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## Re-Visiting the Theory and Practice Gap through the Lens of Student Teacher Dilemmas

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*Abstract: This study concerns the dilemmas student teachers met during their field experiences: what they were and what coping strategies they used. Its purpose is to help staff and students better understand the challenges student teachers face as they move from university-based to school-based learning. Data reveal three main categories of dilemmas: teaching, professional identity and future career plans. When coping with dilemmas, participants turned to various people around them. They felt some of the dilemmas were beyond their control, thus, could not be resolved due to problems in the Turkish education system. Findings are discussed as related to professional learning.*

### Introduction

Field experience in teacher education has long been the most favourably viewed element of student teachers' professional learning in that "through situated engagement and negotiation with practitioners and peers in a teaching community, pre-service teachers come to define for themselves what it means to be a teacher" (Samaras & Gismondi, 1998: 716). Field experiences offer them the opportunity to learn about students, to confront classroom realities, and to think about self as teacher. Empirical evidence also indicates that field experiences support socialisation into the profession and increase motivation to continue studying while providing a sheltered context for experimentation (Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004).

A major concern in teacher education is the quality of prospective teachers' learning experiences. In this paper, the concept of dilemma is used as a window through which to explore the learning experiences of a group of student teachers during their field experiences when they took on the role of teachers in the context of foreign language teaching. It is argued that analysis of student teachers' self-reported dilemmas is not only a useful way to reveal their thinking, but also it may help understand the nature of what they perceive as coherent or contradictory between what is learned during university-based courses (i.e. theory) and what is experienced in field work (i.e. practice). There is a specific need in Turkish foreign language teacher education for further research into that latter aspect while dilemmas originating from the perceived gap can be used to reflect the professional development of future teachers and to inform and design learning opportunities to support their growth (Talanquer, Tomanek & Novodvorsky, 2007).

Sociocultural perspectives indicate that contexts of experience, such as those of practice schools, influence what learners notice, take up and modify as they are introduced to new practices. Understanding students' experiences can reveal what, how and why students learn in our courses, which is important as the perceived disconnect between university and school are rarely identified or explored.

## Theoretical Framework

One of the greatest challenges facing teacher educators and researchers is to understand how teachers learn from their experiences in different contexts. Recent research adopts the notions of situated learning and sociocultural theory of learning. Originally built on Vygotskian theory, the situated learning theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), suggests that learning should be understood as a process of participation in a social context. That process helps learners become involved in a community of practice that embodies beliefs, values and behaviours to be shared and acquired. From this perspective, teacher learning is “enculturation into existing social practices associated with teaching and learning but also a dynamic process of reconstructing and transforming those practices to be responsive to both individual and local needs” (Johnson, 2009:13). The knowledge gained this way is the consequence of participation (Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006). Framing teacher learning as a situated practice focuses attention on the relationship between participation and context of learning (Ovens & Tinning, 2009).

The present study attempts to understand the learning experiences of teacher candidates within their social contexts of learning (i.e. practice schools). Specifically, it aims to understand the nature and content of the student teacher dilemmas that arise when they encounter incongruence between theory and practice.

## Theory and Practice Debate

Studies show that teacher candidates face problems when implementing what they learned in university-based courses in the traditional or conservative school settings (Loughran, Mitchell, Neale & Toussaint, 2001). Some researchers framed the problem of learning the work of teaching in terms of a divide between *theory* and *practice* (Korthagen, 2010: 99), the transfer problem (Korthagen & Kessels, 1999), or in terms of the *connection* or *disconnection* between teacher education and practice (Huang, Lubin, & Ge, 2011). This problem is also described as “the Achilles heel of teacher education” (Darling-Hammond, 2009: 8).

It is possible to distinguish different uses of the terms “theory” and “practice” in the literature on learning to teach. For example, Korthagen and Kessels (1999) introduce two different uses of the word theory. They draw a distinction between two conceptions of knowledge, what Aristotle named *episteme* and *phronesis*. Accordingly, the conception of knowledge as *episteme* is that: the aim is to have knowledge about many different situations; general concepts are used; it is based on scientific research. This type of knowledge is conceptual and abstract. In contrast, knowledge as *phronesis* is used for action in specific situations that requires focusing attention on particular aspects of the situation. Knowledge as *phronesis* is perceptual: knowledge as guide to action. Programmes that adopt this view of knowledge base help their learners to become aware of important features of their own experiences and help them make sense of their own contexts for teaching.

Laursen’s (2007: 7) study reveals the diverse nature of student teachers’ conceptions of theory and practice: they may use the term “theory” for “subject matter content in school subjects, tools and methods to be used while teaching and managing the class, and educational and psychological views on for instance learning and human nature.” On the other hand, practice refers to “activities in schools, especially about what the teacher does in the classroom working with students” (ibid.).

Thus, not only researchers and teacher educators, but also student teachers use the terms theory and practice differently. Throughout the article, I will use the terms university- and school-based learning. University-based learning is often identified as being synonymous with “theory”, and school-based learning as “practice” by our student teachers. In the context of this study, university-based learning refers to the learning about teaching through a variety of theoretical and practical courses on education, language, language learning and teaching, and (micro) teaching sessions. School-based, on the other hand, refers to learning about teaching through field experiences in practice schools. I am aware that the distinction I make here is an oversimplification of the diverse forms of knowledge and learning experiences student teachers gain through university-based courses and field experiences in schools.

