SENDAN: A CASE STUDY[1]

Sendan: Bir vaka çalışması[1]

Gülden İLİN[2]

Abstract

This case study explores an ELT supervisor's constructs on effective supervision. In order to achieve this aim, repertory grid technique, a non-directive elicitation technique which is originally used in clinical psychology was utilised. Having acquired the espoused theories of the supervisor, to find evidence on whether or not and the extent to which, if any, the participant supervisor puts these espoused theories in action, the supervisor's feedback sessions he held with his student-teachers at teaching practice period were recorded. The recorded sessions were later transcribed and subjected to content analysis. The analysis of the transcriptions revealed evidence on the observable similarities and discrepancies between his personal and actual theories regarding the issue under investigation. Next, a follow-up interview based on the supervisor's constructs in his grid was held. The interview had an emergent style and it had a twofold purpose. First, it served to the triangulation and validation of the data obtained by means of repertory grid elicitation technique and the recordings of the feedback sessions. Second, the interview constituted a ground for discussion and a mutual understanding on what meanings the participant attached to his constructs. The findings demonstrate that the supervisor is able to put the majority of his theories into practice while supervising the student-teachers. In terms of the significant themes that stand out in all three data collection tools used for the study, we find out that the supervisor views "reflection" and "self-assessment" as effective tools for teachers' professional development.

Key Words: Espoused theories, theories in action, reflection, professional development.

Özet

Bu vaka çalışması bir Türk üniversitesinde, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi bölümünde görev yapan bir danışmanın okul deneyimi sürecinde aday öğretmenlere verilen danışmanlık hizmetine yönelik algısını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu nedenle, ilk olarak danışman öğretmenin etkin danışmanlığa dair kişisel teorilerine ulaşmak amacıyla kökensel olarak klinik psikolojide veri toplama aracı olarak kullanılan bir sorgu tekniği olan "repertory-grid" den yararlanılmıştır. Bu aracın çalışmada kullanılma nedeni, repertory-grid tekniğinin anket ve yüz yüze görüşmelerde olduğunun aksine yanıtlayan kişiyi sorularla yönlendirmiyor olmasıdır. Danışmanın benimsemiş olduğu kişisel teorilerini bu yöntemle belirledikten sonra, okul uygulaması döneminde bunları ne ölçüde uygulamaya koyup koymadığını görebilmek amacı ile danışmanın uygulama öğrencileri ile yaptığı geri bildirim toplantıları kaydedilmiştir. Bu ses kayıtları daha sonra çözümlenmiş ve içerikleri analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sonuçları genel anlamda danışmanın repertory-grid yöntemi ile ortaya çıkan görüşlerine uygun davranışları bu toplantılarda sergilediğini göstermiştir. Bu teorilerden bazıları ise çeşitli sebeplerle gözlemlenememiştir. Bu bulgulara ulaşıldıktan sonra, katılımcı ile etkin danışmanlık konusundaki görüşlerinden yola çıkan ve toplantı kayıtlarına gönderme yapan bir görüşme yapılmıştır. Bu görüşme iki ayrı amaca hizmet etmek için uygulanmıştır: ilk olarak, araştırmada kullanılan veri toplama araçlarının üçlenmesini sağlayarak bulguların geçerliliğini garantilemek ve ikinci olarak ise tartışmalara zemin hazırlayarak, araştırmacı ile katılımcı arasında sonuçları yorumlamaya katkısı olacak ortak bir anlayışı gerçekleştirmek şeklinde açıklanabilir. Çalışmada ulaşılan sonuçlar, danışmanın kişisel teorilerini uygulamaya koyabildiği, bir danışman olarak kendini etkin bulmakla birlikte değişime ve gelişime açık olduğu, katılımcının düşünce örgüsünde ortaya çıkan ortak belirgin temaların ise mesleki gelişime yol açan etkili araçlar olarak "yansıtıcı düşünce" ve "kendini değerlendirme" olduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Benimsenmiş kişisel teoriler, uygulamaya konulan teoriler, yansıtıcı düşünce, mesleki gelişim

