

How amenable are student teacher beliefs to change?

A study of EFL student teacher beliefs before and after teaching practice

Evdokia Karavas and Mary Drossou

University of Athens

Abstract

Research has repeatedly shown that student teachers have well entrenched beliefs and attitudes about teaching and expectations about the role of the teacher which have been formed on the basis of their own experiences as pupils and images of “good” teachers (apprenticeship of observation). Their beliefs strongly influence their own developing practice and what and how student teachers learn during teacher education programmes while they often lead to the formation of inappropriate images and inadequate expectations of teaching. Research has shown that teaching practice experiences may help student teachers in modifying their preconceived ideas about teaching and classroom instruction when encouraged by experienced mentor teachers to confront their beliefs. This paper presents the results of research conducted on ELT student teachers’ beliefs before and after their teaching practice placements in order to detect any changes/developments in the nature of these beliefs. The study’s findings were particularly revealing as regards the effect of the experienced mentor teachers and the school culture on student teacher’s beliefs and provide useful insights for the design of teacher education programmes.

Keywords: student-teacher beliefs, knowledge and concerns, teaching practice, teacher education, life long learning

1. Introduction

Research into novice teachers’ teaching practices has led to the rather disheartening conclusion that new teachers teach as they were taught perpetuating the models, practices and ideas of the teachers they were taught by. The impact of teacher education courses on altering student teachers’ pre-existing beliefs which result in such practices has been found to be minimal and in some cases non-existent. This study attempts to investigate this contention by examining the beliefs of 100 student teachers of the Faculty of English Studies at the University of Athens before embarking on their teaching practice experience (and after having successfully completed a series of courses offered on the Pre-service Teacher Education and Training programme) and after their teaching practice in which they were guided by experienced mentor teachers.

2. The nature and importance of student teacher beliefs

Student teachers are not atheoretical beings before embarking on their professional education courses; they are not empty vessels who absorb wholesale the knowledge and skills transmitted by experts and then automatically put into practice what they have been taught. Research has repeatedly shown that student teachers have deeply grounded beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning and expectations about the role of the teacher formed on the basis of their extensive experience as learners. By the time they reach university, students have closely observed teachers and scrutinised their behaviour for at least 12 to 13 years; students have spent thousands of hours in what Lortie (1975) has termed *apprenticeship of observation*. Throughout this observation period, they have developed a wealth of initial knowledge of teaching, a rich repertoire of images, models and taken for granted practices about teaching, they have developed a body of values, commitments and beliefs about teaching (Calderhead 1991). The beliefs student teachers hold are implicit, informal and embedded in their mental images of classroom practice and often lead to the formation of inappropriate images and inadequate expectations of teaching (see Borg 2003, Calderhead 1991, Deng 2004, Freeman and Richards 1996, Kagan 1992, Nettle 1998, Roberts 1998). Beliefs are part of the student teachers' evolving identity as teachers; they represent the "medium for each person to negotiate his/ her identity as a social being" (Cabaroğlu and Roberts 2000: 388). Beliefs blended with experiences, theoretical and technical knowledge form student teachers' developing professional identity (Trappes-Lomax and McGrath 1999).

In his review of 16 studies of pre-service teacher beliefs, Pajares (1992) concluded that student teachers' beliefs play a pivotal role in the way they interpret and acquire information from their teacher education courses. Their beliefs act as perceptual, self validating, selective filters which sieve information presented to them. This filtered information is then used to confirm and support rather than confront or challenge their pre-existing conceptions (Calderhead and Robson 1991, Doolittle, Dodds and Placek 1993, Kagan 1992, Puchta 1999, Roberts 1998). Not only do their pre-existing beliefs mediate how student teachers interpret information about teaching and learning but also how they translate that information into classroom practice; in other words, beliefs also shape, influence and guide student teachers' classroom practices and their professional development, remaining with new teachers well into their first years of teaching (Cabaroğlu and Roberts 2000, Calderhead 1991, Deng 2004).

Whether or not teacher education courses and teaching practice actually influence or change student teachers' pre-existing conceptions is a matter of heated debate while related research results have been largely inconsistent. Many researchers have argued that student teachers' beliefs are inflexible, stable and resistant to change (Freeman 2002, Kennedy 1991). They represent a *latent culture* which, despite effects of training, is reinforced on entry to the teaching profession; as Calderhead and Robson (1991: 2) argue, "school experience is a powerful socialising agent which washes out the effect of training".

