

Chapter 11

The Impact of Pre-Service Teachers' Reflection on Their Instructional Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to investigate the impact of reflection on freshmen pre-service English teachers' classroom practices. Specifically, it explores how the participating student teachers' perceptions influenced their instructional practices as a result of participation in reflection activities. The participants of the study were ten freshmen student teachers enrolled in the English Language Teaching undergraduate program at a foundation (non-profit private) university in Turkey. Data came from the reflections of the participating student teachers about their recently-completed 15-hour field-based experience at the pre-school level. As a part of this class reflection activity, the participants were prompted to keep a diary in one of their undergraduate courses and respond to a series of statements or questions related to their classroom observation tasks. They were also engaged in class discussions and were required to write their overall feedback based on their field-based experience. The findings of the study revealed that reflective activities helped the prospective student teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses related to classroom activities, use of materials (use of technology and visuals) and classroom management, leading to self-awareness about their understanding and application of teaching skills and strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of teacher candidates being able to develop their ability to engage in reflective practices has gained the attention of various theorists and practitioners in the field of teacher education (Fairbanks and Meritt, 1998; McDraw, et.al., 2004; Frid and Reid, 2005; Pedro, 2005; Rodman, 2010). Based on a theoretical framework derived from the works of Dewey (1919, 1933) and Schön (1983), the use of

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reflection and reflective practice encourage pre-service teachers to actively consider and reconsider their beliefs and to think critically about their classroom practices (Rodman, 2010). As Dewey (1933) argued, reflection preceded intelligent action and is the act of active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it, and the consequence to which it leads. Emanating from Dewey's work, Shön (1983, p. 26) defined two distinct kinds of reflection: reflection-in-action which is the process that allows teachers to reshape what they are working on while they are working on it and reflection-on-action referring to thinking back on what teachers have done in order to discover how their knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome.

A close examination of research on the Turkish training system reveals that most studies are descriptive and there has been little empirical research. One of the possible reasons behind this problem might be the fact that many teacher education programs in Turkey provide pre-service teachers with inadequate opportunities to actively engage in designing their lesson plans, reflecting on their classroom practices and developing research-based strategies in a classroom context. In the Turkish education system, the pre-service teachers start their practicum experiences in their senior year which gives them few opportunities to develop their reflective thinking skills. Right after graduation they start teaching in a real classroom environment without having enough reflective practice, which causes feelings of frustration and burnout. Thus, particularly in Turkish teacher education programs, there is a great need to ensure that pre-service teachers are involved in continuous reflection which help them to make meaning of their teaching practices through connecting the learned theories and teaching practice experiences. In light of these observations, this chapter examines the effects of reflection and reflective activities on freshmen English pre-service teachers' instructional practices.

This chapter will highlight the following objectives:

1. Give a brief preview of pre-service teacher education programs and reflective teaching.
2. Investigate the effects of reflection and reflective activities on freshmen English pre-service teachers' instructional practices in a Turkish context.
3. Discuss the results of the study for evaluating and developing pre-service teacher education programs.
4. Provide solutions and recommendations for the existing pre-service teacher education programs.

BACKGROUND

There are many definitions of the term reflection (e.g., Goodman, 1984; Houston, 1988; Roth, 1989; Schön, 1987). One of the most widely known definitions, based on Dewey's 1904 notion, states that "the primary purpose of teacher preparation programs should be to help students reflect upon the underlying principles of practice" (Goodman, 1984; p. 9). Likewise, Grant and Zeichner (1984) claim that "reflective teaching involves a balance between thought and action; a balance between the arrogance that blindly rejects what is commonly accepted as truth and the servility that blindly receives the 'truth'" (p. 10), whereas Semerci (2007) proposes "a reflective thinking teacher always tries to train students with his/her best" (p. 1370). Finally, Crowe and Berry (2007) argue that "becoming a teacher involves learning to think like a teacher...thinking like a teacher involves developing a sensitive awareness of one's actions and a consistent focus on recognizing alternative perspectives and approaches to learning situations" (p. 32). Based on these definitions, it can be inferred that reflection is one of the most important components in teacher education programs.

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