1. Introduction

In a teaching learning context, various opportunities, a suitable environment, adequate encouragement and assistance can all be ensured for the benefit of the parties involved. However, a person's values, strategies and underlying assumptions are determinant factors on the patterns of an individual's behaviour. According to Schön (1987), the only learning which significantly influences behaviour is self-discovered and self-appropriated learning. In addition, an individual's ability to develop theories of what is good to do in new situations and to behave effectively leads to developing professional competence (Agyris and Schön, 1974). Thus, we may suggest that the ultimate learning can be said to be the outcome of the learner's personal attainment. Still, activities leading to awareness on individuals' personal theories (Kelly, 1955 in Gouldian, 1989 p.11) may trigger one's objective self-evaluation and purposeful learning because what we believe to be true (our personal theories) may not be consistent with how we practically behave. Schön (1987) categorises theories as one's espoused theories and theories in use. As he defines, espoused theories of action are those we use to explain or justify our behaviour and can be extrapolated via the hints in way teachers' talk about their own teaching. On the other hand, theories in use or in other words, theories in action, which are not always congruent with espoused theories, are tacit, hard to describe and needs to be discovered. However, these theories underpin practice.

Ecclestone (1996) believes that it is crucial to explore these theories to find out about the implicit and explicit values of people and this can be reached through reflective activities. Awareness on their tacit knowledge thence would be accelerated (in Trowler and Cooper, p. 223). Similarly, Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2004) point out that in such a complex activity as teaching, involving in activities to compare what teachers say about their teaching and what they really do in practice is important. In line with this Kane et al.'s view, Watkins (1998) argues that high quality learning is viewed as "requiring active construction of meaning and the possibility of conceptual change on the part of the learners" (p. 20). In addition, in student-teaching dealing with work that lead to changing conceptions is almost universally acceptable (Devlin 2006). Finally, awareness of personal theories and reflection as a tool for promoting change in teachers can be said to be inseparable components of this process (Taggart and Wilson, (2005).

Postholm (2008) regards reflection as a key activity in teacher development and makes an etymological definition of the word. As he informs, "reflection" comes from Latin (re-flectio), and means to "turn" (re) "back" (flectio). When explored from the perspective of teachers, as he describes, encountering new situations, teachers think of something that is behind them regarding both in time and space. They reflect before they take action on their prior experiences by using their theories, and on how these experiences can be reflected in action and on action, connecting theoretical concepts to their teaching practice. In this way theories can serve as a tool in reflection processes. Contrary to the above discussion, Akbari (2007) argues that there is no evidence to show improved teacher or student performance resulting from reflective techniques and almost no acknowledgement of teachers' personality in such discussions. In addition, he warns that excessive emphasis on reflective practices and teachers' practical knowledge might result in isolation from the language teaching discourse community. However, in another educational context, El-Dib (2007) identifies that prospective EFL teachers have low and low-medium levels of reflection where one does not consider causes of problems or consider only single cause and effect reason for any given problem. Based on these findings, he values the notion of reflection and suggests that prospective teachers engage in reflective thinking while doing action research.

From a parallel perspective, Ross (1989 as cited in Galvez-Martin, 1998) defines reflection as "a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility for those choices" (p.22). As a prominent figure in the scope of reflection, Dewey (1933) views reflection as an outcome of a sequence of some steps. To elaborate, encountering a problematic situation, first, one feels indecisive about the new situation, tries to interpret it going through the probable consequences of actions, explores ways to handle the problems arise, then build a preliminary hypothesis and finally makes a decision on the action to take. According to Hatton and Smith (1995), reflection can be categorised under four headings. These are technical reflection which they characterise by decision making about immediate behaviours or skills, descriptive reflection that is, analysing one's performance in the professional role and giving reasons for actions taken, dialogic reflection based on the observed instances in stimulated recall interviews which is somewhat "hearing one's own voice exploring alternative ways to solve problems in a professional situation" and lastly, critical reflection, as thinking about the effects upon others of one's actions, taking account of social, political and/or cultural forces" (p. 45).