The inflexibility and stability of student teacher beliefs has been identified by a number of research studies (see Almarza 1996, Guillame and Rudney 1993, Johnson 1996, Nettle 1998). For instance, Peacock (2001) in his investigation of 146 TESL trainees' beliefs over three years of studies in TESL methodology found that trainees' beliefs remained constant throughout the period of their training. The majority of trainees in their 3rd year, and especially those with low proficiency levels, still believed, after years of training in communicative approaches and techniques, that learning a second language entails learning vocabulary and grammar rules. Similarly, Tabachnick and Zeichner (1984), investigating changes in student teacher beliefs over their teaching practice period, found that the majority of student teachers' perspectives solidified rather than changed over their 15-week teaching practice placement. They conclude "as the analysis continued, it became increasingly clear that the dominant trend was for teaching perspectives to develop and grow in a direction consistent with the latent culture that students brought to the experience" (ibid: 33). Other research studies reach similar rather pessimistic conclusions (Brown and McGannon 1998, Fajet *et al.* 2005). It seems that even if student teachers' beliefs converge during their teacher education courses, they tended to diverge after their teaching practice experience thus suggesting that pre-service teacher education programmes are ineffective in changing or influencing student teacher beliefs and that in the end,

"...new teachers teach as they were taught. The power of their apprenticeship of observation and of the conventional images of teaching that derive from childhood experiences, makes it very difficult to alter teaching practices and explains in part why teaching has remained so constant over so many decades of reform efforts" (Kennedy 1991: 16).

The inflexibility and stability of student teacher beliefs though has been questioned by a number of studies which have identified changes in student teacher beliefs

throughout their teacher education courses and after their teaching practice placements (Cabaroglu and Roberts 2000, Hascher *et al.* 2004, Lightbown and Spada 1993, Sendan 1995). What these studies reveal is that belief development and change is possible but it is gradual and cumulative and highly variable among individual student teachers. Findings also suggest that certain beliefs are more susceptible to change than others. It is the central, core beliefs that are more resistant to change (Peacock 2001).

Moreover, it has also been pointed out that the claimed inflexibility of student teacher beliefs may be due to shortcomings of the pre-service training programmes rather than being an inherent characteristic of student teacher belief systems *per se* (Kagan 1992). Input provided in teacher education courses and classroom experience alone are necessary but not sufficient to effect a change in beliefs. Before student teachers can effectively integrate new information and detect inconsistencies in their belief systems, they first need to become aware of their personal beliefs and conceptions about teaching (Williams 1999). Systematic opportunities thus must be given to student teachers through their teacher education courses to make explicit their beliefs, to analyse them, scrutinise them and challenge them (Almarza 1996, Crandall 2000, Deng 2004, Fajet *et al.* 2005, Roberts 1998). If student teachers are not given opportunities to examine their beliefs, they cannot be open to new ideas and cannot be in a position to detect inconsistencies and reexamine their beliefs in the light of new data. Research has shown that teaching practice experiences may help student teachers in modifying their preconceived ideas about teaching and classroom instruction when encouraged by mentors to confront their beliefs (Joram and Gabriele 1998).

3. The context of the study

Within the framework of the teaching practice course offered to 4th year undergraduate student teachers at the Faculty of English Studies at the University of Athens, and in an effort to provide a more meaningful teaching practice experience to our student teachers, systematic attempts have been made over the last two years to train our cooperating experienced teachers who guide student teachers during their teaching practice placements, as mentors. In 2006, and before the teaching practice placements began, all cooperating teachers of English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) were invited to a seminar in which they were informed of the role and responsibilities of a mentor, and were trained in providing constructive and meaningful feedback to student teachers. A mentor training pack was also developed including information on the importance of the

teaching practice experience for developing student teachers' knowledge and skills and on the roles and responsibilities of the mentor teacher and student teachers during the teaching practice placement. Our programme was awarded the 2006 English Language Label award being positively evaluated for its innovativeness and potential for establishing mentorship schemes in Greece.

