

The Teacher Educators and Leaders as Agents of Change in a Teacher Education Activity System; the Reform-in-the-Making in Turkey

Sultan TÜRKAN¹ and Gary GROSSMAN²

Abstract

The paper utilizes data collected as part of the 2003-2004 US-Turkey Fulbright study of educational reform in Turkey. Included in this research was a general survey of 170 Turkish teacher educators; an in-depth follow-up of 38 of these respondents; and a third survey of 7 Turkish educational leaders as defined by the position they hold in the system. All surveys employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Within the purview of activity theory, this paper utilizes the qualitative data of the surveys and describes the internal tensions and contradictions among 38 teacher educators and 7 university leaders recommending reflections on the possible solutions to the tensions. Overall, it was found that teacher education reform was not identified by the masses of teacher educators and university leaders who had conflicting motives participating in the reform. It also provides recommendations concerning how Turkey may better approach the European Union goals in this area.

Key Words: Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), teacher educators, reform

Introduction

This paper explores the conflict between “subjective” and “objective” experiences of a teacher education reform project, World Bank-funded National Education Development Project/ Higher Education Council (NEDP/HEC) that took place in Turkey from 1994 through 2000. More specifically, the initial evaluation of the reform designed to transform teacher education in Turkey and sponsored by the Turkish Fulbright Commission, noted teacher educators’ participation in the reform process as best accounting for attitude differences. However, participation alone could not be the sole factor accounting for cleavages in attitudes toward the reform. Grossman et al. (2007) revealed that there was an anomaly as to how teacher educators used the curriculum materials provided by the NEDP/HEC and how they viewed curriculum development as part of the pre-service

¹ University of Arizona, sultanturkan@gmail.com

² Arizona State University, gary.grossman@asu.edu

teacher education phase of the project through which it had been produced. Further analysis of the data pointed to a moderate positive correlation between the extent of participation in the project and the degree of success participants attributed to the project. Nonetheless, it was hypothesized that the anomaly with respect to the overall success of the project which was simultaneously viewed as unsuccessful by the presumed beneficiaries of the curriculum materials may have resulted from a power-coercive/stakeholder-participatory strategy of the NEDP/HEC project. Given this anomaly, this paper considers the qualitative data gathered as part of the research and aims to examine how the NEDP/HEC reform activity was perceived by the participants (teacher educators, and university leaders) as well as what tensions the qualitative data reveal between teacher educators and university leaders that might explain the anomaly as was reflected in Grossman et al. (2007).

With this goal, this paper employs the framework of activity theory to describe the 'activity system' of the teacher education reform that occurred from 1994 through 2000 in Turkey. It assesses the attitudes of teacher educators and teacher educator leaders toward the quality of the pre-service and professional development reform activities in Turkey. The tensions between two groups of prominent decision makers are analyzed through such theoretical components of activity theory as the subjects, mediating tools or artifacts, the rules of the activity system, community, division of labor, and finally the 'object' as driven by a motive oriented towards a goal. The paper utilizes survey data collected as part of the 2003-2004 US-Turkey Fulbright study of educational reform in Turkey. Included in this research is a general survey of 170 Turkish teacher educators; an in-depth follow-up of 38 of these respondents; and a third survey of 7 Turkish educational leaders as defined by the position they hold in the system. The internet-based surveys conducted in early 2003 examined respondents' attitudes to the changes needed in teacher education as Turkey aims towards EU membership and the degree to which they accepted the reform and how they used the project ideas and materials. The surveys included both scaled response and open ended questions.

All surveys utilized both methods of qualitative (apriori themes) and quantitative data analyses (descriptive and inferential). Within the purview of activity theory, this paper describes the internal tensions and contradictions among teacher educators and university leaders recommending reflections on the possible solutions to the tensions. It also provides recommendations concerning how Turkey may better approach EU goals in this area.

The Teacher Education Reform

In 2003–2004, four years after the end of the NEDP/HEC project and the restructuring of teacher education programs across Turkey, a major study of their effects was conducted under the sponsorship of the Fulbright Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Turkey. One portion of the study consisted of an evaluation of the project's teacher education curriculum reform. The study measured a representative national sample of Turkish teacher educators and educational leaders, constituting one of the largest surveys of the teacher educator community in Turkish history. It considered their levels of acceptance together with their use of project ideas and materials, and their attitudes to the changes needed in teacher education as Turkey aims towards EU membership.

One of the findings highlighted an anomaly in the perceptions and experiences of the reform participants. Specifically, the anomaly showed a reform project that was successful in every "objective" measure: new curricula and new textbooks for use in Turkish faculties of education were incorporated across the board; they were heavily used in teacher education classes; and that program graduates--new teachers--were better than they had been in the past, as well as showing improvements in all areas. Yet, the teacher educator responses generally indicated that the reform effort was a "failure", i.e., an unwillingness to acknowledge the project--and the process--as having been responsible for these positive changes. This anomaly manifested itself throughout the data of the Fulbright study, also being noticed with regard to restructuring of the faculties of education (Grossman and

Sands, 2008) and in the development of national processes of accreditation and quality standards (Grossman et al, 2010).

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Cultural Historical Activity theory (CHAT) by Vygotsky (1978) and his successors, Leont'ev (1978) and Luria (1976), and Engeström (1987) posits that the 'practical' power of the human activity that is socially mediated is to change or revolutionize the objective reality. Vygotsky (1978) argued that the change in the objective reality occurs through the interactions of the human agents with the objects of the environment which are mediated by the cultural means, tools, and signs. CHAT argues that humans are engaged in actions directed towards certain objects and goals through utilizing artifacts, resources, signs and tools in order to construct their own meaning and so eventually to change and revolutionize the circumstances and mindsets. The activity system, therefore, is shaped by actions of the subjects and communities directed at objects through artifacts (e.g., signs, tools, and symbols), division of labor, and rules. Engeström (1987) is central to the current analysis in that Engeström's framework depicts the human activity within a context and in relation to a community, rules of the community, division of labor, etc. (see figure 1).

