

First Year at DBE and Change?

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This article includes a very brief description of the in-service teacher training program conducted at the Department of Basic English (DBE), Middle East Technical University (METU); background information about the three teachers who started teaching at DBE in September 2008 and attended the training programme (the participants of the study); the data collected (the perceptions of the participants regarding how the components of the program contributed to their self-development); and future implications for increasing the effectiveness of the training programme regarding the initiation of change. It focuses on the analysis of the data collected by using questionnaires, interviews and journals, and dwells on the perceptions of the participants regarding whether change took place at the end of their first year at the DBE. The participants explain the problems that they were faced with in their first year at DBE, how they solved their problems, and what the role of the training program was in this process.

As teachers develop and grow, they add more tools to their “teaching bag” and become more equipped to educate their learners more effectively. Their beliefs, attitudes and feelings, and professional knowledge change sometimes before they even notice. Thus, it is possible to say that developing and growing teachers are bound to change. However, teachers who are not after development and growth miss the opportunity to change.

James (2001) states that “one pre-condition for change is that teachers themselves are ready to and want to change. Teachers must recognise a need to change, as it cannot be successfully imposed by others” (p.9). In this context, training programs can help. They can enable teachers to “recognise a need to change” and motivate them to change. Yet, “genuine change is not confined to an all too often short training programme” (ibid).

This mini case study focused on to what extent the training program conducted at the Department of Basic English (DBE), Middle East Technical University (METU) motivated the participants to change. The research question was: “Does the in-service training program conducted at the DBE inspire and initiate change? Does it motivate the participants to change?” In other words, “Does it contribute to the growth of newly-hired teachers?”

The participants were three newly-hired teachers who started teaching at the DBE in September 2008 and who attended the in-service training program. The in-service program they attended is designed for instructors who have recently acquired teaching positions at the DBE and lasts one academic year. It is composed of input sessions and workshops, a minimum of 8 teaching practices (4 per semester) and pre- and post- observation conferences, 2 written reflections (1 per semester), mentoring / coaching sessions, and a minimum of 6 hours of directed peer observations. The number of contact hours between instructors and course tutors for input, tutorial support, and feedback is between 140 and 160.

For data collection, questionnaires, journals, and interviews were used. The questionnaires used in this study were the questionnaires used for program evaluation and they were administered at the end of the first semester and the second semester. The journals were kept by the participants throughout the year and the interviews were conducted at the end of the academic year. The perceptions of the participants regarding whether change took place at the end of their first year at the DBE were analyzed to determine how much the in-service training program contributed to the growth of newly-hired teachers.

The findings indicated that all the participants perceived a change in their teaching when they considered the beginning and the end of the academic year. The first participant was a novice teacher

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who started to teach English at the DBE. When Basak's answers to the questionnaires (c.f. App. A) were compared, it was seen that she marked 8 statements "partially" at the end of the first semester, while she marked the same 8 statements "fully" at the end of the second semester (at the end of the year). When she was asked to write a reflection on her teaching, and when she was asked in an interview whether her teaching had changed, she said it had absolutely changed and added that the "overwhelming" and the "stressful" period was over. She said as she was trying to improve her teaching skills, and focusing merely on how to execute her lessons, she was encountering classroom management problems. Having made progress in the 'basics of teaching' to some extent, she said, she started to improve her classroom management skills. She stated that at the end of the year she felt much more confident and competent as a teacher because she was much more aware of teaching practices. When she was asked about the factors that contributed to the change in her teaching, she said it was basically the training period. The in-service training program enabled her to acquire and practice a range of effective teaching techniques in all skills and contributed to her self-awareness and feeling of competence as a professional teacher. She said the input sessions were designed on the basis of the needs of the participants and combined trainer input and participative activities and added that she could use ideas from the sessions in her own class. She said the pre- and post-observations greatly contributed to her development. The pre-observation conferences provided valuable insights regarding lesson planning skills and avoiding potential problems, and during the post-observation conferences she had the chance to reflect on and discuss her teaching. (c.f. App.B.1)

The second participant had a teaching experience of four years. She started her fifth year in teaching at METU. The findings indicated that she perceived a change in her teaching when she considered the beginning and the end of the academic year. When her answers to the questionnaires were compared, it was seen that there was no difference in her answers. Both at the end of the first semester and at the end of the year, she marked 'fully' for all the items in the questionnaire. When she was asked to write a reflection on her teaching, and when she was asked in an interview whether her teaching has changed, she said she could see a lot of changes and added that she had improved her teaching skills. When she was asked about the factors that contributed to the change in her teaching, she said it was "everything in the training program". She stated that the input sessions, the workshops, the observations, the pre- and post-observation conferences, the peer observations and the things that she shared with other instructors helped her to improve her teaching skills and gave her confidence. She said the support and positive feedback she received from the trainers encouraged her a lot to learn new things and apply them to her teaching. She added that the program helped her to see the strengths and weaknesses in her teaching and deepen her knowledge and develop her ability to reflect on and improve her teaching. (c.f. App. B.2)