The discussions above draw our attention to three interrelated themes. The first is the significance of creating awareness on one's espoused theories and theories in use. The second theme "reflection" appears to be an effective tool to achieve this goal. Finally, the connection between awareness raising and reflective practice is considered. In the same vein, in this case study, we explore a university supervisor's espoused theories and look for probable congruence with his theories in use. We focus on examples of reflective practices during his supervision sessions, and come to a certain understanding of how the participant supervisor relates reflection to professional development.

2. The study

This paper emerges from a previously conducted doctoral study in which Sendan acted as both a participant and co-advisor (Ilin, 2005). Among the concerns of the study was to elicit the participating ELT supervisors' constructs on effective supervision and to find out whether or not and the extent to which, if any, these supervisors put their espoused theories in action. To attain this goal, seven supervisors, including Sendan, from the ELT department of a Turkish university participated in the study. Their personal theories regarding effective supervision were elicited by means of repertory grids, a bipolar tool originally used in clinical psychology. Having acquired the supervisors' constructs, their feedback sessions were recorded to detect evidence on the probable observable similarities and discrepancies between their personal and actual theories regarding the issue under investigation. In addition, follow-up interviews served to the triangulation and validation of the data obtained. This paper focuses on one of the participating supervisors' espoused theories and theories in action as a case: Fehmi Can Sendan's.

The following constitute the research questions for the study:

1. How does the participating university supervisor conceptualise an effective university supervisor?

2. Do the supervisor's theories in action cohere with his espoused theories?

3. Findings

After the elicitation of the supervisor's constructs by means of rep-grid technique, the data were computed and structural and hierarchical formation of Sendan's constructs on an effective supervisor were reached. As displayed below, the supervisor's grid data consists of 16 constructs and 11 elements. The FOCUSed grid reveals the construct and element trees drawn at 80% cut off point.

Figure 1 Supervisor's Focused Grid
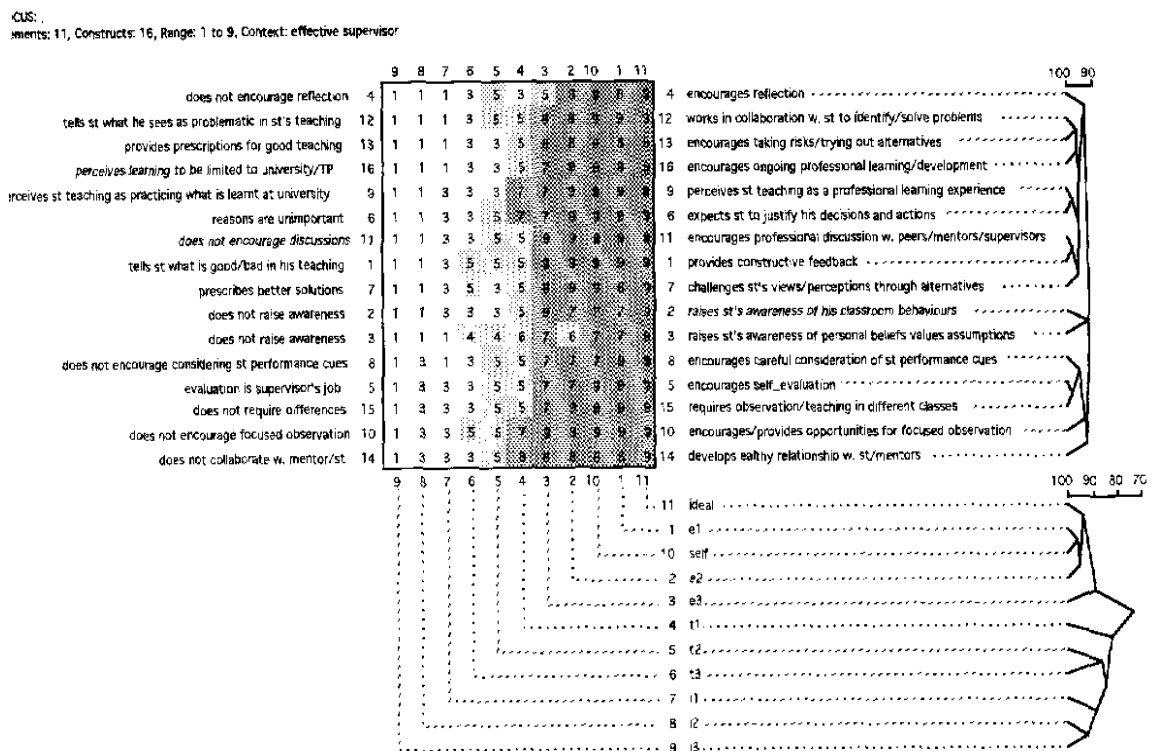
In the focus analysis of the grid, there appears to be two main clusters and one pair. In the first cluster, we see that construct 16 (C16) *encourages ongoing professional learning and development* the highest priority construct in the rank order, (C13), *encourages taking risks and trying out alternatives,* (C12) *works in collaboration with student- teachers to identify and solve the problems, and* finally (C 4) the second highest priority construct, *encourages reflection* highly associate at 98 % match level. When we go into more detail regarding this finding, we see that the supervisor is highly certain about his views. However, with the remaining % 2 from %98 match level, he also leaves some room for change and development. Concerning the organisation of the constructs, we can infer that the supervisor teacher holds the belief that a supervisor who encourages ongoing professional learning and development also encourages the student- teachers to take risks and try out alternatives. These qualities, in his opinion, lead to professional