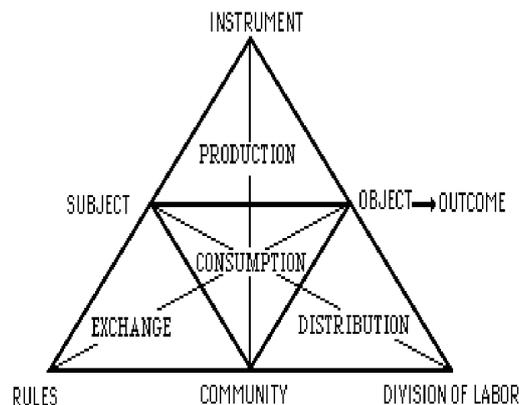


Figure 1: The structure of human activity (Engeström, 1987, 78)

To apply these main components of CHAT to the Turkish teacher education reform activity, the object(s) of this activity system is composed of every single issue that Turkish teacher educators, and university leaders raise in the survey and interviews in relation to Turkish educational system, in general and in particular, the teacher education system. The *community* in this model refers to sub-groups of individuals who participate in

forming the general *object(s)* of the system but who might have an original group construction different from other communities. Therefore, the groups of teacher educators and university leaders at various universities across Turkey might have different group dynamics but still participate in building the system and issues (objects) of Turkish teacher education. Another dimension to this activity system is *division of labor* which is composed of “both the horizontal division of tasks between the members of the community and to the vertical division of power and status” (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research). In application, the division of labor vertically between YÖK and all the teacher education programs of various fields as well as the ‘division of tasks’ among and across all the teacher education programs are what makes up yet another angle of the Turkish teacher education activity system. Finally, the *rules* are concerned with the norms and implicit and/or explicit contracts that determine the direction of interactions and actions which could be restrictive or liberating within the particular activity system. In our activity system, the *rules* and conventions are to be inductively identified by the voices of teacher educators and university leaders raised in interviews. There is another dimension to the Turkish teacher education activity system on which we will elaborate later and that is the compliance with EU standards. This dimension seems to be encircling the activity system of Turkish teacher education and certainly has served to drive the reform process, at least in terms of its perceived urgency.

Contradictions and Expansion in Activity Systems

On another note, the activity systems are dynamic, and are constantly changing or “disturbed” by contradictions among the constituents. In the research of activity theory, disturbances refer to the deviations from standard scripts (e.g. Engeström 1996b, Norros 1996). The contradictions and tensions are by-products of the constant and dynamic interactions within and between activity systems in a particular context or community. Within the theoretical framework of CHAT, disturbances, contradictions or tensions are inevitable for *transformation* (Engeström 1999). Tensions are depicted as double bind situations in which participants or subjects “innovate, create, change or invent new instruments for their resolution through experimentation, borrowing or conquering

already existing artifacts for new uses” (Engeström 1987, 165 as cited in McCafferty, Jacobs, and DaSilva Iddings 2006). Therefore, tensions and contradictions within an activity system are mechanisms that help transform the overall system in unpredictable, restless, mutable ways; “including ways that may otherwise be suppressed or marginalized in institutional systems” (DaSilva Iddings & Rose, 2007, p. 9).

In the case of the Turkish teacher education activity system, internal and external tensions merging with one another and intersecting with EU standards become apparent. To recap, the rationale behind this assumption lies in the theory that an activity system; in this case, Turkish teacher education does not exist in free space. It indeed is in constant interaction with other activity systems (teacher education standards in EU, lifelong learning principle, postmodern learning and teaching approaches and the like).

In other words, *transformation* might happen when some of the participating teacher educators or university leaders deviate from the common procedures and established norms within the old or existing teacher education activity system run by the Higher Education Council (HEC) and Ministry of Education (MONE). This way, they might cause an expansive transformation of the whole pedagogic activity system. Essential to this methodological analysis is the diachronic analysis between the kinds of activities or tasks done earlier in a given teacher education program and the later kinds of activities to train pre-service teachers in various subject matters.

The application of Activity Theory to the Fulbright study

The 2003-2004 Fulbright study of educational reform in Turkey was generally intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the pre-service teacher education reform phase of the NEDP/HEC. The qualitative data from this study were designed to provide a richer descriptive exploration. For this task, the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) perspective is being utilized. The examination seeks to describe and explain the cooperative (or uncooperative) efforts of teacher educators and university leaders in the reform movement. Through the lens of CHAT (Engeström, 1993), the NEDP/HEC reform movement is viewed as a reform activity. The reform activity was targeted to change and/or reconstruct the pre-service teacher education curricula to operate effectively within

the activity system of preparing teachers at primary level in Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Music and Art, and at secondary level in Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English, Music, and Art, as well as the relationships amongst the actors of the Turkish teacher education community. Therefore, the reform activity took place with the goal to reconstruct the pre-service teacher education activity system centrally governed by the interface between the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE) and the Turkish Higher Education Council (HEC), the former having responsibility for the primary and secondary system (including teacher appointment and placement), and the latter having responsibility for the universities (hence, teacher training programs). Thus, the qualitative data from the study aim to describe how the subjects (teacher educators, and university leaders) within the NEDP/HEC reform activity system perceived the activity that they partook.

With this goal in mind, the NEDP/HEC reform activity will be recast through interpreting the reform activity according to all the constituents of an activity system (**subject, instrument, rules, division of labor, object and outcome**). This interpretation is to consider the ways in which the production, consumption, exchange, and distribution take place among such constituents of the reform activity as the **subjects** (teacher educators/university leaders), **instruments** (teacher education revised curricula, student textbooks, training courses, equipment, apparatus, teaching resources, and reference books), **rules** (the ability to work collaboratively and constructively to produce revised curriculum materials, to plan and teach training courses as needed), **community** (native and foreign teacher educators from other countries), and **division of labor** (division dispersed among the project participants), **object and outcome** (greater focus given by Turkish teacher education on teaching methods). These constituents will be explicated to understand what might have caused some of the anomalies that Grossman et al (2007) revealed. Further with the descriptive analyses, implications will be drawn. The themes of discussion that emerged earlier from quantitative and qualitative data analysis done in Grossman et al will be pursued and taken further with recommendations. Thus, the first theme to be analyzed is the statement of the most important educational problem in Turkey as

articulated by teacher educators versus university leaders. Second, the perceptions and perspectives on the curriculum reform phase of the project will be analyzed across the two participant groups. Lastly, prospects of expansive change will be forecast along with implications to continue the reform movement in Turkish teacher education system.

