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# Evaluating the ability of prospective teachers to involve passive students in the lesson during practice teaching

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## Abstract

This study aimed to assess the ability of prospective teachers to involve passive students in the lesson during practice teaching. The participants included four prospective teachers at Faculty of Education, Kırıkkale University, Turkey. Qualitative method was used in the study and data were obtained by classroom observations. The findings revealed that prospective teachers usually followed a student-centered approach and approximately two thirds of the students participated in the lesson; however, made no specific effort to involve the passive and withdrawn students in the lesson. On the other hand, two of the prospective teachers were at times observed to use verbal encouragement to involve these students in the lesson, and asked them some questions about the subject and elicited answers at certain stages of the lesson.

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*Keywords:* Prospective teachers; teaching practice; passive/withdrawn students; active learning; individual differences.

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## 1. Introduction

Teachers, the most important element in the educational system, are responsible for raising the future generations and the human force needed by the country. Their task is to teach the body of knowledge they possess to their students within certain criteria (Küçükahmet, 2006a). As the teaching profession requires specialized knowledge and skills, those who choose this profession need certain competencies to fully accomplish the requirements of the profession. The acquisition of these competencies depends on prospective teachers going through special education prior to entering the profession (Şişman and Acat, 2003). Known as preservice education, this process and the competencies that prospective teachers need to become qualified teachers has always been a topic of discussion.

According to Stronge (2002), the basic qualities for an effective teacher may be listed as: 1. Prerequisites to effective teaching (e.g., subject matter knowledge, communication, certified), 2. Teacher as a person (e.g., positive attitude, reflective), 3. Classroom management and organization (e.g., behavior expectations, materials, classroom in order), 4. Organizing for instruction (e.g., time use, planning), 4. Implementing instruction (e.g., instructional strategies, questioning, student engagement), and 5. Monitoring student progress and potential (e.g., homework, grading, testing). Küçükahmet (2006a) handled teacher competencies under the following headings: 1. Personal

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qualities, 2. Professional and academic competencies, 3. General culture competencies, 4. Professional attitudes and behaviors, and 5. Professional preparation. For Arends (1997), these competencies can be divided into two groups: 1. Personal and 2. Professional competencies (As cited in Demirel, 2004). Furthermore, a study conducted in Turkey in 2002 within the scope of the joint project of the Ministry of Education and universities, “Support to Basic Education Project”, identified the following as teacher competency areas: 1. Personal and professional values, 2. Knowing the students, 3. Learning and teaching process, 4. Monitoring and evaluation of learning and development, 5. School-family and society relationships, and 6. Knowledge of curriculum and content. It consists of 31 related subcompetencies and 233 performance indicators (Gürkan et al., 2004).

In short, to become qualified teachers, prospective teachers generally need certain personal, professional-academic and general culture competencies. In addition to these general competencies, another important skill that prospective teachers need to master is ensuring the active involvement of all students in the lesson. Senemoğlu (2009) notes that the level of student involvement in the instructional process is one of the most important indicators of the quality of educational services offered, and that these services may be considered excellent if almost all students participate in the instructional process in a direct or indirect way. For teachers to be able to involve their students in the lesson actively, they initially need to know that there are individual differences between students. Similarly, Küçükahmet (2006b) argues that teachers need to know that their classes are not homogeneous. Although classes made up of students with almost the same physical and mental structure are generally described as “homogeneous classes”, there are differences within these classes too. Teachers thus need to remember that all students have a unique personality and individual differences.

Individual differences vary among students. While some students have predominant logical-mathematical skills, others may be better at verbal skills, and yet others may possess exceptional sportive or artistic skills and talents. Likewise, though some students are able to actively participate in the lesson and establish harmonious social relationships with their peers and the teacher, others may exhibit hyperactivity and attention deficiency characteristics, or be out of tune, withdrawn, passive and unwilling to participate in the lesson. All these types of students are present in classrooms. The question that emerges here is: Why are some students more active and sociable, but others passive or antisocial or less sociable? Answering this question is no easy task. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers make an effort to understand the reasons behind passive and withdrawn students’ behaviors. Brophy and Rohrkemper (1989) and Celep (2008) states that personality and genetic features, social anxiety, environmental, familial and peer group related factors; and various school and teacher related factors (fear of school, changing school or classes, the behaviors of the teacher and other students, etc.) may lead to shyness or withdrawal on individuals’ behavior.