In February 2007, a two day conference in which all mentor teachers were invited was also organised at the University of Athens with speakers from the Faculty and abroad. The conference on the theme *Mentoring student teachers of English: Issues and possibilities*, focused on various aspects of the mentors' role and their potential contribution to the professional development of student teachers. In addition, a revised and expanded mentor training pack was distributed to all our cooperating teachers. In 2008, a Handbook for Mentor Teachers (Karavas 2008) was developed and distributed to our body of mentor teachers. The Handbook aims to:

- develop our mentors' understanding of the academic, professional and social needs of EFL student teachers
- develop a deeper understanding of the importance and contribution a mentor can make to the professional development of student teachers
- develop awareness of the practices of mentoring
- develop mentors' understanding of their roles and responsibilities during practice teaching
- provide an overview of the mentoring literature.

It should be mentioned at this point that the teaching practice course is offered as an elective course to fourth year students who have successfully completed a series of courses (compulsory and elective) on applied linguistics and methodology; on average 150 students choose to take up the teaching practice course every year. Teaching practice placements last for two months during which student teachers are assigned to primary or secondary (private or public) schools close to their area of residence and are guided throughout by a trained mentor. During their placements, student teachers are requested to observe (with the use of guided observation forms) various aspects of their mentor's teaching practices, to gradually take on responsibilities and teaching tasks assigned by the mentor and finally to teach a group of students for two sessions. Thus, the aim of the teaching practice course is threefold. Firstly, it aims at providing trainees with the opportunity to take the position of an informed observer in an EFL classroom in

a Greek school and to systematically follow and reflect on the processes of teaching and learning therein. Secondly, it aims at familiarising them with classroom conditions and the discursive practices of participants in the teaching/learning process from the position of a teaching assistant. Thirdly, it aims at providing them with an opportunity to carry out supervised teaching for a short period of time. The trainees are evaluated by the EFL class teacher (mentor) that they assist, but also by the course instructor who assesses trainees' experience recorded by them in written form and evaluated in seminars.¹

4. The investigation of student teacher beliefs

After efforts to train our cooperating teachers as mentors, we set out to investigate the potential effects of the mentor programme on the development of student teacher beliefs, concerns and their concepts of self-efficacy. A questionnaire was developed for this purpose and was given to student teachers before and after their teaching practice placements. However, due to word restrictions, this paper will focus only on the results concerning the development of student teacher beliefs.

The aims of this study were to (a) investigate student teachers' perceptions of the role of the teacher and learner in the classroom, the place and importance of explicit grammar instruction and error correction and the importance of pair/group work before embarking on their teaching practice and after completing a series of compulsory and elective courses offered within the Pre-service Teacher Education and Training programme (PRE-ED) of the Faculty of English Studies, and (b) to investigate any changes in their espoused beliefs after completing their teaching practice placements under the guidance of trained mentors.

A 20 item Likert-type attitude scale was developed for this purpose in which students were asked to tick their degree of agreement or disagreement (on a five point scale) with each item. Statements related to teacher and student roles in the classroom, learner autonomy and responding to student needs, the role and importance of explicit grammar instruction, native like pronunciation and error correction and the benefits of pair/group work. One hundred questionnaires were collected from student teachers before and after their teaching practice.

¹ For more information on the Pre-service Teacher Education and Training programme (PRE-ED) of the Faculty of English Studies see www.enl.uoa.gr or Karavas 2008.

5. The findings of the study

5.1 Student teacher beliefs before teaching practice

The results of the attitude scale given to student teachers before their teaching practice revealed some interesting findings. Student teachers displayed consistently positive attitudes (see Table 1) towards the following issues:

- the importance of adapting teaching practices to suit learner needs,
- the importance of pair/group work for promoting cooperation and interaction amongst learners,
- encouraging/training learners for independence (learning how to learn).

Table 1. Student teacher beliefs towards learner autonomy, pair/group work, adapting teaching to cater for learner needs

<i>Student Teacher Beliefs</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>
1. The teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of the many different roles he/she must perform during the course of a lesson	1%	0	99%
2. When learners are allowed to interact freely in pairs or groups, they learn each other's mistakes	62%	12%	26%
3. Since the learner comes to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of the language he/she is in no position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for him/her	85%	7%	8%
4. Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than imposed on them	0	0	100%
5. Students do their best when taught as a whole class by their teacher. Small group work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine but it can never replace formal instruction by a competent teacher	66%	10%	24%
6. The teacher's role in the classroom is to guide the learners in discovering knowledge for themselves	3%	3%	94%
7. Training learners to take responsibility for their learning is futile since learners are not used to such an approach	95%	3%	2%
8. Pair/group work promotes cooperative learning and genuine interaction among students	0	0	100%