Methods

Units of Analysis

In activity theory, the unit of analysis and principle of explanation both deal with the 'activity' (Engestrom, 1999; Nardi, 1996). Among the aforementioned components is the *object* that makes activity systems distinct from one another as "the motive that is involved in a particular activity setting specifies what is to be maximized in that setting. By maximizing one goal, one set of behaviors, and the like over others, the motive also determines what will be given up if need be in order to accomplish something else" (Wertsch, 1985, 212). The goal/object of an activity system therefore is defined and elaborated by its *motive*. Behind a motive there is always a need driven by a problem distressing or clogging the system.

The overall analysis in this paper through the activity theory lenses is done with hindsight into the NEDP/HEC reform activity by understanding participants' points of view (Nardi, 1996). To do so, we examined the transcripts of surveys and interviews 2003-2004 US Fulbright study conducted with 38 Turkish teacher educators as the subjects and part of the community in this reform oriented activity system. The main focus of the analysis was to describe and explain how these two groups, constituting the subjects and the community of the teacher education activity system, create contradictions and tensions while attempting to transform the whole system in alignment with the EU standards. With this goal in mind, first, the constituents of the reform activity system (subjects, object, community, rules, and tools) were identified and described. Then, the opinions of the survey respondents were calibrated for general patterns mapping contradictions, possible tensions and points of agreement. The respondents had points of agreements and contradictions mapped under the following three themes: 1) the most important education

problem, 2) success of the NEDP/HEC Reform Activity System, 3) curriculum reform as the tool of the reform activity system.

We take up the current analysis describing the most serious educational problem in Turkey as articulated by both the teacher educators and university leaders. The most important educational problem in Turkey was raised as a question to a random selection (Phase I) of 170 faculty line teacher educators (primarily assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors), followed by a random selection of a sub-sample of 38 respondents for further exploration (Phase II). Finally, these issues were presented to a selection of 7 positional leaders in Turkish teacher education (Phase III). Then, the perspectives on the curriculum reform are examined and finally, prospects of what could be done differently in a future project of similar kind are explored. Thus, throughout the analysis, perspectives of both the teacher educators and university leaders are revealed with comparative analysis.

Findings

The Most Important Education Problem in Turkey

The most important educational problem is crucial to start with because we want to understand whether these two different groups of teacher education authorities exchanged ideas with one another or reconciled as to what it is that troubles the educational system most in Turkey. Although our sample size is not sufficient to make generalizations, it was pointed by the majority within each group that there is a need to change the traditional understanding of teacher-centered instruction that does not consider students' individual differences and encourages memorization. Further, it is alleged to underestimate research abilities and higher order skills such as critical thinking and problem solving skills. Thus, 6 of 7 teacher educator leaders and 21 out of 38 teacher educators believed that there were methodological issues with regard to classroom instruction across the nation, as most teachers still promote memorization in steering the classroom decisions. Another emerging viewpoint across these two groups had to do with the lack of stability in changing the educational system and curriculum. Thus, 28 of 38 teacher educators made such comments as:

“There needs to be consistency in the efforts and the educational policies need to be thought in the long-term and plans need to be made accordingly”.

“The curriculum is changed without making the necessary changes, improvements and preparations at the school/university level. As a result, it naturally does not work in the desired manner and does not go beyond mere/shallow changes”.

“The biggest problem with our education is the radical and rapid change of curriculum and educational system in general. Without making the necessary needs analysis and pilot studies, the premature ideas are put into practice/applied. There is the need for long-term planning and trial/pilot study processes before actually moving to the implementation stage”.

“Regarding the rapid changes of the educational system, we lack the ability to learn from our failures and mistakes. Instead, we abolish one idea and replace it with a completely different one”.

Although university leaders did not elaborate specifically on such views, 5 of them made reference to continuous change in the educational system and a lack of stability. One further point of agreement referred to a lack of qualified and educated teacher educators. 26 teacher educators and 6 leaders concurred with a widely felt need for trained teacher educators not just warm bodies serving in this role.

The main point of divergence across the two groups that could be discerned is that teacher educators seem to articulate a more specific set of problems which might indicate that they observe and are concerned with these issues on a daily basis as they are in direct contact with pre-service and in-service teachers. Although this does not point to any tension or contradiction between the two groups, it is noteworthy to mention the educational problems that were raised only by the teacher educators. For instance, it was considered

as problematic to apply foreign educational/curriculum models without any adaptation to the realities of the Turkish educational system, or culture and available resources. Thus, 13 of 38 teacher educators complained about not having a national teacher education system uniquely designed for the needs and realities of the schooling in Turkey. Some of their elaborations are as follows:

“It is sad to observe that we highly depend on the views and interference of foreign bodies when trying to improve our educational system without questioning their observations and applying them as they are without making any adaptations. Instead, I believe that we need to depend on our previous and historical experiences and opinions of national experts”.

“What we need to do is to take into consideration of the international experts in the field of education and examine the international educational models in an objective way and then create our own educational model. Only through this way we can have the chance to improve the current educational system”.

Along the same lines, the two points raised by these teacher educators were related in that one referred to the highly politicized educational system while the other one regarded the highly centralized system. In a way, the twelve teacher educators who identified this area implied that the educational system, particularly teacher education, is so centralized that any decision taken in the interest of the particular political party that is in power gets to be dispersed for implementation across the country no matter if the regional conditions are conducive to the effective implementation of those decisions. This view could be summarized from the following statement:

“I believe that the main reason/hindrance for the educational system in Turkey is the fact that it is highly centralized. In order to make it a more dynamic system, there is the need to make the local educational bodies more active and give them the opportunity and freedom to make their own decisions and have the opportunity to make certain adaptations. In other words, there needs to be a democratic system that will include the local bodies in the decision making process of the central educational bodies”.