This type of student has a tendency for social isolation and loneliness, and very few friends (Crozier, 1997). According to Eysenk (1965), typically withdrawn individuals usually prefer to be on their own; are rather timid, bashful, quiet, serious and introverted; orientate towards inner rather than external reality; are continuously engaged in self observation; like books more than people; stay distant to other people than a few very close and special friends; are reticent and cautious (As cited in Pişkin, 2004). Brophy and Evertson (1981) labeled this students as “invisible” because their teachers had nominated them as the least noticeable students in their classes. Classroom observation revealed that these invisible students (in grades 2 through 5) showed low rates interaction with their teachers and a general pattern of passivity in the classroom (As cited in Brophy and Rohrkemper, 1989). Crozier (1997) also noted that this pattern of behavior may be maladaptive and can be a precursor to psychological difficulties later in life.

It follows that teachers need to implement certain strategies and activities to make passive or shy and withdrawn students in their classes participate in the lesson actively and develop their socialization. To begin with, teachers should adopt a student centered approach that will enable all students to actively participate in learning activities in and outside the classroom, and they should organize their learning environments accordingly. In addition, the following activities may be influential in making passive students participate in the lesson more actively and enthusiastically (Johnson; Blanco, as cited in Brophy and Rohrkemper, 1989; Cangelosi, 1992; Fidan, 1996; Celep, 2008; Demirel, 2004; Öncü, 2003; Pişkin, 2004): (a) planning and implementing activities that match these students’ learning styles and intelligences; (b) encouraging shy or withdrawn students to actively participate in group work (big and small group work) in the classroom, (c) offering one to one/individualized instruction on difficult topics to these students as needed, (d) avoiding the use of discouraging words, attitudes and behaviors with these students (being overcritical, rebuking, teasing, humiliating, threatening, etc.), (e) involving them in games that require verbal

responses and making them take part in drama or role play activities, (f) appreciating the accomplishments of these students, rewarding them and frequently giving them positive reinforcements; (g) giving them responsibility by assigning them important tasks; (h) asking their advice when this may be helpful (such as teacher-pupil planning); (i) helping them establish better communication with their peers inside and outside the school, and offering them guidance in solving related problems; (j) asking open-ended and thought-provoking questions to these students to elicit their views, and encouraging them to freely ask questions they are curious about, (k) helping them when they need help to avoid traumatic failure; (l) taking into consideration students' personalities and natural learning styles, and arranging the classroom environment according to different personalities; (m) encouraging these children to join volunteer groups or recreational and social organizations outside of school; (n) displaying works produced by these students in the classroom for other students to view.

It is crucial that prospective teachers acquire these competencies or at least become experienced in these issues during their preservice education so they can become qualified teachers. Teaching practice has an important role in the acquisition of these competencies by prospective teachers. During teaching practice, prospective teachers need accurate and effective guidance from cooperating teachers as well as their lecturers. Such guidance involves giving feedback to prospective teachers about their lacks and errors, and attempting to correct them both at the institution of the teaching practice and during the theoretical part of the course they take at university. The aim of this study was to assess the level to which prospective teachers could involve passive (shy, timid or withdrawn) and non-participating students in the lesson during the instructional processes in their teaching practice.

## **2. Method**

The qualitative method was used for the methodology of the present study. Data were obtained through the qualitative data collection technique of observation. Participants included 4 senior students (prospective teachers) from the Elementary Teacher Education Department of Kırıkkale University's Faculty of Education. Of these, 2 were females and 2 were males. In line with the aims of the study and upon receiving expert opinion, an observation form was developed. In this form, certain activities needed by prospective teachers to involve passive/withdrawn students in the lesson were listed and used as basic assessment criteria during the observation. These activities involved setting up individual and group work, allowing students to perform drama, offering reinforcements and rewards, verbal encouragement for involvement in the lesson, asking questions to passive students to elicit their views, implementing activities that are in line with students' learning styles and intelligences, making use of various instructional materials and methods, trying to establish effective communication with them, showing one to one interest in them when they experience difficulties, avoiding negative words and behaviors, giving feedback and correcting errors, etc.

