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## Perceptions on School-Based English Teacher Education: A Qualitative Study

### Abstract

The National Education Development Project (NEDP) is one of the most important attempts to improve the quality of teacher education in Turkey. NEDP focused on the development of practice in pre-service secondary school language teacher education in Turkey. NEDP supported this research to explore student, mentor, teacher educator, and mentor trainer opinions and experiences in depth and understand the actual implementation of school-based teacher education at schools. Individual interviews were conducted in a British University to explore participants' perceptions. This paper will discuss each issue which emerged from the data separately to highlight the issues that appeared important.

### Keywords

Language Teacher Education, School-based Teacher Education, Educational Change, and Turkish Teacher Education System

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# **Perceptions on School-Based English Teacher Education: A Qualitative Study**

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*The National Education Development Project (NEDP) is one of the most important attempts to improve the quality of teacher education in Turkey. NEDP focused on the development of practice in pre-service secondary school language teacher education in Turkey. NEDP supported this research to explore student, mentor, teacher educator, and mentor trainer opinions and experiences in depth and understand the actual implementation of school-based teacher education at schools. Individual interviews were conducted in a British University to explore participants' perceptions. This paper will discuss each issue which emerged from the data separately to highlight the issues that appeared important. Key Words: Language Teacher Education, School-based Teacher Education, Educational Change, and Turkish Teacher Education System*

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## **Introduction**

It has been a common practice, as Cowen (1990) notes, for educators to look to the educational systems of other countries in an attempt to discern whether other countries indeed are doing something more effective. Analyzing the educational systems and practices of different countries when there is dissatisfaction with one's own practice yields the potential for borrowing good practices.

The recent Turkish literature on education has focused on new teachers' effectiveness and confidence based on their pre-service learning experiences (Saban, 2003). Of late there has been concern about training for secondary school teachers, particularly with regard to the relationship between the university and local schools. Therefore, the Turkish educational system is looking to educational systems of other countries for wisdom on improving their own teacher training system.

This is a phenomenological study of perceptions of school-based English teacher education from students, mentors, and teacher educators (also called tutors) in the context of actual practices of school-based teacher education in England. This research was conducted to explore student, mentor, and university tutor views of teacher training in England based on a partnership between university and school, and to understand how much this system achieves, in integrating theory and practice. The information then is to be used in making recommendations into the Turkish system of educating teachers.

The paper will outline teacher training methods and the course philosophy of teacher training in Turkey to provide a background to the national and institutional context in which the programmes operate. The next section presents and discusses the qualitative

study conducted in England. The concluding discussion focuses on implications for Turkey's system of educating teachers.

## **Turkey's System of Educating Pre-service Teachers**

### *History*

The first Turkish teacher training institution, known as the Darulmuallimin, was established in 1848. Since then many different models of teacher training have been implemented. The current structure of the initial foreign language teacher education system was established in 1981, at which time the Higher Education Law reorganized and restructured teacher education. All initial teacher training programmes were transferred from the Ministry of National Education to the universities and were increased from three to four years of study. The goal in moving teacher education to the universities was to increase the quality of training teachers, initiating research, and development projects. In addition, this new structure enabled teachers to continue their education to master and doctoral levels.

In 1990, the National Education Development Project (NEDP) was developed as another step toward improving the quality of teacher education in Turkey. It was implemented under the Loan Agreement concluded between the Turkish Government and the World Bank (The Official Gazette, 1990). NEDP, funded by the World Bank and managed by the British Council for the Council of Higher Education, Turkey, supported all Turkish Faculties of Education. The objective was to contribute to the improvement of pre-service teacher education. Success was measured by a comparison with Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, on the quality and validity of teacher training and effective economic resource utilization in the fields of administration and management. The focus of the project was curriculum development and materials production, the development of student-teacher experience in schools, establishment of a system of faculty-school partnerships, development of a set of standards in teacher education, and establishment of an accreditation system via a new National Committee of Teacher Education to set national standards for teacher education. It also assisted with the provision of long-term and short-term fellowships and in upgrading the facilities of all faculties of education. The development of this project in Turkey has built on considerable change and development in teacher education in recent years.

Today, out of 98, 65 (5 private and 60 public) universities have faculties of education, most of which offer dual (regular and evening) programs. All degrees are validated by the universities. These schools follow an obligatory curriculum and some modern language departments have a preparatory year in which students' language abilities are developed.

In addition to those students studying in schools of education, students who have graduated from the modern language departments of the Schools of Science and Humanities may also become modern language teachers. Although the aim of these departments is not training teachers and the curriculum is not a teacher training curriculum, students may go on to become teachers after completing a pedagogical formation course.

### *Course philosophy and pedagogy*

Holmes (1983) said that the system of training teachers for Turkish schools is in a state of flux. It is changing from a traditional pattern to a more professionalized higher level system. This change and modernization in education have been ongoing since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 basic structures of formal education were determined. Since then, the education system has expanded in new directions and has had several reforms, but the framework has remained basically the same.

The philosophy of initial teacher training (ITT) has changed over time. In 1940, the Supreme Council of the Ministry of National Education discussed the establishment of a teaching philosophy for the initial teacher training schools and accepted the following approach; education students should learn through observing events and discussing them with experienced teachers to develop critical ideas. Then, in 1949, the council aimed at the re-organization of the curriculum of teacher training schools by introducing the idea of competency-based teacher education. At a 1971 meeting, the Council agreed that new teachers should understand that their role is not only to teach some rules and principles, but also to direct the students to think further and to discover. It was believed that effective learning occurs in a place where students seek knowledge and think. In the eleventh meeting that took place in 1982, the Council drew attention to the psychological and sociological factors that affect pupil's development. Teachers needed to understand and work to meet students' developmental needs, to help students learn without judging them, and to promote the abilities of each child by taking individual differences into account. After the 1980s, the educational objectives of the Bloom Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) influenced teacher education programmes and prospective teachers were trained to develop understanding in the cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor domains.

### *Course structure*

Turkish higher education criteria require that students on ITT courses have academic courses that will provide them with a theoretical background and teaching practice at a secondary school where they will have real teaching experience. Theoretical background knowledge comes from four kinds of courses: (1) Turkish nationalism, (2) competence in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the language that will be taught, (3) general educational issues, and (4) theoretical knowledge of language, language learning, and teaching.

Starting in 1998, all faculties of education in Turkey follow a standardized curriculum prescribed by the Higher Education Council (YÖK, 1998). Preparation for the teaching profession requires the acquisition of the necessary theoretical basis. For English teacher education courses, the knowledge base is drawn from linguistics and learning theory. Besides, the teaching practicum requires three sessions of field experience during the 4-year teacher education course; one, during the second semester of the first year and the other two in the first and second semesters of the fourth year. It is the last session in which students are required to do actual teaching. The aims of practice teaching are: (a) to develop student-teacher confidence in the teaching endeavor, (b) to enable them to develop some practical skills needed in their future role as teacher, and (c) to enable them

to be active and familiar with forthcoming professional responsibilities. Students are under the supervision of the classroom teacher and a university tutor.

## **The Study**

### **Aim**

National Education Development Project pre-service teacher education funded this research in response to growing dissatisfaction with teacher education practices in Turkey (YÖK, 1999). The Project organized fellowship training programs for post-doctoral candidates in the United States and United Kingdom to restructure pre-service teacher education programs offered by investigating the structure and the philosophy of pre-service teacher education programs offered by these countries. The results informed and helped shape the direction of teacher education policies and practices in Turkey.

Therefore, the purpose was to obtain the perceptions of students, mentors, mentor trainers, and teacher educators in the context of actual practices of school-based teacher education in England. The aim in investigating all four parties- students, mentors, mentor trainers, and teacher educators was to obtain a range of perspectives to examine for consideration in the restructuring.

### **Researcher**

The National Education Development Project conducted a careful search among post-doctoral candidates to investigate the structure and the philosophy of pre-service teacher education programs offered by England and the USA. The candidates were the Turkish teacher educators who had good command of English and who study issues related to teacher training at the various levels of schooling. The researcher, herself, as a university-based teacher educator, had always been attentive to modifications in teacher training courses and interested in improving their careers through continued education efforts. The researcher presented herself as a researcher, revealed her identity as a researcher and explained the purpose of study.

### **Research Perspective**

Cresswell (1998) divides qualitative research into five main qualitative research types and identifies the key challenges of each mode of inquiry: (1) the biography, (2) grounded Theory, (3) ethnography, (4) case study, and (5) Phenomenology. It should be noted that these five theories are not the only theories qualitative researchers employ and each of these theories are interconnected with each other.