### **The Concept of Dilemma**

As a researcher (and lecturer) who has been working with student teachers for over twenty years, I have been fascinated about how my students learned to teach. Researchers approached this issue from many different perspectives. Since the 1970's, cognitivism as the new paradigm of teacher thinking has been influential in research on teaching and learning to teach with an emphasis on teachers' thought processes. Gaining insight into student teacher thinking and learning is a challenging task. Teacher educators can assess student teacher competence in performing a set of teaching skills by reading their lesson plans or observing their teaching but not their thought patterns (Talanquer et al., 2007). Thus such assessment alone is not a sufficient indicator of teacher preparation (Munby, Russel & Martin, 2001 cited in Talanquer et al.).

The concept of dilemma can be a useful tool to help reveal the nature of student teacher thinking and to identify the nature of perceived problems and concerns student teachers have when they are trying to build a link between theory and practice (Tillema, 2004). The information to be gathered this way “is of central value for teacher preparation as it can be used to assess the professional development of prospective teachers and to design learning opportunities to support and foster teacher growth” (Talanquer et al., 2007: 402). Previous studies have used the concept of dilemma to get an insight into pedagogy of teacher educators (Cabaroglu & Tillema, 2011; Tillema & Kremer-Hayon, 2002), and student teachers (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

Dilemmas arise when there is dissatisfaction with consequences of past teaching decisions or anxiety about a decision that is yet to be put in to practice in real classroom time (ibid.). Dissatisfaction or anxiety arises especially when student teachers perceive dissonance between theory and practice. Dilemmas are reported to be common elements of teachers' practices so much so that teaching is sometimes described as dilemma management by Lampert (1985) and Lortie (1975) (cited in Talanquer et al., 2007). Following from the discussion above, in this study teaching dilemmas are conceptualised as “problem spaces created in the minds of teachers as they engage in the practice of teaching” (Talanquer et al., 2007: 401).

### **Foreign Language Teacher Education Research**

In their study, Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987: 302) argue that:  
Being a foreign language teacher is in many ways unique within profession of teaching. Becoming a foreign language teacher too, is a different process from that which other future teachers experience. This reality is rooted in the subject matter of foreign language itself.

Borg (2006) lists the many characteristics that distinguish foreign language teaching, including the complexity and dynamism of languages themselves. Some other examples of characteristics include: the scope and the content of language teaching, range of materials, teaching methods and activities, the nature of relationships between language teachers and learners, and issues related to the status of native and non-native language teachers.

It has been argued in the literature that “foreign language teacher education has relied on a limited knowledge base in developing policies in and programs to support teacher development” (Watzke, 2007: 63) and indeed this is well documented (Velez-Rendon, 2002). It is concluded that understanding the nature of dilemmas as perceived by the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) student teachers is important from both a developmental and educational standpoint.

## Research Questions

The present study sought to find answers to the following questions:

- What are the dilemmas (if any) experienced by the student teachers as they move from university-based to school-based learning?
- How do student teachers cope with these dilemmas?
- How do these dilemmas affect student teachers and their learning experiences within the school context?

## Participants and Context

Participants of the study were 42 volunteer student teachers (32 female and 10 male with an age range of 20 to 26 years) who were attending an English Language Teaching (ELT) department in a faculty of education in a Turkish university. The 4-year long undergraduate programme leads to a BA degree and includes a preparatory year of intensive language proficiency work and ELT specific courses (e.g. Teaching of Language Skills, ELT methodology, Teaching English to Young Learners, Materials Evaluation and Development, Literature and Language teaching). Throughout the programme, student teachers are encouraged to reflect on their teaching skills and conduct microteaching sessions (followed by self, peer and tutor evaluation and feedback). The first three years consist of campus-based courses whereas the final year includes two school-based practicum courses (10 weeks each). In the first term, student teachers are placed in schools to observe classes and carry out some tasks. In the second term, they practise teaching.

In the courses, humanistic and learner-centred approaches to teaching are favoured and student teachers are encouraged to make use of language teaching methods and strategies in which the teacher is seen as a facilitator rather than a disseminator of knowledge. Moreover, caring about learners’ affective needs as well as their academic needs are emphasised so that participatory and discovery methods are favoured instead of traditional didacticism. Additionally, student teachers are expected to use the target language (i.e. English) as the medium of instruction extensively.

## Data Collection and Analysis

An exploratory and qualitative research methodology was adopted. Two key assumptions in data collection (and analysis) were to be sensitive to “working in the interpretative zone” (Tillema, Orland-Barak, & Mena Marcos, 2008) and, as Mena Marcos &

Tillema (2006) noted, to study dilemmas in context in order to explore the “walk” instead of the “talk.”

There has been debate as to how phenomena such as teacher learning and thinking can best be studied. One method of inquiry into teacher learning and thinking is teacher self-reports, by means of journal keeping. In this study, the data collection instrument comprised a journal developed by the researcher, which had an open format with two main guiding questions and four related (sub) questions. Later, the journal was given to three lecturers in the same department for feedback on its content. After some slight changes according to suggestions from the lecturers, the journal was piloted with a cohort of ten student teachers for five weeks during their teaching practice one year before the actual study was conducted. During the piloting, it was observed that the journal provided valuable insights into the dilemmas experienced by and the thinking of the student teachers.

