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## **My quest for negotiating meaning. Reflections on my dilemmas about practices of English language teaching in public school context in Turkey: An autoethnography**

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**Abstract.** The autoethnographic study aims to explore the teacher researcher’s dilemmas about the practices of English language teaching (ELT) in the public school context in Turkey and the reasons behind them. Narratives were used to depict the experiences which led to the dilemmas; the researcher’s journey of learning, lived experiences and interactions in the community of practice. The narratives, which portrayed the emergence of dilemmas, were analysed through reflections on them. The reflections were also supported by the other mixed methods studies, theoretical and regulatory documents. The results demonstrate that the dilemmas arise from the gap between the theoretical recommendations of the curriculum and daily practices of ELT in this specific context. The study is situated in the interpretivist paradigm of research, and holistic-content analysis was used as a form of narrative analysis. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning, Wenger’s community of practice, Dewey’s reflective practice, and Miller’s teacher identity concepts establish the theoretical framework of the study.

**Keywords.** autoethnography, teacher identity, reflective practice, community of practice, social constructivism, continuing professional development, narratives

### **1. Introduction**

I have been teaching English at public schools for fifteen years and I am very proud to be a member of this community. I believe that “teachers are learners of teaching” (Johnson, 2009). Thus, teaching better entails learning better. The relevant research has been called continuing professional development (CPD) for the last twenty years (Erol-Güçlü, 2018). Development has always been an unavoidable and indispensable phenomenon of life through ages. It is inherent in the nature of life. Therefore, I think it is very natural that I have always sought ways to develop myself both personally and professionally. Moreover, I do not want to be one of the teachers mentioned in the quotation of Ur “It has been said that teachers who have been teaching for twenty years may be divided into two categories: those with twenty years’ experience and those with one year’s experience repeated twenty times” (1996, p. 317, as quoted in Erol- Güçlü, 2018, p.1).

Personal and professional development requires the person to continue to learn throughout his/her life. And its importance was affirmed by UNESCO’s lifelong learning policy (UNESCO, 1972). As it was contended by Vygotsky (1978) in the theory of mind, human learning can occur through interaction; interacting with symbolic artifacts (books) and other people in the society. Teachers can continue their professional development through engaging in dialogic interaction with other teachers in their community of practice (Lave, 1991) and

professionals that can be accessed through “interrelated communities of practice” (Wenger, 2000, p.229). In his theory of experiential learning, Kolb also emphasizes the importance of dialogue to negotiate between the private meaning which is apprehended by an individual and the meaning which is comprehended by a group of people, that is, public meaning (1984, as cited in Roberts, 2016). Similarly, Thatcher argues that we must “increase the area of shared meaning we have for words and thus for ideas expressed in words” so that we can foster teacher learning (1990, p.290, as quoted in Roberts, 2016). On the other hand, Roberts draws our attention to “the critical role of social validation in the process while each teacher develops his/her thinking by personal construction” (2016, p.33). That is the point, right at which my dilemmas about the practices of English language teaching (ELT) in the Turkish public school context emerge.

As a teacher I cannot work in isolation, my L2 teaching practices have to be compatible with the others. Moreover, the regulation relevant to the practices of ELT such as the types and number of assessments provide that decisions are taken by majority vote (Ministry of National Education, MoNE, Guidelines for Educational and Departmental Boards, 2019). The meaning I make from the ELT curriculum for 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades, coursebooks and the articles of the regulation relevant to student assessment provided by MoNE does not match with the others’ when I examine these theoretical and regulatory documents. Whenever I try to negotiate the meaning which I construct from these documents with the others, I see that they do not find the theoretical knowledge and methods presented in these documents related to the practice, the real conditions and constraints of the classrooms. There is a mismatch between my apprehension from these documents and their comprehension.

As it is stated by Wenger, “We each experience knowing in our own ways. And knowing is a matter of displaying socially and historically defined competences. The socially defined competence is always in interplay with our experience and learning takes place in this interplay” (2000, p.226). Wenger also warns us about the critical role which the communities of practice play in learning by stating that “communities of practice cannot be romanticized. They are born of learning, but they can also learn not to learn. They are the cradles of the human spirit, but they can also be its cages” (2000, p.230).

