

**INCORPORATING REFLECTION INTO TEACHING ENGLISH AS A  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN TURKEY: A PILOT STUDY  
PROPOSAL**

“For student teachers, the opportunity to talk about their actions, their thinking, their beliefs, and their feelings, is part of the process of learning to be a reflective teacher.”

A.E. Richert

**Introduction**

The Council of Higher Education (YOK), which is a fully autonomous national board of trustees without any political affiliation, became the supreme authority for the regulation of higher education in Turkey after changes to the state constitution in 1981. Since then, YOK has been the planning, coordinating, and policy-making body for public and private higher education.

All universities and schools of higher learning are affiliated with the Council of Higher Education. Each university consists of faculties and four-year schools, offering bachelor's level programs, the latter with a vocational emphasis, and two-year vocational schools offering pre-bachelor's (associate's) level programs of a strictly vocational nature.

Students are admitted to higher education through a centralized, nation-wide single-stage examination administered by the Student Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM) every year.

The curriculum to be followed by the foreign language teacher education programs in Turkey is prepared by the Council of Higher Education. Public universities are strictly encouraged to follow the curriculum proposed by YOK while universities in the private sector have the flexibility to alter the curriculum based on certain administrative criteria. Nevertheless, the proportionality of the courses proposed by YOK has to be maintained in the case of a curriculum change.

Table 1 provides the list of courses that need to be covered in pre-service English as a foreign language teacher education programs. As shown in Table 1, the undergraduate curriculum for prospective English teachers consists of 58 field-related, educational/pedagogical and liberal education courses whose approximate credit-wise proportions are 60%, 20% and 15%, respectively.

Table 1. Curriculum developed by the Council of Higher Education for English language teaching programs in Turkey

<b># of Credits</b>	<b>Freshman Year/First Semester</b>	<b>Category of the Course Proposed by YOK</b>	<b>Medium of Instruction</b>
3	Contextual Grammar I	Field-related (F)	English (E)
3	Advanced Reading and Writing I	F	E
3	Listening and Pronunciation I	F	E
3	Oral Communication Skills I	F	E
2	Turkish I: Written Communication	Liberal Education (LB)	Turkish (T)
3	Computing I	LB	T
3	Effective Communication	LB	T
3	Introduction to Education	Educational/Pedagogical (P)	T
	<b>Freshman Year/Second Semester</b>		
3	Contextual Grammar II	F	E
3	Advanced Reading and Writing II	F	E
3	Listening and Pronunciation II	F	E
3	Oral Communication Skills II	F	E
3	Lexical Competence	F	E
2	Turkish II: Oral Communication	LB	T
3	Computing II	LB	T
3	Educational Psychology	P	T

	<b>Sophomore Year/Third Semester</b>		
3	English Literature I	F	E
3	Linguistics I	F	E
3	Approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT) I	F	E
3	English-Turkish Translation	F	E
3	Oral Expression and Public Speaking	F	E
2	History of Education in Turkey	LB	T
3	Principles and Methods of Instruction	P	T
	<b>Sophomore Year / Fourth Semester</b>		
3	English Literature II	F	E
3	Linguistics II	F	E
3	Approaches to ELT II	F	E
3	Language Acquisition	F	E
2	Research Methods	LB	T
3	ELT Methodology I	P	E
3	Instructional Technology & Materials Development	P	T
	<b>Junior Year/ Fifth Semester</b>		
3	Teaching English to Young Learners I	F	E
3	ELT Methodology II	F	E
3	Teaching Language Skills I	F	E
3	Literature and Language Teaching I	F	E
2	Second Foreign Language I	F	Elected Language
3	Drama	LB	T
2	Classroom Management	P	T
	<b>Junior Year/Sixth Semester</b>		
3	Teaching English to Young Learners II	F	E
3	Turkish-English Translation	F	E
3	Teaching Language Skills II	F	E
3	Literature and Language Teaching II	F	E
2	Second Foreign Language II	F	Elected Lan.
2	Practices in Public Service	LB	T
3	Measurement and Evaluation	P	T
	<b>Senior Year/Seventh Semester</b>		
3	Adaptation and Development of Materials in ELT	F	E
2	Second Foreign Language III	F	Elected Lan.
2	Elective I	F	
2	Principles of Ataturk and History of the Turkish Revolution I	LB	T
3	School Experience	P	T
3	Guidance and Counseling	P	T
2	Special Education	P	T