Phenomenology is the one that is adopted here. The founder of the phenomenological movement was Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), who explored the way that we “know” objects. The philosophy of phenomenology aims to define the basic nature of the signs we interpret. Holloway (1997) states that at its roots, phenomenology attempts to describe phenomena and human experience. Holloway notes that the research methodology of phenomenology is concerned with the “lived experience” of people. Phenomenology uses methods that attempt to understand what is studied. The purpose of

phenomenological research is to obtain “a view into research participants’ life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings (what it means to them) constructed from their life experiences” (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 315). This method involves obtaining in-depth accounts of experiences from participants and seeking to discover the ways in which they develop and ascribe meaning to these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This study examines the current teacher training system in England in order to critically examine practices to learn about the successes in the hopes of applying this to the Turkish system.

It should be noted that because participation in the research was voluntary, it is likely that the students and especially mentors interviewed are among those most committed to the partnership scheme. This should be borne in mind in interpreting their views, expressed below.

### *Participants*

Participants included five Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students, five curriculum mentors and one mentor trainer from Southampton schools. To gain the broader Higher Education Institution (HEI) perspective, five teacher educators from five different universities participated.

The use of a small number of respondents is consistent with the recommendations of McCracken (1988), who stated that “less is more.” It is more important to work longer and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them.

Five student-teachers who participated in this study were attending a 36-week PGCE secondary course in Modern Foreign Languages teaching, following the Partnership model. The course model of learning to teach was explicitly reflective and experiential (University of Southampton, Partnership Documents, 1994/1995). For confidentiality, pseudonyms (Anne, Alan, Deborah, Patricia, and Lynne) for the five student teachers were used throughout the study. The participants had undergraduate degrees prior to entering the program.

Five curriculum mentors from Southampton schools (pseudonyms, Ms. Sawyer, Ms. Bloomfield, Mr. Clark, Mr. Wills, and Dr. Lyons) from 8 to 25 years experienced in teaching shared their advice through the study.

The mentor trainer was re-named as Mr. Fullick. Mr. Fullick was a senior administrator at his school. He had worked in the school for 24 years.

English teacher educators were all working in different universities which adopt PGCE. The rationale for using 5 different universities was to gain the broader Higher Education Institution (HEI) perspective. The teacher educators (pseudonyms, Mr. Usher, Mr. White, Mr. Johnston, Ms. Skinner, and Dr. Dickson) were from the University of Bath, the University of Oxford, the University of Reading, the University of Southampton, and the University of Portsmouth. Their experience with English teacher education was from 15 to 25 years. The participants are not related to one another; neither the mentors interviewed are the same mentors to the students who were interviewed, nor the tutors interviewed are those who supervised the students. The rationale for using those who were not in relationship with each other was the belief that more ideas would be generated in the groups of people who did not know each other. It was thought that the

participants might feel inhibited if they were interviewed among and about their acquaintances, which might result in a lower quantity of information.

### **Data Collection**

All participants were interviewed face-to-face individually using a semi-structured format, using question schedules (See Appendix). The interviews focused on the opinions about three areas: (1) lesson planning, (2) teaching, and (3) lesson teaching reflections. Post-observation interviews, on the other hand, focused on participants' reflections after teaching. The interviews lasted 65 min on average, but some were lengthier and on a few occasions I spent half a day or more at a particular school or university. All were all conducted by the researcher. Semi-structured interview schedules were developed and piloted before the study started, and I used amended versions for the main study. In total, I interviewed 16 participants.

In addition, I obtained permission to conduct direct observational visits to students on teaching practice in Southampton schools, observe teacher training sessions at the university, and to attend a training session for mentors in Modern Languages. The participant observations were conducted before the interviews. The spontaneous questions arose from the events which occurred during the observations and served to clarify the interviews. During that time, the researcher observed and noted the various activities carried out by the participants. Sketchy notes were taken during observations. The notes were expanded to personal reflections when the researcher returned home.

### **Framework for Data Analysis**

Miller (2004) indicates that phenomenological studies can produce a vast amount of data for interpretation. Therefore, it is important that the researcher has set aside the time to do the analysis and has a clear understanding of how to carry the analysis through. Creswell (1994) describes four major steps in data analysis in a phenomenological inquiry that I followed. The data were analyzed in several stages; with the participants' informed consent, I tape-recorded interviews and transcribed them. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain, analysis begins as soon as the first piece of data is collected in qualitative research. After all data had been collected, I read the participants' exact transcriptions in their entirety. The goal of qualitative inquiry is to determine and explain a pattern of relationships that may best be analyzed by grouping the data into conceptual categories, either predetermined or arrived at through the accumulation of data. I read the transcripts multiple times focusing on the stated aims of the study. Initially the transcripts were read without taking notes. They were then read in batches divided by pre-service teachers, mentors, teacher educators, and mentor trainer. In this way particular themes were identified and frequencies of recurrence labeled. Divergent or opposing views were also labeled and categorized until a range was identified.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers endeavour to achieve what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call trustworthiness in their work. They have framed the notion of trustworthiness as a

question: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). They have presented four criteria for the purpose of evaluating the goodness and rigor of qualitative work. The criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

This study aimed to assure credibility by following Lincoln and Guba's argument that credibility is supported by prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation. This study took place over an eight month period of time. Additionally, there were intense observations and evidence collection from the observations, interviews, and PGCE document evaluation once the participants were identified and secured. Transferability could actually be regarded as a goal of this project. It was achieved by taking the knowledge obtained from the study for application in the Turkish system of educating teachers. Dependability was assured through planning a suitable research methodology to address the specific question posed by the study. This methodology was undertaken in a rigorous manner as planned. To establish confirmability, rich and thick description of the setting, program, participants, procedures, and interactions were provided so that readers could understand the specified boundaries and parameters of this study. In addition, participants were allowed to read and confirm interview transcripts.

## **Results**

This section will discuss each issue which emerged from the data separately. The aim is to highlight the issues that appeared in answer to the questions that were posed to the participants.

### **An Overview of Institutional Programmes**

For this research, five teacher educators from five different universities were interviewed. These teacher educators were asked to describe their individual courses in order to understand the similarities and differences between these programmes. In many respects courses are similar because of national requirements. For example, all programmes require a hundred per cent student attendance. Besides, issues like the length of the course, the length of the time spent at school and the number of the people who deal with each student-teacher, their roles and responsibilities are fixed; all PGCE courses are 36 weeks long of which the equivalent of 24 weeks are spent in schools which are named partnership schools. All courses can only use those schools for students to carry out their actual teaching practice, and they cannot use schools which are not in formal partnership. There is no flexibility. All student-teachers have to spend time in two schools. The first placement is always seen as a familiarization period for students, and tutors all say they send students into their first school to become familiar with the British comprehensive school, with some set tasks to do, mainly observation tasks. In the second school, all courses prefer a very slow period of observation plus gradual participation. They say, at this stage, students begin to become more independent.

As to the differences there are some minor administrative ones, for example, they all have different names for the first school and the second school. For the first school, for example, the University of Bath uses "Home School," The University of Reading prefers

"School A," and similarly, all courses use different names for mentors. The length of each practice also shows differences from university to university. The University of Oxford and the University of Bath have longer first teaching practice periods. However, the other three universities have first shorter teaching practice periods. Students go to their main placements later. Other more important differences will be mentioned below.

### **Selection of the Student-Teacher**

Mentors all say they are encouraged to participate into the selection procedure. However, only, Ms. Sawyer says she has actually been involved. Others were also invited but it was normally a working school day and there were practical difficulties in attending. Ms. Bloomfield says she was also invited and she wanted to go but, "funnily enough I was asked last week to go to an interview, this week for the PGCE and I asked my school and they wouldn't let me" (Bloomfield, B: 185). About student selection, Mr. Clark says sometimes they had been allocated students who are poor in their language. He says it is difficult to make a better selection, as they can only select among actual applicants.

The teacher educators report that the student selection system in Britain is organized centrally by the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR). The first move a student makes is to write to GTTR who will send them a brochure or prospectus of the postgraduate courses for teacher training available in Britain. The students can select up to four courses. For example, if Southampton is their first choice then their application form is sent to the University of Southampton first. Universities start to receive applications in October for the following year. The criteria all courses look at from the application form are if the candidates are well enough qualified in languages; at least 60 percentage of their first degree should be foreign language related. Then they examine their academic references and their personal qualities. Do they have any some experience of dealing with children or with teenagers? Have they some experience of organizing? Usually, it will be their tutor, from their final undergraduate year who gives some indication as to how academically strong they are and something about their personality. Tutors all look for fairly open personalities, (e.g., more outgoing than introverted). Then, they invite those who are selected for an interview, jointly with a curriculum mentor from one of their partner schools. They interview them in the language they will teach. Mr. Usher finds student selection procedure very difficult and he says his department has been constantly talking about how to be more systematic in that way. He says, "I think our selection has improved especially by using mentors by making the students go to school and it is worrying that we have not got an entirely systematic way" (Usher, B: 237). He says some universities ask the candidates to teach for ten or fifteen minutes, which is quite time consuming. For example, each year they have to interview about 60 or 70 people applying to the English department. So, it is quite demanding.