In the Turkish public school context, ELT practices and the initiatives to improve the quality of L2 teaching have been researched via many mixed methods studies (Gursoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2017; Erarslan, 2018; Tosuncuoğlu, 2018, Coşkun, 2016; British Council & Tepav (The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey), 2014) by the academicians from an outsider’s perspective. Yet, this autoethnographic writing addresses the issue from an insider’s perspective. In this sense, its approach to the issue is unique. It aims to reveal the complexity of the issue while addressing the points which have not been brought forward before. For this purpose, the teacher researcher asks the following question:

1. Why do I have dilemmas about the practices of English language teaching in the public school context in Turkey?

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The study is situated in the sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivism contends that learning takes place in a social process in which new knowledge and skills are acquired interacting with others. This epistemological shift in the theory of cognition has substantially influenced L2 teacher education (Johnson, 2009). The study also draws on teacher professional identity construction (Miller, 2009) and two aspects of identity are central to the objective of the study; “identity is a way of doing things but is inflected by what is legitimated by others in any social context” as it was posited by Miller (2009, p. 173).

Lave (1991) and Wenger's (2000) concepts of community of practice and interrelated communities of practice enable the researcher to demonstrate the significance and effect of others on her quest for negotiating meaning; that is, her dilemmas and identity. In addition, the study builds on reflective practice, particularly on Dewey's views on reflection "reflective teaching involved being constantly on the alert to the circumstances of teaching and the implications of issues arising during teaching. Teachers were responsible for all aspects of their teaching and their consequences" (Dewey, 1933, 1938, as quoted in Burton, 2009, p.298).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Autoethnography as a Qualitative Research Method**

I encountered autoethnography as a research method in the book written by Creswell (2013). The relevant chapter of the book defines autoethnography as one of the "five qualitative approaches to inquiry" and gives Neyman's doctoral dissertation (2011) as an example (Creswell, 2013, p.73). I quickly searched for the dissertation. In the dissertation, Neyman (2011) used autoethnography to investigate her personal and professional development in the public school contexts of Ukraine and the USA. Upon reading it, I said to myself "That is the research method you need to address your dilemmas".

Reed-Danahay posits that autoethnography is "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context", and is "the method and the text" (1997, p. 9). Ellis and Holman Jones defines autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (as quoted in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p.1). In the theoretical discussion, Mendez (2013) provides a thorough analysis of autoethnography and asserts that "autoethnography is not just writing about oneself, it is about being critical about personal experiences in the development of the research being undertaken, or about experiences of the topic being investigated" (2013, p.281). According to McIlveen, the fundamental trait of autoethnography "...entails the scientist or practitioner performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon" (2008, p. 3, as quoted in Mendez, 2013, p.281).

Some researchers state that the data which emerge as a consequence of our reflections on our personal lives and experiences can have such literary forms as a poem, a narrative or a story (Denzin, 1989; Connelly and Clandinin, 1999; Nekvapil, 2003, as cited in Mendez, 2013). In other words, it can be suggested that an autoethnography aims to produce the meaning and knowledge from the lived experiences of one person through critical and reflective thinking.

As it is stated by Adams, Holman-Jones & Ellis "Auto-ethnographies begin with the thoughts, feelings, identities, and experiences that make us uncertain—knocking us for sense-making loops—and that make us question, reconsider, and reorder our understandings of ourselves, others, and our worlds" (2015, p.47). Moreover, Ellis contends that an autoethnography must appeal to "readers' minds and hearts" (2000, as cited in Mendez, 2013, p.281).

Dyson (2007) considers autoethnography as a research method which empowers educators. In his autoethnographic writing, he tells his particular research journey in pre-service teacher education and makes meaning out of his encounters, experiences and interactions with the world. And he believes that he can create the potential to influence the wider educational community through his continual writing. Likewise, Hamilton, Smith and Worthington explore the three methodologies- narrative, autoethnography and self-study which "privilege self in the research design, believing that addressing self can contribute to our understandings about teaching and teacher education" (2008, p.17).