development. In addition, a supervisor bearing the above qualities works in collaboration with the student- teachers to identify and solve the problems they may face, and thus, *encourages reflection* (C4). In fact, this construct, (C4) appears to be the super-ordinate construct and is associated with (C16), (C13), and (C12) at 92% match level. The interview account in the following excerpt demonstrates the extent the supervisor puts emphasis on reflection:

Excerpt 1: In fact, in the evaluation criteria given to the supervisors by the department "reflection" is not mentioned. However, I emphasise that reflection for me has an utmost importance in the evaluation of their performances. The student-teachers who think about their practices, decisions, and actions in the class and come to me to discuss about these issues, gets higher grades. I tell this to them.

In the interview, the supervisor also discusses that reflection and assessment are two different things. As he puts it, student-teachers do not like to talk about their weaknesses but if you convince them about the benefits of such self-criticism and assessment, they may feel themselves more relaxed and ready to share both weaknesses and the strengths of their performances.

In his grid, we see two other tightly matched constructs. Construct 9, that is, *perceives student teaching as a professional learning experience* associate with (C6) *expects student-teachers to justify their decisions and actions* at 98% match level. These two constructs also coincide with the super- ordinate construct *encourages reflection* (C4) at 98% match level. Actually, the supervisor ranks this construct as the second highest priority. This, once again implies that the supervisor supposes that an effective supervisor encourages "reflection", an umbrella term he uses to encompass the other qualities as well. In other words, according to Sendan, if you encourage reflection, student- teachers will reach a level of conception to become able to justify their decisions and consequent actions.

Construct 11, namely, *encourages professional discussions and actions with peers, mentors and supervisors* and the fourth of the five high priority constructs of the grid, (C1) *provides constructive feedback* highly associate at 98% match level. Moreover, (C7) *challenges student- teachers' views and perceptions through alternatives* are linked with these two above mentioned constructs at 92% match level. All these constructs cohere with the super-ordinate construct (C4) *encourages reflection* at 92% match level. Regarding construct 11, when we voice our participant we come up with the following comment:

Excerpt 2: Sometimes, the student-teachers experience dilemmas. For example, a mentor may ask student-teachers to behave in a certain way while s/he may be doing just the opposite her/himself. Or what a mentor favours may not correspond to the supervisor's views. In such instances, I advise my students to discuss the issue not only with the mentors and supervisors but also with their peers. They may not approve of the way their mentors teach. In such instances, I remind them that teaching practice is a period of exchange of knowledge. All their experiences, good or bad will, somehow, lead to professional development.