### **Language Competence of Student-Teachers**

Four mentors say explicitly they want to select the students who are good at their subject. That is, they want the students to have good command of the language they will teach. Ms. Skinner believes students should have attained a reasonable level of language competence before they start the course. Students should already be good enough at the time of application because during the course there is no time for developing language skills.

"We can't do any language input; there is so much to do for language methodology. We can just concentrate on professional methodology" (Skinner, 2A: 673).

She says if a student says her/his language is not good enough, if this person asks for help, they say no, because they don't have time. What they advise is "Go away and improve your language. Go abroad and come back." (Skinner, 2A: 667).

## **University**

Students have similar general opinions on what they gain from the university. They think the university is good for the theory side of things. They believe they need theory, at least at the beginning of the course. As an example, they mentioned some areas in language teaching, (e.g., communicative language teaching and how to undertake a listening activity or reading activity). More generally, they mentioned advice on how to control a class, classroom management, disciplining, lesson planning, and how to relate children. They see this kind of "theory" as vital up to a point. According to them, the university gives them guidelines before they go to school. They believe if they have a good basis, input from the university they will feel more comfortable about going into school.

However, a striking feature of student opinions about the university is that they view it as a place that would give the most useful guidelines only at the beginning. They see university as secondary, and especially after the school experience, it is seen as very boring. As Deborah says "I am tired of the theory side and the academic side" (Deborah A: 023). As to their understanding of theory, it is "disciplining," "how to control class," "how to relate pupils." It is mainly understood as classroom management. Except for one student, they do not mention any specific theory underlying language learning, or language teaching. One student manages to be more specific, mentioning the use of the target language in lessons.

Just one student says it would be better if they had more theoretical input from university. This is Patricia who thinks she would like to have more educational theory, more of the philosophy behind education on the professional themes program. She thinks it is always good to have a basis and have a background on how to handle difficult situations because she believes student-teachers have to know "what you are doing, why you are doing it, for what reasons" (Patricia, A: 180). She adds she knows most people do not want this, however. One of the students stated explicitly that she did not want to come back to university after the practice.

## **Schools**

University tutor, Mr. Johnston, says "it would be nice to select the schools. In reality, schools select us" (Johnston, A: 242). The general pattern is that because insufficient schools come forward, universities do not have opportunity to select the schools. As Dr. Dickson points out, "we take everything we can" (Dickson, 1B: 009). All teacher educators say they had some problems with the selection of schools and they did not find some schools very suitable in terms of training teachers. Ms. Skinner says some schools are small; therefore they have to arrange and visit more schools. Mr. Usher summarizes the types of problems he has had with schools and what he expects from schools.

The be people committed to the scheme, who understand that their role is to begin to learn how to make their knowledge, their expertise available to beginning teachers, and they would support the beginning teachers' own explorations, they would encourage that not certainly say, "do it in my own way." (Usher, B: 121)

He says that, luckily, they are happy with most of the schools, only a few of them cause problems. He says these schools really did not understand their role. They were not supporting students; they were making them copy their methods and interns found them unfriendly.

Dr. Dickson says when there is a cause for dissatisfaction, and they discuss it with the school, some schools respond by saying that what the university pays is insufficient, that partnership requires a lot of extra work and they do not want to be involved any more. Mr. Fullick agrees that in some schools training does not happen well at all. Moreover, he thinks the main problem is that neither university nor school was given enough time to really set up the scheme properly. He states that it all happened in rush and it was very time consuming.

### **The General Responsibilities of the School**

According to Mr. Johnston, a University tutor, schools are responsible for students' classroom performance, monitoring, and providing day to day support to students, in lesson planning and in materials. He says schools are responsible for making both a formative and summative judgment of what student does in school. The professional mentor should spend time with students once a week, outside the departments, to study whole school issues. He says the university end of this is partly to assess a written assignment. Other teacher educators did not speak about the general responsibilities of the school.

All five students think they benefited more from the practice side of things. They think that at the end of the day they learn by experience, by being in the school. They believe in experience very strongly. They say they went to the school with a certain knowledge, as "this is how, this is what works, will not work" and that it is good to have this knowledge. Alan who agrees with his friends says, at the end, "it's just you being in the school and spending an hour or fifty minutes in front of the pupils and teaching them" (Alan, B: 033).

They conclude that is the best way to learn. They think the school-based part of the course is far more important, and in that setting they have to learn very quickly on a practical basis. Patricia says she has learned a lot from the school, though, she points out the importance of the quality of school. She says everything depends on what school the student-teacher is in and also depends on the contact the university tutors have with the school. Nonetheless, she believes that the school cannot teach everything. She thinks students have to learn from their own mistakes.

### **The Communication Between the School and the University**

There seems to be three modes of communication in all programmes. The tutors all say the most practical one is telephoning. They say all participants have telephone access to each other including students. They say generally they use the telephone in case of

emergencies. Besides, there are some people both at the university and at the school who are responsible for sending written documents to each other. For example, at the University of Reading there are co-directors for carrying out communication. All programmes have detailed course books and mentor handbooks. Furthermore, university tutors and mentors have meetings where they come together and discuss issues.

### **Practicing in Two Different Schools**

For all students, the two teaching practice periods are different. In the first one they say they are still not confident enough. For example, for Patricia discipline was very difficult. She feels that when she went into her second school, she knew a bit more. She thinks that in some ways it is good that the first experience is not that long. She believes it is possible to make big mistakes in the beginning. So, it is good to leave all the mistakes behind and to make a new start in the second school. Deborah calls this first teaching practice period a kind of an "experimental session." Anne also says she made more mistakes in the first school and in the next school she tried not to do the same thing again.

Students think that throughout the year they change and develop. In many respects first and second placements in schools have and should have different characteristics. For that reason what they expect from the school and the university changes slightly throughout the year. As Alan points out, in the first placement in school, students need a lot of help, a lot of guidelines. The second placement was just "get on with it, do it. So it was you learning how to be a teacher, what worked, what didn't work" (Alan, B: 023).

University tutor Mr. Johnston asserts that it is not possible for someone to be a qualified teacher now, by being only in one school, because the government insists on this. However, he adds that even if the government had not insisted, they would feel it is a good thing for students to be in two different schools. He says "Our partner schools are not the same, they are different" (Johnston, A: 215) and it is good for students to experience these differences.

Ms. Skinner says these two schools have different functions. School A is a familiarization period for students. Some students are 21, 22 years old and they have recently been in schools themselves. But quite a large proportion of students are mature students, who may be as old as 55. It may be 20 or more years since they have been in schools themselves and they need to get back into contemporary classrooms. She says the main school experience is School B. Mr. Usher points out to the length of time students spend in each of these schools. He says in most courses the first experience is very short, which he does not find very satisfactory. He says if the aim is to bring students to school to gain confidence, this should be done very slowly and calmly. He adds the students on the Oxford course stay in the first school until May, and he believes that the benefit of being in the school from October to May is very important.

### **Theory and Practice**

Four students say in general terms that both theory and practice are essential and they balance each other, they benefit from each other. They believe there is a link. For example, they say they are taught on a Tuesday or Monday different methods, different criteria for language teaching. And then in school they are given the opportunity to go in and

actually use it, in practice. So without the university based work, they would not have got their confidence. One student believes theory and practice could be better related than is the case at present. As far as communication between university and school was concerned, a student-teacher says: "that seems to be lost quite a lot." There is a sense that the lecturers from the university are a little bit out of touch with what goes on in school because it's a long time since they have been in school.

Mr. Wills, a mentor, is aware that the university offers theory work at various stages of the year and thinks what they offer the students is reduced considerably from the old system. He says there are certainly things that he does regret from the old one: "I think it is not good that there is less input by the university tutors now, than it used to be" (Wills, A: 087). He believes to a certain extent students have a lack of theory. Similarly, mentor Ms. Bloomfield says she thinks they need more theory. She observes however that students prefer to be at the school. Once when she attended a lecture at the university with these trainees, she saw they just wanted to go back to school. They could not see what the point of these lectures was. But she says it was a good lecture, full of important stuff. Although it was not irrelevant, and was not badly delivered, trainees could not appreciate it. She says while she was "scribbling notes like mad," students seemed uninterested. She says it might be a case of the student-teachers not yet realizing how important the stuff they are being told at university is. She gives a particular student as an example. She says, she knows at the university students had a lecture on listening, (e.g., on the best ways of delivering this skill). But the student-teacher could not do it in the classroom. She is sure that if the student had listened to her tutors carefully she would not have had problems in the classroom. Ms. Bloomfield concludes, "it might be sort of an unwillingness to realize that what they're doing at university is very pertinent to what they're going to be doing in the classroom" (Bloomfield, B: 192).

Mr. Usher says the benefit of this system is that teacher education courses try to relate what they teach at the university to what goes on in school. He adds that when he was a beginning teacher, he had a course titled "Philosophy of Education" that was not related to a single experience of school. He says they try to help the students see the link between what they learn at the university and what happens in the classroom.