The third participant is an experienced teacher. She has taught English for fifteen years. The findings indicated that she perceived a change in her teaching when she considered the beginning and the end of the academic year. When her answers to the questionnaires were compared, it was seen that she marked 3 statements "partially" at the end of the first semester, while she marked the same 3 statements "fully" at the end of the second semester (at the end of the year). When she was asked to write a reflection on her teaching, and when she was asked in an interview whether her teaching has changed, she said her teaching had changed a lot. She said the institutions where she had previously taught did not focus on the teaching of skills. There was no training for teachers on the teaching of skills and they were left alone. However, at METU, she said, providing students with skills training is one of the objectives and in order to train students, teachers have to be using the skills themselves. Therefore, at the beginning of the year, when she first started teaching at METU, she was not very clear about how to go about with her skills lessons. However, in time, she gained insight into conducting skills lessons. She said, first she learned them and then she taught them to her students. As the second term started, she felt she knew what to teach, how to teach, and what to expect from students. When she was asked about the factors that contributed to the change in her teaching, she said it was the in-service training program. She said if she were left alone, if there was no training, she may not have realized that students have to be trained for the skills. The in-service training, the

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observations, the pre-observation and post-observation conferences really contributed a lot to the change in her teaching. (c.f. App. B.3)

Considering these findings, it is possible to say that the participants of this mini case study perceived a change in their teaching and that the in-service training program contributed to this change. Basing on the findings, it can be said that the in-service teacher training program conducted at the DBE catered for the needs of the participants, it offered solutions to their problems, and most important of all, it was effective in motivating the participants to change and inspiring change. Yet, the participants' enthusiasm and willingness were, perhaps, the most significant factors contributing to the effectiveness of the program. As for future implications, it can be said that no major changes in the in-service training program are required at this point. Of course, as the participants and the needs of the participants change, these changes need to be considered and the program needs to be designed accordingly.

References:

James, P. (2001). *Teachers in action: Tasks for in-service language teacher education and development*. Cambridge: CUP.

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Appendix A: Questionnaires Used for Course Evaluation

2008-2009 In-Service Teacher Training Program First Semester Evaluation

The aim of this questionnaire is to provide us with insight into your perceptions as regards the effectiveness of the in-service training program to date, and to enable us to reflect on our methodology, techniques and practices. Therefore, we kindly request that you give us your honest opinion regarding the following.

A. Mark the best alternative according to your experience. If you mark “sometimes” or “no”, please explain why in the space provided and if possible provide examples of when that was not the case.

	Yes	Some- times	No
1. The timing of topics in relation to their emergence in the elementary group program was right.			
2. The content of the sessions was parallel to the content of the elementary group program.			
3. The input was delivered in a way that made it possible to implement it in class.			
4. The input inspired me to try out the new ideas / techniques in my classroom setting.			
5. The sessions facilitated planning my upcoming lessons.			
6. The pre-observation conferences helped me improve my lesson planning skills.			
7. The pre-observation conferences enabled me to pinpoint and avoid potential difficulties prior to the execution of the lesson.			
8. The post-observation conferences helped me reflect on my teaching and set realistic goals for continuous professional development.			

B. Having completed the first semester of the In-Service Teacher Training Program, please indicate how equipped you feel in the following areas. If you mark “partially” or “not at all”, please briefly explain in what respect you feel you need more assistance.

I believe that I can:	Fully	Partially	Not at all
1. identify the form, function & communicative intent (meaning/use) of target language,			
2. set a realistic context to enable learners to gain awareness of the form, function and meaning/use of target language,			
3. identify the listening/reading strategy a task calls for,			
4. prepare my learners for the listening/reading task at hand in a way that will increase their chances of success,			
5. plan/execute lessons during which all the learners are practicing the same target reading/listening strategies and sub-skills,			
6. check answers so that there is evidence pointing to the actual use of the target strategies,			
7. decide which vocabulary items need to be presented at the pre-stage of a skills lesson and which can be left to the post,			
8. plan/execute lessons that help learners gain insight into the various aspects of a new vocabulary item (collocations, pronunciation, etc.)			
9. prepare my learners for the writing task at hand in a way that will increase their chances of success,			

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10. provide developmental feedback to students' written work orally and in written form,
11. balance the pre-, while- and post-stages of a skills lesson,
12. use effective error correction strategies,
13. change the sequence of and/or adapt material if necessary,
14. plan and execute lessons that reflect strong classroom management skills,
15. make efficient use of audio visual classroom aids,
16. enable learners to develop effective study skills and gain learner autonomy,
17. determine the focus of peer observation and appropriately choose and use an observation tool.