	Senior Year/Eighth Semester		
3	Testing and Evaluation in ELT	F	E
2	Elective II	F	
2	Elective III	F	
2	Principles of Ataturk and History of the Turkish Revolution II	LB	T
2	Comparative Education	P	T
2	Turkish Educational System and Educational Administration	P	T
5	Practice Teaching	P	T

### Review of Literature

Reflection has been defined in various ways by many educational theorists and teacher educators so far. Dewey's early conception of reflection has provided a foundation for many current definitions: "*Reflection is an active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of grounds supporting it and future conclusions to which it tends* (Dewey, 1933, p. 6 as quoted in Yost, Sentner and Forlenza-Bailey, 2000, p.39). Similarly, another definition of reflection by Loughran (2002) reveals that "...reflection continually emerges as a suggested way of helping practitioners better understand what they know and do as they develop their knowledge of practice through reconsidering what they learn in practice" (p. 34).

No matter who defines reflection in what way, definitions seem to be at a consensus that reflective teachers question their educational standpoints, judge their teaching in the light of recent developments, and try to discover better ways of teaching with respect to the changing needs of the students, schools and the society. Thus, it is important for teacher education programs to provide opportunities for student teachers to develop their reflective thinking skills (Arends, 1988).

According to Korthagen and Vasalos' 'onion model' (2005), there are six levels on which reflection can take place: mission, identity, beliefs, competencies, behavior and environment. Inner levels such as mission and identity "determine the way an individual functions on the outer levels but there is also a reverse influence (from outside to inside)" (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005, p.53). So, questions concerning the inner levels such as, "Why did I decide to be a teacher? What inspired me?" play a crucial role in reflecting as a teacher. Furthermore, if these reflections eventually end up influencing the reflections on the outer level, teachers can be considered to have accomplished what Korthagen and Vasalos call "core reflection" (2005, p.53). Instead of focusing on the analysis of the instances or events causing the problems in classrooms, teachers should be able to go "deeper" in their thinking; it is this "deeper" level of reflection which can bring about long term solutions, and which can help them step out of their vicious circles in their everyday classroom practices.

Achieving a depth in reflection requires a lot of "thinking, feeling, wanting and asking" (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005, p.50). As put forward by Zeichner and Liston (1996), reflective action is a process that involves more than logical and rational problem-solving processes; it involves intuition, emotion and passion. In reflective action, in contrast to routine action, "reason and emotion are engaged" (p.10). Likewise, the attitudes of open mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness constitute the key features of a reflective teacher for Dewey (as cited by Zeichner and Liston, 1996). Being open to listening to more than one perspective, recognizing the possibility of error in our strongest beliefs, being ready to give full attention to alternative possibilities, making deliberate efforts to see situations from different perspectives are among what these

attitudes require from teachers. The question we need to ask is, how are teachers going to develop these attitudes and this will to think, feel, want, and ask about their teaching? A possible solution is that pre-service teacher education should make sure to raise teachers' awareness towards the long term benefits of reflection.

Zeichner (1996b) wrote that “there is no such thing as an unreflective teacher” (p.207). It is reasonable to assume that every teacher adopts a way to reflect on their teaching. However, as stated by Korthagen and Vasalos (2005), “systematic reflection often differs from what teachers are accustomed to doing” (p.48). Likewise, for prospective teachers, writing self- and peer-evaluations, getting peer feedback, and keeping journals during their student teaching may not correspond to the notion of reflection proposed by teacher educators who claim that reflection should be carried out in a functional, systematic way. For example, Rodgers (2002) presents us with many characteristics of systematic reflection. Following Dewey's philosophy, she mentions that reflective experience has to involve interaction between the self and environment; there has to be a continuity involved in reflection; perception precedes everything, and reflection requires thinking in a disciplined way. In her article on “seeing student learning,” Rodgers (2002) also suggests a four-phase reflective cycle, which consists of presence in experience, description of experience, analysis of experience and experimentation. Without experimentation, or taking intelligent action, reflection is not considered complete. For this reason, encouraging prospective teachers to write self-and peer-evaluations as well as keeping journals may not be sufficient in order to teach them how to be reflective.