They are doing literacy this week. I am really interested in literacy, when they go to school, they will say to the teacher, "we are looking at literacy, we are looking at teaching of writing at the moment. I want to observe that this week. I want to discuss this with you." My tutor says "there are some good strategies." The teacher may say that sounds great but the reality is... (Usher, B: 524)

He thinks what school does is to provide practical experience related to given theoretical issues. Mr. Fullick, a mentor trainer, does not believe that the new system is very successful at relating theory to practice. He says that in the old system courses used to be underpinned by sociology, psychology, and academic work in the field that has never been popular with students. Students generally see this type of theory irrelevant. However, he says, "We swam from one extreme to another really. Theory went out of fashion, personally I don't see it as going the right way" (Fullick, A: 467).

## **Mentor Selection and Training Procedure**

Mentor selection seems to be quite easy. Mentors say when subject departments decided to become involved in the scheme they usually selected the head of department as curriculum mentors. If the head of the department does not volunteer, somebody else is nominated from the department. Four mentors interviewed for this research are heads of departments. The fifth says she positively wanted to be a mentor. She says her head of department was quite happy for that to happen. She believes "It is better to choose a person who wants to do it rather than to put it as a burden on someone" (Sawyer, B: 031). When Ms. Bloomfield was selected as a curriculum mentor she was acting head of department and she took over the last term of the student-teachers. When the new head of department came she was requested to give the role back to the head of the department. She said she "hung on to that responsibility because I enjoyed it" (Bloomfield, B. 012). She says she does not understand why they wanted to take it away from her. She does not think it is a head of department's job. According to her the heads of departments are generally very busy and it is better for somebody who feels a vocation for mentoring to be a mentor.

None of these five mentors had formal training that leads to a certificate. The only ongoing training they have is meetings with the university tutors, once at the end of every year; for new mentors this is a whole meeting, for existing mentors it is half a day. In these meetings as Mr. Clark expresses it, they discuss what has happened during the year or the term and some individual problems students have. They share ideas and university tutors pass on their knowledge or skills to mentors. While four mentors think in general it would be a good idea to have more training than there is, Mr. Wills trusts his own experience and feels the best training is at the classroom.

You see face to face problems, difficulties, good things, bad things. And, I think if as a student you are confronting those situations with good help, good guidance from experienced teacher, I think, even if there is no formal training for mentors, you can feel fairly comfortable with what you are delivering to a student. (Wills, A: 060)

Especially, Ms. Bloomfield believes in the importance of mentor training very strongly. She responds that when this scheme was first set up there was quite a lot of training. She says she has seen notes in her file from two or three years back where the professional mentor at her school and the head of department of languages came to the university for training. However, many of the mentors that were trained initially have left and new mentors are coming in without any training.

All five mentors say there is no formal appraisal of what they have done throughout the year. They say, above all it is the school's decision to appoint a curriculum mentor. It is a matter of nomination by the school. They say they suppose if there is a problem there have been signals throughout the year. Ms. Bloomfield states that:

There is always a person at school called the professional mentor in charge of all the other curriculum mentors who I suppose would use that as a way of keeping teachers on performance. She could talk to my students, say, "Are you happy? How are you getting on?" And if I wasn't doing a good job, she'd

say, "No, I'm really unhappy. I haven't seen my mentor for 3 weeks. She never says anything about my lessons. The departments aren't feeding back to me and she's not making them," There is an informal system there. (Bloomfield, B: 082)

They add that students are free to go to the university when they are not satisfied with what they are receiving in school. So, when the university is not happy with a mentor and what he or she is doing, there would be consultation between the school and the university. The university would come to them and may say that, for example, "such student needs more input on a particular subject."

Like the other tutors, Mr. Usher says the university does not select the subject mentors. Nevertheless, he finds this proper. He does not think the university should select them. Again like other university tutors, Mr. White says that the professional mentor who is already responsible for staff development selects them. He says in some cases, it appears that the job is given to someone who is not good at it. They are given the job because there is a belief that this is something very easy. He points out some other problems as well, for example, he says sometimes the heads of department are not prepared to give as much time to mentoring the student needs. When the university is not happy with what mentors do, the only thing they can do is to improve the situation, is to talk informally to the mentor. He says "we are not in the position to say 'do something about it'" (White, B: 094). School may say we are not interested in it any more.

About training, Mr. White relates that the University of Portsmouth used to offer a considerable number of days at university to talk about the job of mentoring. However, he adds this is now much more difficult. He says they have two or three days a year for training. He adds, "we don't think it is enough... In my university, there is an assumption that some training happens as a result of joint observation; the school mentor would see that university tutor debriefing a student. This is also a training" (White, B: 114). Mr. Usher says there is no mentor training that leads to a certificate at the University of Oxford, but there is induction. When mentors meet at the university for a day they are given detailed papers about this scheme, including a mentor book. He says "We would like to have more extensive mentor training that is very expensive" (Usher, B: 415).

Another university tutor who talks about financial constraints is Dr. Dickson. She explains that they trained mentors last year and adds "But now the money has gone, we do not have training any more" (Dickson, 2A: 037). Like Mr. White, she believes it is useful to go to schools and talk to mentors. However, she is a bit pessimistic about training adults. She remarks: "They have very strong ideas for teaching. Less experienced ones are flexible, their ideas may change" (Dickson, 2A: 068). She says she had mentors who have fixed ideas about how languages should be taught. Besides, she says some mentors are not generous. They are jealous because students are young, lively and sometimes better than they are. She declares, "I witnessed people trying to bring students down. I think this is human nature" (Dickson, 2A: 173).

Like other tutors, Mr. Johnston also contends the only training they have is meeting mentors twice a year. He says "training" is a wrong word because they do not have enough money to do a series of training meetings. He adds, "what we try to do is to introduce new mentors to what the courses, what the expectations are, what the responsibilities are" (Johnston, A: 467).

*The reward of becoming a mentor*

All five mentors who were interviewed agree on the mutual benefits of becoming a mentor. They believe the students need them and they need the students. All find it is very enjoyable to work with people who are keen to become members of the teaching profession. According to Dr. Lyons student-teachers are a link between the university and the school. They bring with them a sense of what is going on in the university. Mentors claim they also gain from the students. It is very much a two way thing; students bring their freshness and new ideas and teachers give them their experience. Ms. Sawyer remarks that she enjoys seeing the students develop, seeing them become much more confident and getting their ideas out of them. She adds "most of them really do develop quite a lot, especially over the second practice" (Sawyer, B. 009). Like other mentors she believes, they can bring quite a lot to the schools because they are so fresh and young. She states mentors learn a lot from them. However, Mr. Clark sees mentoring not only as a matter of personal satisfaction; he believes as today's teachers, it is their responsibility to train future teachers. He says he wanted to be a mentor "because it is an important job for a teacher to do to prepare for teaching, students who will follow, be following up for me" (Clark, A: 005). Furthermore, he points out another practical benefit of training students in the school. He says very often they can employ a very good student.

All mentors say that they enjoy being a mentor, although they do not have any financial rewards and it means extra work for them. They say mentoring takes time; with some trainees it takes longer. And all five mentors declare that it is an extra commitment. The school receives a payment for each student, and most of this sum is used for the employment of extra staff to cover lessons, so the mentors' free time is guaranteed. They all have one or two hours free time, to meet with students. However, as Ms. Bloomfield indicates "I do get periods off to do it, but I spend more on it than I get the time off" (Bloomfield, B: 043).

*The role and responsibility of the mentor*

On the role and responsibility of the mentor, all five mentors speak about the same issues. They say their role in this system is to welcome students, to support them throughout their time with them, to offer them guidance, to give them ideas on how to approach particular classes and particular work in languages, how to approach particular grammar points, how to cope with behavior problems, to organize their time within the school, to monitor, to provide feedback, to supervise, to decide what the key issues are that the student might want to concentrate on, to set targets, to connect her/him with some of the classes, to watch her/him frequently, and support her/him. Besides all this, they say they are responsible for keeping records and passing information to the university. Ms. Sawyer says she feels herself responsible for getting other teachers of the department involved in the system. "I've got to make sure that my colleagues are aware of what is involved because I can't oversee every lesson directly myself. So I've got to keep all the faculty colleagues up to date on everything" (Sawyer, B: 038). Furthermore, she says sometimes they need to talk to trainees on the issues that are not directly related to their classroom teaching. She says, "you can discuss current modern languages issues, you can talk about the pastoral side of school, you can talk about applying for a job and if there are problems, you are trying to deal with

them” (Sawyer, B: 047). Mr. Wills draws attention to the difference between the two phases of student experience at the school. He says mentors are responsible for understanding this change. For example, in the first phase the student first observes the teacher and should be slowly introduced to teaching. The length of time spent teaching depends on the student. S/he may teach up to 10 or 15 minutes of a class time. During this initial period the teacher should always be present. In the second phase student can be expected to take a larger commitment, a larger time table. Even at this stage he thinks observing is necessary, rather than entirely leaving the student alone during the period. However, the student needs more freedom as he/she progresses.

