

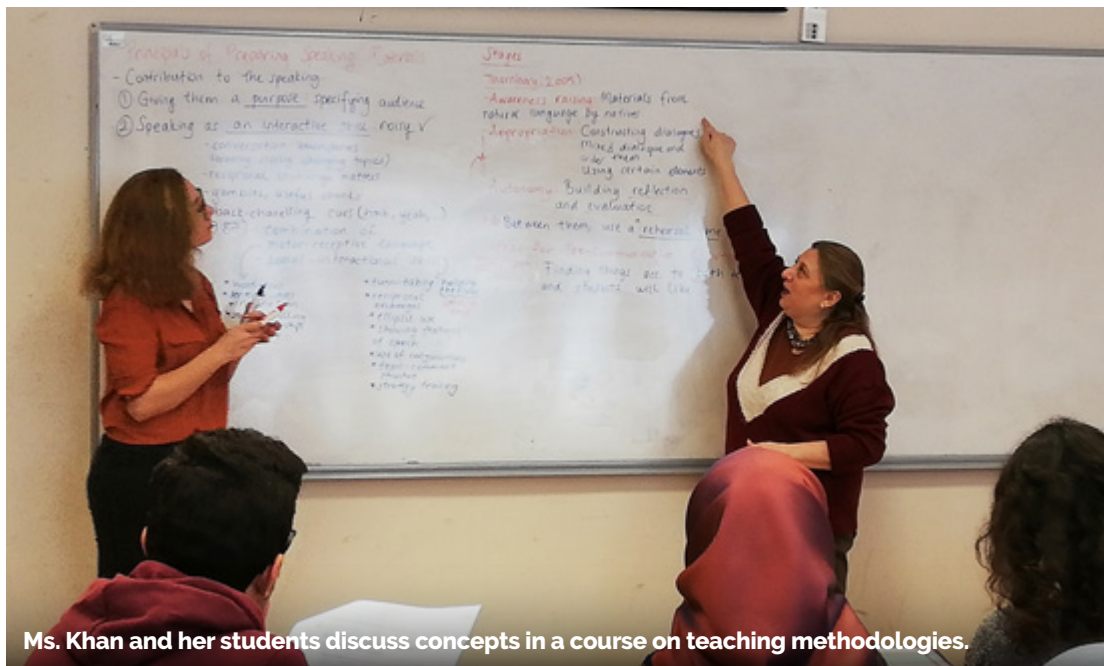
The office door opened with a slow, gentle knock.
“Teacher,” the woman said as she entered, smiling.
“Welcome,” the teacher replied, rising from her seat and stretching her arms out to embrace the woman who entered.

The woman took out a square package and handed it to her. The teacher slowly unwrapped it, and the words captured in a white frame began to show.

Life is the biggest task, it said.



Özlem Khan outside her office in the Department of English Language Teaching at Hacettepe University in Ankara



Ms. Khan and her students discuss concepts in a course on teaching methodologies.

“This is a reflection of my journey of learning with you,” the woman said, grinning. “It’s been a challenging task ... but rewarding.”

The teacher, Özlem Khan, looked at her former student and replied gently. “It’s the same for me. Every term presents new challenges but reaps new rewards.”

Ms. Khan’s sentiment reflects her approach to teaching. She fosters autonomy in her students—future English language teachers in Turkey—through instructing them on how they can use learner-centered teaching strategies in their own classrooms.

In 2013, Turkey’s Ministry of National Education enacted reforms in primary schools that focus on learner-centered evaluation methods. Within this framework, the government increased the use of English language teaching (ELT) in schools. Partly as a result of these changes, Ms. Khan, a lecturer in the Department of English Language Teaching at Hacettepe University in Ankara, takes her preservice teachers—undergraduate senior students—to primary and secondary schools throughout Ankara for them to conduct teaching lessons as a part of their spring practicum. Ms. Khan has an average of 200 students each semester, and about 50

of them are fourth-year practicum students. These students are earning their bachelor’s degrees in ELT, and they are eager to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in Ms. Khan’s courses.

“Students are very receptive to get your feedback on their teaching,” Ms. Khan says. “They are ready to engage with students in an authentic classroom setting and critically reflect on their own teaching.”

Ms. Khan is a practicum instructor, and this involves many tasks. In the fall term, she asks her practicum students to research different topics, from classroom management to communicative teaching methods, and then discuss the topics with one another. They also write about learner-centered strategies they plan to use in the classroom during the spring semester, when they go to private secondary schools and give lessons.

In the spring, in addition to observing the preservice teachers, Ms. Khan coordinates with schools, knocking on doors searching for certified teachers and asking if a school will allow students to come and deliver lessons. Teaching the practicum course means the students and Ms. Khan are in the schools with the in-service teachers and

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their students. The practicum students know in advance the grading criteria for their lesson demonstrations at the schools, and the host teacher also sees the criteria, which are established by the Ministry of National Education.

“By showing the in-service teachers the grading criteria, they are informed about the new trends. Every spring semester is an opportunity for me to further train practicing teachers,” Ms. Khan says.

For 11 years, Ms. Khan has been teaching undergraduate students at Hacettepe University; however, her teaching career began far sooner. Before coming to Hacettepe, she spent five years teaching English language to high school students in private schools.



The Faculty of Education building at Hacettepe University, where Ms. Khan teaches

“Teaching in high schools was challenging in terms of motivating the students,” Ms. Khan says. “However, it was also rewarding because once the students gained higher levels of proficiency, it felt fulfilling, as I saw their progress because of my being able to use learner-centered strategies.”