Before their school placements, all fourth year students were informed of the research purpose and what the researcher asked of them. Out of 160, 42 volunteered to participate in the study. The students involved in the study were not members of a course taught by the researcher; participation of the student teachers neither served as a source to gain any credit nor as a part of a course requirement.

After brief explanation of what a dilemma is (along with some examples), participants were given blank journal forms. It was explained that they were expected to write about the dilemmas they experienced throughout their field experiences for each week. If they did not experience any dilemmas, they were told to indicate this. Particularly, participants were encouraged to write down dilemmas related to the incongruence between what they learned at university and what they observed and experienced in school. Additionally, they were encouraged to write their thoughts about the situation and how they coped with dilemmas. The journals yielded a corpus of 420 pages of student teachers' reflections on the dilemmas.

Analysis was ordered by the research questions and was conducted in a three-step technique as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). In the first phase, the researcher took a descriptive stance by being open to code statements and recurring patterns in the data without making presuppositions in advance as to what important categories would be (Patton, 2002). An open coding strategy was employed as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), involving multiple readings of the journals and creating codes by collecting statements with similar content that emerged from student teachers' accounts of their experiences, a process which was based on the frequency of key ideas surfacing in the journal entries. At the end of this step, data were condensed and coded by selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the statements in the journals.

In the second phase, the coded data were clustered under appropriate categories. Following from this procedure, the categories and subcategories created were discussed along with extracts withdrawn from the journal entries with two other researchers in order to test and confirm findings. Some minor changes were made upon the suggestions of those researchers.

## **Findings**

### **Dilemmas: Their Nature, Content and Coping Strategies**

The data from journal entries revealed a variety of dilemmas faced by student teachers. Figure 1 in the following page shows categories of dilemmas identified.