### *Characteristics of good mentoring*

There is no important difference in the opinions on the criteria of good mentoring. A good mentor should be confident in his or her subject matter. Then, he or she should be able to form a reasonable relationship with people. Dr. Lyons thinks a good mentor is somebody who can see the potential the student-teachers have and develop it with encouragement, to see how they work best in the classroom, to work with them, and develop their skills in a constructive way. Ms. Sawyer draws attention to the importance of independence. She also believes in helping students develop, but "without making mini versions of you" (Sawyer, B: 109). She says some students are young and they expect the mentors to say what is wrong and right. To Mr. Clark the main thing is teaching experience. He thinks teachers could not be effective mentors unless they have a number of years' experience. So, he believes the mentor should be someone with at least 10 years experience. According to Ms. Bloomfield the mentor has to be very competent at his/her job. He or she has to have subject knowledge and also subject application. The skills of teaching French and Spanish are essential and also general classroom teaching skills have to be high. She believes a good mentor is one who is good at adult training because adult learning and teaching is different from working with children. She also claims mentors should be good listeners.

According to all students, the school-based mentor is there to give them guidance and advice, and also constructive criticism. They believe the mentor role is a very supportive one. They think the best mentor is the one who is "not afraid to tell you where you are going wrong," (Deborah, A: 173) and then offers trainees alternatives and better ways of doing something. For all students, a mentor should be someone who is willing to listen and discuss with them and give them advice. They think mentors need to be able "to be straight with people," to be upfront with them, and if they are doing something wrong, then be able to explain it to them. But they also need to be tactful. Student-teachers say they should not completely discourage trainees because people do not take criticism very well. So, mentors need to be able to communicate clearly but very gently as it were. They think mentors need to be genuinely interested in the trainees if they want the trainees to become good teachers.

It seems students all understand the school-based mentors' role. They say that rather than concentrate upon specific subjects, professional mentors guide them in general on how to be a teacher, how to fit in with the school, how the school works, what they have to be aware of in behavior, and what the assessment policy is and things like that. They think the professional mentor is particularly important at the start, when the student-teachers first join the school. They are there to greet the students, to make them feel at home. Alan says that "they talk more about general issues in school, the life of the school, the running of the

school, how they fit in there as a teacher” (Alan, B: 067). They think professional mentors are very important initially. Students say professional mentors are also people to turn to if they have got problems.

As to the curriculum mentor, they think he or she is responsible for sorting the timetable, making sure you have got enough on your timetable, not too little, not too much. "They make sure that you have settled in, that you feel confident initially with the classes" (Alan, B: 090). Each week there is a specific slot set aside in their timetable where they meet up with mentors and they talk about how lessons are going. They look at lesson plans. Maybe they discuss problems and worries. They say the curriculum mentor is basically supposed to observe them and give them feedback and is supposed to meet with them once a week and chat through any issues and see how things are going. Overall, the curriculum mentor is seen as the key figure in their training. However, when talking about the mentors the students all mention time constraints. They say they are supposed to have fixed meetings, but the mentors are very busy and so it is difficult to meet regularly. For example, Patricia says she had problems with arranging meetings with her mentor. Although she taught his classes, sometimes she could only "grab him for 2 minutes," to discuss her teaching. Beside time constraints students say they did not find some mentors to be very supportive, mainly because in some cases, there was not much encouragement. Except for one student they all had problems with a mentor at some stage that merited being taken to the university and discussed with the university tutors.

### *Mentor assessment*

University tutor Mr. Johnston says if the mentors do not do the training course and he adds "the majority do not do" (Johnston, A: 582), the mentors are not formally assessed. However, he says tutors have their judgments about mentors. He claims:

In certain cases where we feel that the mentor is not acting in the interest of the student, is maybe being non-supportive, maybe he is too negative, maybe he is not providing the student with enough time, or with the right kind of expertise. (Johnston, A: 585)

He asserts that it is very difficult for the university tutors to have an accurate picture of what is happening because they are not there enough with the mentors in schools. However, he says they get a lot of feedback from students. According to him what students say provides clues how things are going. Nonetheless, Mr. Fullick says even if a mentor seemed to be problematic there is little that can be done. He adds the university still has responsibility for the quality of the course and the training but it has little control over schools.

### **Tutor**

The students find having a university tutor very useful, as backup to their school experience. They see him/her mainly as a person who is not in the school, who is not there all the time, who is not involved directly, but at the same time who has contact with the school. They say that when they have problems and they do not feel they could go to

someone who was in the school, either the professional or curriculum mentor, it is easier to go to the university tutor who is responsible. If someone was having problems in their school and could not talk to either of the mentors at the school, there is someone at university who can help them and it is also someone who is qualified in their subject. If they have got subject problems they can go to them for advice. Deborah says she thinks their role also is "to see how you are doing and to make sure you are doing OK" (Deborah, A: 157). And if students have problems with their teaching or their subject knowledge, they can suggest ways of improving or doing things differently. More generally, there was some recognition they could help them to become better teachers and also to give them the knowledge necessary to become teachers. According to Alan, a good university tutor should be approachable so that if they have problems at the school, they could easily ring him up and chat it over. The university tutor should be very clear when he/she gives lectures and should give them important information that he/she knows would benefit them in schools. Furthermore, he/she should have good experience himself/herself as a teacher and he/she should be able to pass that on.

What is interesting in these student responses about the role and responsibility of the university tutor is their belief that he/she exists at the university mainly to solve their problems with the school and school-based mentors.

### **School Visits**

One major difference among the courses appears in the number of school visits. When compared to others, the University of Reading undertakes quite a large number of visits. The University of Reading makes at least six visits for each student. Ms. Skinner explains that they do not just go to monitor students when they are at school. She says, "we see them during classroom teaching, we talk them after, we talk to them before, we watch the lessons, we talk them afterwards, we have close relations with supervising teacher" (Skinner, 1A: 258).

This number for other universities is generally five or six times a year. Mr. Usher, says in the past they were visiting schools more frequently. He says it used to be once a week, now it is once a fortnight and adds "we try to get ourselves a little bit more time" (Usher, B: 343). He says he sometimes goes not necessarily to see students teach, but to talk to interns generally about how things are going on.

### **The Assessment Procedure**

Mentors say the most important part of the assessment procedure is observation of practice teaching. They say students are evaluated informally every time. Ms. Sawyer prefers mostly to rely on colleagues and their observations. Therefore, she expects her colleagues to note down their observations. While mentors observe trainees' teaching they report back to the university at least once or twice during every phase. Mr. Wills says:

If there are problems, it looks that the student is likely not to pass, we contact the department pretty constantly, so there is a minimum of two evaluations one each phase of their teaching practice, that will be increased if necessary.

The evaluations we do are internal. Usually the university gets in touch a minimum of once per term. I think the contact between the school and university is not as frequent as it ought to be. (Wills, A: 188)

Mr. Wills says evaluation is again not only "tick, tick." There they can write comments on student achievement. He adds:

If a student has done a little bit of work on the use of video, I have a possibility to write, s\he has started to use video, but we need to look at developing this as a future target in her career. (Wills, A: 146)

He claims this format gives them a chance to write comments other than just "yes" or "no," "pass" or "fail." He says his judgment is based on what he has seen and what his immediate colleagues have seen, and it can also involve quite a few other members of staff at the school because the student is not just necessarily staying in one department. He asserts that they are looking at how the students are developing their role within the school. He declares, "it is not just me seeing these things, it is other people. So my decision is informed not just by what I say, but by what I hear. It is approved by other people" (Wills, A: 218).

All tutors say that in Britain assessment criteria have to fit in with the set of competencies which are laid down by the Government. However, individual programmes may add to these competencies. The assessment of students seems basically split into two, with most of the responsibility for assessment belonging to the school, since the teachers in both schools regularly see the students in the classroom, where they must be competent. For the university, the students also have to produce a range of assignments based on their school experience and lesson observation, so that students are trained to understand what it is they see. They also have a big assignment to see if they have developed a rationale for their classroom practice. By the end of the course the schools and the university both have to be satisfied that each student fulfils these competencies.

Like other tutors, according to Mr. Usher the key assessment is done by the school, by the curriculum mentor, by the other teachers, and by the professional mentor. The university's job in that respect is to support them and to discuss progress throughout the year with the mentor and the student together.

Ms. Skinner says since they are very careful when they select students and generally they have very good students in the course, they rarely have problems. She says when there is a student who is slow in gaining these competencies; they support them with extra support and extra teaching. However, if they do not see any improvement, they advise the students that teaching is not for them because teaching is extremely stressful and demanding.

### **Student Autonomy**

Two students mention the issue of autonomy. Anne says her first mentor had a definite way of thinking and wanted student-teachers to adopt that way of thinking. She expected to mould a student-teacher into the type of teacher she wants them to be. Anne had problems when she had taken some ideas from another teacher, but she says her second mentor encouraged independence saying "it is really good because every teacher's going to be different" (Anne, A: 365). Patricia says some teachers step back as long as you keep with

in basic guidelines and are doing basically what you should do. It is your class and your teaching, "do it the way you want" (Patricia, A: 094). Like Anne, she says some mentors can be a bit more prescriptive, and this creates a lot of pressure. She says she sometimes feels "they want you to do what they would do" (Patricia, A: 087). There are times when she has felt boxed in.

