FROM STUDENT DESK TO TEACHER'S TABLE

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ABSTRACT
This study describes a project at Fatih University where graduate research assistants and faculty cooperate in developing teaching vocation in Sociology department. The model of a microteaching workshop has been conducted for this objective. The professor and two research assistants have worked as a group. In the class, they take turns and each is responsible for teaching a class, while the other two observe and analyze the teaching act. The observers use a three-column observation sheet. In this observation sheet in the first column, the observers list the content of the teaching act; in the second one, they note down the tactic used by the teacher for the teaching act; and the third column is used to take notes about the observers' comments on and questions related to each teaching acts. After each class, the three meet to discuss and analyze the teaching strategies used in the class and their effectiveness. Through this model, the professor and the graduate students serve both as teaching models and as teaching analysts and also they take both the role of a teacher and a student.
Key words: microteaching, sociology, teaching models, future faculty

INTRODUCTION

Most PhD graduates in Turkey are employed in universities where their primary responsibilities are teaching. However, while generally most graduate schools in Turkey support the development of scholarship, little attention is paid to the development of pedagogical skills for these faculties of the future. Pedagogical training is a key overlooked element by graduate programs for graduate students to develop their professional skills.

This paper describes a project at our university where graduate research assistants and faculty members cooperate in developing the teaching vocation of graduate research assistants in the Sociology Department. This semester long project follows the model of a micro-teaching workshop, as teaching practice is important to transfer theory into practice. Karçkay and Şanli in their study, "The effect of micro teaching application on the pre-service teachers' teacher competency levels," emphasize the importance of micro-teaching for the development of teaching skills by stating, "The purpose of micro-teaching application is to develop skills in teaching" (2009: 844). In our project, the professor and the graduate research assistants take turns where each is responsible for teaching a class session while the other two observe and analyze the teaching act. Before the class session the person responsible for that session identifies the goals set for class. Then just before the class the three meet to discuss the teaching activity. In the class session, the observers use a three column observation sheet to record the topic being presented or the skill modeled in the class session; first, the observers list the content of the teaching act at each point during the class, second they note down the tactic used by the teacher in the teaching act, and last the observers note their comments on and questions about each teaching act. After each class, the three again meet to discuss and analyze their observations and comments on the teaching strategies used and to assess their effectiveness. For the next class session, the roles are reversed, so both the professor and the graduate students serving in turn as teaching models and as teaching analysts.

This process prepares graduate research assistants for their future teaching role, because they practice teaching guided by the mentoring of experts, since one of the expectations from PhD graduates is to convey their knowledge through efficient methods. In our project, graduate students engage in teaching while being observed and received feedback from a more experience teacher. Further they learn to be astute self-observers and self-assessors of their teaching as part of their professional development. Our project, then, builds from an apprenticeship model of professinal growth.

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Literature Review

Recent studies in the development of pedagogical skills of graduate students show that more emphasis should be paid to the training of teaching assistants, they are preparing for the role of teaching—one can think of the teaching assistant as undergoing anticipatory socialization.

The skills that graduate students should have are not limited to research facility; these students also need to have teaching skills, because most of PhD graduates are employed as teachers in universities. Mozer and Napell in their study, "Instant Replay and the Graduate Teaching Assistant" (1975), emphasize that the teaching-learning relationship is receiving more attention recently: "... more and more professors are beginning to pay attention to the dynamics of the learning-teaching relationship..." (242). Eventhough the need to prepare graduate students for teaching role is widely acknowledge, few such programmes exist in Turkey.

