

Chapter 4

Overcoming the Coronavirus Impact on Novice Teachers Through E–Mentoring: Online Reflection and E–Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to present the mentoring offered to novice teachers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) period. Four novice English teachers engaged in the distance education program of a private K-12 school in Istanbul, Turkey participated in the study. The data was collected qualitatively from teacher diaries and online discussions between the novices and their mentors. Specifically, the participating teachers wrote online diaries regarding the three types of reflection (e.g., reflection-in, reflection-on, and reflection-for). Then, they participated in online discussions with their mentor reflecting on their lessons and reframing decisions about their classroom practices. The findings of this study will provide further directions in identifying effective practices for novice teachers through online reflection and e-mentoring to support distance education in English classrooms.

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NOVICE TEACHERS

Novice teachers can be defined as “teachers who have completed their teacher- education program (including the teaching practicum) and have just started teaching in an educational institution” (Farrell, 2009, p. 182), although as noted by Farell (2019), the definition of a novice teacher is not clear-cut (Farrell, 2012). There is also no consensus on how many years of teaching are necessary to end this novice stage. Some researchers defined a novice as a teacher with less than five years of teaching experience (e.g. Kim & Roth, 2011) while others referred to it as a teacher with two years of teaching experience or less (e.g. Haynes, 2011).

Being a vastly studied topic, the experiences of novice teachers are still studied further to explore “the factors that would help to understand the difficulty or the ease with which individuals enter full time teaching and construct their professional identity” (Ruohotie- Lyhty, 2013, p.120). As the first few years of teaching are considered as critical times for professional development (Farrell, 2009; Warford & Reeves, 2003), novice teachers face many challenges regarding relationships with students, problems with classroom management, and unfamiliar instructional methods (Bullough, Knowles, and Crow, 1991). Veenman (1984) characterizes these first teaching experiences as a type of “reality shock”, defined as “the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training as a result of the confrontation with the harsh and rude reality of everyday class- room life” (p. 143). Parallel to this definition, in a more recent study, Farrell (2012) claimed that there is a discrepancy between pre-service teacher preparation and in-service teacher development which leads novice teachers to experience “reality shock”. A possible reason behind this gap might be that teacher education does not fit with the actual problems that teachers face with in their classrooms. A possible reason behind this discrepancy might be the unrealistic optimism of student teachers during training and/or the gap between theory and practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ganser, 2002; Hegstad, 1999). These two features highlight the importance of redesigning the teacher education programs, which could offer a more realistic picture of what being a teacher entails.

Fuller and Brown (1975) listed sequences of concern novice teachers go through. The first one is the pre-teaching stage where novices are concerned with the pupils they observe in the classroom rather than with themselves as teachers. Next, the early survival stage is when teachers lose their teaching role and they are more concerned with their survival needs as teachers. In addition, the teaching situation stage is when there is more focus on teacher’s performance rather than the learning process of pupils. In the last stage, the teachers start to become more concerned with the pupils and address their individual needs.

Recent research emphasizes the role of the first years of teaching highlighting how the experiences of teachers shape their identity and future practices. The concerns of novice teachers including feelings of stress (Mann, 2008); the potential for misunderstandings in a culturally diverse classroom (Hooker, 2003); beliefs about teaching (Erkmen, 2014); school setting and work place information as well as mentoring practices (Başer & Karaman, 2015; Brannan & Bleistein’s, 2012; Carter & Francis, 2001; Flores, 2011; Kim & Roth, 2011) and isolation leading to loneliness and frustration (Numrich, 1996) which may lead to a set of norms and behaviors that clash with their previous experiences (Sabar, 2004; Scherff, 2008) were recently investigated by various scholars. In this sense, as the role of teachers are shaped and redefined by various experiences particularly during the first years of teaching, this chapter aims to explore the reflection of novice teachers of themselves and their classroom practices during.

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