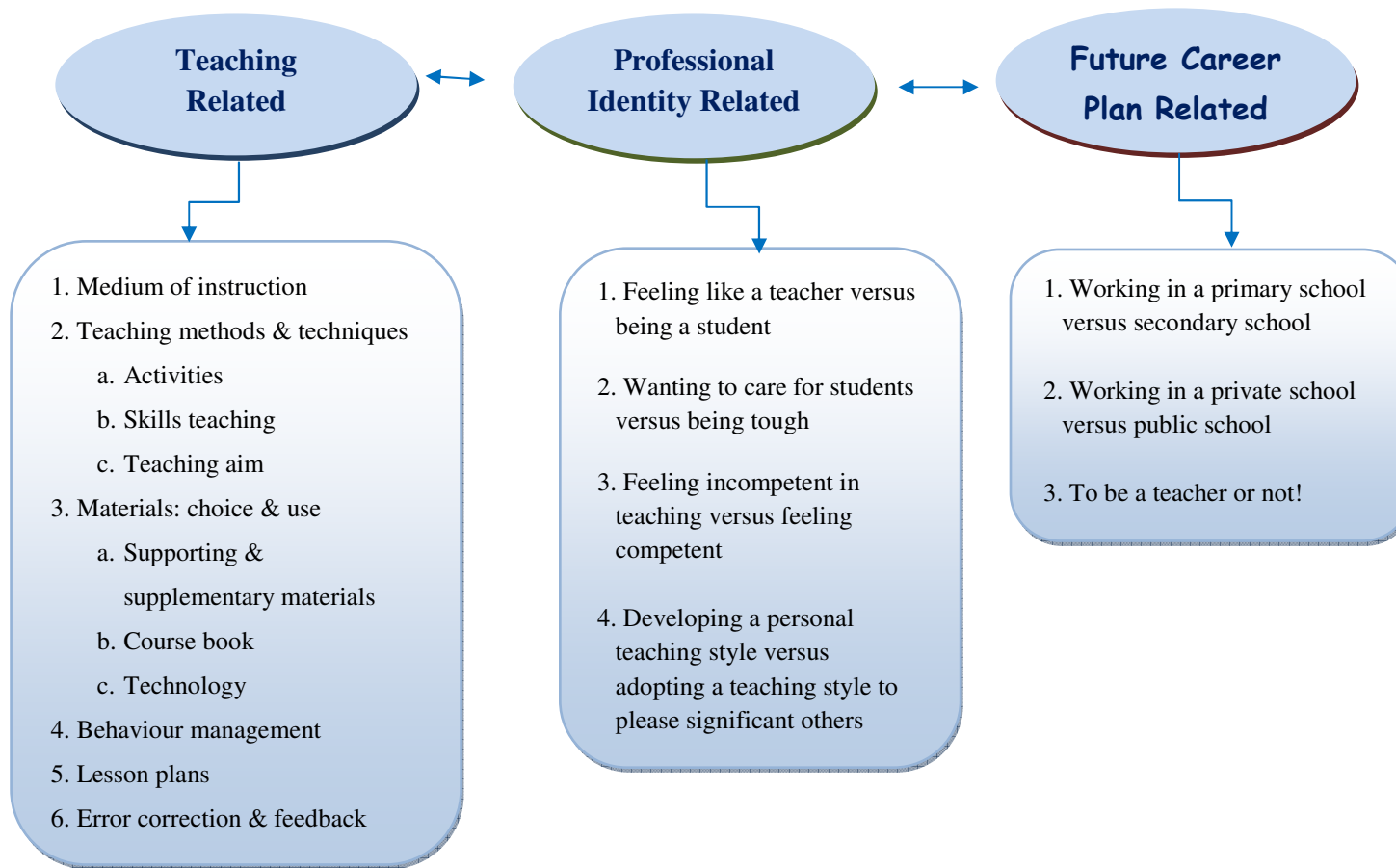


Figure 1. Overview of student teacher dilemmas

**Table 1. Distribution of dilemmas over 10-week teaching practice period**

Type of Dilemma	W 1	W 2	W 3	W 4	W 5	W6	W 7	W 8	W 9	W 10	Total number of times mentioned
Medium of instruction	13	6	6	1	5	3	-	1	2	3	40
Teaching methods & techniques	3	8	4	3	1	2	4	5	2	1	33
Materials: choice & use	5	4	7	1	4	3	3	2	-	-	29
Personal relationships with students	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Behaviour management	1	3	1	2	3	-	2	-	3	2	17
Lesson Plans	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	2	2	1	10
Error correction & feedback	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	4
Professional identity	3	3	1	6	1	1	3	4	-	2	24
Future career plans	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	3



Table 1 shows the distribution of dilemmas over the 10-week teaching practice period ordered by frequency of mention.

In the following sections, each category of dilemma along with coping strategies are explained and elaborated upon with extracts from journal entries.

### **Dilemmas about Teaching**

#### ***Medium of Instruction***

Whether to use Turkish (L1/mother tongue) or English (L2/Target Language) as the medium of instruction when teaching presented a dilemma for the participants.

With regards to this dilemma, one participant explained:

We were taught at university that in language learning, use of target language plays an important role. However, in the classrooms I observed that teachers mostly use the mother tongue of the students. This constitutes a big dilemma for me: should I use mother tongue or the target language in my classrooms? (*ST24, Week 1*)

The majority of the participants reported their dilemmas about the medium of instruction throughout the 10-week period. Moreover, some of the student teachers were still struggling with this particular dilemma as late as the last week of their teaching practice period. Teacher candidates attributed the dilemma of using L1 as the medium of instruction to such problems as low proficiency level of students, lack of motivation, and their past learning habits and student teachers' perceived (low) sense of efficacy in L2.

The data showed that participants coped with this dilemma in two different ways. While some used English only, others preferred to use both English and Turkish. Those who opted for the first strategy used mime and gestures to convey the meaning. Participants who fell into the second category explained that they had no other choice, as the students in class "lost their motivation", "got bored", "didn't understand", and "started misbehaving" when they spoke English. Regardless of the coping strategy employed, reflections noted in the journals pointed out a shared commitment (in line with the training courses attended at university) to the importance of target language usage as a medium of instruction. To exemplify:

If every time I ask something in English and students say "bilmiyorum" [I don't know] because they don't understand, the first thing I should do is to teach them how to say "I don't know" in English!" (*ST20, Week 3*)

#### ***Teaching Methods and Techniques***

These dilemmas are related to the choice of activities, skills teaching and teaching aims. The majority of student teachers stated that they either observed the use of Grammar Translation Method (GTM) by classroom teachers or were required to employ this method when teaching. GTM is a language teaching method in which the principal characteristics are: to teach "a language in order to read its literature or to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 5). In this method, grammar rules are taught explicitly, texts are translated into and out of target language, reading and writing skills are emphasised over speaking or listening skills, and students' mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction.

The following excerpt reflects one participant's disappointment:

We are taught that the best way of teaching grammar is teaching it inductively and that language is for communication. This is my teaching philosophy as well. So, today I used PowerPoint Slides, communicative games, puppets etc. When I asked the classroom teacher whether I should go on teaching in the other class, he said "your

lesson was nice, but focus on grammar more, and less on speaking or listening.” The teacher expects me to use GTM! This is my first dilemma, a contradiction between my teaching philosophy and the demands of our education system. (*ST41, Week 3*)

In the journal entries, participants often experienced dilemmas regarding the choice of teaching activities: whether to use games or role-plays, or mechanical drills or translation techniques or not. This dilemma was due to the fact that, they claimed, teachers in the schools were not using them and that students were not accustomed to such activities or their use caused behaviour management problems.

One participant explained:

We were taught that a typical English lesson must include all language skills [i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking]. But in the practicum school, we are just expected to teach grammar and vocabulary because students cannot speak, and understand listening texts. So, my dilemma is: should I focus on listening and speaking skills more or not? (*ST24, Week 6*)

Finally, dilemmas in teaching aims were related to whether to emphasise accuracy over fluency or vice versa:

The teacher [I observed] mostly gave importance to accuracy, not fluency and this contradicted with what I was taught. There should be a balance between the two. I want to choose activities that will help students improve their fluency ...but we are expected to focus on accuracy more. (*ST25, Week 4*)

As to the coping strategies of the participants, they reported unanimously their disappointment with and disapproval of, the use of “old”, “boring”, “monotonous”, “uninteresting” teaching methods, techniques and materials by teachers they had observed. All of the participants explained that they put into practice what they learned in the training courses by employing: principles of a “communicative teaching approach” (i.e. activities that emphasised fluency over accuracy), and listening and speaking activities as far as possible.