On the other hand, the supervisor complains about the time constraint as preventing him from providing feedback in the way he actually wishes to do:

Excerpt 3: In fact, if you hold the feedback sessions in groups, then your students benefit more. All students listen to one another's feedback and learn something more. Such a session will lead them to more critical thinking and discussion. However, gathering all your students in your office at the same minute may be problematic. If you do this during the breaks, the time is too short. Not all of them may wish to spend their break in their friend's feedback session. On the other hand, as a teacher, you may be rushing from one class to another and may not be feeling very keen to do this in your break. I mean, everything is dependent on adequate time and this is what we do not have.

When we explore the second cluster, we encounter tightly matched constructs and the supervisor's disposition for professional development again. To elaborate on the issue, the constructs are tightly matched, signalling that the supervisor has already reached a particular certainty in his mind regarding the qualities of an effective supervisor. On the other hand, incompatibilities observed among the construct matches imply his openness for change and development. Construct 2, namely, *raises student- teachers' awareness of their classroom behaviours* and the third highest priority construct in the rank order, (C3) *raises student- teachers' awareness of their personal beliefs, values and assumptions* match at 90% level. Consequently, we may assume that the supervisor thinks that only if student- teachers come to a real understanding of their own beliefs, values and assumptions, will their classroom performances improve. Regarding these constructs, Sendan gives the following explanation:

Excerpt 4: I ask my students questions about what they did in their sessions. I do not tell them they were good or bad, but ask them to talk about the classroom events. I ask them whether or not something unexpected happened during their sessions, how they dealt with them. I ask them about the rationale behind their choices, their aims. If you let them talk about their experiences, you can elicit their beliefs, values, and assumptions. In addition, you lead your students to reflection on their experiences as teachers.

In the third and the final cluster, *encourages careful consideration of student- teachers' performance cues* (C8), *encourages self-evaluation* (C5), and *requires observation and teaching in different classes* (C15) associate at 95% match level. Concerning this cluster, for (C8) and (C5), the supervisor's effort show itself in the above extract albeit he does not appear to be satisfied by the way he observes the prospective teachers (C15). He rationalises his view in the following:

Excerpt 5: In fact, we should be able to spend more time with our student-teachers. I personally want to observe my students in different classes. This year, I was not able to manage this because we can only observe students on Thursdays and Fridays. Unfortunately, I had classes at school on Thursdays and I only had Fridays left for observations. Timetable and workload should be arranged taking this problem into consideration.

Although *encourages and provides opportunities for focused observation* (C10), and *develops healthy relationships with student- teachers and mentors* (C14) look separated from (C8), (C5), and (C15), in fact, all of them associate with one another at 92 % match level. We may speculate that although Sendan believes that an effective supervisor should maintain good relationships with both the student- teachers and the mentors, he cannot associate this particular construct with any of the other constructs. In fact, the supervisor points out the importance of such a relationship between the supervisors, mentors, and even the headmasters of the school. However, he points out the need for more interaction and cooperation among the mentioned parties:

Excerpt 6: The mentors, supervisors, school principal and student-teachers should work in collaboration during the practicum. Unfortunately, in some cases, this may not be possible. When it is the case, it is inevitable to face problems. The organisation of practicum needs a more careful consideration.

Element Links

In the analysis of the main study, we also acquired results on how the participating supervisors' elements were organised which reveal how they viewed and evaluated both themselves and other supervisor teachers they imagined during the repertory-grid elicitation process. When we investigate Sendan's element clusters, we encounter a clear-cut pattern. That is, each group of Sendan's elements (effective, typical and ineffective supervisors from his personal background) forms a separate cluster. This indicates that he has firmly conceptualised the qualities of each group of supervisors in a certain way in his mind. When we look at the components of the first cluster, we find that Ideal, Effective 1, Effective 2, and current Self associate at 93% match level. Within this cluster, Self and E1 are linked with each other more closely (96%) than E2 and ideal (92%) demonstrating that the supervisor has a sense of self- confidence and places himself close to effective supervisors while still showing openness for professional development. Effective 3 and Typical 1 form a second cluster at 78% match level. This finding may imply that in spite of the supervisor's belief that T1 acts as a typical supervisor, he also appraises T1 as an efficient supervisor by some means. According to his evaluation, Typical 2 and Typical 3 falls into the same category and clearly places together with inefficient supervisors, I1, I2, and I3 in the last cluster. These elements associate at 88% match level which means that Sendan has a less clear definition in his mind about the properties of an ineffective supervisor as compared to the effective ones.