However, despite student teachers' favourable attitudes towards (a) the importance of pair/group work and learner cooperation, (b) the importance of adapting teaching to suit learners' needs and (c) encouraging learners to take responsibility for their learning,

student teachers also appeared to hold favourable attitudes towards the importance of explicit grammar instruction and error correction as can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. Student teacher beliefs towards explicit grammar instruction, error correction and native like pronunciation

<i>Student Teacher Beliefs</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>
1. Language learners need to understand the grammatical rules of English in order to become fluent in the language	20%	2%	78%
2. It is important to provide clear, frequent, precise presentations of grammatical structures during English language instruction	12%	2%	86%
3. Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time	52%	4%	44%
4. It is important to help learners develop native-like pronunciation	33%	6%	61%
5. It is important for learners to repeat and practice the language in order to become fluent	3%	1%	96%
6. The role of the teacher in the classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing and example	18%	3%	79%

These results show that student teachers believe in the usefulness of explicit and systematic grammar instruction in developing learners' ability to use the language and in the systematic correction of learner errors. This finding is consistent with other studies (e.g., Breen 1991, Peacock 2001) where ESL teachers and trainees, contrary to ideas promoted in their teacher education courses, strongly believed in the importance of grammar and vocabulary instruction and error correction for successful language use. These 'detrimental' beliefs, according to Peacock (2001: 187), "are probably even more resistant to change". This was the case with our student teachers who continued to be strong believers of explicit and systematic grammar instruction and error correction after their teaching practice.

A rather surprising result of student teacher beliefs before embarking on their teaching practice, relates to their belief of the native speaker 'myth'. Quite contrary to discussions in class about the nature of English as an international language and the futility of striving to acquire a native like pronunciation, our student teachers embark on their teaching practice believing that the development of native like pronunciation is an important goal of foreign language learning. This belief slightly changed after teaching practice as we will see later on.

Another interesting finding of pre-teaching practice attitude scale was the inconsistency evidenced in certain student teacher beliefs. Table 3 highlights student teachers' attitudes towards the role and importance of grammar instruction (which were presented in Tables 1 and 2) in order to reveal the apparent inconsistency in their attitudes.

Table 3. Inconsistencies in student teacher beliefs as regards the role and importance of explicit grammar instruction

<i>Student Teacher Beliefs</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Agree</i>
1. Language learners need to understand the grammatical rules of English in order to become fluent in the language	20%	2%	78%
2. It is important to provide clear, frequent, precise presentations of grammatical structures during English language instruction	12%	2%	86%
3. It is important for learners to repeat and practice the language in order to become fluent	3%	1%	96%
4. The role of the teacher in the classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing and example	18%	3%	79%
5. For most students language is acquired most effectively when used as a vehicle for doing something else and not when it is studied in a direct and explicit way	6%	5%	89%
6. The teacher's role in the classroom is to guide the learners in discovering knowledge for themselves	3%	3%	94%
7. Knowledge of the rules of the language does not guarantee ability to use the language	2%	0	98%

As can be seen from the table above, student teachers seem to agree with apparently contradictory statements as regards the role and importance of grammar instruction; although the majority of student teachers seem to overwhelmingly agree with the value of explicit grammar instruction and practice, the importance of knowledge of rules of the language in order to use the language effectively (statements 1-4), they also hold the opinion that knowledge of grammar rules is not a prerequisite for effective language use and that effective language learning results from students discovering the rules of language on their own rather than when studying it in a direct and explicit way (statements 5-7). Inconsistent and unclarified attitudes are not a phenomenon peculiar to our student teachers but a phenomenon which has been identified in a number of similar studies. Unlike experienced teachers, student and novice teachers' knowledge tends to

consist of isolated bits of information where connections between the parts have not yet been made (Williams 1999); thus inconsistencies in their belief systems may exist without student teachers actually being aware of it. This clash of beliefs is probably due to their conceptions formed during their apprenticeship of observation (i.e., years of observing language teachers directly and explicitly focusing on grammar) and to new input provided in their teacher education courses which stresses that declarative knowledge does not necessarily lead to procedural knowledge and that knowledge of the rules of the language does not guarantee ability to use the language effectively, fluently and appropriately. Having not been given explicit opportunities to confront, analyse and challenge their beliefs in their teacher education courses, student teachers are probably not aware of this inconsistency.