Thus far, several outstanding problems and related needs in the Turkish educational activity system have been identified by teacher educators and university leaders. Though there were several commonalities in the positioning of the problems, the wide range of problems noted by teacher educators has one important implication to our current analysis. That is, when there are many issues to be dealt within an activity system oriented towards reform, the statement of the problem varies between and across the agents of change, i.e., teacher educators and university leaders. Therefore, the positioning of the *object* or goal within the activity system may have been either misunderstood, or misrepresented in application. In fact, as some teacher educators indicate in the survey, the goals of the reform activity system were not clearly defined and publicized. Thus, when the goal of reform is not unified across all the members of the community, i.e., stakeholders, the publicized goal could be the one aligned with EU standards and imposed by the administrators of the reform movement, in short, the agencies or *subjects* in power. Therefore, the de-factor teacher education system before the NEDP/HEC reform activity may not have been initiated from the grassroots such as from groups of in-service teachers, teacher educators, parents and so on. If that is the case, the reform activity might be perceived as having been “dumped on” teacher educators, or imposed from the top. Therefore, it is essential to continue the analysis with what goals of the NEDP/HEC reform were stated by the teacher educators and how successful teacher educators and leaders viewed the teacher education reform in general.

Success of the NEDP/HEC Reform Activity System

Starting with the degree of awareness about NEDP/HEC reform among the two groups of educators, the responses from both groups revealed a high degree of awareness. That being the case, we looked to see which aims of NEDP were articulated. Data obtained only from teacher educator group in Phase I reveal potentially interesting points of analysis regarding the aims of NEDP. Seventy-eight teacher educators listed such aims as improving quality of education and educating qualified teachers; *“improving the standards of human resources”*; *“helping the prospective teachers to expertise on a single subject area”*; *“helping educate future faculty.”* Most interestingly, 61 of these teacher educators mentioned

the EU compliance goals of the NEDP. Their responses related the goal to modernize the traditional educational system in Turkey so that it is close to the EU standards and to improve the educational system in line with better or the best examples in the world or in Europe and the U.S. To quote some of their statements; *“establishing the integration with EU”; “modernizing the educational system by taking into account the results of scientific research studies”; “improving the educational level of society through educating teachers and improving their status”; “improving the education in such a way that the knowledge is more memorable and effective for the students”; “establishing a relevant educational system in line with Turkey’s socio-economic status”; “making use of the funding from World Bank in a rational way”; “reaching the standards of OECD countries.”*

These data reveal the interesting point that the government in power at the time pursued a policy that would be conducive to alignment with the EU expectations for teacher education. Thus, as mentioned before, this goal may not been initiated in these terms by the agents of change who positioned themselves as the stakeholders of the teacher education system at the time. This conclusion is confirmed by 9 teacher educators who claim that it was a top-down project in that the decisions were taken from the top power agencies imposed on faculties of education and also that it was done without fully examining the Turkish educational system and without any adaptation in terms of the socio-cultural needs and differences of the system. A further interesting point is that none of the university leaders pointed to the top-down nature of the reform movements. This points to the source of tension between the teacher educators and university leaders in that university leaders do not specify the NEDP reform as a top-down reform while teacher educators tend to express this point very strongly.

When it comes to the reasons why NEDP reform efforts were successful or unsuccessful, university leaders like the deans and rectors had consistently more positive points to emphasize while teacher educators had less complimentary views about the effectiveness of the reform effort. All of the leaders endorsed the idea that the reform helped with standardize teacher education across all Faculties of Education which in itself to improvement of the curricula. They all thought that updating the programs with the

current theories prevalent in the field was successful as well. However, compliments about the standardization of teacher education curricula seem to be at odds with the same body of leaders' earlier reports. According to the reports, 7 university leaders pointed to disparities not only between the theoretical and methodological skills that pre-service teachers acquire at all faculties of education but also between what these pre-service teachers acquire and the actual realities of schooling, considering great regional disparities of schooling in Turkey. This idea establishes an inconsistency or a tension within the body of university leaders that were interviewed and between university leaders and teacher educators. The reason for this is that while university leaders support the reform movement that entailed standardizing the teacher education curricula in 13 subject areas, they simultaneously acknowledge regional disparities both at the level of teacher education programs in higher education and schooling resources and practices at all levels across the country. In other words, they know that standardizing the teacher education curricula across faculties of education was a great aspect of the reform movement as the premise is that the quality of pre-service teachers as products of these faculties varies across the country but, at the same time, they acknowledge that this standardization wouldn't work any way as these pre-service *"graduate from faculties of education and start teaching at different geographical regions of Turkey, most of the time they are discouraged by the underdeveloped conditions of the public schools (especially the ones in small villages). Although they would like to apply all the theories they were taught during their education, they can not due to lack of resources and crowded classrooms. As a result they somehow lose their idealism and motivation."*

The answer to this anomaly could be traced in teacher educators' claims that the educational system in Turkey is highly centralized and therefore, whenever some decisions are taken from the top, the constituents of the schooling community (teachers, administrators, students and so on) get to follow the directives to the extent that their resources could afford. Thus, they say: *"Due to the highly centralized educational system, the society becomes a distant body to education. However, without the involvement of society in the educational process, it is not very likely to solve the problems of the educational system. Therefore, our society needs to be encouraged to take part in the educational system at all levels"*. They also

point out that *“The efforts of decentralizing the educational system have still not been put into practice. There is just a limited effort of giving responsibility to the local bodies. However, I believe that it is highly necessary for our educational system to go through a complete change and reform and it needs to be completely decentralized”*.

Concisely, according to the leaders, the curriculum standardization could be a good thing to make all teacher training practices standard and transparent across the nation but how will the gap between diverse schooling realities across the country and the theoretical, methodological tools seeded in the pre-service teachers at faculties of education be bridged? Possibly, curriculum centralization should not have been part of the reform, in contrast to what the leaders supported about the NEDP/HEC teacher education reform efforts. This contradiction is amplified when considering the dilemma raised by Ekiz (2003) in that the Ministry of National Education (MONE) as the central unit which appoints graduates of teacher education programs across the country to teaching positions, but neither HEC, the enactor unit of the NEDP reform, nor MONE attempts to ensure that these graduates are prepared to serve the expectations of the public in terms of the diverse socio-cultural and socio-economic affordances vary across regions.

One common drawback of the reform efforts was related by both teacher educators and leaders that NEDP was implemented without any piloting and evaluative construction as feedback entered the reform process. This was actually the only negative point raised by 5 university leaders while 10 of the teacher educators stressed on this downside of project implementation. In a way, they all seem to agree that the reform efforts should have continued and more in-depth evaluative studies should have been carried out during both the implementation process and post-implementation stage.