### **3.2. Narratives as a Method of Inquiry**

The researcher wrote narratives to reveal her dilemmas. Because narratives have the power to “recount events that most deeply affect human understanding” (Lyle, 2013, p.19). Through narratives, I had an opportunity to recall how I thought and felt when I experienced these interactions resulting in my dilemmas. As it is suggested by Fitzclarence and Hickey, “Narratives provide the sources of meanings that people attribute to their experience”. They also “provide the primary frame for interpretation of experience” (1999, as quoted in Dyson, 2007, p. 40). And the reflections on these narratives enabled me to requestion the meanings that I attributed to these interactions. The meanings and dilemmas were also made observable to the audience by means of reflections and reflective thinking which are based on the theoretical and regulatory documents.

Hamilton, Smith and Worthington state that “narrative inquiry which draws upon Dewey’s (1916, 1922, 1938) emphasis on lived experience” underscores “how lived life bears on lived educational experiences” (2008, p.19). And Connelly and Clandinin were the first researchers who applied it to educational research (1990, as cited in Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008, p.19).

### **3.3 Context of the study**

The context of the study is the practices of ELT in the public schools in Turkey. In the Turkish EFL context, L2 teaching, its quality and learning outcomes have always been on the agenda of policymakers, academicians, non-governmental organizations and the media. The study which was jointly carried out by the British Council & Tepav (The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey) (2014) can be given as a recent example of the importance given to education in general and especially to the teaching of English in Turkey. The study is titled “Turkey National Needs Assessment of State School English Language Teaching” and investigated the question of “how English language teaching in Turkey can be improved in order to produce students with the foreign language skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to the ambition to position Turkey as one of the top ten global economies by 2023”. The study is based on a mass survey administered to almost 20,000 students, parents and teachers of English as well as the economic analysis of TEPAV. The results of the study indicated that more than 80 % of the English language teachers who were observed had professional competency and language proficiency to meet the needs. Yet, it was observed that English was being taught as a school subject, not a medium of communication in all the schools which were visited.

The meta-analysis conducted by Erarslan (2018) documents the initiatives to improve the quality of ELT in the Turkish EFL context. Based on the argument that the programs did not succeed in “equipping primary school students with the necessary communicative skills in English”, he investigated the studies which had evaluated Primary School English Language Teaching Programs in Turkey (ELTP) which “underwent substantial changes within the larger curriculum reform movements taking place in 1997, 2006 and 2013, the last of which is also called the 4+4+4 education system” (2018, p.325).

Another action which indicates the importance given to the teaching of English as a foreign language was the new English Language Teaching Program for grades 2-8 which was launched in 2013 (Gursoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2017). The program aimed to start English language teaching at an early age -in the second grade- in order to increase the total hour of English language teaching in the Turkish public school context. The study conducted by Gursoy, Korkmaz and Damar (2017) investigated the views of prospective ELT teachers

towards this change and compared their views with those of trainers and in-service English language teachers who were investigated in the earlier phases of the study. The results indicated significant differences between the three groups of participants in terms of the appropriate starting time and teaching methodologies used even though all the groups were in favour of an earlier start in foreign language education.

The other action, which intended to improve the quality of L2 teaching practices, was the change of English Language Teaching Curriculum which was launched in the education year of 2017-2018 starting from grade 9 at secondary education (Coşkun, 2016). The new curriculum aimed to improve the communicative competence of the students at the public high schools in Turkey.

The agreement between the Ministry of National Education and the British Council to promote the continuing professional development of English language teachers and support them to develop their four language skills can be given as the latest example of these initiatives (MoNE, 2019).

### **3.4. Trustworthiness and Limitation of the Study**

Trustworthiness of this autoethnographic writing was established by data triangulation. The narratives and reflections on them are the researcher's primary data source. The curriculum, coursebooks and the regulations of MoNE establish the secondary data source of the study. In addition, the mixed methods studies and reports investigating the initiatives aiming to improve the learning outcomes of ELT in Turkey form the third data source of the study. The researcher's emic role in the study as both the researcher and the participant can be considered as both a limitation and a strength. The study does not intend to make generalizations about the issue. Instead, it intends to provide an in-depth insight into the phenomenon from an insider's perspective and to demonstrate the complexity of the issue.