### **The Criteria for a Competent Student-Teacher**

All mentors say there are some competencies which student-teachers are expected to develop. They come via the university, but they are set by the central government's Department for Education. So, all schools operate with more or less the same set of criteria and set of competencies which students have to work towards achieving. What mentors do is to monitor their development. According to all mentors, with languages the most important issue is a reasonable level of competence in that language. Similarly, for Ms Bloomfield a good teacher can speak the foreign language fluently. Besides, they agree that a good teacher is the one who is committed to the pupils, who likes children, someone who at least begins to recognize there are differences in ability and in personality, and who can treat pupils a little bit as individuals. Ms. Sawyer believes in this profession you need someone who is quite active. However, to Dr. Lyons the most important competence is being able to set up reasonable relations especially with the pupils. He comments:

You can have native fluency in a FL, you can have theoretical knowledge of how to organize a classroom, how to organize the learning process, but if your personal relationship with the pupils involved in is not successful, then none of those things will work. So, the most important is this relation.”  
(Lyons, A: 234)

### *Observation of student-teachers*

Mentors think observation is a very useful technique and they believe students learn a lot when they observe different teachers. Dr. Lyons says in his school they have a coherent view on how modern languages should be taught. Nevertheless, he adds also that there are personal styles of teaching. He believes when students observe teachers who do the same job in different ways, they will realize that they have to find their own individual ways that work for them.

Mentors report that students have set tasks to help them structure their lesson observations. When they observe a teacher these tasks provide foci like use of the target language, lesson structure, lesson planning, or how to teach listening. As to mentors' observation of student-teachers, they see it as the only way to judge if the trainee is good enough to be qualified as a teacher. Mr. Wills says they observe students because it is legally required. He asks “without observation how are we going to see whether they are doing their jobs, whether they are putting into practice some of the things we have talked about?” (Wills, A: 174).

They consider observation a chance for feedback to the student. However, the format they use for observation differs slightly from one mentor to another. First of all, each school has prepared its own observation sheet. In Mr. Wills' school they have an observation

sheet for the mentor or the teacher who will observe the student that is not "a tick list" type, but enables them to write comments. Mr. Clark says when they observe they focus on things like how a lesson begins, how well managed is the transition between lessons and how well are pupils motivated during the lesson. The observation sheet used by Ms. Bloomfield includes two sections: a list of specific features that they are looking for, and a global section where people can tick "very good," "good," "and average." She believes both ways have their own advantages. Ms. Sawyer thinks the most important issue is continuity of observation from beginning, as this will give a real opportunity to see the student progress.

## **Feedback**

The students all say they find feedback very useful and they think they need more, especially in the first period of practice. They say they get a chance to discuss issues that should be improved. However, they seem to benefit from positive feedback more. They are reluctant to say they do not like negative feedback, but they say everything depends on how the person says something. Deborah says if mentors say something to trainees very angrily and get very negative about it, then people have not liked that. She says she can take negative feedback if it is "Think about this. What went wrong? Why do you think it went wrong? Do you think maybe you should have done it like this?" She prefers someone who is willing to discuss and advise, rather than someone who is ready to "jump down your throat" and say "you have done this wrong, you should do it like this". For her, it is finding the balance between being too positive and saying "oh yes that was good" all the time, even if something was not, and on the other hand saying "You shouldn't do it like that. You're not going to be a good teacher if you do it like this all the time" (Deborah, A: 202). Alan thinks the teachers are very sensitive because they never said "Right this was really awful, terrible, you did this, this, this wrong" (Alan, B: 242). They always balance it so they have some positive points to make. And he thinks the criticisms he did get, or the less positive things, are points that he realized he needed to improve on. He says he was actually grateful. Anne remarks that in her second school she did not actually have a timetabled slot for discussion, but her mentor was there at any time if they needed to talk. So, sometimes they might have gone for two weeks without having a problem or needing to talk. Another time she might have dropped in on the mentor two or three times a week, depending on how things were going. She says she actually prefers that system because "if you've actually got a timetabled slot, sometimes they are talking for the sake of talking" (Anne, A: 152) and there is not actually the need there to be talking.

However, students say some mentors do not have much time for discussion. For example, Lynne says she could not get feedback from her mentor in her second school and she depended on the information she had gained in the first school and in the university. She says students do need feedback to develop.

According to Dr. Lyons, a mentor, all they are trying to do is to put a slightly different perspective on things, to show the student slightly different ways of doing things. To Ms. Bloomfield feedback is for pointing out things that are developing well and things that need to be worked on more closely. There are several issues that mentors all agree about. First, all of them find providing feedback useful. They think students need and want this. For example, as Ms. Sawyer says "usually they are very grateful because they want to progress too" (Sawyer, B: 097). Second, they believe they should be open with students. As

Mr. Clark indicates "It is fair to be honest to the student about what is going on" (Clark, A: 166). Similarly Ms. Sawyer, who prefers making notes while observing trainees, says, "I wouldn't be writing down anything the student couldn't see, I wouldn't do anything with that before I discuss it with students" (Sawyer, B: 082). Third, feedback should be very constructive, although they think sometimes this may be difficult. They think some students are unprepared for negative criticism. In general, as Ms. Sawyer points out, mentors try to make positive comments for how students can improve and on how well they do things they have done. Although most students want this, it is possible to get one or two who do not like any sort of criticism, who are a little bit unwilling to listen to advice. When Dr. Lyons has something negative to say he prefers to give examples from his own teaching and explain to them that like all teachers, sometimes he has good, sometimes bad lessons. This may happen to anybody. He says he wants students to learn this one thing from observation; when students see sometimes things go wrong for other teachers, this will help them.

Mentors seem to have different preferences in the way they provide feedback. Mr. Wills says, in his school they provide feedback on an ongoing basis. He says they look at the previously set targets, for example, they may say, "you have problems with the OHP today, you forgot to turn it off on the first instance, you did it facing the wrong way... next time you use it before the lesson starts, be sure you plugged it in" (Wills A: 185). Ms. Sawyer believes in the importance of making notes while observing. She says, at the end of the lesson very quickly "that was pretty good, well done" and then sometime later the same day they go through the lesson, in quite a lot of detail.

### **Classroom Observation**

All students said they observed quite a lot, especially in the first school; they observed different styles of teaching, attitudes, different concepts and strategies dealing with discipline, different methods, and different ideas. They think every teacher is different and it is good to observe as many teachers as possible. They all said in general terms that they find observation very useful.

They said they knew how to observe because they had school-based tasks. Alan said, "we would fill in some notes and see how we were doing it, how we structured the lessons, how we got about it" (Alan, A: 189). Patricia says when students observe teachers they try to relate it to what they have learned at the university. For example, at the university they learn about sex differences and this leads to watching teachers' attitudes, comments and responses to girls and boys. Similarly, Anne says they are actually given guidelines in a book by the university and each section focuses on a different aspect of the teaching. So in one lesson, they might be focusing on the use of target language, and in another lesson might be concerned with classroom management. So, their observations are focused on different things.

Deborah believes she has not only learned from good teachers but also from weak teachers. She says some lessons were interesting; she picked up some really good ideas and really enjoyed being in the lesson. And in others, she said she "just sat there like the kids," thinking "I can't wait for this to be over" (Deborah, A: 203). She could see an occasion that the pupils were struggling with the lesson. She was only an observer but she was meant to be interested, to show the kids this is an interesting lesson. But sometimes she said she could not do that. Anne agrees with Deborah on learning from bad models. She says sometimes

she does not like teachers' way of dealing with things, and so, she decides to try a different way. Therefore, she thinks it is very useful to see different approaches.

As to their own observation they say they were observed by school teachers, school based mentors, and in the second teaching practice by a university tutor for assessment. They believe that if university tutors had felt that there was a problem with someone, they would have seen them more often. Four students think maybe university tutors should come in the first teaching practice. In common with other students, one of these students says it might be an idea for them to observe at the beginning, "to get an idea of how you are coping with teaching right at the beginning" (Deborah, A: 250).

Students say they prefer just having the class on their own, towards the end at least. To begin with, they think it is a bit of security, having an extra teacher there, "on discipline things." But by the end, most teachers leave them to their own devices, and they are happy with this.

### **Reflection**

Four students make no explicit mention of reflecting on their own teaching. Only one says in general terms that she tries to think about her teaching critically but when things get really busy, she just thinks "that was terrible" (Patricia, A: 056), and hopes that the next lesson would be good.

All the university tutors say the students have to be able to think about their own teaching. Ms. Skinner says it is one of the competencies students should perform. Especially, Dr Dickson asserts that she is quite happy to see the students be themselves. She wants the students to think about their own teaching and develop their personal qualities.