When reform itself is not initiated by the teacher educators, in-service teachers, and school administrators, themselves driven by the needs and motives that need transforming to emancipate the system, the result is that *“the reform did not go far from theory and it is not practiced fully”*, a point made by 11 teacher educators. Further, 7 teacher educators related that the resources were not distributed equally among the educational institutions and used in the desired manner. In fact, one teacher educator states: *“I heard that in some*

of the institutions, the technological resources distributed by the project were not opened and they still remain in the boxes, which is a shame.” One can not help but ask why a reform effort was considered effective by university leaders but not so much put into ‘practice’, as the teacher educators claim. Do the teacher educators suggest that most of the participants had not utilized the tools (resources) provided by the NEDP/HEC reform efforts? If so, why? If not, why not? These questions guide the remaining discussion, as this may contribute to a clarification of the anomaly under consideration.

Curriculum Reform as the Tool of the Reform Activity System

Among the positive aspects of the reform activity system were the standardization of the curriculum and provision of technological and instructional resources as stated both by the teacher educators and leaders. These resources clearly served as the tools within this activity system working towards the grand goal of improving teacher education in Turkey. This being the case, we wondered what teacher educators as the principal observers for the ‘reform in practice’ thought about the utilization of these resources. These resources as reported in Grossman et al (2007) correspond to a revised curriculum which was based on the analysis of the leading teacher educators about the needs of the users (teacher educators). Other resources were equipment, teaching resources, and reference books linked to programmatic developments. Also, student textbooks were provided with accompanying teacher’s guides which embodied the revised curricula, including content, student teaching/learning activities, and instructors’ guidelines. Twenty-two such books were produced by the end of second phase of the project for use during pilots of the new curriculum. Instructors could use the books either in their entirety or as a resource. When such immense changes were provided to the large body of teacher educators, out of 170 respondents to the online survey 41 teacher educators did not find the curriculum development portion successful while 36 found it successful, which is approximately close to a neutral tie. The contingency question raised to the same pool of respondents revealed the finding that NEDP/HEC produced curriculum books and other materials that were seen by a majority (59%) and used by the same majority (56%) but 71% of them found them to be only somewhat useful.

Through the activity theory lenses, there is a “double bind” situation here. To recap the description of double bind situations, the implication is that the subject of an activity system devise a goal that needs to be reached at and so they “innovate, create, change or invent new instruments” and through experimentation, they conquer or replace already existing tools or resources or artifacts. In this process, the tension between the new and the old could be heightened if the subjects or the community involved as the agents of change fragment the effective use of resources. Alternatively, they diverge in their perspectives and ways to adapt the old tools or use the new ones. The tensions between the old and new could result from the idea related by two teacher educators that there was a lack of coordination and cooperation between faculties of science and faculties of education. What that possibly means is that the two faculties might have not reconciled on the content areas in subject matters like math, science to be acquired by the pre-service teachers. It is also possible that these tensions resulted from insufficient training provided for the teacher educators about the new/revised program which was articulated by 3 teacher educators. The reluctance or failure to utilize the new tool within the reformed teacher education system; i.e., the new textbooks, or curricula, could be explained through considering the tensions emerging from the adaptation of an exported model into the Turkish context which constitutes one of the contradictions. In the case of NEDP/HEC reform efforts, many of the teacher educators that were followed up with an in-depth qualitative survey accounted for the ‘unsuccessful’ curriculum development portion highlighted that necessary steps were not taken to successfully adapt foreign models in consideration of Turkey’s cultural and social differences. They also pointed to the insufficient number of well-trained teacher educators who could possibly facilitate the smooth adaptation of existing models to the Turkish context, i.e., recognizing social and cultural conditions across the country. This point is elaborated further in the following comment: *“for example, (the) educational administration course was taken out of the curriculum, which is basically and American influence. In the US, educational administration is a different field; however, in Turkey the case is that experienced teachers become administrators/principals.”* Therefore, the second double bind, or contradiction, here emerges from teacher educators who suggest that most of the resources were not fully disseminated or utilized in their immediate programs. On

the other hand, there is cynicism and distrust regarding the true alignment between the new set of resources/tools (i.e., curricula, textbooks etc.) and the old ones because of the 'foreignness' of these curriculum resources and, most importantly, their effectiveness in the local context. Along the same lines, some of the reactions support this double bind, as follows:

- (1) *"Although there are no teacher educators, we still have certain departments and we are seriously in need of more teacher educators, because we can not cope with the load of work".*
- (2) *"The new program has decreased the class hours of educational psychology, philosophy, and evaluation, which are the core courses in pre-service education and it gave more emphasis to practice. These attempts resulted in lack of theoretical knowledge on these issues and thus making the practice component somewhat unsuccessful".*
- (3) *"In some of the courses, as we lacked time to cover all the content, we have to make use of the practice sessions, which completely clashes with the aims of this project".*

The second and third comments are clear double binds implying that the 'new' curriculum or any other mentioned set of resources belonged to other educational contexts (primarily the US). Thus, when being implemented in the new context, the conditions and long term possible outcomes were not considered. In fact, when asked the second time what the least successful aspect of the restructuring effort was, a total of 14 teacher educators related that Turkish teacher educators' opinions were not considerably taken into account and, therefore, the effort was mainly a decision of foreign experts. More interestingly, although Turkish teacher education experts and teacher educators were involved, some complained that the selection of in-service teacher participants was subjective and not representative of people and issues in the field.

At this point before we shed prospects of future reconstructive activities, we take a break to digest all these dynamics reflected from the qualitative survey. As is obvious in the above analysis and discussion, there are double binds and contradictions that might have occurred during the course of reform implementation and might be ongoing. The best debriefing tool to use in alignment with the theoretical framework of this paper is Engeström (1993)'s model for describing the activity systems. This aforementioned model

helped to see who were involved as agents of change in the reform activity system; what their perceptions of this reform's *objects* or *goals* were; what *tools* were available to get to the *object* of the reform activity and what these agents of change thought about these tools. The general model as adapted from Engeström (1993) is applied to the case of Turkish teacher education reform activity (see figure 2). Following the figure, our interpretations of the contradictions and anomalies are depicted in the table 1.