### **3.5. Data Collection and Analysis**

To explore the dilemmas and the reasons behind them, the researcher wrote four narratives which thoroughly depict her journey of learning, her lived experiences and interactions in the community of practice and interrelated communities. The narratives were analysed by reflections on them and the analyses were also supported by the documents regulating the instructional practices of ELT in the public school context in Turkey. Holistic-content analysis (Earthy & Cronin, 2008) as a form of narrative analysis was used to display the reasons behind dilemmas. This form of narrative analysis aims to reveal the meaning the participant attribute to the issue, and its effect and significance on the participant's identity.

### **My Journey of Ph. D – Narrative I**

It was in the second half of September 2018 when I, all of a sudden, decided to continue my journey of learning in ELT attending a Ph. D program. I quickly searched for the universities in İstanbul which offer the program. I found ELT doctorate programs in three universities; Boğaziçi, Yeditepe and Bahçeşehir Universities. However, I was too late. Their application and assessment periods had already been closed. However, later in January 2019, I learned that Bahçeşehir was accepting candidates for the spring term. I sent an email to the coordinator of the program and got the list of the books to study for the assessment. It was not a short list. So, I could not study enough to be accepted. I felt quite upset and frustrated. I did not know what to do. Then I sent another email to the coordinator. She told me to study harder for the next time. They would have another application period in May for the academic year 2019-2020. I read three books from January to May: one about SLA Theories, one is about Teacher Education

and the third one is about Teaching by Principles. I applied for the program for the second time. This time I was accepted. I spent July 2019 reading Swain and her colleagues' book "Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education" (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2015). I attended a German Language course in August 2019. Finally, September came and I started the program! Many chapters of the books and research papers were studied and negotiated for meaning.

### **My Reflection on the Narrative I**

The readings that I do to prepare myself for the Ph. D acceptance exam, the readings, reaction and research papers for the courses and discussions in the courses enabled me to reflect on and think critically about what I read in the books and what I experienced in my professional life. I did my best to make my teaching practices contingent on the theory and started to think in scientific concepts as it was suggested by Vygotsky in the Sociocultural Theory (1978). In Johnson's words (2009, p.21) "according to Vygotskian sociocultural theory, the responsibility of education is to present scientific concepts to learners, but to do so in a way that brings these concepts to bear on concrete practical activity". Then my dilemmas began to emerge! I had difficulty in relating some theoretical knowledge and regulatory provisions to my daily practices of L2 teaching.

### **English Curriculum is Changing - Narrative II**

It was in the first week of May 2017 when I took a phone call from our school secretary. She told me that they received a document listing the names and schools of the teachers who would attend a training program in Antalya between the dates of 12th-16th May 2017. My name was also on the list and she was asking me if I had applied for the training. I said "No, I did not apply for it and had no idea about it. Later, I learned that the Ministry of National Education had been planning to change the curricula of some school subjects and working on it for one year with volunteer secondary school teachers and academicians. And the amendment works had been finished and it was time to introduce the new curricula and train the teachers who would introduce the curricula to the other teachers at schools in each city and district in Turkey.

The training was called "Train the Trainer Program, MoNE General Directorate of Secondary Education" and held at a five star hotel in Side, Antalya. It was a cascade model of CPD (Kennedy, 2005) and had a five day intensive program starting at 8.30 in the morning and ending at 5.30 in the afternoon. Many important points relevant to education were taken into consideration. Values Education, 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, Bloom's Taxonomy, the use of technology in education, Pisa and its importance and some sample questions, Industry 4.0, STEM and the Turkish Qualifications Framework were taught to the teachers who would be the prospective trainers.

Teachers from each different school subject gathered in different meeting halls. The new curriculum, its rationale and the types and number of the changes were all introduced. The workshops were held. In those workshops, the teachers who came from each city and district in Turkey prepared a lesson plan using 5E Model in groups according to the new curriculum and did a lesson based on this plan. For the evaluation part of each lesson, a technology-based game was played. The training lasted for seven days including travel days; we got tired but learned!

Then, in the second week of September 2017, the teacher trainers were assigned to the districts where they worked and a few nearby ones to introduce the new curriculum to the teachers who worked at the schools in these districts. Some schools were assigned to host the trainings in these districts and the new curriculum was introduced to fifty to eighty teachers

every day during one week. And I was one of these teacher trainers and gave trainings at four different schools for five days.

