# KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE:
# IMPROVING 4TH YEAR STUDENT TEACHERS' TEACHING SKILLS AND PREPARING 1ST YEAR STUDENT TEACHERS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE[*]

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to develop a new approach to help both 4th year students and 1st year students to get the utmost benefit from application activities. This new approach will provide 4th year students with an experience of teaching practice and also preparation of 1st student teachers to teaching practice process before they start their practice teaching. In this study, an in-faculty practising school model will be developed by having 4th year student teachers practice teaching in faculty before teaching in practice school, which will also help 1st year students teachers to reach expected goals and attain required qualifications related to professional skills.

## Introduction

It is believed that progress in education depends on the improvement of the teachers. But, teachers' professional development cannot be described as linear continual formulation and a defined stable process to constitute a professional perspective (Ovens, 1999; Solomon & Tresman, 1999). However, the main insight in teacher education points out that experience has a strong impact on building teaching beliefs and behavioral features (Scheerens, 1992; Munby & Russell, 1994). At this point, as schools are unable to offer an extra support for gaining extremely experience of teaching during teaching practice. On the other hand, student techers' responses indicate the necessity of practice in teaching and this makes the faculty to be also more responsible in providing a medium for such a practise (Bullock & Cloke, 1997).

When student teachers confront the necessary teaching task, they are usually not in accordance with their own beliefs in the extent of experiences of teaching practice (Suqrue, 1997). Student teachers draw out that they do not implement profoundly the application activities because of the limitations of the process, especially regarding time (Saka, 2001). Therefore, having more practice before graduating has a crucial role to improve professional skills of practitioners. In addition to this, the idea of reflection and the reflective practitioner has a crucial importance on raising interest in relation to elaborate practice teaching in classroom with respect to emerging an interactional profitable climate for discussion and inquirement about teaching (Field & Philpott, 2000). In order to make a positive contribution to this process, faculty need to ensure opportunities for practitioners to collaborate and share their insights and experiences interdependently (Bradley, Conner & Saithworth, 1994). Therefore, it is necessary that the student teachers should be oriented to understand teaching during their practice teaching (Golstein & Lake, 2000). Thus, the aim of this study presents a different approach to improve professional skills of student teachers and to prepare them for their own authentic practice in schools. In other words, this research develops a strategy which enhances the impact on faculties and schools for professional skill development and for evaluating how participation in such approach can lead to changes in practice.

## Conceptual Framework

As experience is gained by practising, teaching ability could be more effectively enriched by eliciting practice teaching, which involves the recognation of teaching-learning process, and adopting professional principals into a stable constructed framework (Hayes, 1999). One of the crucial aspects of this process is thinking comprehensively about teaching and learning in terms of convenient support, suggestions and encouragement to act confidentially in following of related objectives. It is indicated that in order to establish greater correspondence between practice and prior beliefs, the more related supportive reflection could be done. This belief could have been less stable and secure without immersion into practice. With this manner, student teachers

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could have also an opportunity to refine and adopt their beliefs and assumptions by means of immersion into practice (Tillema, 2000).

When the 4th year student teachers and the 1st year student teachers interact during field experiences, they experience teaching through collaboration for preparing their practice teaching. When the student teachers work in groups, the role of the tutor is to orientate their interaction and contribute or support their teaching skills thus making them interact more skilfully (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). The presence of other student teachers in the classroom (the 1st year student teachers)   has a vital importance to constitute new ideas and convenient advice during practice teaching (Talvitie, Peltokallio & Mannisto, 2000; Metcalfe, 1999). In this process, working together within groups and between groups extremely enriches their professional skills development by means of sharing their materials, thoughts, ideas, assumptions and beliefs. Moreover, a chance to ensure mutual support by observing each others' practice and having best relationship with peers (Veenman, Bentum, Bootsma, Dieren & Kemp, 2002; Talvitie et.al, 2000). In this way, they could gain decision-making competencies. But, the complexity of the concept can be difficult to articulate in a way that helps student teachers to develop their professional skills sufficiently. Yet, this approach could be described as an effective attempt to improve professional skills of practitioners (Jay & Johnson, 2002). It is believed that, this approach is useful in constructing the framework of student-teachers'image as constructing reasonable change on framework of teacher development; emerge from teacher's own teaching, by the adaptation of others'"experimental learning" regarding agreeable features (Ovens, 1999).

As a developing teacher, practitioners could have an opportunity to assess their own teaching effectiveness, feeling more confident about exploring new strategies and approach by eliciting their new and hidden potential skills as a result of this approach. This interactive process has positive impact on their own teaching practice and their skills as a team member in terms of self-esteem, confidence, encouragement and reasonable solutions. However, this approach does not appear to provide the same interpersonal context as traditional face-to-face mentoring. The idea behind this approach is that it will make teaching practice more relevant to actual practice teaching. For practitioners, the first step will be to observe and focus on the practice in faculty. By this way, the practice teaching process in secondary education will be improved at the same time and the experiences of student teachers and 1st year students will be combined by reflective practice in interactional environment. The approach explained in this study is based on the view that reflects the different patterns of faculty preparation for practice teaching in the extent of supportive interaction. Thus, faculties would be seen as practice school in this process of which steps described as the followed.