Many research studies conducted in different university departments imply that preparing graduate assistants as future faculty requires the development of teaching skills. Especially in universities in the United States, studies report on and analyze teaching-learning programs that aim to provide learning environments for graduate students. One project modeled in US practice was carried out within the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science at Memorial University in Canada. "Preparing Future Faculty" (2009) is seen as a way to create "new thinking and programs that would better prepare doctoral students as future faculty" (Crocker, Venkatesan, Shorlin, and Dawood 2009:354). In the Memorial University program gradute students got teaching experiences under the supervision and guidance of faculty members. They found that their program was not only beneficial for the graduate assistants, but also brought benefits to undergraduate students as well. Graduate students' teaching brings a breath of fresh air into the classroom: as did our undergraduate students, the Memorial undergraduates report that they feel more comfortable when the graduate assistants feel more comfortable:

The major goal of the Teaching Opportunities for Graduate Assistants (TOGA) program is to provide professional development to support graduate students in their teaching roles which would also support, although indirectly, the learning of undergraduate students (2009: 354).

Another benefit of preparing graduate students as future teachers is explained by Darling and Earhart in their study, "A Model for Preparing Graduate Students as Educators": "The second benefit is the development of graduate students as effective instructors. Becoming a competent teacher is an important facet of professional development and potential future employment" (Darling and Earhart 1990:341).

Teaching assistants often do not feel comfortable in the role of teaching during their first weeks as teachers because of their inadequate experience in teaching; however, thanks to guided teaching experiences, teaching assistants feel more secure about teaching. Darling and Earhart focus on this, saying:

> It has also been very rewarding to see beginning instructors who originally
> were very insecure about teaching their first class develop poise and
> confidence in their abilities to teach. …after having this guided experience in
> learning how to teach, they became so enthralled with teaching that they
> changed their career plans (1990:346).

At this point, mentoring also plays a crucial role for the development of teaching skills of graduate students as it provides the collaboration of the graduate student with the professor. Scarboro and Husain, sociologists, examine the benefits of mentoring in their paper. Scarboro and Husain state that "mentoring is associated with cognitive growth, clarification of values, increased identification with a discipline, and increased self-confidence" (2003: 4).

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Experiences on Teaching

In Turkey, according to Turkish Ministry of Education guidelines, persons wanting to be teachers have to complete an educational sciences program or get a certificate for teaching and they have to get pedagogical proficiency determined by governmental procedures; however this applies only for teaching in primary or secondary schools. In order to teach in universities, the only expectation for meeting university teaching requirements is to fulfill a PhD degree. However, getting a PhD is primarily a preparation for research and scholarship and in itself is inadequate to insure pedagogical skills in the field. Teaching needs some training period to learn strategies, techniques and methods for classroom management and facilitating student learning. However, in Turkey while mastering one's field there are few chances to practice in teaching. The goal of our Sociology Department mentoring program at our university is to enable its research assistants to develop their teaching skills as well as their scholarly competence. So, as research assistants we had the chance to be on the stage: that is we moved from students' table to teacher's desk and adopted teaching responsibilities. On the stage we both adopted a role and were under observation. In this way we as teacher assistants had the chance to see our potential as and our limits as novel teachers.

Our Experience

At this point, we would like to share our experiences: what we did, what we learned, and what we heard from our students, from our teacher and also from each other as well. We had three main steps in each teaching-learning process and all these processes were aimed at guiding us through our teaching activity.

This micro-teaching activity happened in the History of Sociological Thought class taught by Allen Scarboro, a full-time member of the faculty in our university. There are 63 students enrolled in this class in the Fall 2011 semester. Normally, the three hours class is divided between two days. On Monday, Scarboro teaches a two-hour session of the class and we -Yasemin and İsmail-observe his teaching activity and style then note down our observation. On the other hand, on Thursday, Yasemin and İsmail take on the role of teaching while Scarboro observes and takes notes.

This micro-teaching experience provided us with many advantages to develop our teaching skills. When we introduced ourselves to the class as the teaching assistants for the fall semester, we were a little excited. It was the first time for us to transfer our collection of knowledge in the field. Also, it was the first serious experience for us to talk in front of a class, while all the eyes were on us, as sociology instructors. Most of the time, we saw ourselves as a student even when we had the teaching role. So one area we explored was the similarities and differences between the student and teacher role.