C. Please use the space below and or any other comments, questions and/or feedback that you might have.

Thank you for your cooperation.

2008-2009 In-Service Teacher Training Program Evaluation

The aim of this questionnaire is to provide us with insight into your perceptions as regards the effectiveness of the program, and to enable us to reflect on our methodology, techniques and practices. Therefore, we kindly request that you give us your honest opinion regarding the following.

A. Mark the best alternative according to your experience. If you mark “sometimes” or “no”, please explain why in the space provided and if possible provide examples of when that was not the case.

	Yes	Sometimes	No
1. The timing of topics in relation to their emergence in the group programs was right.			
2. The content of the sessions was parallel to the content of the group programs.			
3. The input was delivered in a way that made it possible to implement it in class.			
4. The input inspired me to try out the new ideas / techniques in my classroom setting.			
5. The sessions facilitated planning my upcoming lessons.			
6. The workshops exposed me to various ways of planning and executing a lesson.			
7. The workshops were effective in enhancing my repertoire of teaching ideas.			
8. The pre-observation conferences helped me improve my lesson planning skills.			
9. The pre-observation conferences enabled me to pinpoint and avoid potential difficulties prior to the execution of the lesson.			
10. The post-observation conferences helped me reflect on my teaching and set realistic goals for continuous professional development.			

B. Having completed the program, please indicate how equipped you feel in the following areas. If you mark “partially” or “not at all”, please briefly explain why.

I believe that I can:

	Fully	Partially	Not at all
1. identify the form, function & communicative intent (meaning/use) of target language,			
2. set a realistic context to enable learners to gain awareness of the form, function and meaning/use of target language,			
3. identify the listening/reading strategy a task calls for,			
4. prepare my learners for the listening/reading task at hand in a way that will increase their chances of success,			
5. plan/execute lessons during which all the learners are practicing the same target reading/listening strategies and sub-skills,			
6. check answers so that there is evidence pointing to the actual use of the target strategies,			
7. decide which vocabulary items need to be presented at the pre-stage of a skills lesson and which can be left to the post,			
8. plan/execute lessons that help learners gain insight into the various aspects of a new vocabulary item (collocations, pronunciation, etc.)			
9. prepare my learners for the writing task at hand in a way that will increase their chances of			

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success,

10. provide developmental feedback to students' written work orally and in written form,
11. prepare my learners for the speaking task at hand in a way that will increase their chances of success,
12. balance the pre-, while- and post-stages of a skills lesson,
13. use effective error correction strategies,
14. change the sequence of and/or adapt material if necessary,
15. execute lessons that reflect strong classroom management skills,
16. make efficient use of audio visual classroom aids ,
17. enable learners to develop effective study skills and gain learner autonomy,
18. determine the focus of peer observation and appropriately choose and use an observation tool,
19. write formal reports of practical classroom ideas upon implementing them and reflecting on the insights gained.
20. collaborate effectively with my colleagues, and give and receive feedback.

C. Please use the space below to add any other comments, questions and/or feedback that you might have which could add to the effectiveness of the program.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix B. 1: Interview with the First Participant

Ö: Özge P1: First Participant

Ö: OK, P1. Good morning.

P1: Good morning.

Ö: I have a few questions about your first year here at METU, DBE. So, now that you have reached the end of the year, do you think you have changed, your teaching has changed?

P1: Absolutely. It has really changed because in the first semester, especially during the first couple of weeks, if I would express my feelings, it would be 'I felt like being lost'. And I was struggling, sometimes desperately, to catch with the programme. I mean, actually the major issue was the class management and I think all of the problems were related to class management. And after the trainings, the sessions, observations, now I think I'm more 'in control' rather than 'under control'. So, I feel more confident, so now I think I can observe that I'm much more aware about the teaching skills, the methods and the effective ways to teach the students.

Ö: OK. So what contributed to this change?

P1: Here, the training period because it was my first experience in teaching and I can honestly say that I've learnt the ABCs of teaching here. And especially the post-observations, the reflections, and the training sessions really helped me.

Ö: OK. So, do you think the in-service programme could be more effective if we did other things? I mean, what else could we do to increase the effectiveness of the in-service programme?

P1: One point is, if you remember we did during one of the sessions last term, we watched the, one of the real lessons of Sibel Hoca. So, it was in a real class environment, real students, so I thought watching such lessons, real lessons, recorded lessons would be really helpful. That was one thing that I thought would be really helpful for me because sometimes during the sessions although we had demo lessons, it's not real class environment, we are not students, sometimes we can behave like elementary or intermediate students. So, sometimes I thought those were not really suitable for real class environment.

