
    g. Other

3. I have faced some difficulties when making my plan:

    Yes ( )   No ( )

    If yes:

    a. Defining aims and objectives
    b. Defining student level
    c. Timing
    d. Defining activities
    e. Preparing materials
    f. Course book and/or resource book selection
    g. All
    h. Other

**ACTUAL TEACHING:**

Fill in the blank line below.

4. Today's teaching topic is:

   ..........................................................................................................................……..

You can circle more than one item in questions 5-10.

5. I have accomplished the teaching objectives:

   a. All
   b. Partly
   c. At some points
   d. Not accomplished
   e. Other

6. Timing for each activity:

   a. Whole class hour (40 minutes)
   b. Nearly whole class hour
   c. Less than …. minutes
   d. Other

7. I have taught the topic through:

   a. Explaining definitions and rules
   b. Using audio-visual aids
   c. Using instructional technology
   d. Correcting student errors
   e. Organising discussion groups
   f. Using examples
   g. Using simulations
   h. Other

8. I have monitored learning through:

   a. Making students do the drills orally
   b. Asking questions

c. Recognising student errors
d. Pair/group work
e. Discussion groups
f. Written/oral feedback
g. Examination/quiz
h. Evaluating homework
i. Other

9. Students participated in the activities actively:

a. All
b. Often
c. Sometimes
d. Rarely
e. Never
f. Other

10. Plan:

a. Followed wholly
b. Followed to a great extent
c. Followed to some extent
d. Could not follow the plan
e. Other

**POST TEACHING:**

Answer the questions below.

11. What exactly did the students learn?

12. Which teaching techniques have I used?

13. Which problems have I faced? (please list)

14. How did I deal with the problems? (please list)

15. Which was the most successful part of the teaching?

16. Which was the least successful part of the teaching?

17. Did I depart from the initial plan? If yes, why? Did the changes work out and how?

18. If I had to do again the same teaching session, would I change anything?