To plan the structure of our first class, on the suggestion of our teacher-mentor, before the class we - Ismail, Yasemin, and Scarboro- met in our teacher's office. The first suggestion was related to taking notes which was somehow different than the style we had followed as students. As students, taking notes meant to us just writing down what teacher said, or what we saw as signposts for our learning. This time, while taking notes we were expected to divide our paper into three columns. In the below you will see one of example of the notes that we took;
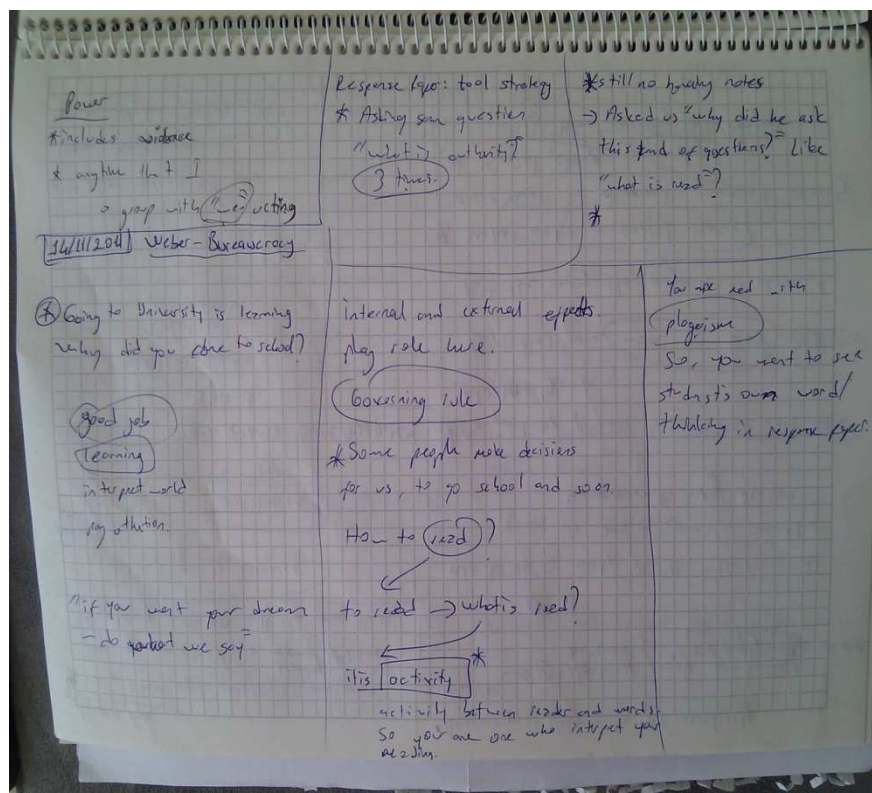
In the first column, we took notes in the usual way of a student. In the second column, we noted the classroom behaviors of our teacher. For example, we took into consideration the gestures and body language used, such as smiling, making eye contact with students, walking through the aisles or making statements to encourage students like 'tell me more!' or 'keep going!' for those students who had little courage to tell their opinions in the class. After noting and discussing these behaviors, we realized that these kinds of tactics are so powerful while acting as a teacher. These encouragements make students feel that what they say in class is worthy and notable for us; in this way students think that their ideas are just to the point and therefore they start to focus their attention to the question more. These consolidations are important to enhance their thinking, because they believe in this way they are in the true path. For instance, we believe that the meaning of smiling has a hidden meaning for the students which is "Yes, this is the answer that I am looking for!", so, smiling is not merely a physical gesture but also is a way to encourage student thinking. When asked a question in class, students generally focus on the word, and when we smile back at them they become more aware and pay more attention to the meanings we intend. So, students look at the meaning not the term. They need this kind of support because they need to feel safe with what they say, and they want to guarantee themselves about their answers. This process is also same for us as students, because at the end of each teaching experience we look at our professor to see the smile on his face and to the assents in his eyes; because it is also important for us to understand we are on the right way.

In the third column of our grid, we noted down our personal comments and questions about each teaching act. For example we noted some comments as "despite all our effort we still could not integrate some students into the discussion during the class" or "the students who generally sit in the front are more attentive than those at the back". Also, we used second and third column for our - Ismail, Yasemin, and Scarboro - post-discussions.

