

Introductory Statement

“Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.”

Abigail Adams

One of my earliest learning experiences comes from a black book which included interesting information from newspapers and various printed materials that my mother collected. She first glued these clippings on white pages and then had them bound. I used to get an indescribable pleasure when looking at the pictures in it and could not wait until the day when I was finally ready to read every single piece of information in this primitive-looking book. To this day, I still remember the picture of a stork cleaning an alligator’s teeth, which introduced me to the notion of ecological balance; I still remember the picture of Kanuni Sultan Suleiman and that his nick name was Magnificent, which introduced me to the notion of history; I still remember the picture illustrating early humans’ discovery of fire, the news about astronomy, literature, and much more. This story was important for me to tell, because as the daughter of a couple who have devoted their lives to teaching mathematics and science, I have always been appreciative of seeking knowledge and sharing it with others as well as learning from them.

My engagement in the field of learning and teaching began in 1994 after I passed a fairly competitive entrance exam and gained admittance to a high school that specialized in teacher training. I further developed this knowledge throughout my undergraduate study in a pre-service teacher education program in the department of foreign language education at Bogazici University, Turkey. When I was in this program, I used to think: “as a teacher of English, I can do countless things for my students but the number of people whom I can reach and the scope of my work will be limited; however, I can reach more people both directly and indirectly and enhance the scope my work if I teach prospective teachers at a university.” Therefore, I made up my mind to pursue a doctoral degree when I was only a junior in college.

Discovering myself as a teacher...

“Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.”

Parker Palmer

My doctoral education at University at Albany began in September 2006, subsequent to the master’s degree I received in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from the same university. At that time, I was still influenced by behaviorist theory, mainly because of the “Planning and Evaluation Instruction” course that I took during my undergraduate studies at Bogazici University, Turkey. The professor had been a doctoral student of Benjamin Bloom at the University of Chicago, and was considerably influential in my understanding of instruction. I used to believe that

having objectives that I could measure at the end of a class period was indispensable in lesson planning. However, as I was introduced with the leading-edge alternatives to theories of learning and teaching during my doctoral education (e.g., ETAP 720 Instructional Theory and Practice offered by Dr. Vicky Kouba; ETAP 710 Principles of Curriculum Development offered by Dr. Carla Meskill; ETAP 770 Frameworks for Teacher Professional Development offered by Dr. Carol Rodgers; and ETAP 735 A Socio-cognitive View of Instruction offered by Dr. Judith Langer), I started to deconstruct the norms that I had imbued from my schooling and teaching experiences in a country that had adopted a centralized educational system. Thanks to the readings in ETAP 720 and 710, I became familiar with Paulo Freire's transformative approach to education. I gradually subscribed to his philosophy, which offers that "knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world and with each other" (Freire, 1998, p.58).

As far as theories of second language acquisition are concerned, the Cartesian dualism of the human mind and body, which was embraced by behaviorism and cognitivism, dominated my understanding until taking ETAP 735. Behaviorist theories such as Contrastive Analysis were quite influential in my teaching. Even though I appreciated the use of Communicative Language Teaching as an approach, a theory that would "restore the proper balance between external and internal realities (that is, between the body and the mind)" (Johnson, 2004, p. 16) was still absent in my mind. In-depth analyses of Vygotsky's *Mind in Society* and Bakhtin's *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* equipped me with a firm understating about socio-cultural approaches to learning. I am well aware that application of these approaches to instruction will not be easy or even possible in a strictly controlled national curriculum. Although I still favor centralized education for nation-states like Turkey, I have now become an advocate for incorporating the dialogical approach into teaching and learning no matter how controlled the curriculum is.

Discovering myself as a researcher...

"We are incapable of producing truth but knowledge."

R. Tony Eichelberger

I had a strong positivist epistemological position when I started the doctoral program. I believed that scientific knowledge should consist only of unbiased observations of physical and social reality. This was partly because of my unfamiliarity with constructivist and postmodernist epistemologies. However, through the readings and my coursework (ETAP 777, Qualitative Research Methods offered by Dr. Jane Agee and ETAP 773, Foundations of Research in Curriculum and Instruction offered by Dr. Abbe Herzig), I have become more appreciative of qualitative research, which provides us with naturalistic and hermeneutic approaches to investigate educational phenomena. I now think that qualitative and quantitative research paradigms complement each other in our production of knowledge. I do not position myself radically in either camp. Yet, I still believe in the power of grand narratives as it pertains to cross-cultural research. We

should be able to compare findings and speak in a common language in order to benefit from educational research in the international arena.