### **Time**

Time appears to be a major problem for all mentors. All mentors said they needed more time if they were expected to do the job properly. They said they had two periods protected to enable them to provide feedback to students. But this took a lot more time than that. Furthermore, there said there were normally some students who needed even more time. Another interesting comment related to time constraints is that, in order to achieve the extra time in school, the amount of time devoted to university (or to theory) was reduced. Mentors thought students needed some more time for theory. As Mr. Wills asserts there are times when he does not do his job properly but he thinks those times are when he feels most pressure in school. He remarks:

That is one of the biggest problems of being a mentor, is lack of time to do the job as effectively as I can. I've had two periods protected to enable me to talk to my students. There is no other time allocated. Even if I go to meetings at the university that time is not paid for to have a cover teacher. This is disgraceful." (Wills, A: 105)

He adds that he does not believe any mentor, in any school, has enough time to do it. Equally, Dr. Lyons says, "if you want to do the job properly, it does take a lot more than that" (Lyons, A: 067). He believes this job requires quite a lot of commitment, on the part of

the person doing the job. However, he says the time needed actually depends on the students. He says as a minimum he needs a period each week to deal with them individually, another period together. If they have problems, then he needs more time. Then in addition there might be occasions he might plan with them any lesson the student is doing.

University tutors' concern with time is also not surprising. The most interesting comment came from a mentor trainer who said the problem with this system was that it was developed in a very short time. He did not find it very realistic. Besides, all tutors noted that teacher education was a demanding experience. Every aspect of it from selection to assessment should be systematic and based on some research. They said especially student selection was very difficult because interviews required a lot of time.

The evidence shows that university tutors believed student-teacher's language competence had a vital contribution to make to their professional development. But they expected students to enroll with a good enough competence because they did not have time to do any language input. They could only concentrate on professional development. They also agreed with the students that tutors should be making more visits to schools. But university tutors said they now had less time than under the old system, because of the transfer of resources to schools.

## **Money**

One of the interesting things that emerged from the data was that despite the mentors' appreciation of their involvement with teacher training, they did not see themselves as being well resourced. One mentor said students either used school's resources or they bought the materials they would use. The university did not provide enough.

Furthermore, they thought the university should have allocated more money to schools to release mentors from teaching. They said otherwise there was no point in inviting mentors for student selection or for other meetings. Tutors recognized that schools were not very happy with the amount of money they were given, to the extent that when tutors wanted to discuss issues awaiting solutions, some schools said "We do not want to be involved any more".

It seemed to the mentors that the university side is not very willing to share their money and resources with school. Additionally, all tutors and mentors agreed that mentors should be trained appropriately. But tutors added that there was no money for it. In their view the whole system was under-funded, and any greater transfer of resources to schools would result in the closure of university departments.

Only one mentor speaks about how schools use the money given by the university to train student-teachers. He says, sometimes they use it to buy new equipment. For example, last year, he says they used it to reequip the modern language classes with better quality.

Mr. Johnston says universities receive a certain amount of money per student from the government and pass on some of this money to schools. Schools have different ways of using this money, sometimes they make direct payment to the teacher who acts as professional mentor. Usually, it is not a direct payment, but is used to provide time off for working with students. Sometimes money goes to the department but usually teachers do not take money but time.

## **Power**

Power relations in the new system were problematic for all participants. One tutor said that he found this system paradoxical. A university which was considered inefficient in training teachers was required to train mentors.

An important issue arising from the data is related to how students view the university and university tutors. Interestingly, students see the university as a sort of supervisor not as a partner. As many of them noted, the university is for solving their problems. They still think the university has authority over the school, and they generally expect the university to help them when they have problems with the schools. Two students said they were a bit disappointed when they came to the university and discussed a problem. They waited for the university tutors to do something, but they did not. University tutors said they did not have any formal control over the schools. The only thing they could do to improve the situation was to visit the school.

## **Pupils and Their Parents**

Having trainees at school was seen by mentors as very important for the future of the teaching profession. They said if they did not train teachers appropriately today, they could not have good teachers tomorrow. According to them, the best place to train teachers was the classroom, the actual environment that teaching happens. Only the mentor who worked at an independent school said he did not want to neglect pupils. Parents who paid money for this school expected the staff to devote all their time to pupils. Two mentors say it is not important if parents or pupils complain about student-teachers. Mr. Clark says the young teacher becomes the experienced teacher; that is a normal part of teaching, "if you don't have student teachers you can't have experienced teachers" (Clark, A: 305). He thinks if the mentor is careful about checking the timetable, there is no problem. Mr. Wills does not believe that experienced teachers are always good teachers. Trainees might not have as much experience as mentors have, but just because mentors have more experience does not make them a better teacher. Besides, both mentors say, although the student-teacher may be teaching the class, they are always accompanied by the normal member of the teaching staff.

Dr. Lyons says occasionally he feels he is neglecting other bits of his job and he believes pupils have priority. He is a teacher in an independent school, where the parents are paying for their children's education. He says, "If you start neglecting that side of a job, then you will get complaints from people that can be justified". (Lyons, A: 083). So, he feels he has to balance his responsibilities.

## **Adult Training**

From interviews with mentors and tutors it emerged that training adults was different from training pupils. However, one university tutor said this system assumed that teachers who were good at teaching pupils were also good at training adults. A survey in his university had shown this was not necessarily the case.

Only one teacher educator mentions adult training. He says there are a lot of assumptions in this system. For example, this system presumes that if a teacher is good at teaching secondary school pupils, therefore, he is good at training adults. He says that some

research proved this idea is not necessarily true. In their university, tutors themselves conducted research on this issue. They asked student-teachers what they think of their mentors as teachers of adults. He says, "There is a very very low rating" (White, B, 136) and concludes that it is important to do some more work on that issue.

### **Structure of the Year**

All students were satisfied with the structure of the course. At the University of Southampton students go to the first school for a short period, then they come back to university and then they go to their second school. Students liked this system; two students emphasized especially that in the first teaching practice period they made some mistakes. They said it was good to leave this place after a short time and make a new start in the second school. The tutor of the University of Oxford did not agree with this however, arguing that students should stay in the first school for a long time so that they could learn slowly and calmly.

Two mentors speak about the structure of the year. They feel comfortable. The first mentor says he thinks possibly the first spell in school could be longer. He believes students need some time to understand the school environment. However, the second mentor does not agree; she says it is good the first training is not too long so that if trainees are making mistakes they can get out of the situation. In the next school they can make a better start.

### **Evaluation of the Present System**

While discussing the present system mentors speak about different issues. For example, Mr. Wills speaks about the resources the university offers. He thinks these resources are limited, so that most of the resources students use come from the schools they are in, or they buy themselves. He does not think the university provides very much. Similarly, Ms. Bloomfield says there is actually no motivation for mentors to be involved in the scheme. They are involved only because they like the role. Dr. Lyons evaluates the system from another perspective. He thinks this system is more beneficial for the good students, who are naturally good teachers, because they spend more time in school and develop quicker. At the end of the year they might be as professional a teacher as they were with the old system. The students who are let down by the new system are those who are not naturally good teachers, who require formal training, who need the input of training more consistently through their classroom practice. Such students would benefit from more time in university, discussing things and going through details, with greater contact with the university continuing when they are in schools. The present system lacks flexibility, so that when you have trainee students who are not finding life easy and who have got problems, the only person who is really available to guide them is the curriculum mentor, who will find it really difficult to find time to do the job. To him, this system favors the ones who are going to be good teachers. A fundamental base is given to them quite quickly, and there is no time in university to discuss ideas, getting the students to understand them in depth. Interestingly, Mr. Clark finds the present system still too theoretical. He says he thinks students have been given too much theory. Another problem, he points out is the number of essays. He asserts that "teaching practice should be teaching practice nothing else. But they have a commitment to the university to be writing essays at the same time which are not

necessary related what they are doing in school. Essay writing is theoretical” (Clark, A: 099).

### **The Success of School-Based Programs**

Four teacher educators do not speak about any kind of evaluation of the success of their programmes. The tutor of the University of Reading says their course is evaluated every year and they make changes accordingly.

### **Implications**

The interviews conducted for this report have yielded useful information about the views not only of students but also of tutors and mentors. This report filtered the information gathered to fit for the improvement of pre-service English teacher education in Turkey. In the light of this information it is possible to see both the positive and the negative aspects of a more school-based program. Several major implications for Turkey flow from the interviews. These implications should be considered carefully before the adaptation of the course.