This three column grid helped us to be more attentive in our- Yasemin and Ismail- observation during the class; therefore we became more interested with details that we did not realize before. Our focus shifted from just taking care of what was being taught in the class, to how the subject was being taught and the students' reaction to the way the subject was taught; thus we had to pay attention now to the three areas rather than just one and we became more intense in our perception.

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We shared the notes that we took on the three- column grid in our post-discussion session. In these discussions we shared what we heard from our students, from our teacher and also from our peers as well. For example; in teaching our section once one of us so often used the questions, "Can you tell me?" or "Who can give answer to this question?" Then, during post-discussion session of our teaching, our teacher warned us that with these questions we do not help the students but challenge them, undermining their confidence in their knowledge. Thus, the post-discussions helped us to see our mistakes and to connect what we visualized with what was aimed; thus we could have better idea why each strategy was used. The discussion period after our teaching was helpful in a way that we could discuss how we could make our teaching better.

Also these discussions made us to realize the purposes of specific behaviors of the teachers in the classroom. Moreover, during pre- and post-discussions on both our teacher's and our own teaching activities, we had the chance to suggest our ideas for the following classes. So, the professor's paying attention to our suggestions made us believe the applicability of our ideas and thus helped us gain confidence in making new suggestions; and the encouragement we got made us to believe our capacity to develop in teaching.

We can say that one of the benefits of our observations and discussions was that we were able to try to solve some problems identified through the observations and discussions. For instance, we suggested that students' paying attention to their mobile phones during the class was destroying their attention to the class. For the following class, we decided to warn them if they use their mobile phone during the class hour, then Scarboro will keep it till end of the class. We also suggested to try changing the students' seating locations because we thought that it may be the reason for or a sign of their not focusing on the discussion. Also, We - Scarboro, Yasemin and Ismail- discussed possible solutions for balancing student participation in the class. We decided to focus more on those who speak less and limit our attention for those who generally sit in the front and volunteer all the time. However, this solution did not work well, because we realized that with this tactic volunteers would lose their eagerness. Although some of our suggestions did not work, our professor was eager to apply our suggestions for us to see the results. This means that he tried to show us if our suggestions would work or not.

At this point we decided to select some students and make a small group and teach them in another classroom. Each week, we selected different students for this small group and also rotated the assistant who was responsible to teach that small group. With this strategy our goal was to understand what the root of the non-speaking students' problem was, whether it was English language proficiency problem or something else, as we aimed to have a lively discussion by integrating all the students in the class discussion. With small group we tried to have discussion section. The main subject of this section was to review the subjects of previous classes.

With the rest of the class we read the weekly newspaper column written by Scarboro and tired to relate the column with the topics of previous classes. Our aim was to try to help student to improve their reading skills in English and to help them make connections with what they already learned in the previous lecture; in this way they had to chance to analyze the theories in the light of everyday life examples.

Moreover, in order to clarify the theories we chose videos related with issues discussed in class. During these sessions, we had a chance to take students' comments about our sessions and got some positive feedback from some students such as, "Thank you so much for your attention," "now we can see better what it is meant in the class!" or "we feel more comfortable with you to ask questions."

While observing the teacher's style and simultaneously participating in the class as students, sometimes we, Yasemin and Ismail, could not stop ourselves from making comments for the discussions. Thus, the frequent changes between our roles as students and as lecturers in the same context were a little confusing for us, because while observing we did not want to interrupt the flow of

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the class; on the other hand we could not help to express our ideas. Then, in such situations we shared our comments on the topic with each other. We whispered to each other when we could not help ourselves to keep silent, because combining the behaviors of a teacher with the behaviors of a student, while in the position of being student together with other students, we supposed that student would see the steps of theories as we did, and we grew impatient to answer the questions. However, we were mistaken to suppose the students had the same background of knowledge as we did.