### **My Reflection on the Narrative II**

After nearly a year of studying in Ph. D program, I came to realize that the training we had in Antalya lacked one important aspect of the teaching and learning process: assessment! We were not trained how to assess our students' learning according to this new curriculum which aims to encourage students to use language for communicative purposes. I asked myself the questions, Our students have got only 160 minutes of English a week and does our teaching really focus on improving our students' communicative competence in those 160 minutes and do we really assess our students' communicative competence in accordance with the learning outcomes of the curriculum; improving listening, reading, writing and speaking skills of the students?

As it was stated by Tosuncuoğlu, "Instruction and assessment should reflect one another" (2018, p.166). The present curriculum also states that "In other words, if a topic or skill is not assessed, it is unlikely to be given priority in the classroom to be improved" (MoNE, English Curriculum for Secondary Education, 2018, p.6). Therefore, the new curriculum strongly recommends to avoid giving weight to the traditional assessment techniques in language classes to overcome the backwash effect of assessment. However, more weight are still given to pen and paper exams in which recall, understanding and application type questions; that is, the questions that assess lower-order thinking skills, are mostly preferred. Moreover, students' knowledge of lexis and structure are not assessed in an integrated way. The written exams do not encourage the students to consider the language as a holistic tool, parts of which makes the whole, and the whole is used to make meaning and to communicate. Yet, the curriculum states that "Since 9th-12th English curriculum is mainly function and skill-based, it is important to assess learner performances via assessment tasks geared towards evaluating integrated skills" (MoNE, English Curriculum for Secondary Education, 2018, p.11).

### **Is This the Grammatical Structure We are Responsible for the Exam? Narrative**

#### **III**

One day, together with my students, I did one of the classes which I like the most. It was a class which aimed to develop reading skills mostly. Yet, in fact each class somehow integrates four skills when it is done communicatively. It was one of the texts in the coursebook provided by the Ministry of National Education. The text was a brochure prepared for tourists about the two historic sites in Turkey. As an engagement activity, the students matched the pictures with the sites scanning the text. Next, they read the text silently and underlined the unknown words if there are any. There were a few. The students tried to guess the meanings of the words from the text and we reached a shared understanding what they meant. Then, some of the students read the paragraphs of the text out loud, which they are crazy about. After that, we moved on to reading comprehension questions. The questions were not true-false ones and consisted of display and open-ended questions about the information in the text. The questions were answered by the students according to the paragraph and their own unique thoughts and reasoning. Before finishing the class, I wanted to help them notice the grammatical structure; how something was done by someone in the past. I explained to them "when we do not know or are not interested in who is the doer of an action, we focus on the action itself and we use the structure- it is done." They found, underlined and read the relevant sentences in the text. Finally, I asked them to prepare a similar brochure as a writing assignment and keep it in their portfolios

to be checked by me. Meanwhile, one of the students raised her hand and asked “Teacher, is it the grammatical structure we are responsible for the exam?”

### My Reflection on the Narrative III

The narrative reflects the argument which is also stated in the new curriculum: “even if we teach communicatively, this does not guarantee the development of communicative competence among learners because learners’ output in language is not being assessed communicatively” (MoNE, English Curriculum for Secondary Education, 2018, p.6). The student’s question perfectly exemplified the argument. She knew that exams would give more weight to assess the recall and reproduction of this grammatical structure in its entirety either in the form of fill-in the blank or rewrite. Therefore, she did not need to focus on improving her reading, listening, writing and speaking skills in English. Instead, she needed to do the relevant exercises in her grammar book. The tables 1 and 2 contain samples from the written exams which are given twice each term in the public school context in Turkey and PISA questions.