1. It may be suggested that the effectiveness of this system depends on the time allocated for training and on the people involved in it. First of all, the university system should be given enough time to develop alternative teacher training courses. It is not effective to make educational changes in a rush. Every part of any educational development should be considered very carefully. After the course has been developed, tutors and mentors need time to do their jobs effectively. Tutors need time to train mentors, teach student-teachers when they are at the university, go to the school, observe them, provide feedback, and assess them. Mentors should also have an adequate time allocation so that they are able both to work with student-teachers and continue their own professional development. They need time to plan the student-teachers' learning, observe them, provide feedback, assess them, keep records, and pass information to the university. Furthermore, mentors and tutors also need to learn to work together on these tasks and need time to do this. With reference to the student interviews, it is possible to say that students also needed more time throughout the course than they were given. Students need to learn slowly and calmly, with time for reflection and debate. This was the request of both tutors and mentors. Otherwise, there is a danger of training only craft people.

2. Another very important implication is related to financial constraints. Clearly, tutors and mentors in the UK believe that financial limitations influence the success of the present partnership model negatively. There should be enough money and resources for training. Mentors and tutors agreed that because of financial constraints mentors are not trained appropriately. Some mentors are not allowed to attend university meetings or join in the student selection procedure, and students have to buy the materials they will use. They all believed if they had more money, the teacher training would have been improved. In England, around one third of the money given to the university for each student is given to the partner schools. This actually appears to be the main source of anxiety. If Turkey

follows this model it is desirable to find a new source of funding for the increased school involvement instead of decreasing the budget of the university.

3. The current teacher education system in England and Wales is supposedly based on equal partnership between the university and the school. Based on the mentor interviews, however, evidently mentors do not want complete responsibility for training new teachers. They would rather retain their links with the training institution. Students seem very clear about the mentor role. However, they are not very clear about the university tutor's role in their training. They see the tutor not as a person who introduces new ideas and themes into the working relationship between teacher and student, but only as a person who supports them and helps them when a problem occurs. On the other hand, tutors cannot do anything more than visiting schools occasionally, talking and trying to improve the situation. Their authority has been diminished and the university does not have any formal control on the schools. Therefore, there will be a need to set up clear, agreed responsibilities for the school and HEI of a kind Turkish school teachers can cope with.

4. Another factor which influences the success of school-based training is the communication between the university and the school and among tutors, mentors and students. First of all, there should be written documents to explain the organization of the course, professional themes, attendance, administration, assessment, and other related issues. These documents should be revised each year. Apart from written communication there should be regular meetings between tutors and mentors.

5. The relationship between the mentor and the student-teacher is especially important during the teaching practice period. As Dufficy (1993) asserts, from a reflective perspective, teaching practice should encourage a relationship between the developing teacher and the teacher educator that is based on negotiation of purpose, breadth of concern, and a more symmetrical power relationship, in order to foster a critical appreciation of teaching. Student-teachers cannot develop reflective ideas if they see the mentor as an inspector. They should feel comfortable enough to discuss their ideas freely. Hence, the more the system of teacher education grows into a school-based program the greater is the need for mentors trained in adult education. However, the preparation of mentors for adult education is a very complex issue. When the literature is reviewed the approaches for solving the problems of preparing adult educators are perceived to be very different. Again, this preparation requires a lot of time and money.

6. One of the most critical issues in teacher training is that student-teachers must understand the importance of subject knowledge for teaching. As Bennett and Carre (1993) remarked “student-teachers must understand the centrality of content knowledge for teaching, and the consequences of lack of knowledge” (Bennett & Carre, 1993, p. 12).

Students need to learn about the central conceptual and organizing principles of their subject matter. It is impossible to know everything before they begin to teach, but they can acquire the awareness of responsibility to acquire new knowledge through their teaching career. Besides, they must develop the ability to reflect on, and learn from experience (Bennett & Carre, 1993). Although these British PGCE students were interviewed at the end

of the third term of their course, a question about the theory-practice relationship was still not readily understood. Turkish student-teachers should be provided with adequate subject study, and they should have a suitable level of knowledge about language. The curriculum of their training course should cover crucial areas of professional competence. Language competence is especially important in teaching a foreign language in Turkey. Prospective foreign language teachers in England have a chance to go to the country where the language is spoken and spend some time. Considering that only a very small number of students might have this opportunity, it can be said that most Turkish student-teachers can only improve their English in the classroom setting. Therefore, they need more time at the university to improve their language competence. As noted before, the language teacher education course in Turkey is a four-year program plus one year language preparation. Therefore, they have plenty of time to acquire a good theoretical basis before they become student-teachers.

7. It is important to underpin any partnership initiative with substantial mentor training. School teachers in Turkey are not generally familiar with student observation and assessment techniques. It is suggested that they should be initiated into such tasks alongside university tutors until they gain confidence in observing a student teacher, taking notes, providing feedback and assessing them and in some other related tasks.

8. Among all these issues the most complex one seems to be the selection of suitable schools so that students can benefit from the success of these schools. In England, the current pattern is that schools are asked if they want to be involved in the scheme. The Turkish educational system is more centralized and schools are not asked if they want to offer the current four weeks teaching practice period. It is seen as part of their responsibility. If we consider that students should spend significantly more time in school, it might be useful to give them a chance to consider if they are ready for this responsibility and explain to them what they will accrue from this partnership. If the Ministry of Education allocates enough money for improving their resources they might be more willing to participate.

Having considered these implications and provided that the required preparations are allowed enough time, a more developed partnership system should result in better learning conditions for Turkish teacher trainees.

### **Summary and Subsequent Action**

In 1995, I was awarded a grant from the NEDP to study the School-Based English Teacher Education in England, at the University of Southampton, the School of Education. I began my research under the supervision of Professor Rosamund Mitchell who provided all resources to help me get started. I spent a good portion of my time in the department learning more about the theory of teacher education. I attended courses, meetings, and all related seminars. I attended PGCE courses to learn what they do at the university. I attended mentor training seminars. I had a chance to attend some meetings between mentors and tutors about the teaching of the student-teacher. Professor Mitchell helped me in finding interviewees and conducting initial interviews, finding appropriate schools for observation and finding teacher educators from different universities with

alternative views. Both the colleagues at the School of Education and the participants were friendly to my research. I had no problem getting permission for the interviews and observation in any of these universities and schools. I felt everybody trusted me. Therefore, I managed to use the eight months in England productively. I was pleased with the outcome. I believe it is vital to analyze the educational systems and practices of different countries. Such analyses help to compare to understand whether other countries are providing more effective education for their prospective teachers, however, it is not easy to conduct such a study in a foreign country. Good supervision is essential.

At the end of my formal scholarly research, I returned to Turkey. As stated above the objective of the NEDP was to contribute to the improvement of pre-service English teacher education at primary and secondary levels. Firstly, in the area of curriculum development and materials production, the project produced books in the methodology of teaching English. Secondly, a national faculty-school partnership scheme was established by the project. Thirdly, a nation-wide system of accreditation for the programmes of faculties of education was established. Starting in 1998, all faculties of teacher education in Turkey followed a standardized curriculum of English teacher education prescribed by the Higher Education Council.

So, after finishing this research, I took part in most of these activities to improve pre-service teacher education in Turkey and the findings of my study were used in all these activities.

Actually, this project was a turning point in my academic career. I feel that this experience served me well professionally and that I am a better, more insightful, and more strategic researcher because of it.

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## Appendix

### Student Interview Questions

1. What do language students think they gain from university?
2. What do students think they gain from school?
3. Are they linked to each other?
4. What do students think about mentors in school? What are their criteria for a good mentor?
5. What do students think about university tutors? What are their criteria for a good tutor?
6. What do students think about classroom observation? How useful is it for their training?
7. What do students think about feedback? How useful is it for their training?
8. Do the students feel they have enough autonomy?
9. Do students reflect on their teaching?
10. What do students think about practising in two different schools?

### Mentor Interview Questions

1. Why do curriculum mentors want to become a mentor? What do they think the reward of becoming a mentor is?
2. How are mentors selected in their schools?
3. What training do they receive at the beginning?
4. What do they think are the role and responsibility of the mentor?
5. How do the schools assess the effectiveness of their role in training?
6. What are the characteristics of good mentoring?
7. What are their criteria for a competent student-teacher?
8. What do they think about selection of the student-teacher?
9. What do mentors think about observation of student-teachers?
10. How do mentors provide feedback?
11. How do mentors assess student-teachers?
12. Do mentors have enough time for training teachers?
13. How do mentors view the theory and practice relationship?

14. What is the reaction of secondary pupils and their parents to school-based training?
15. How do the schools use the money allocated for SBTE?
16. Are mentors happy with the structure of the year?
17. How do mentors evaluate the present system?

### University Tutor Interview Questions

#### Overview of institutional programmes

1. How are the students selected?
2. What is the assessment procedure?
3. How are schools selected?
4. What are the general responsibilities of the school?
5. How is communication between the school and the university achieved?
6. How are mentors selected and trained?
7. What do students think about mentor assessment?
8. How is the success of school-based programs evaluated?
9. Why do student-teachers practise in two different schools?
10. What is the importance of reflection?
11. What do students think about language competence of student-teachers?
12. How often do you visit schools?
13. Do they think in this system the gap between theory and practice is bridged?
14. What do students think about adult learning?
15. How do schools use the money?

### Author Note

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