Later, the participants were observed during their teaching practice and the activities they used to involve passive students in the lesson were noted on the observation form. All four prospective teachers were observed 2 hours weekly for 2 weeks, for a total of 4 hours, all of which were video recorded. Data from the observations were analyzed and interpreted by the technique of descriptive analysis by using the criteria in the observation form. In data analysis, the 4-hour video recording for each participant was viewed in order to assess the level to which they tried to involve passive/withdrawn students in the lesson and identify the activities they preferred to use for this aim. For several weeks before the teaching practice, prospective teachers were given theoretical information about the importance of student involvement and student centered instruction, thus hoping to raise their awareness. On the other hand, in an attempt to ensure reliability of the data, participants were not given any information about the study, nor offered any intervention throughout it.

## **3. Findings**

This section presents a summary of the findings obtained by observing the participants. Below is each participant's set of activities implemented to involve passive students and the level to which they did so.

### *3.1. Participant 1 (P1):*

The first participant, a male prospective teacher, instructed fifth graders about sound pollution in the Science and Technology class for 2 weeks and a total of 4 hours. There were 26 students in the classroom. P1 started his lesson by asking the whole class various questions about the topic. He allowed students who raised their hands to speak out their views one by one. After getting initial student responses, he continued the lesson by asking several follow-up questions. As the same students responded to these questions, he made an announcement about the need for more active student participation. He then continued the lesson with a brainstorming activity about the topic. Approximately two thirds of the students participated in the brainstorming activity while the remaining students did not voice any opinions. Meanwhile, P1 gave the silent students verbal encouragement to increase their involvement. Upon this, one of the quiet students voiced an opinion. P1 wrote student views on the board and asked the students to copy them in their notebooks. P1 elicited student views during the rest of the lesson, mostly by using the questioning method. He amended incorrect or incomplete responses by giving clues or samples. Meanwhile, P1 made another warning for more student involvement; however, generally the same students continued to answer his questions. At the end of the lesson, P1 closed the lesson by summarizing it.

In sum, P1 taught the lesson by mostly taking students' opinions, using the questioning method, and trying as much as possible to involve students in the lesson. Throughout the lesson, approximately two thirds of the students were observed to actively participate in the activities and respond to questions, while almost one third did not exhibit active involvement. Some of these students were seen to display the general characteristics of a passive personality; however, P1 was observed to only use verbal encouragement and give them a chance to answer his questions to actively involve these students, but he did not use any other activities to involve these students in the lesson.

### *3.2. Participant 2 (P2):*

The second participant, this time a female prospective teacher, taught 2nd graders addition and subtraction in the mathematics course for 2 weeks, and a total of 4 hours. There were 27 students in the classroom. She started her lesson by linking it to the topics of the previous one. She then asked a few general questions to the class in general and elicited opinions from several students. Following this, she read out a problem about the operation of addition and asked a volunteering student to come to the board and solve the problem. Upon the correct solution of the problem, she gave positive reinforcement to the student by getting others to applaud. P2 then distributed activity sheets to all students in the classroom and got them to work on an addition. She asked a volunteering student to read the first problem in the activity sheet and chose nine more volunteering students to take part in an activity related to the question. The activity was observed with interest by the other students. P2, had another student read out the second problem and started another activity related to it. For this activity, she chose three volunteering students who had not participated in the previous one. Applause was used once again as a reinforcement to those who participated in this activity. P2 continued by having other volunteers read out the problems on the activity sheet. In other lessons too, she got the students to add and subtract through relevant activities and thus ensured voluntary participation of the students.

To sum up, P2 used the student-centered approach to ensure participation in the activities, as well as visuals to effectively teach relevant concepts. She gave positive reinforcement to students who participated in the activities or provided correct responses. Almost all students were observed to participate in the lessons, with the exception of a few passive ones who mostly chose to observe the activities. It was noted that P2 did not make any announcements about student participation or took any action about it.

### *3.3. Participant 3 (P3):*

The third participant, a male prospective teacher, P3 instructed third graders about the requirements for the survival of living things and natural and artificial environments in the Life Studies class for a total of 4 hours. There were 20 students in the classroom. P3 started the lesson by repeating the topics of the previous lesson. After giving brief information about the topic of the day, he chose six volunteering students for a drama activity. He asked the participants of the drama activity to act like a living thing around them. The activity lasted approximately 13

minutes. P3 asked the students who participated in the activity several questions and elicited responses, while other students only observed the activity. After the drama performances by each student, P3 praised them and thus provided them with reinforcement. After the activity was complete, P3 asked several questions to the whole class and elicited responses from volunteering students. Approximately half the class participated in the lesson in this stage by contributing their opinions. P3 wrote student opinions about the activity as well as his own views on the board, and asked the students to copy them in their notebooks. Meanwhile, P3 checked student writing and gave one-to-one help to some students.