**Procedure**

This approach should be applied in three steps:
In order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this approach and to implement of the necessary directions for the study, the process needs to be essentially followed as three phases in these points;

*Phase 1.* **Pre-application for preparation**

   • 1st year student teachers are informed during the lesson of school experience to be more conscious about intended aims in relation to be prepared for teaching practice.
   • 4th year student teachers also are informed during the seminars which are the parts of the teaching practice in the faculty for the purpose of teaching practice and the contribution of this process with respect to providing more opportunity in practice teaching for improving their professional skills to the intended level.
   • If the number of attended 4th student teachers to the teaching practice is about 50. 4th year student teachers is separated into 7 groups which have 7 student teachers homogeneously in terms of being successful as group. Each group is oriented to study collaboratively within group and between groups for improving their professional skills.
   • Each group is informed to choose at least two volunteer students, as the education term involves 14 weeks. When two 4th student teachers are chosen according to willingness in each group which involves 7, the schedule of education'term is convenient for this number of groups. Besides, it is possible to determine the group numbers according to the total numbers of the 4th student teachers.
   • After separating groups, 4th year student teachers need to choose two practitioners within groups and are oriented to prepare themselves to implement lesson in the class of 1st year student teachers during their lesson of science teaching (physics, chemistry, biology, math, etc.) or any lessons in which is related with their subject which they will be practising in practice schools.

*Phase 2.* **Application**

• The selected student teacher within the groups begins to implement lesson (at least two hours) by taking active role in front of 1st year student teachers for teaching and other members of group observe the same lesson. This interactional environment is indicated shematically in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Practitioners'situation in classroom (an interactional atmosphere)
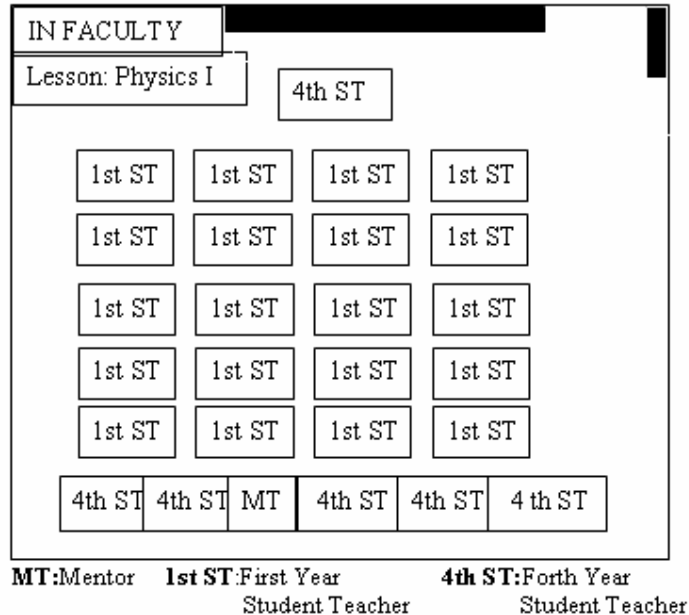


• In the next week, the other student teachers which are defined within the group in advance begin to implement at the following lessons which take place in the next week in front of the same practitioners.

• This rotational process is ongoing between groups throughout the teaching practice.

• After each selected practitioner has implemented lesson, method tutor and 1st year student teachers give feedback and suggestion to the 4th year student teachers who taught lessons within the group in front of other members of group to establish remarkable and effective interactive environment for stimulating each other to evolve and elicit their own professional skills.

*Phase 3.* **Inquiry**

• Method tutor can orientate the practitioners not only by having them gaining professional skills but also what could be done to prepare them for their professionalism by applying this approach to reach intended targets.

• The responses of practitioners need to be record fastidiously and elaborately with respect to especially effectiveness of working collaboratively in interactive environment.

• The results of the records of practitioners are filled by method tutors and practitioners as meaningful and remarkable documents in order to modify and sustain the approach and reflect and transform their experiences, beliefs and assumptions to the new practitioners who will be attending this process in the following years.

• And so, this valuable process is ongoing by developing itself remarkably term-by-term when applied fastidiously and masterfully.

This approach provides the practitioners various kinds of opportunities thorough reflection of specific responses, regarding learner participation, learner relationships, teaching methods and the use of teaching aids. This can be seen as a process which gives inspiration to practitioners. Thus, it encourages professional skill-development and beliefs which are related to any specific results and usual training (Solomon & Tresman, 1999).

