

# **CONSTRUCTING A REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO TOOL**

An Action Research on the Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Experiences

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## DEDICATION

*This dissertation is dedicated to my  
beloved son, Pertev Zeki, who has  
practiced times of loneliness,  
developed a deep sense of longing and  
learnt to be patient when his mother  
was continuously away undertaking  
this study*

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## **ABSTRACT**

My interest into reflection and portfolio construction was developed during the 2005 Contexts for Teacher Education Module on the EdD course at the Nottingham University. Experiencing and observing some significant problems with the current portfolio stimulated me to undertake a study on portfolio construction by integrating reflection into it. The aim of this study was to examine student teachers' perceptions of their experiences of constructing a portfolio in order to develop a more reflective portfolio construction tool.

The research was conducted in the Department of Educational Sciences at Eastern Mediterranean University in North Cyprus, focusing on the EDUC 420 Practice Teaching course which is a fourth-year course in B.A in English Language Teaching. Methodologically, the researcher has adopted action research since the phases of the study best suits to the nature of action research. The study consisted of three phases, the first phase of which focused on the student teachers' perceptions of their experiences with the currently used portfolio tool and attempted to diagnose the problematic areas of it as well as its strengths. In the second phase, the researcher attempted to develop a more reflective portfolio construction tool based on the findings of the first phase and on the related theoretical/empirical knowledge. The third phase was concerned with the implementation of the newly developed portfolio tool and reported on the effectiveness of it. Four broad research questions guided both phases of the study. Interviews and end-of-the-semester reflection essays were used as sources of data and content analysis was done to analyse the data in both the first and the third phases of the study.

The impact of portfolio in increasing self-awareness, improving certain thinking skills and the importance of communication student teachers had with the supervisor/cooperating teacher during portfolio construction process were underlined. Lack of sufficient feedback and guidance, of continuous supervision and monitoring, and of depth, diversity and perspective in the guidelines of the

reports have been reported as significant weaknesses of the currently used portfolio tool. Specific and focused questions to be integrated into the journals, peer collaboration to be incorporated into the processes and close follow up of all the components and processes were given as suggestions for modification in the first phase of the study.

In the third phase of the study, student teachers reported that the components of the newly developed portfolio tool increased their self-awareness as prospective teachers making them more conscious of what potentials they have or lack and enabling them to understand or relate theories with practice. Student teachers indicated that they were able to produce solutions since the components of the portfolio guided them to define their weaknesses by examining the underlying reasons. This was achieved through the step-by-step approach and the guiding questions given in the journals/reports which enabled them to think from multiple perspectives and to behave differently in different situations which contributed to their critical thinking skills. They also claimed that they did not find the observation tasks useful and underlined the importance of the communication and interaction rather than observation in getting acquainted with the students.

Student teachers reported that the communication and the dialogue held during the feedback sessions provided multiplicity of voices and helped them develop their critical and reflective thinking skills through the questions posed and the reasoning and comments made during guidance.

Student teachers reported that peer collaboration helped them improve their critical thinking skills by helping them develop a 'critical eye' which enabled them to observe objectively and consciously. However, they also reported about the weaknesses of the peer collaboration suggesting for a necessity of continuous peer observation and of the suitability of partners in improving the weaknesses. The guiding questions, continuous guidance and peer collaboration tasks acted as the instructional scaffolds promoting reflective and self-assessment skills of the student teachers.

## DECLARATION

I confirm that this dissertation is my original work. It does not include material previously presented for the award of a degree in this, or any other University.

Signed .....

Canan Perkan Zeki

December 2010

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- ST is the abbreviation for student teacher
- CT is the abbreviation for cooperating teacher
- S is the abbreviation for supervisor