Ö: Because they were not natural, the teachers there are not students.

P1: And the dynamics in our classes are sometimes different than those in the sessions.

Ö: Yeah. Of course we are trying to create the environment for the teachers to share ideas to demonstrate how they would carry out an activity. We want to give you the opportunity to practise your teaching ideas. But of course that's an artificial environment.

P1: I agree.

Ö: How about the peer observations?

P1: I really find them useful because those are real classroom environments, real students so if I have any chance in the future I would like to go for other peer observations. Those are useful.

Ö: OK. So how about the future? Do you think you will continue to change?

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P1: Sure. I mean the training sessions will end in two weeks but I don't think it will end for us because, you know, I think it's something life long. It will continue life long so I would like to have the chance to develop myself. And by experience, through years, and maybe some other activities, both here or abroad, I would like to continue to learn and develop myself, to improve my skills, teaching skills.

Ö: Great. So at the end of this year then, can we say that you really want to continue with your personal development and change?

P1: Sure, definitely.

Ö: So you believe in the necessity of change?

P1: Sure, because I mean when I compare the beginning of the semester and now, I think it's more fun to be in class now because I feel more self-confident and it's because of this training.

Ö: Thank you.

P1: So I think it's important.

Ö: OK, all right. Thank you very much.

P1: Thank you, too.

Appendix B. 2: Interview with the Second Participant

Ö: Özge **P2: Second Participant**

Ö: Hello, P2. So I have a few questions to ask you. First of all, now that you've reached the end of your first year at DBE, do you feel any changes in your teaching? Do you think you have changed?

P2: Yes, I can see a lot of changes. I mean when I started working at DBE I had some concerns about this intensive programme, but now at the end I can easily say that I have improved my skills.

Ö: OK, so what has contributed to this change?

P2: Well, actually, everything in this training program. I mean the observations, the sessions, the input sessions, the conferences we had, the pre and post conferences after the observations and peer observations. The things that we shared with other instructors. They helped us to improve.

Ö: So, do you think you will continue changing? Do you think change is inevitable and you will be changing and changing?

P2: Yeah, of course. I can't say that this is the end of my self-improvement. Of course I will change. I will learn new things and apply them in my teaching and also in my life. I like learning new things and being busy with my profession so I think I will go on learning and practising them, improving myself.

Ö: OK. So what sources will you be using? What will you be doing then for the change?

P2: Maybe I won't attend such formal training programmes again but just by sharing with other instructors, or reading different sources, to learn new ideas or innovations in the field, I can improve myself.

Ö: OK. Anything else?

P2: Thank you.

Ö: Thank you.

Appendix B. 3: Interview with the Third Participant

Ö: Özge **P3: Third Participant**

Ö: OK. Good morning, P3. How are you?

P3: Fine, and you?

Ö: I'm fine, thank you. So I have a few questions to ask you. First of all, now that you've reached the end of the year, you've completed your first year here at DBE, METU, do you feel that you've changed, your teaching has changed at the end of this one year period?

P3: A lot. I feel it has changed a lot and in respect of my teaching skills and what to achieve, my objectives, have really changed. In my previous, in the institutions at which I've taught previously there was no skills training and everybody was left alone. You did whatever you knew from your education or from your experience. But here, I see the objectives are different. The objective is not only letting the students read or listen to things but also teach them the skills, train them with the skills and equip them with the skills. Of course in order to train them, you have to know the skills. And so I felt the change together with the trainings and the sessions. First, I learned most of them and used some of them but not in such detail. First I learned them, and then I taught them to the students. This was really different from what I had done until this moment.

Ö: OK. So what do you think has contributed to this change?

P3: Of course the training. If I were left alone, if there was no training, I may not have realized that students have to be trained for these skills. The training, the observations, the pre-observations, post-observations really contributed a lot to my change.

Ö: OK. So your first year is over. I think I can say that. Do you think you will continue to change?

P3: I guess so. Since I have started. I will be going on with my research on the internet or with the teacher training unit here. I'm sure I'll be coming here to ask questions and I want to do this.

Ö: You're most welcome.

P3: Thank you. I'm sure I will have a lot of questions. And I feel comfortable. I will feel comfortable to come here, I think so. And I would like also again, I would ask you to come and see me what the problem is. You might help me. Because this is just the start. I may have further questions.

Ö: OK. So you feel you're bound to change and change is a must.

P3: Yeah. It is a must.

Ö: OK.

P3: And I don't think it will ever stop.

Ö: Yeah. OK, anything else on this issue?

P3: No.

Ö: OK. Thank you very much.

P3: Not at all.