While in student/observer role, we generally sat at the back of the class among students. Sometimes students asked for our clarifications about their confusions. Once, a student, in front of us asked a very interesting question during the class time; "Why he - our teacher- asked the same questions to us again and again? Does he think that we cannot hear or that we have difficulty in understanding?" It was obvious that she was confused and also she could not see the structure of the teaching process. The repetition of the same question for three times within five minute confused her. We tried to clarify the questions for the student by saying, "Just calm down, nobody thinks that you have incapability to understand, if you can stay patient you will see that these questions are for catching your attention for the next step. He tries to build an idea in your mind step by step. Within a few minutes you will see the reason why he asked this question to you repetitively". After our answer, she nodded her head and went back to listening. Five minutes later, she turned back smiling to show that she understood the step that we talked about.

Most of the students in our class speak Turkish as their first language. So, when faced with some English problems their heads generally would turn towards us- as they knew we were Turkish speakers. They generally thought that we had the answer for possible questions in the class. When they needed further explanation in their native language, or asked about their confusions to us individually, they felt more comfortable, because they believed that we were closer to them as students; however at the same they were sure that we had enough knowledge to help them as teachers.

When we took the role of teaching, it turned out to be the time for us to apply what we had gained during the observation periods. This time our professor took notes about our teaching. At the beginning we did not have much confidence in our roles; however the participation by the students in class, the larger number of volunteer comments by students who usually would not speak much, and the positive student attitude facilitated our role.

All in all, teaching in the class made us to realize our potentials and deficiencies about our future role as university instructors, so it was like a preliminary preparation for our upcoming profession.

CONCLUSION

In this study we tried to explain and share our two-months period of micro-teaching activities in a sociology class at Fatih University. This project will continue until the end of this academic year. Until the end of this semester we will follow somehow the same procedure with some small changes for the methods we use in order to understand what kind of differences affect both students and us in a positive way for the teaching-learning environment. As we become more acquainted with the students and with the teaching activity itself, we will have different and better perspectives about what works or not for the following term.

We think that this project is a fruitful model for teaching-learning activity for graduate teaching assistants in the different faculties in our university and other universities. As we mentioned above, teaching needs some experiences and skills for each faculty candidates. After these experiences we feel that we have become more comfortable to be in the teacher role, and we are motivated to continue with the role of teaching.

Thanks to the experiences we have gained until now, we feel that this model has benefits both for ourselves as future teachers and for both our current and our future students. First, our current students have become more comfortable in communicating their ideas in the classroom. Also, we learn from

both our teaching experience and also from students, so a multidimensional learning takes place in this project. Moreover, we learn from our professor and from each other; also students learn from the professor, us and each other. We learn not only to become teachers, but also to become good role-model students for our current students. Secondly, our future students will benefit when we enter the teaching profession as stronger and more facile instructors.

Another advantage is that the university does not need to spend extra money to apply this project. The university just benefits from the graduate assistants, who are currently working in the university, in a more efficient way. Moreover, neither the mentoring professor nor the graduate students need to spend a lot of extra time for the project. The only extra time needed for the graduate students is three extra class hours and for the instructors to spend the additional thirty minutes for the pre- and post-discussions. It may sound too much among all other responsibilities of graduate assistants, but when we compare the experience gained, the time spent becomes negligible. Or else, the same students will have to spend more time when they start as a faculty after getting their PhD. After this process now we have more self confidence for our roles of being teacher and students, because we have a new chance to realize our capabilities and performance.

However this teaching-learning activity sometimes causes some difficulties for us, because being student and being teacher at the same time in the same context can make us to engage our roles and confuse us about which side we stand. Although this seems to be a disadvantage, it is a clear indicator of our learning to become teachers. If we can confuse the roles that itself shows that we have another role rather than just being a student.

Finally, as we gain more experience, we realize that our professor gives more control to us about our teaching activity and we become more controlled by the students, and students determine their own learning. Therefore, it seems that the teachers are like the conductor in a group of musicians playing different instruments; we just provide the harmony, the students themselves create the art.

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