After teaching in high schools, she traveled to the United States and earned a master’s degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from Colorado State University and a master’s in education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Ms. Khan then returned to Turkey to serve as a lecturer at Hacettepe, and she stands out as having a strong impact on Turkey’s ELT community. As a lecturer, she instructs undergraduate courses to future English language teachers, focusing on teaching methodologies, materials development, applied linguistics, and teaching using literature. She has also shared her knowledge with the ELT field. With a local colleague, she recently published an article on materials development by teacher-trainees on how to teach idioms; she has written a book chapter on the principles of materials development; and she has presented at conferences on textbook analysis and materials development, with a focus on vocabulary and speaking.

For Ms. Khan, however, the greatest reward is the strong impact her preservice teachers have on their own students as they begin and move forward in their teaching careers. She inspires them to have a positive influence on others by fostering their own students’ creativity and success. Fostering this creativity, for her students, often means adapting textbooks and prescribed curricular materials for a learner-centered classroom.

“I don’t want my students to be bound to prescribed materials.”

“I don’t want my students to be bound to prescribed materials,” Ms. Khan says. “I encourage them to be flexible as teachers. If they allow themselves to be bound to the textbook, then learning becomes monotonous. My practicum students are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks and materials, and they can adapt them easily before and while giving a lesson. Through this, they are able to be more curious and creative. I’m hoping once they start practicing, they can set a model for the other teachers.”

Ms. Khan also coordinates observation topics for her preservice students to integrate into the existing material covered by the teacher of a given course, and then she observes the preservice students’ lesson demonstrations and provides them feedback. Some topics she has coordinated are the teaching of the present perfect and present progressive and the differences between the two tenses.

“I have constant one-on-one meetings with my students,” she says. “I encourage them to prepare materials on their own and critically reflect on their teaching experiences and become autonomous learners.”

One way Ms. Khan fosters her students’ creativity and autonomy is in the teaching methodologies practicum courses, where she asks students to conduct microteachings to one another and then provide structured peer feedback. “They aren’t outsiders,” she says. “They are in the learning process, so I want them to make a connection between their prior learning experiences—because they are learners themselves—so they need to understand their own learning.”

Having discussions with peers includes comparing what is learned in her classes and what might happen in real life. Ms. Khan notes that students “learn how to bridge the gap between what is learned in the classroom in their degree program and what they may experience out in the field as new teachers.” Students not only learn from conducting the teachings to their peers but also learn how to provide constructive peer feedback. Ms. Khan says, “Providing peer feedback allows them to develop their skills in critical analysis and apply it to real situations they would encounter in their careers.”

This feedback on their microteachings is in addition to the feedback received by Ms. Khan on their teaching demonstrations in secondary schools in the spring. Before delivering a teaching demonstration, her practicum students research and brainstorm strategies to handle issues faced in the classroom. Then, after conducting a lesson, they self-reflect on their teaching and compare the experience with their prior knowledge, learned through research and discussion.

One common issue faced in the classroom is the feasibility of employing group work. Ms. Khan uses group work at the university level, but in primary and secondary schools in Turkey, group work is often not employed because of large class sizes. Ms. Khan asks students, before going into their practicum teaching, to brainstorm strategies they can



Ms. Khan and a student discuss a course on materials development.

use to manage group work. After teaching lessons, her students conduct structured self-reflections of their demonstrations before receiving and discussing Ms. Khan's feedback. In the case of using group work, the students self-reflect on which strategies worked in their lesson demonstrations and which did not. Moving forward, Ms. Khan asks students to plan strategies they would use, not use, and modify in the future based on the learning context of the classes. Conducting these brainstorms and self-reflections furthers her students' autonomy as learners and future professionals. The learning is interactive, social, and practical.

Over the years at Hacettepe University, Ms. Khan has seen many students pass through her courses. However, it is not in the number of students taught that she finds motivation and inspiration; instead, she says, it is in "seeing the change in the students."

She then looks down at the framed words her former student gave her and reads the quote aloud in its entirety:

"Life is the biggest task ... all you need is to enjoy learning."

Ms. Khan looks up and continues.

"The student told me these words reflected how she felt: 'I now enjoy learning, Teacher. And I'm confident now that I will be a better teacher because of what I've done in your classes.'"

Ms. Khan's hand slowly grazes over the face of the frame.

"I see the growth in the students from their first year as freshmen to their fourth year as seniors about to graduate," she says. "When they, as new teachers, are able to give *me* ideas for the classroom and tell me, 'Teacher, we could use this in the classroom'—when they then go to job interviews, they're able to create a lesson plan on the spot—I know I helped them be creative and spontaneous. I find fulfillment in knowing I fostered that



Ms. Khan proudly shows a framed picture given to her by a former student, relaying a message the student learned in her preservice teaching years.

creativity in them and that they're able to experience professional success in their lives."

In that, she encourages her students, who will go into all areas of Turkey, to reach out and, as teachers, open doors for others to travel along the journey of change and growth through the process of learning.

"That," she says, "is the ideal we're hoping for in our students and in ourselves. It's what we should all strive for."

This article was written by **Melissa Van De Wege**, who served as an English Language Fellow in Ankara, Turkey, from 2017 to 2019. Melissa has taught in higher education and has delivered teacher-training workshops on methodologies of English language teaching and the teaching of writing in the United States, Qatar, and Turkey.

Photos by Melissa Van De Wege