Table 1. Samples of Written Exam Questions

<p><b>D. Rewrite the sentences in the passive form. (10*2)</b></p> <p>1. Do they speak French in Morocco? _____</p> <p>2. Children don’t use notebooks and pencils these days. _____</p> <p><b>E. Build up sentences in the Present Perfect Simple. (5*2)</b></p> <p>1. They/ not be/at parties /over a month. _____</p> <p>2. Mike /go out with/for/Maria/ two weeks. _____</p> <p><b>F. Write the sentences in Active Voice: (6x2=12 pts)</b></p> <p>1. The books can be taken from the library. You _____</p> <p>2. The money is kept in the safe. They _____</p> <p><b>G. Fill in the blanks using Type 1 (10*1)</b></p> <p>1. If he ..... (not / arrive) soon, we ..... (have to) have dinner without him.</p> <p>2. Alan and John..... (play) tennis if the weather ..... (be) good.</p> <p><b>H. Add a question tag to each sentence(10*1)</b></p> <p>1.I am invited, .....?</p> <p>2.Let’s go to London next weekend, .....?</p> <p><b>I. Ask questions to the underlined words.(5*3)</b></p> <p>1.I have spent a lot of money on clothes recently.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....?</p>
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I'm simmering with anger as the school wall is cleaned and repainted for the fourth time to get rid of graffiti. Creativity is admirable but people should find ways to express themselves that do not inflict extra costs upon society.

Why do you spoil the reputation of young people by painting graffiti where it's forbidden? Professional artists do not hang their paintings in the streets, do they? Instead they seek funding and gain fame through legal exhibitions. In my opinion buildings, fences and park benches are works of art in themselves. It's really pathetic to spoil this architecture with graffiti and what's more, the method destroys the ozone layer. Really, I can't understand why these criminal artists bother as their "artistic works" are just removed from sight over and over again.

Helga

Source: Mari Hankala.

There is no accounting for taste. Society is full of communication and advertising. Company logos, shop names. Large intrusive posters on the streets. Are they acceptable? Yes, mostly. Is graffiti acceptable? Some people say yes, some no.

Who pays the price for graffiti? Who is ultimately paying the price for advertisements? Correct. The consumer.

Have the people who put up billboards asked your permission? No. Should graffiti painters do so then? Isn't it all just a question of communication – your own name, the names of gangs and large works of art in the street? Think about the striped and chequered clothes that appeared in the stores a few years ago. And ski wear. The patterns and colours were stolen directly from the flowery concrete walls. It's quite amusing that these patterns and colours are accepted and admired but that graffiti in the same style is considered dreadful. Times are hard for art.

Sophia

The two letters above come from the Internet and are about graffiti. Graffiti is illegal painting and writing on walls and elsewhere. Refer to the letters to answer the questions below:

However, the exams which assess the students' reading, writing, listening and speaking skills are given only once in each term. Reflecting on the samples of the questions, which are mostly preferred and asked in the language exams in the public school context in Turkey, and the PISA questions, raises a dilemma for me. While the curriculum and the initiatives aim to improve the quality of instruction so that the students can acquire the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication, which also enables the development of higher order thinking skills alongside, L2 practices in mainstream classrooms still do not give weight to the activities and assessment methods encouraging the students to practise these skills. Moreover, the latest regulation of secondary education enacted by MoNE (5/9/2019 – 30879 RG) imposes that "In foreign language courses, students are trained in accordance with the outcomes determined in the foreign language program in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills"(2019, Article 10/2-a, p.8). It also emphasizes that "Tools and methods that measure critical and creative thinking, research, questioning, problem solving and similar skills are given importance in determining students' achievement" (2019, Article 43/1-e, p.29).

### **I Can't Find the Grammatical Structures in this Book – Narrative IV**

Teachers' rooms are vibrant. Ideas and laughter are shared. Discussions, sometimes hot debates are observed. It was one of such days and one of the language teachers was evaluating the coursebook provided by the MoNE according to the new curriculum. She looked through the book, searched for the language structures section and said: "I cannot find the grammatical structures in this book. For example, in this unit, there are some "Modals of Necessity", but "Need to" is not included." One of the others added "I looked for it in the workbook, but I could not find it in there, either." Then, it was decided that "Need to" was not supposed to be taught and explicit instruction would focus on the existing ones.

#### **My Reflection on the Narrative – IV**

I am used to hearing the kind of collaborative dialogues which I narrate above among the language teachers. However, I am not used to hearing the conversations such as “the students will prepare or prepared a brochure introducing a historic site or a rule/regulation about a topic they choose; they took a video as a pair or group describing the process how fruit salad is done, they wrote a letter of intent to apply for a job, they created a blog or vlog. They uploaded their writings, videos on their blogs and their peers wrote comments on them”.