Summary and Implications for Future Reform Activities in Turkish Teacher Education

In light of the findings, it should be clear that the CHAT perspective positions the unit of analysis to be the activity itself, in this case, the Turkish teacher education reform activity. The activity in this reform system was primarily directed towards this overall goal. We will attempt to consider all the points raised so far and primarily center our interpretations around the adapted matrix as reviewed earlier. The final interpretations are to be coupled with implications to advance the reform movements in Turkish teacher education system which then are synthesized in table 2 in the appendix. First of all, we need to recap the constituents of Turkish teacher education reform activity system in light of the CHAT.

As subjects of the reform activity system, Turkish and foreign teacher educators collaborated to work for the *object* to reform the overall teacher education system, primarily the curricula, through utilizing *tools* or constructing tools like curriculum standardization and provision of technological and instructional resources; equipment, apparatus, teaching resources, and reference books linked to the developments; student textbooks with accompanying teacher's guides of the revised curricula, including content, student teaching/learning activities, and instructors' guidelines. This collective activity took place with the involvement of a large *community*: 42 faculties of education across the country, 100 members of subject panels, 397 + 581 participants in curriculum workshops, 88 deans and heads of department. The *division of labor* occurred among the 32 foreign and

Turkish teacher educators who actively worked towards the specific *goal* to revise and reconstruct the teacher education curricula across 13 subject areas. In this huge enterprise involving up to 3881 people over a 4 year time period between 1995 and 1999, the follow-up interview with 7 university leaders and survey on 38 teacher educators revealed tensions between the goals of the teacher educators at the individual level and that of the authorities at the collective and institutional level (Decision makers at the World-Bank National Education Development Project; at Ministry of Education and Higher Education Council). The *motive* behind the fundamental goal of reconstructing the Turkish teacher education system was the need to reconstruct the traditional understandings of educating individuals across all educational levels. However, the qualitative data revealed the tension between the university leaders and teacher educators in that most of the teacher educators (N= 16) posited political interference and centralized educational system as the most serious problem while only 2 out of 7 university leaders view the centrality of the educational system as significantly relevant. As one teacher educator related, “*In order to make it a more dynamic system, there is the need to make the local educational bodies more active and give them the opportunity and freedom to make their own decisions and have the opportunity to make certain adaptations.*” Therefore, when the power-coercive strategy pursued by the NEDP/HEC project is not reconciled by all the stakeholders involved in the reform efforts, then the outcomes or products or material artifacts of the project will not be put to practice. Even when put into practice, they will be proven to be in vain especially if some of the teacher educators did not participate in the material development panels and so do not concur with some of the content included like certain teaching methodologies and so on.

Considering the CHAT principles, *multivoicedness* and *historicity*, we gain insights and implications as to what could be done in the next teacher education reform activity (as illustrated on Table 2). *Multivoicedness* contains “the division of labor ...creates different positions for the participants, the participants carry their own diverse histories, and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved in its artifacts, rules, and conventions” (Engeström, 2006, 64). Further, *multivoicedness* helps to understand how each participant of the reform activity might have derived various

meanings depending on the position that they held throughout the reform process. The positions that university leaders hold vary from that of the teacher educators. Therefore, the perceptions and meanings that university leaders and teacher educators constructed throughout the reform activity system varied. Thus, the *multivoicedness* principle becomes salient in the data as seven university leaders commented that the reform activity was successful in terms of standardizing the teacher education programs across the country while most teacher educators find this standardization as imposed from the centralized authority. However, both parties agreed that the change in teacher education programs happened rapidly without systematic piloting and continuous reconstructions. The idea is articulated by one teacher educator as follows: “The biggest problem with our education is the radical and rapid change of curriculum and education system in general. Without making the necessary needs analysis and pilot studies, the premature ideas are put into practice/applied. There is the need for long-term planning and trial/pilot study processes before actually moving to the implementation stage.” The implications synthesized from the points raised above can be listed as follows:

- Twice a year, individuals should be encouraged to feed their insights and suggestions openly into the system that has recently undergone a reform movement.
- The feedback, that systematically and iteratively reconstructs the ideas and so shapes parts of the system accordingly, should be provided by all the stakeholders like not only the teacher educators or department heads but also the pre-service teachers being exposed to the bits and pieces of the reform activity and the officials/colleague teachers at the local school settings.

The other principle, *historicity*, allows to shed light on how long a reform activity system should be followed up. According to this principle, the individual changes and develops on a moment-to-moment basis as a result of the activities he/she engages in. Then, she/he in turn gets constructed by his/her actions or the actions that the activity tailors for the individuals. Therefore, both the synchronic and diachronic developmental phases that the individuals take become central to discussion how the participants of the teacher

education reform activity got to develop resources, materials to contribute to a new way of thinking and acting while training pre-service teachers. This principle provides the implication that the ways in which teacher educators or university leaders retained some of the features in the reform activity should be followed up on an iterative and continuous manner. Besides, these participants might have developed novel perceptions, understandings or strategies to enact the revised curricula which should simultaneously find its place to be declared either through public media or electronic tools like a list-serve or a website designed exclusively for the teacher education reform activity. Only then, the participants could internalize the new ideas and attitudes presented through various phases of the project; add and reconstruct further ways of bringing the reform ideals to life. Therefore, the diachronic and synchronic maintenance of the reform activity should continuously and systematically be passed on between generations of teacher educators without the need for any power-coercive strategy to remind them to maintain the significant features of the reform movement.

As a final point, it seems that in order for the teacher education reform to expand to new generations and take fresh forms, decentralization of the teacher education programs could be one deviation that most of the current teacher educators or even the university leaders might strive for. Another expansive cycle that might be forecast is a grassroots movement initiated by a large group of teacher educators to construct their own teacher education model without having to adapt any of the 'foreign' teacher education models. So as to revolutionize teacher education activities, the visions change need to be constructed from within first and expanded equivocally. Along these lines, Ekiz (2003) puts: "In order for large, complex organizations to change, they need to create not only a vision of a different future but also a new field of vision made up of concepts that spread so effectively throughout the organizations that nobody can avoid them." (Ekiz 2003, 4).

In summary, several major contradictions between the objective and subjective experiences of the reform participants were identified in the data. The first contradiction was emerging from the way the reform was introduced. While the Ministry of Education asked for the foreign intervention, teacher educators did not seem to be cognizant of this

initial introduction of the reform. The other disturbance, which became effective after the reform was initiated in practice, was the urge to comply with EU standards. This layer of contradiction, while unanticipated in the planning and implementation phases of the reform, still influenced response patterns when the data were collected, hence influencing the current situation. This could be interpreted in the sense that the teacher education system after the reform movement faced the obligation to incorporate EU objectives in the reform activity system which necessitates a re-conceptualization as to who (**subjects**), is to participate in what **actions**, through utilizing what **tools** to meet the **objectives** of the overall reform movement.