### *Materials (Choice and Use)*

For some participants, the choice and use of language teaching materials created another dilemma which included concerns about supporting (i.e. books or work/exercise books) or supplementary materials (i.e. dictionaries, reference books, DVD/CD, pictures), the course book, and technology. Participants often expressed their confusion over whether to follow the course book strictly or to skip or adapt some parts of it. One participant said:

While there are a great variety of materials, teachers I observed just relied on the course book. We were taught to prepare and benefit from variety of materials.

However, in real life we see that the only source of teaching is the course book! Kids learn English only by listening to stories of Mr. and Mrs. Brown... What am I to do? Follow what I observe practiced in reality, or do what I am taught at university courses? (*ST18, Week 3*)

In a similar vein, another one exclaimed:

When we use materials outside the course book, they [teachers] perceive this as a ‘game’! They told us that we have to conduct the lessons more seriously! (*ST39, Week 3*)

As to the coping strategies, a majority of the participants expressed their determination to use all the resources available because:

[...] kids were so happy; they said they wished they were taught this way all the time. I think that teachers are lazy and old-fashioned; they can’t keep up with the new teaching methods and techniques, and technology. (*ST34, Week 1*)

### *Personal relationships with students*

Two instances were recorded in relation to the dilemmas over personal relationships with students. In one case, a participant wrote that one of her students had asked for her telephone number. She decided not to give it as she thought that it would be inappropriate but she gave her e-mail address as she did not want to “hurt the feelings” of the student. Another participant faced a dilemma when one of the students offered a gift (a bracelet) to her. As she thought that teachers were not supposed to accept gifts from student, she refused it “by smiling” and explained that she could not accept it.

### *Behaviour management*

Management of student behaviour during teaching was a thorny dilemma that student teachers had to cope with. Participants reported many instances of misbehaviour and how teachers dealt with them. Very often, they did not approve of teachers’ management strategies they observed (e.g. shouting, scolding, treating students badly or rudely, threatening them with low grades, humiliating, giving punishments). Student teachers attributed the occurrence of student misbehaviours to teachers’ “inability” to teach or to use their body language effectively, or teacher intolerance, aggressiveness, and impatience. After having observed teachers’ management strategies and instances of student misbehaviour, many of the participants echoed similar concerns: “Will I be able to maintain classroom order or not?” The journal entries showed that they experienced a variety of dilemmas: whether to ignore student misbehaviour or dealt with it, whether to shout or not, whether to change or stop doing an activity (due to students’ misbehaviour), whether the noise level was acceptable or not, whether to give punishment or not.

Data revealed that the coping strategies for dealing with student misbehaviour seemed to be a trial and error venture sometimes resulting in success, sometimes in failure. In the case of failure, they reflected on what went wrong, and accordingly, made future plans as to how to deal with it. Some of the student teachers felt frustrated and came to the conclusion that the “right techniques” and “theory” did not necessarily “yield fruitful results in reality.”

### *Lesson plans*

Dilemmas revolving around lesson plans were of two types: whether or not to make lesson plans, and secondly, whether or not to follow the lesson plan as prepared. Especially during the observation stage, student teachers were disappointed to see that teachers did not prepare a lesson plan and that they simply followed course books “word for word.” Witnessing these practices presented a new dilemma: “should I prepare a lesson plan or not?” Many reported that they were confused as they were always encouraged to prepare lesson plans in the courses they attended at university.

When student teachers themselves started to teach, they had to cope with the dilemma of whether to implement or abandon the lesson plan they prepared in times of “crisis.” Examples of teaching crises reported were: “carefree” and “negative” student attitudes towards the activity or teaching material, occurrence of student misbehaviour, and time management problems or the mismatch between expected level of the learners and the actual level. To exemplify:

Today I was supposed to teach farm animals. I carefully planned my lesson and prepared a lot activities and teaching materials. After I started teaching, I realised that most of them already knew farm animals. But there were a few students who didn’t

know. So I panicked. I didn't know whether to follow my lesson plan no matter what, or to put it aside and do something completely different. (ST37, Week 6)

Additionally, participants indicated that they "became more aware of" the importance of planning a lesson. Their coping strategies included: "always make a lesson plan", but "be flexible" when and where necessary.

### ***Error correction and feedback***

Fourteen of the participants seemed to be confused over whether to correct errors/give feedback or not:

While I was teaching, one of the students pronounced a word incorrectly. I couldn't decide if I should correct. Then, I remembered that we were taught at the university that we should not correct the students if the aim is to improve fluency. So I ignored it. But later, the teacher criticised me. I was told that I should've corrected it. This was my dilemma. (ST12, Week 6)

As the type of errors and situations where feedback is required differ, so do their coping strategies. What is common among the participants who experienced this type of dilemma is that they expressed a determination to "stick to humanistic approaches", for example, correcting errors without humiliating the student or being aggressive, or by being patient.

### **Dilemmas about Professional Identity**

The transition from *student* role to *teacher* role raised various dilemmas over professional identity: feeling like a teacher versus being treated as a student; being a tough, authoritarian teacher versus being friendly with students; and adopting a teaching style "to please the teacher" at school/teacher from university or to adopt a personal teaching style.

I thought that my students would respect me because I am a teacher. I was wrong. I tried to explain them that I was a teacher. Other friends of mine are suffering from similar attitudes from the teachers and students. (ST20, Week 1).

Participants expressed that, although they wanted to "be like friends" with their students, they were afraid that their students might try to undermine or challenge them as teachers. In coping with this dilemma, they reported to have adopted "kind but firm" teacher role.