5.2 Student teacher beliefs after teaching practice

On the whole, student teachers did not change their beliefs as a result of the teaching practice experience. Student teachers responded almost exactly the same to most of the statements after their two-month teaching practice placement revealing consistently favourable attitudes towards the need to adapt teaching to cater for learner needs, the need to encourage learners to become independent, the use of pair/group work for promoting cooperation.

Certain changes in their attitudes appeared, however, after teaching practice but not always for the better as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Changes in student teacher's beliefs after teaching practice

<i>Student Teacher Beliefs</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>
1. It is important to help learners develop native like pronunciation	33%	49%	61%	40%
2. When learners are allowed to interact freely in pairs or groups, they learn each others' mistakes	62%	52%	26%	39%
3. If errors are left uncorrected, it will be difficult for learners to speak correctly later on	47%	37%	48%	54%
4. Students do their best when taught as a whole class by their teacher. Small group work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine but it can never replace formal instruction by a competent teacher	66%	57%	24%	32%
5. Language learners need to understand the grammatical rules of English in order to become fluent in the language	20%	30%	78%	69%
6. It is impossible for a teacher to organise his/her	59%	58%	36%	42%

teaching so as to suit the needs of all students				
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A surprising result was that student teachers' attitudes towards the goal of native like pronunciation changed as a result of teaching practice (only 40% of the students believed that native like pronunciation is an important goal of language teaching in contrast to 61% who believed so before teaching practice) possibly due to their realisation that since even the mentor expert teachers they observed did not have native like pronunciation, it would be unrealistic to set this as a goal for language learners. Moreover, a somewhat smaller number of student teachers seemed to have positive attitudes towards the importance of formal grammar instruction (statement 5). However, a slightly larger number of student teachers seemed to have positive attitudes towards the potential "dangers" of pair/group work (statement 2), the importance of error correction (statement 3), and the role of the teacher as instructor and transmitter of knowledge after teaching practice (statements 4 and 6).

A possible reason for this change of attitude may be sought in the area of student teacher *concerns* during teaching practice. Research suggests that at different stages of their careers teachers have different professional interests and concerns. Novice teachers are mainly concerned with classroom management and control issues and are worried about being accepted by their pupils and peers; these concerns act as a great source of stress to student teachers (Berliner 2001, Guillaume and Rudney 1993, Moore 2003, Murray-Harvey *et al.* 2000, Roberts 1998, Swennen, Jorg and Korthagen 2004). More specifically, student teachers and novices have been found to regard procedural concerns relating to time management and classroom management as important to teaching success. Their concerns typically focus on threats to their self esteem in meeting new role demands (such as failing to manage a class or losing control, or losing face in front of their students). Student teacher concerns were investigated in this study and it was found that classroom management, lesson planning, being accepted by their students, providing explanations and instructions greatly concern a large number of students, especially after their teaching practice experience. Thus, returning to the results of the attitude scale, the increase in the number of students who seem positively predisposed towards the role of the teacher as authority, the value of error correction, and the assumed dangers of pair work may be due to their concern in maintaining discipline and control: A teacher-centred mode of instruction and error correction are techniques or

coping strategies that student teachers may use to assert their control and authority and maintain discipline in the classroom.

6. Discussion

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study of student teacher beliefs before and after their practice teaching was that (a) their beliefs about certain aspects of teaching and learning lacked internal consistency and coherence (as evidenced by their agreement to apparently contradictory statements on the attitude scale) and that (b) this inconsistency did not change as a result of teaching practice; if anything, their teaching practice experience served to solidify some of their pre-existing beliefs, especially those relating to the value of error correction and the role of the teacher as authority.