In the following lesson, P3 showed students some objects and asked them to guess what these may be. Volunteering students were given a chance to speak. This activity grabbed the attention of all students and more than half examined the objects one by one and contributed their opinions. Afterwards, P3 asked the students several questions about the objects and told them to write a poem about them. He then asked volunteers to read their poems aloud. In the following classes too, P3 conducted similar activities, asked students questions, elicited their opinions, and exemplified relevant concepts and terms.

To conclude, P3 made an effort to mostly attract students' attention, use the methods of questioning and drama, and make the concepts more concrete by making use of relevant objects. Despite the student-centered approach used, P3 did not try to encourage passive students who did not make an effort to participate in the lesson by making explanations, using words or activities. Throughout the lesson, approximately two thirds of the students participated in the lesson by taking part in drama work or contributing their opinions, while one third either did not participate or only spoke when they were directed a question.

### *3.4. Participant 4 (P4):*

The fourth participant, a female prospective teacher, taught 4th graders sound insulation in the Science and Technology course for a total of 4 hours. There were 22 students in the classroom. P4 started the lesson by asking the whole class about sound and sound insulation. Volunteering students answered the questions first. P4 then showed a toy train, and asked the students what types of sounds they would hear when traveling by train and how it might be possible to stop outside noise from leaking in the train. Volunteers answered the questions. P4 then asked them questions about how sound insulation may be achieved in places such as homes or schools, reinforced the responses and corrected them with feedback when necessary.

P4 then asked the students to open their books and examine the picture on a certain page. The students were expected to voice their opinions about the picture, which several volunteers did. Meanwhile, P4 expanded on students' responses, helped them give more in-depth answers by offering clues, and asked a question to a student who did not participate in the lesson much. She reinforced the answer and asked another student. Afterwards, P4 asked a volunteering student to read a passage from the text book. She asked questions to the whole class about the reading passage and allowed both volunteers and some passive students to respond. She then had another volunteer read the second text aloud and asked questions about it. In this stage, the majority of students were observed to actively participate in the lesson and answer the questions. In the remainder of the lesson, P4 used the texts and questions in the book to elicit students' opinions, conducted several activities relevant to the topic, and tried to ensure the participation of the whole class in the activities. At times, P4 gave verbal encouragement for the involvement of students who were not responding to questions or voicing their opinions. In sum, P4 mostly used the questioning method and visuals in her lesson. At the same time, she tried to grab students' attention by using daily life examples. When compared to other prospective teachers, P4 was observed to make more of an effort to involve passive or shy students in the lesson. She was particularly noted to elicit these students' opinions, make them read the texts in the book, and encourage them by giving reinforcement.

## **4. Conclusion and Recommendation**

One of the most important competencies of a qualified teacher is to ensure the active participation of all students in the lesson by considering their personal differences and needs. Prospective teachers need to acquire knowledge, skills and vision in line with these competencies, which form the basis of a student-centered and constructivist approach, both through theoretical classes and via practice teaching. In this study, prospective teachers were



assessed with respect to the level to which they were involving passive/withdrawn students in the lesson during their teaching practice.

The prospective teachers in the study group were observed to generally use student-centered instruction, make students' learning permanent by activities such as drama, visuals or brainstorming, and prefer the questioning method the most. It was further noted that almost all participants tried to instruct the whole class and did not have any special techniques for non-participating or passive students; only two prospective teachers (P1 and P4) used verbal encouragement or special announcements to involve all students in the lesson; and one (P4) tried to involve several passive students in the lesson by making them read a text aloud or by giving them a turn to speak. In all four prospective teachers' classes, approximately two thirds of students were observed to have interest in the lesson and actively participate in it, while less than a third generally remained quiet, did not answer questions or participate in activities.

Accordingly, even though prospective teachers tried to use the student-centered approach, they should also have used activities to make passive/withdrawn students an active part of the learning process. According to Brophy and Rohrkemper (1989), these activities include providing self-concept support, encouragement, and opportunities to develop confidence and comfort in the classroom to shy and inhibited students, as well as closer monitoring, improved nonverbal communications, environmental engineering, and instructive suggestions, or demands for improved concentration designed to maintain the attention of students prone to withdrawal or daydreaming.

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