The journal entries showed that teacher candidates went through a phase where they confronted the dilemma of feeling incompetent in knowledge of teaching English versus the expectation of being an expert in teaching: "Am I going to be able to teach effectively or not?", "Am I going to be able to manage the time/students/misbehaviours or not?", "Can the students understand what I am trying to teach or not?", "Am I able to reach the students or not?", "Will I be able to teach eight graders, or should I teach young learners?" Teacher candidates explained that this dilemma would be resolved "in time" by "gaining more experience."

Conflicting expectations of schoolteachers and university teachers created a sense of frustration for some:

The real dilemma is this: our teachers at university expect us to teach in the way they taught, the teachers at school expect us to teach in the way they do at school –We have to please both sides. How about us? Our personality? (ST41, Week 6)

In dealing with this dilemma, while some preferred to "strike a happy medium to please" both the teacher from university and schools as "a temporary solution", others "did

their best” to put into practice the theory they learned at university regardless of the problems they were confronted with.

### **Dilemmas about Future Career Plans**

The decision about whether to take up a post in a private school or a state school, and in a primary school or high school posed dilemmas for some of the participants. Lack of facilities in schools, teachers’ approaches to students, teaching methods observed, characteristics of certain age groups of students and the curriculum led them to consider working in private schools. One participant wrote:

Being a teacher is a serious job. Teachers working in state schools are not aware of this. They don’t make any effort to do better. I don’t want to be among such teachers. Working in state schools is stifling. (*ST24, Week 3*)

Additionally, two student teachers recorded a profound dilemma with the following question: “Do I really want to be a teacher?” due to the negative experiences they had. The first participant encountered student misbehaviour because of her “ineffective teaching” so she failed to maintain order in the classroom. The second participant indicated that he found teaching “challenging” and that he was not sure whether he wanted to work as a teacher or not.

### **Overview: Some Common Themes**

Data from journal entries showed that student teachers faced a variety of dilemmas and each dealt with them in their own ways. Dilemmas over the medium of instruction were pervasive. In fact, almost all of the participants faced this dilemma at least once during the teaching practice period. Decisions related to teaching method and technique, and material choice and usage also presented themselves as common dilemmas to be dealt with.

Journal entries showed many of the participants differentiated teaching practice experience as “practical”, or “real” and on campus courses as “theoretical”, or “remote.” Additionally, they expressed their disappointment with the courses offered on campus:

Practice is different than the theory given in the books at university, I realised that I was only given theoretical information, rather than reading about the theory from books, we should focus on real situations. None of the theory we learned was helpful, theory and practice are completely different. (*ST18, Week 6*)

However they did not approve of or like what they witnessed in practice in school settings and wrote that they favoured what they learned at university. Moreover, many teacher candidates seemed to be determined to put into practice what they learned in university-based courses:

There are so many problems in the education system. I strongly believe one should not say “this is how it has been and will always be!” One should do something to change it. We should change it! I think things will be different when I start from scratch as a real teacher with my own students. No matter what, I will use what I learned – otherwise why did I bother to learn them? (*ST32, Week 6*)

Several participants believed that their dilemmas could only be resolved by “changing the whole education system” including the national curriculum and course books. Others hoped “to bridge the gap” when they were assigned to teach in their own classrooms the following year. Only a few indicated that they used some of the teaching methods and techniques that they were advised against at university. Contrary to what they were taught, however, those methods and techniques did seem to work.

It emerged from the data that participants did not necessarily confront the same types of dilemmas at the same time. In other words, the type of dilemmas did not fall into a pattern in terms of their occurrence. Furthermore, it seemed that the dilemmas were a direct result of “hands-on experience”, although at times due to those dilemmas, they felt “frustrated”, “disappointed”, “shocked”, “disillusioned”, “confused”, “annoyed”, “discouraged”, “stressed”, “weary”, and “helpless.” Additionally, some reported that they felt “out of place” and that they “didn’t feel as a part of the school system”:

Every Monday or Tuesday [i.e. the days we go to practice school] is a torture for me, because it is impossible to put into practice what I have learned at university. Day by day I am losing my enthusiasm to teach, I feel that I am of no use! (*ST14, Week 6*)

Overall inspection of the data suggested that the coping strategies employed fell into two broad categories: they either reconceptualised their ideas on teaching or restructured their conditions. When they were faced with a dilemma, while some of the participants seemed to change the way they thought (or their teaching approach), others preferred to make changes in the way they taught without actually changing their thinking. Argyris and Schon's work over the past twenty years has been concerned with examining conscious and unconscious reasoning processes (Dick & Dalmau, 1990). Argyris and Schon (1974) assert that people hold maps in their heads about how to plan, implement and review their actions. They further assert that few people are aware that the maps they use to take action are not the theories they explicitly espouse. Also, even fewer people are aware of the maps or theories they do use (Argyris, 1980).