Although the new curriculum is mostly functional and skill-based (MoNE, English Curriculum for Secondary Education, 2018, p.13), the discussions about the instruction practices mostly focus on and around the grammatical structures; rather than on the functions which enable the students to use language as a tool for constructing meaning. I would like to underline once more that the curriculum states “throughout the curriculum, in line with the alternative assessment principles, learners are asked to show what they can do and produce rather than what they are able to recall and reproduce (MoNE, English Curriculum for Secondary Education, 2018, p.6). Although I strive to find ways to encourage my students to develop their four language skills, I find myself in the dilemma, whether I must continue to elaborate the grammatical structure, e.g., passive voice in isolated sentences because the exam will focus on its recall and reproduction in either fill-in the blanks or rewrite questions, or make my students practise writing a paragraph describing the construction of an ancient building in the 160 minutes that I have each week with them.

#### **4. Results**

The study demonstrates that the teacher researcher’s dilemmas arise from the mismatch between the theoretical recommendations of the ELT curriculum for 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades, the relevant provisions of the regulation of secondary education and the daily practices of ELT in the public school context in Turkey. The results suggest that the daily practices of ELT are not contingent on the relevant theoretical and regulatory recommendations. The researchers’ understanding from the relevant theoretical and regulatory documents goes against the “conventionalised and routine consciousness” of the community of practice (Dewey in the *Public and its Problems*, 1927, p.184, as quoted in Cramp & Khan, 2019, p.344).

The result also implies that the researcher’s lived experiences in regard to the initiatives which aimed to improve the quality of teaching, in particular to the scope of the study, English language teaching seem to befit the anaesthetic experiences which were defined by Dewey in “*Art as Experience*” as the experiences where there are: “beginnings and cessations, but no genuine initiations or conclusions. One thing replaces another but does not absorb it or carry it on” (1980, p.40, as quoted Cramp & Khan, 2019, p.344). The disconnectedness between the theoretical knowledge provided in those trainings and the curriculum, and the daily ELT practices in mainstream classrooms puts the researcher in a dilemma. The fact that this state of disconnectedness is not questioned and goes unnoticed exacerbates the researcher’s dilemmas.

In this specific context, the teacher researcher’s professional identity cannot be fully achieved due to the conflict between her apprehension and the others’ comprehension from the theoretical documents, which proves that the way we teach, we assess form our professional identity, but our professional identities cannot be fully accomplished if they are not validated by the others in the community of practice as it was stated by Miller (2009). Likewise, teacher reflectivity cannot be effectively practiced because the individual teacher is not empowered to

change and improve some instructional practices if these changes are not legitimated by the others in the community of practice.

The study also shows that closing the gap between scientific and everyday concepts, as they were contended by Vygotsky (1963, as cited in Johnson, 2009, p.14), involves deep and meaningful learning by engaging in the activities of CPD. And this may not be valued by the community of practice as it was contended by Wenger (2000), which is another reason behind the researcher's dilemmas.

Another finding of the study is that the cascade model of CPD, which aims to transmit knowledge (Kennedy, 2005), does not seem to genuinely intend to encourage and support practitioners to put the theoretical recommendations of the curriculum into practice effectively, which is another reason behind the researcher's dilemmas. If the practitioners who endeavour to relate the theory to the daily practices are not supported, what are all the initiatives and trainings for?

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This autoethnographic study aimed to shed light on the researcher's dilemmas relevant to the practices of ELT in the public school context in Turkey and addressed the question "why do I have dilemmas about the practices of ELT in the public school context in Turkey" through narratives which vividly depict her journey of learning, lived experiences, interactions and quest for negotiating meaning. The narratives and reflections on them made the dilemmas visible to the readers as well as the teacher researcher. The reflections were also supported by the relevant theoretical and regulatory documents. The study, which is situated in the interpretivist paradigm of research, suggests that the researcher's dilemmas arise from the gap between the theory of ELT and its daily practices in the public school context in Turkey. It does not seem to the researcher that the theory relates to the practice; in other words, the practice is contingent on the theory in this context. The results suggest that increasing the shared, joint understanding among the practitioners about how to put the theory into practice is as important as, maybe more important than introducing new curricula to improve the quality of English language teaching in the public school context in Turkey. And follow-ups are strongly needed to monitor how the theory, which is introduced via the new curricula, is being implemented in the practice-at the schools, in the classrooms.

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