**Discussion and Conclusions**

To improve teachers' professional progress, it is necessary to examine their knowledge, competencies and beliefs about teaching in different school settings with students of different ages. Hence, when student-teachers organize lessons in the 1st year students' class, it will be more profitable as they take part in different kind of classroom settings with different age groups before their actual teaching practice at schools (Kershner, 1999). Moreover, it is found that peer teaching in faculty, especially in the preparation of pre-service education helps to improve the ability of practitioners in professional skills such as planning and implementing the lesson (Metcall, Ronen-Hammer & Kahlich, 1996). This means that, if the student-teacher has longer periods of practical experience he or she will find himself/herself in a better position for applying their experiences to the practical tasks. This will, of course, contribute them to make their experiences, beliefs and assumptions more theoretical-based (Tillema, 2000). In addition to these, it is concluded that when 4th year student teachers would practice teaching in part of course schedule (such as; Physics-I) during teaching practicum before actual practice in schools in front of practitioners who are 1st year student teachers in the faculty, the identified limitations related teaching practice process could be minimised to the reasonable degree by recognising and inquiring lack of experiences of practitioners and they will gain councious by applying this approach (Saka, 2001). Thus, when 4th year student teachers engage in self directed teaching, the practitioners could change their invaluable beliefs through reflection and involvement *into* practice teaching (Tillema, 2000). The essential practitioners' benefits of the described process is summarised in Figure 2.

It is indicated that practitioners can improve their professional skills during teaching practice by sharing ideas, observing each other and working together with collaboratively and reflectively (Metcalfe, 1999). Observation of others' experiences provides practitioners the scope of an activity living and understanding the teaching which will encourage themselves to improve their own practice (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). The study explains how the teaching practice process can be planned best in an interactive situation, in which deeper thoughts and effective practice emerge from reflection on practice. Hence, this approach which involves reflective practice could provide more opportunity for the 4th year student teachers with respect to learning by teaching, learning by doing and learning by collaborating (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Therefore, this approach could ensure to improve the process of practice teaching in a professional group work or teamwork.

**Figure 2.** The essential benefits of the described process for practitioners.
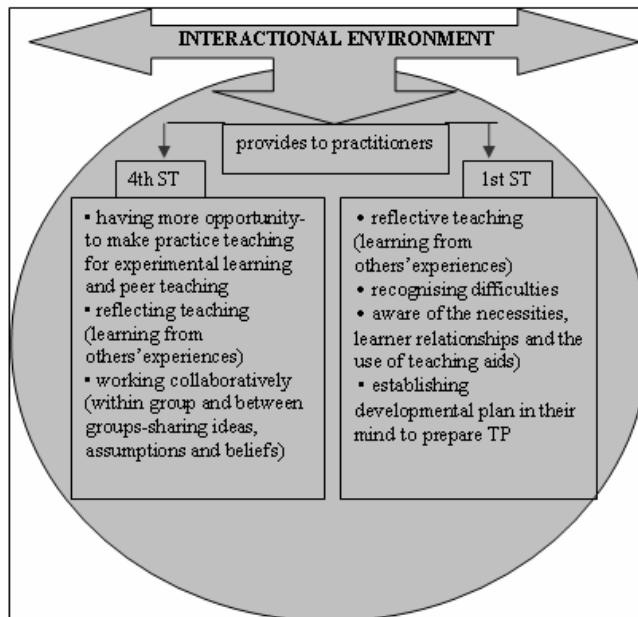


Working in groups is compared to working alone during practice teaching, and it is found that student teachers reflected positive attitudes (Veenman et.al., 2002). The claim arising from this study is that, there is a need to establish a positive framework to support collaborative and interactive reflective teaching during practice teaching (Ovens, 1999). Hence, one of the striking conclusions of this study is that, this approach provides student-teachers a professional development plan. On the other hand, it is not expected that student teachers can improve their own professional skills by using only this approach.

This strategy will be very useful for both the 4th year student teachers and the 1st year student teachers. So, we can kill two birds with one stone. Another desired outcome of this study is the improvement in instructional practice. Hence, this approach   enables the determination levels of professional skills of the 4th year student teachers in the faculty facilitating the process of reflection for actual practice in schools (Seabrooks et.al., 2000). Thus, this framework leads to giving method tutors and student teachers an organising faculty practising model which helps them examine the practitioners'practice simultaneously. Furthermore, faculty practice teaching and actual practice teaching in schools can be monitored by videotape for comparing and evaluating the process interdependently and elaborately. So, the complexity of the process could be demystified through reflection profoundly and by itself. This approach brings out the need for further research in a number of areas which are related to the impact of student teachers on how much experience of practice teaching can be shared among peers to improve their own professional skills throughout their teaching practice. One of the main implications of this research for future research would be to find out that how this approach works as a framework for practitioners' continuing professional development.

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