To clarify, this is not merely the difference between what people say and do. Argyris and Schon suggest that there is a theory consistent with what people say and a theory consistent with what they do. Therefore the distinction is not between "theory and action but between two different "**theories of action**" (Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985: 82). Hence the concepts Espoused theory and Theory-in-use:

**Espoused theory:** The worldview and values people believe their behaviour is based on

**Theory-in-use:** The worldview and values implied by their behaviour, or the maps they use to take action

Participants reported adopting the latter approach in order to “please” their cooperating teachers and their teachers from university. When faced with a dilemma, they tried to find a solution together with such people as their fellow student teachers, and teachers from university and schools. Fellow student teachers were most frequently mentioned as persons with whom they shared their dilemmas. Additionally, some indicated that they kept their dilemmas to themselves and resolved them on their own. Only a few felt their dilemmas could not be resolved at all, because those dilemmas were related to the foreign language curriculum and education system in Turkey and were beyond their control.

## Discussion

The present study revealed the types of dilemmas student teachers faced and how they tried to cope with them. The themes that emerge from the findings are related to the ongoing debates in the literature on theory and practice (in)congruence, teacher socialisation, professional development and professional identity, and finally, medium of instruction. Each of these themes in relation to the findings is discussed in the following sections.

### Theory and Practice Dichotomy

In line with some other studies, participants often assigned high priority to what they learned in university-based courses and regarded fieldwork as an area for testing university acquired knowledge (Korthagen, Loughran, & Lunenberg, 2005; Yayli, 2008). However, they often reported a mismatch between “theoretical” and “practical” knowledge and differentiated field work as “reality” and on campus work as “remote,” “theoretical” and “incongruent with reality” which corroborates findings of Allen (2009) and that of Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson (2009).

Researchers attribute the lack of or difficulty in establishing connections between university education and practice to variety of reasons. Some of the examples cited are: the weak relationship between courses and field experiences due to fragmentation; weak pedagogy and lack of articulation in extant teacher education programmes (Feimen-Nemser, 2001); mismatch among the perceptions of university professors, cooperating teachers and teacher candidates regarding the significance of theory (Joram, 2007); candidates’ misinterpretation of theory or its faulty implementation, or the inadequacy of theory itself (Stones, 1983). Additionally, the structure of the teacher education programme is claimed to provide little time for reflection and for engaging in reflective tasks (Kwo, 1996). The participants of the study attributed their dilemmas regarding theory and practice incongruence to the school context (the curriculum, lack of facilities, students’ past learning habits, low student motivation, student misbehaviours and related management problems, teachers and their “old fashioned” teaching styles and thinking) and to the incongruence between expectations of cooperating teachers and university teachers.

#### **Teacher Socialisation, Professional Development and Professional identity**

It has been well established that the formation of professional identity is an ongoing process of identification and negotiation of self-image as a teacher, mediated by prior learning and teaching experiences, and expectations and results of interaction between the self and significant others in a school context (Hyun-Woo, 2011). Research findings also indicate that student teachers need to feel secure and be included in the school community (Graham & Roberts, 2007) by “fitting in” (Jones, 2005) and avoiding confrontations with other staff (Chambers, Coles & Roper, 2002). Similarly, participants reported that some of their dilemmas originated from being caught up between the expectations of the cooperating teacher in school and the teacher from university, and the wish to develop a personal teaching style. This “struggle for voice” resonates in other studies documented (Britzman, 2003; Jephcote & Salisbury, 2009; Loughran, 2006). Furthermore, participants reported that sometimes they had to teach in the way the teachers in schools asked them to. This “tactical compliance” has been reported in previous studies (Moore, 2003; Roberts & Graham, 2008).

In line with the findings of some previous studies (Conway & Clark, 2003; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2007), participants expressed concerns about feeling inadequate as a teacher with respect to classroom management, possessing insufficient and inadequate subject matter knowledge, not being able to meet the expectations and needs of students, feeling frustrated about the selection and employment of teaching methods.

Additionally, although there is evidence in the literature that student teachers are mostly concerned with establishing a friendly relationship with their students (Antonek, McCormick, & Donato, 1997) and that they give less importance to “educational” aspect of their teaching (Hollingsworth, 1989), the findings suggest that teacher candidates *can* and *do* reflect beyond *survival skills* as is articulated in the multiple dilemmas confronting them during their school experiences. Furthermore, identity formation is considered as a path fraught with challenges and tensions (Ottesen, 2007). In line with these, participants reported experiencing emotional distress when confronted with such dilemmas.

### **Target Language or Mother Tongue?: Medium of Instruction Debate**

The use of the target language (TL) in monolingual foreign language classrooms has always brought about hot debates. There exist ample studies that delve into pros and cons of exclusive use of the TL or mixed method approach.

It has been argued that exclusive use of TL makes the language real and provides learners with an opportunity of experiencing unpredictability (Macdonald, 1993). Additionally, it is believed that exclusive use of TL, and hence maximum exposure to the language, provide the language learners with an opportunity to practice the language to the fullest (Swan, 1985). On the other hand, it is also argued that the stringent exclusion of L1 can cause a waste of time, and stress and confusion. Use of L1 can be, if used appropriately without being overly dependent on it, a useful linguistic resource (Celik, 2008).

Although there is little tangible evidence to support the issue either way, some training programmes advocate the total exclusion of the L1. Similarly, participants of the study explained that they were strongly recommended to use the L2 as a medium of instruction. However, they had to switch to Turkish when teaching which posed itself as a dilemma. In other studies conducted in Turkey (Genc, 2010; Komur, 2010; Tuzel & Akcan, 2009), and elsewhere (Littlewood & Yu, 2011) pre-service teachers have been reported to have experienced similar dilemmas.