This re-conceptualization becomes possible through the lenses of CHAT. As the reasons for that are listed above, CHAT helped to illuminate how the agents of change (university leaders and teacher educators) employed their own cultural means and tools in reacting to the Turkish teacher education reform activity coerced from top to down. Since they reacted to the change through the contradictions that had already been in place within the system of operation before the introduction of the reform, their reaction to the reform was conflicted as well. On the one hand, the reform efforts to change the way teachers are educated in the participating universities were viewed to be positive by the participants, on the other hand these participants did not find the reform efforts effective depending on the degree of their involvement in the activity.

Drawing upon the above points, we advise that the multileveled pattern of contradictions among the agents of change might inhibit the Turkish system's future attempts to fully realize the reform. We thus suggest that involvement of all the change agents and participants at the grassroots level in the overall design and implementation of the reform movement is essential.

References

- Cole, M. 1999. Cultural psychology: Some general principles and a concrete example. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, and R-L Punamäki (Eds.), *Perspectives on activity theory* (pp. 87-106). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cole, M. & Engeström, Y. 1993. A cultural-historical interpretation of distributed cognition. G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed Cognitions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ekiz, H. E. 2003. *Organizational Responses to Customer Complaints in Hotel Industry: Evidence from Northern Cyprus*. Unpublished Master Thesis, Eastern Mediterranean University.
- Engeström, Y. 1996. Interobjectivity, ideality, and dialectics. *Mind, Culture and Activity: An International Journal*, 3 (4), 259-265.
- Engeström, Y. 1999. Activity theory and individual social transformation. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen & R-L. Punamäki (Eds.), *Perspectives on activity theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Y. 1999b. Innovative learning in work teams: analyzing cycles of knowledge creation in practice, in: Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen & R-L. Punamäki (Eds) *Perspectives on Activity Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Engeström, Y. 1987. *Learning by Expanding: an activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*, Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.
- Engeström, Y. 1993. Developmental studies on work as a testbench of activity theory, in: S. Chaiklin & j. Lave (Eds) *Understanding Practice: perspectives on activity and context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press:.
- Engeström, Y. 1996. Developmental work research as educational research, *Nordisk Pedagogik: Journal of Nordic Educational Research*, 16(5), pp. 131–143
- Engeström, Y. 2005a. *Developmental work research: Expanding activity theory in practice*. Berlin: Lehmanns Media.
- Engeström, Y. 2006. Development, movement and agency: Breaking away into mycorrhhi-

- zae activities. In K. Yamazumi (Ed.), *Building activity theory in practice: Toward the next generation*. Osaka: Center for Human Activity Theory, Kansai University. Technical Reports No. 1.
- Grossman, G.M., Onkol, P.E. 2006. Towards the Europeanization of Turkish teacher education: education reform and professional development in a new context. In *Lifelong Learning in the Balkans*, ed. N. P. Terzis. Thessaloniki, Greece, pp. 337–357: Kyriakidis Brothers SA.
- Grossman, G.M., Onkol, P.E., Sands, M., 2007. Curriculum reform in Turkish teacher education: attitudes of teacher educators towards modernization in an EU candidate nation. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 27: 138–150.
- Grossman, G.M., Sands, M.K., 2008. Restructuring reforms in Turkish teacher education: modernization and development in a dynamic environment. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 28: 70–80.
- Grossman, G. M.; Sands, Margaret. K., and Brittingham, B. 2010. "Teacher accreditation in Turkey: The creation of a 'culture of quality' ". *International Journal of Educational Development*. 30: 102-109.
- Il'enkov, E.V. 1982) *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's 'Capital'*, Moscow: Progress.
- Leont'ev, A.N. 1974. The problem of activity in psychology, *Soviet Psychology*, 13, 4–33.
- Leont'ey, A.N. 1978. *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Leont'ey, A.N. 1981. *Problems of the Development of the Mind*. Moscow: Progress.
- Luria, A.R. 1976. *Cognitive Development: its cultural and social foundations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McCafferty, S., Jacobs, G., & DaSilva Iddings, A. 2006. *Cooperative learning and second language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Nardi, B.A. (Ed.) 1996. *Context and Consciousness: activity theory and human-computer interaction* The MIT Press: Cambridge.

- Norros, L. 1996. System disturbances as springboard for development of operators' expertise. *Cognition and Communication at Work*. Ed. Y. Engeström and D. Middleton. Cambridge: Mass Cambridge University Press.
- Vygotsky, L.S. 1978. *Mind in Society: the development of higher psychological processes* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L.S. 1987. *Thinking and Speech*. Plenum: New York.
- Wertsch, J.T. 1985. *Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