Inconsistencies in student teachers' belief systems are not uncommon. According to Nespor (1987), student teacher beliefs take the form of "episodically stored material derived from critical incidents in individuals' personal experience" (cited in Borg 2003: 86), they have a highly evaluative and affective character, are accepted as true by the individual and may include conceptualisations that differ from reality (also see Borg 2001). Student teacher beliefs differ from experienced teachers' beliefs in that the belief systems of the latter are more elaborate, more schematic and more connected to specific contexts and therefore tend to be more coherent and cohesive (Joram and Gabriele 1998). It may well be that this inconsistency of student teacher beliefs is due to the persistence of their pre-existing images of teaching and the input and ideas assimilated through their teacher education courses. Whatever the cause of this inconsistency, its very existence is quite alarming since these beliefs make effective communication between our student teachers and their teacher educators problematic and may be limiting if not detrimental to their professional development and to effectively performing their role as EFL teachers.

This inconsistency and the persistence of their pre-existing perceptions of teaching highlight the importance of making our student teacher beliefs a focus of our teacher education programme. As has been repeatedly pointed out (Almarza 1996, Borg 1999, Calderhead and Robson 1991, Fajet *et al.* 2005, Joram and Gabriele 1998, Peacock 2001), teacher education courses need to target student teacher beliefs since any new input provided will need to "compete with, replace or otherwise modify the folk theories that already guide them" (Bruner 1996: 46). By taking student teacher beliefs into account from the very beginning, teacher education courses could be structured in order

to best align these with the pedagogical practices and knowledge they will need to learn for their subsequent teaching careers; if student teacher beliefs are ignored, teacher education courses will have little chance of effecting change in their perceptions.

Making student teacher beliefs a focus entails firstly making student teachers aware of the existence of these beliefs since they are largely unconsciously held. Thus students need to become aware that they hold intuitive beliefs about teaching and learning formed on the basis of their experiences as learners. Student teachers also need to become aware of the fact that no causal relationship exists between their teachers' past teaching methods and their own learning and that becoming a good teacher is not a matter of simply copying their past teachers. Systematic opportunities must be given to student teachers to articulate their beliefs and for this they need to develop the professional discourse to frame their ideas and rename their experiences. Classroom data collection, focused and guided observation of teachers, open discussions on their opinions/perceptions of teaching practices, reflective and evaluative assignments are some of the techniques that can assist student teachers in examining their beliefs, reflecting on them, rationalising them and detecting possible inconsistencies. Detecting incongruence within one's beliefs and/or limitations of a perception, comparing and evaluating beliefs in the light of alternative ways is an important springboard for belief and general conceptual change.

Teaching practice can also serve as a powerful agent for student teacher belief clarification and change. Well trained and supported mentor teachers can influence, shape and challenge student teachers' practice and beliefs through professional dialogue, feedback, analysis and reflection of the teaching process (Carver and Katz 2004, Farrell 2006, Hascher *et al.* 2004, Hill 2000, Moon 1994). Apart from the essential practical, technical and emotional support that mentors provide to student teachers, their most significant potential contribution lies in assisting student teachers to analyse and critique existing routines and practice, offering and discussing alternatives and reflecting on the theory and rationale underlying instruction. In order to achieve this, mentor teachers should not act as local guides who help novices adapt to the existing context and culture of teaching (Wang 2001), but must exhibit firstly a willingness to reflect on their own experience and to explore their practice with trainees and secondly an understanding that their approach to teaching is not the only one and not necessarily the best one. Mentor teachers' beliefs and practices must also be compatible with ideas and principles promoted by teacher education courses.

The results of this study point to the fact that student teachers' beliefs did not change as a result of the teaching practice experience while beliefs as regards the value of error correction and the role of the teacher as transmitter of knowledge and authority solidified and became more widespread among student teachers. This may well be due to the effect of mentors' practices and beliefs since "the nature of the experience that supervising teachers provide for student teachers will be greatly influenced by what those supervising teachers believe about teaching" (Nettle 1998: 201). In other words, the mentors themselves may have inadvertently contributed to the stability of student teacher beliefs by perpetuating practices which sat comfortably with student teacher's pre-existing beliefs. This is not uncommon since research has indicated that there is an association between certain types of beliefs held by supervising teachers and the direction of change in student teachers' beliefs (see Nettle 1998: 201). If this is indeed the case, then more research is needed in order to understand the practices and beliefs of mentor teachers and how these can influence the perceptions and practices of student teachers. More systematic training for mentors is also needed in areas such as providing constructive and meaningful feedback to trainees, engaging in professional dialogue, in analysis of teaching practices and reflecting on the rationale underlying them.

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