### **Classroom and Misbehaviour Management**

It has been shown that pre-service teachers rank classroom management as their top teaching concern (Boz, 2008) and that they feel inadequately prepared in the area of classroom management (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Although classroom management was not the top concern that posed a dilemma for the participants, it was still ranked highly. Almost half of the participants experienced a dilemma related to classroom and misbehaviour management. Furthermore, in relation to management, a majority of the student teachers perceived an incongruity between what they learned in university-based courses and actual classroom teaching they observed and experienced, a finding which corroborates previous studies (Flores, 2006; Kaya, Lundeen, & Wolfgang, 2010; Stoughton, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Findings of the present study provide a glimpse into student teachers' complex, multifaceted professional development and contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First of all, from a theoretical perspective the study into dilemmas related to theory and practice incongruence show the multiple layers of concerns that the student teachers must address. The category of dilemma identified embodies a set of issues for prospective teachers and suggests areas of focus for professional development or school socialisation. Additionally, the results may guide teacher educators and other parties involved in the development of educational programmes based on student teachers' dilemmas from a practical perspective. Korthagen (2010) maintains that building teacher education on student teacher concerns and preconceptions can be a fruitful strategy in order to bridge the perceived problem of the gap between theory and practice.

Findings revealed that there were times when the participants struggled with their dilemmas and recognised a significant incongruence between what they learned at university and what they observed and experienced in practice schools. Also, findings showed the need for support for student teachers in dealing with a variety of dilemma often leading to



conflicts, frustration, tension, physical and emotional stress, even drop out. In other words, learning to teach in the school context presented challenges for student teachers. Gabrys-Barker (2012:52) argues that while it is necessary to provide student teachers with a strong knowledge base and a set of solid rules about teaching and classroom procedures, at the same time it is important to promote challenge and risk. She further notes that student teachers come to training courses with different motives and sensitivities along with differing degrees of personal maturity, each of which contribute to their initial performances in real classrooms and presents challenges to respond to. Although confrontation with challenge is inevitable and can be productive, student teachers should then be provided with individual coaching and supervision in order to promote the relationship between theory and practice (Korthagen, 2010).

Moreover, it is revealed that the mismatch between theory and practice is multifaceted, and that there is not one straightforward solution to the problem. I contend that the prevailing problem of theory and practice gap should be dealt with context-specific solutions as I acknowledge that the perceived mismatch reflects the lived experiences participants have had. Different contexts and subjects may require different solutions.

The problem of theory and practice incongruence has always preoccupied me over 20 years of teaching experience and mentoring prospective teachers. During their visits or through their emails, our graduates sometimes complain about the courses they took at university. They say that “the realities of schools” do not make it possible to put into practice what they are taught in the courses. Thus I am left with a dilemma of my own: should I arrange the content of my teaching to correspond with the problems and realities of current teaching context or consider how languages are best taught in ideal circumstances with the latest language teaching methods, materials and technology? It seems that such widely held notions that “teacher education programmes are not powerful interventions” and that “student teacher beliefs act as a filter” tell us only one small part of a complicated story. In other words, before we put the “blame” on one specific group or phenomenon for the apparent theory and practice gap, further research into student teacher learning and development is needed to draw the whole picture.

Based on the distinction between two conceptions of theory made by Korthagen and Kesseles (1999), another conclusion is that participants consider university-based learning is at the level of episteme (i.e. knowledge about many different situations and general concepts; abstract knowledge) rather than phronesis (i.e. knowledge about specific situations; perceptual knowledge). The emphasis made in the courses on the procedural knowledge results in gaining knowledge about teaching methods and techniques to be used in many types of situations.

As a researcher, but mostly as a teacher educator, I found the analysis of dilemmas a powerful tool in that it revealed our students’ thinking and concerns about teaching, perceived constraints and limitations guiding their decisions and actions during teaching, and their resolution strategies. Additionally, the findings shed light on the areas where they felt inadequately prepared to tackle their weaknesses and made me aware of basic sources of their disappointment and unhappiness about our programme and school practices. Also, it emerged from the data that there is a need to strengthen the link between the university and schools and to improve mentoring efforts in order to facilitate socialisation into the profession for student teachers.

From student teachers’ perspectives, I argue that explicit study of teaching dilemmas may help them reflect on and relate those dilemmas to their existing knowledge base and perspectives. Reflecting on own teaching dilemmas may challenge student teachers’ preconceptions, and this way, they may become aware of their “taken-for-granted assumptions” about teaching (Fransson & Grannas, 2013). Additionally, student teachers can be helped to bridge the theory-practice gap by being alerted in advance to the kind of

dilemmas they may face, with discussion of ways to cope with such dilemmas (Denicolo, 1996).

Becoming aware of common dilemmas our students faced have driven us to make some recent changes in our programme. The content of some of the school-based learning related courses has been restructured to provide student teachers with the opportunity to work under closer supervision of course tutors and with the support of fellow student teachers on the areas they feel inadequate. In other words, rather than working collectively, the course content has been tailored to suit individual needs so as to help them in their professional development. Work in the school is accompanied by such weekly structured tasks as critical evaluation of one's teaching performance, identification of areas where they felt inadequate, setting a goal to cope with the problem area, gathering information from related literature, conducting guided observations and interviews, preparing action plans and putting them into practice, and finally, reflecting upon teaching performance.

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