My empathy for the underprivileged and subsequent passion for social justice have been the most influential driving forces behind my research initiatives. The educational system in my home country, in particular, serves many underprivileged children and adults, and almost all of the research with which I have been involved has a connection to this interest of mine. On the other hand, if one day I pursue a research agenda that would change our understanding about learning and teaching in the modernist sense, it would also pertain to underprivileged learners, such as those learning English in a multicultural setting or learners who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Future Plans

From experience to expertise¹

During my graduate education, I attended most of the special seminars and presentations held by the School of Education. I attended ACRIDAT and Educational Psychology Brown Bag meetings. I became a member of Jean Piaget Society, NERA, and TESOL and have attended various annual conference meetings. I have initiated all of these activities because I knew that being a good course-taker was not enough for the transition to independent research. Indeed, the repetition of these activities has been the key to my progress and development of skill, confidence, disposition, and independence as a scholar. In the future, regardless of where I work, I will continue to attend international conferences to share my research with the field, stay connected to practicing teacher educators in the world, and seek for new avenues for collaboration.

The focus of my future research will bring together the themes I have highlighted in this portfolio: foreign language teacher education, reflective practice, second language studies, and educational psychology. I will continue to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research. For instance, my dream research is to investigate the Turkish national curriculum for English as a foreign language (EFL) by taking many factors into account. I would like to revitalize foreign language instruction starting with a descriptive study at the national level. I see myself conducting another quantitative study to find out what kind of problems EFL teachers have across the nation. A qualitative study that would provide snapshots of EFL teachers' professional lives in less developed eastern regions of Turkey would help to understand local problems better. Through this extended research, I intend to connect theory to practice in a way that practitioners find meaningful and useful while fostering my experience to provide leadership for complex long-term projects. My other research plans include taking action against the rampant behaviorism that dominates teacher preparation and teacher evaluation. I would like to strive for the incorporation of reflective practice in national teacher education curricula. Finally, I plan to conduct phenomenological studies of low-income students attending private

¹ Title of the fourth chapter of Walker, G.E., Golde, C. M., Jones, L., Bueschel, A.C., and Hutchings, P. (2008). *The formation of scholars: Rethinking doctoral education for the twenty-first century*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

elementary schools on scholarships. I would like to shed light on their experiences to investigate how these experiences affect their self-esteem, which also ties in with my scholarly interests with regards to educational psychology.

I am also going to collaborate with Dr. Melda Yildiz from William Paterson University, NJ for a forthcoming summer school project. This multifaceted OKU Project is going to take place in Burdur, Turkey, and bring together high school students, faculty, and teacher candidates from Mehmet Akif University, Burdur, Turkey as well as faculty and teacher candidates from William Paterson University. Learning modules, workshops, experiential learning activities, and field trips will be co-designed and co-taught by the local and international faculty and the teacher candidates. I will actively be participating as an EFL instructor and a researcher during this process.

I believe that my educational experiences leading up to the dissertation have prepared me for the style of thinking necessary to produce original work. Not only the doctoral level courses that I took in the ETAP Department but also my individual initiatives have played key roles in my development. I have gained intellectual mastery and acquired the research skills to undertake extended research. With the moral responsibility I feel towards my country and the underprivileged around the world, I promise to excite my field through diligent efforts to understand what is known and discover what is yet unknown.

I have selected the following work to include in this doctoral portfolio as evidence of my scholarly thinking, writing, and independent as well as collaborative research:

Scholarship

ETAP 735, a critique of language aptitude research from a socio-cognitive lens
ETAP 770, literature review for a pilot study proposal

Research

ETAP 699, master's thesis
ETAP 777, research paper

Collaboration

ETAP 710, curriculum development project
After-school activities paper published in the *Journal of Early Adolescence*

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