According to Feiman-Nemser (2001), a pre-service teacher education program should ensure that prospective teachers are going to acquire skills to: 1) “analyze beliefs and form new visions, 2) develop subject matter knowledge for teaching, 3) develop understandings of learners and learning, 4) develop a beginning repertoire, and 5) develop the tools to study teaching” (p.1016). As Feiman-Nemser points out, teachers bring their previously shaped beliefs about teaching and learning to their pre-service preparation. In most cases, they view teaching as transferring knowledge and learning as memorizing this knowledge. They assess their new practices based on their memories from their elementary and secondary education, which might mislead them into preserving their ill-formed beliefs about teaching and learning. Thus, they need to be given opportunities to “examine critically their taken-for-granted, often deeply entrenched beliefs so that these beliefs can be developed and amended” (2001, p.1017) before they can embrace new visions. As for developing a beginning repertoire, what Feiman-Nemser (2001) reveals is that prospective teachers need to learn techniques, skills and approaches pertaining to curriculum, instruction and assessment in order to promote student learning. Pre-service preparation is also a time where teachers start to form habits and skills needed for inquiry into improving their teaching. In order to be able to engage in studying their own teaching, prospective teachers need to develop skills of observation, interpretation and analysis. Some of the examples that Feiman-Nemser enumerates are “analyzing samples of student work, comparing different curricular materials, interviewing students to uncover their thinking, studying how different teachers work toward the same goals, and observing what impact their instruction has on

students” (2001, p.1019). During these experiences, teachers can create meaning individually, isolated from their peers but their interpretations can be “fuller and more complex when generated in community” (Rodgers, 2002).

In one of their contributions to the literature on teacher education, Ball and Cohen (1999) revealed their version of what teachers need to know. According to them, teachers need to understand the subject that they teach. However, this knowledge should include not only the procedures and information but also the meanings and connections.

Secondly, teachers need to know child development and how children learn in order to understand their thinking and in order to be responsive to their needs. Pedagogy is another field at which teachers should get competent. Knowing pedagogy entails knowing how “to connect students with content in effective ways” and developing “the capacity to adapt and shift modes in response to students” (Ball and Cohen, 1999, p.9).

Last but not least, teachers should be able to learn in and from practice engaging themselves in inquiry-based teaching, which requires an ongoing investigation towards their teaching, and their students’ learning.

### **Statement of the Problem**

When we analyze the curriculum designed for the English language teaching programs, we can easily notice that the majority (60%) of the courses is field-related, such as advanced reading and writing, teaching English to young learners, and literature and language teaching. These courses aim to ensure that prospective foreign language teachers learn, for example, the relationship between language structures and lexical items; important methods and approaches in ELT; practical skills for effective communication; a variety of literary texts from a range of eras and writers of British and

American literature and literary works written in English; designing and conducting needs analysis on language learner needs; the differences between young learners (K-6) and learners at other ages (in terms of learning of language structures, skills and sub-skills); techniques and stages of teaching listening, speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary, so on and so forth. Obviously, the curriculum was designed to teach EFL teachers their subject matter from many aspects. According to Feiman-Nemser (2001), one of the central tasks that a teacher education program needs to accomplish was to make sure whether prospective teachers are developing a beginning repertoire of techniques, skills and approaches in curriculum, instruction and assessment. Some of the field-related courses (approaches to ELT, testing and evaluation in ELT), and some of the educational courses (principles and methods in instruction, measurement and evaluation) aim to teach these skills to prospective English teachers. As for helping teachers to develop understandings of learners and learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) and to learn child development and pedagogy (Ball and Cohen, 1999), the curriculum consists of both educational/pedagogical and field-related courses such as educational psychology, classroom management, teaching English to young learners and special education. Even though most of the elements mentioned by Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Ball and Cohen (1999) regarding what teachers need to know are addressed by the curriculum, what is striking is the fact that skills pertaining to inquiry-based teaching, analyzing beliefs and forming new visions, and developing the tools to study teaching are not addressed by virtually any of the courses in the curriculum, perhaps with the exception of research methods.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion that is possibly drawn from the above discussion is that the curriculum designed by the Council of Higher Education for English language teacher education programs in Turkey does not support the current literature on teacher education with respect to reflection. There is a noticeable emphasis on field-related courses that addresses subject matter knowledge and necessary skills to teach it. Although there is a concentration on learning and pedagogy by several courses, there is little evidence that the curriculum supports developing prospective teachers' skills for reflective practice.

Providing pre-service teachers with opportunities for reflection cannot be regarded as dispensable if a more efficient professional preparation is the aim. Teacher educators should strive to prepare teachers to be critical thinkers who can challenge the status quo. Reflective practice can be established and supported over time through the teacher education curriculum.

In this paper, as a doctoral student in School of Education, Department of Educational Theory and Practice at University at Albany, SUNY, I propose a pilot study which is going to examine the prospective English teachers' opinions about reflective practices in a semester-length undergraduate course on reflection.

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