Appendix

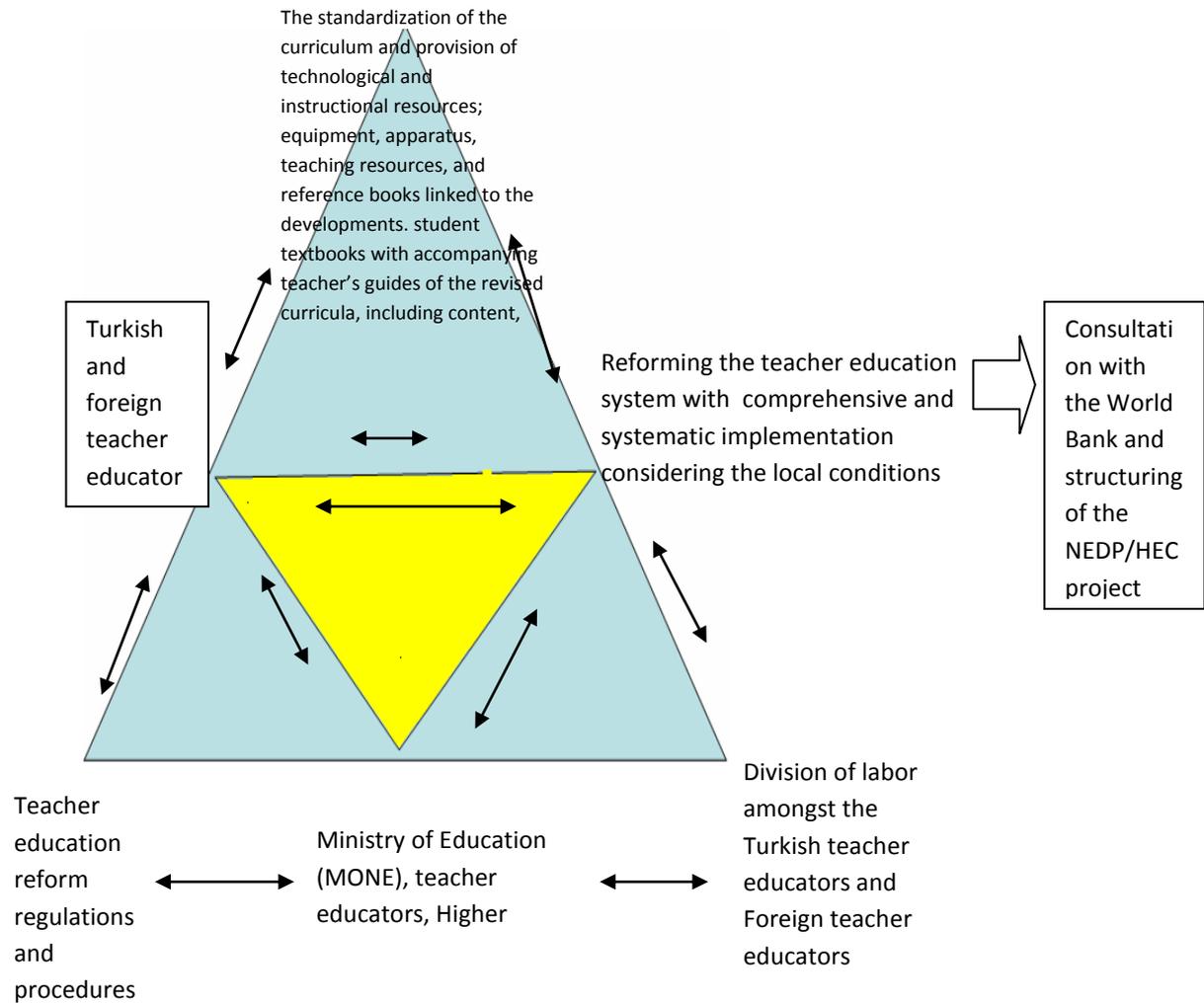


Figure 2. Teacher Education Reform Activity System in Turkey

Table 1. Analysis of Contradictions through CHAT

<u>CONTRADICTION</u>	<u>PHASE</u>	<u>CONTENT OF ANALYSIS</u>
Primary <i>within</i> the components of the old activity	Need state	<i>improving the educational level of society through educating teachers and improving their status on sustainable basis (concurred by the majority of both teacher educators and university leaders)</i>
Secondary between the components of the old activity	Community (MONE/HEC and schools, in-service teachers and teacher educators) and agents of change not reconciling on a workable set of goals	Some of the diverse goals were related as follows: <i>*Lack of qualified teacher educators</i> <i>*Lack of financial and personnel resources allocated to every region equally</i> <i>*Political interference in the educational system (the educational practices become too political)</i> <i>*Applying foreign educational models without undertaking comprehensive adaptation procedures in line with the socio-cultural and socio-economic circumstances</i>
Tertiary between the old and the <i>given</i> new activity/motive (between the only understood and the effective motive)	The exchange, distribution, consumption and production stages of the reform efforts were not fully in alignment with the local interests and motives of the teacher educators.	The reform was imposed from top to down leading to its incredibility and lacking teacher educators' claim over the project (as is obvious from the unopened boxes of materials and the dilemma between some educators claiming to have used the materials which were found to be somewhat useful by the majority)
Quaternary - <i>between</i> the new activity and its neighbor activities	The distribution and exchange of the procedures devised, decisions taken during the reform efforts across all the faculties of education in the country	Curriculum reform was centralized and standardized without involving the majority of the Turkish educators and experts across all the faculties of education in the country The centralized curriculum is at odds with the centralized appointment of the teachers across the country as the graduates of the teacher education programs are appointed to schools settings reflective of diverse regional disparities across the country.

Table 2. Interpretations and Reform implications through CHAT Principles.

	<i>Activity system as unit of analysis</i>	<i>Multivoicedness</i>	<i>Historicity</i>	<i>Contradictions</i>	<i>Expansive cycle</i>
Who were reforming the Turkish teacher education?	Fifteen experienced teacher educators from education faculties paired with seventeen counterparts from the USA, UK, and Sweden all involved in development of newly designed teacher education curricula.	About 3881 people were involved in the overall reform activity between 1995 and 1999		Not every participant actively questioned, internalized, implemented or created novel ways to actualize the true intentions of the reform activity	In the future, even the pre-service teachers might be involved in the decision making processes or in providing iterative feedback to the implementation phase of the teacher education reform project.
Why were they reforming the Turkish teacher education?	The activity to overcome the insufficient number of educated/trained teachers	Both the university leaders' and teacher educators' mostly agreed on the goal to better the teacher education programs to advance the quality of teachers as graduates of these programs.	Goals diverged as time went by	The tension resulted from the power-coercive strategy of the project	In the future, a large body of Turkish teacher educators might take the initiative to reconstruct their programs and ways to train the pre-service teachers
What did they reform within the Turkish teacher education?	The activity to revise the teacher education curricula, books and materials.	Over time, they acted collaboratively to revise the curricula as modeled	Diachronic collaboration	The tension resulted from the fact that most teacher educators argued against centralizing and standardizing all the curricular materials in teacher education	Each faculty of education in each region might decide to construct its own curriculum sharing common/ indispensable principles with the other teacher education programs in the other regions
How did they reform within the Turkish teacher education?	By involving consultant panels, faculties of education; by conducting needs analysis on the objectives, strategies, outputs; by organizing research and material development meetings, visits; by organizing evaluation workshops; by publishing books and disseminating them	Every participant was involved			As a reconstruction, involvement of the masses of people should happen over a longer period of time so that a larger body of individuals could understand, internalize and create novel ways to implement the products (books and workshops).