Constructs concretely observed during the study

Whether the supervisor's theories in action cohere with his espoused theories constitutes the second concern of this paper. The table below displays the supervisor's constructs that were concretely observed during the feedback sessions.

Table 1 Supervisor's concretely observed constructs

Total/16no	Concretely Observable Constructs	Rank order
1	Provides constructive feedback	4th
2	Raises st's awareness of his classroom behaviours	-
4	Encourages reflection	2nd
5	Encourages self-evaluation	5th
6	Expects st to justify his decisions and actions	-
7	Challenges st's views through alternatives	-
10	Provides opportunities for focused observation	-
12	Works in collaboration with st to identify/solve problems	-
13	Encourages taking risks/trying out alternatives	-

Sendan had totally 16 constructs in his grid, nine of which were concretely observed during the feedback sessions and the classroom observations. Naturally, not all the

constructs he included in the grid were observable, nor might he need to use all his effective supervisory strategies in all the specific contacts observed with his student-teachers. For example, *perceives student teaching as a professional learning experience* (C9) is hard to observe. However, the way the supervisor felt about these constructs was discussed in the interview and related accounts were given in the excerpts 1, 3 and 4. On the other hand, *encourages professional discussion with peers, mentors and supervisors* (C11) is another construct that could not be observed since the participating supervisors' contacts with the above- mentioned people was not within the limits of this study. Although the above-mentioned possibilities may lead us to consider some of the constructs as not concretely observable, it is worthwhile making a summary of the observed constructs.

The recordings of Sendan's feedback sessions reveal a parallel path between his espoused theories and his theories in action. Consistent with his theories, we observe that while supervising student-teachers during the feedback sessions, he adopts a style that serves to students' implicit learning, rather than deliberative teaching methods. According to Reber's (1993) definition, implicit learning is the acquisition of knowledge independent of conscious attempts to learn and in the absence of explicit knowledge about what was learned, in brief, there is no intention to learn and no awareness of learning at the time it takes place (in Eraut, 2000). The supervisor tries to achieve this utilising a variety of reflection types during his sessions with the student-teachers (Hatton and Smith (1995).

The quote below demonstrates how the supervisor leads the student-teacher to descriptive reflection to analyse her performance and giving reasons for actions she took during her practice teaching session.

Excerpt 7: A student wanted to ask you a question and you immediately approached this student and listened to her question. Do you think others heard the question and answer? How do you guarantee this? What if, for example, some more students who wanted to ask the same thing but cannot dare to?

One of his other observed constructs bears the fifth highest priority in Sendan's grid, *encourages self-evaluation.* To go in detail, he benefits from dialogic reflection based on the observed instances at the practice school, providing the prospective teacher with a ground to explore alternative ways to solve problems in a professional situation. In the following extract, we can recognise his intention:

Excerpt 8: How do you evaluate yourself during this session? What were your weaknesses and strengths? What other ways could you have used to deal with some of the problematic classroom incidents? First, you criticise yourself, I want to listen to this. Then, we will discuss with your friends. I will talk about my observation notes after listening to your criticisms.

The analysis of the recordings of his feedback sessions also exhibits instances when he directs the student-teacher to technical reflection making decisions about her immediate behaviours. According to Sendan, an effective supervisor expects student-teachers to justify their decisions and actions. Although expectation is not an observable concept, in this exchange of interaction, the supervisor's belief is detected in the question he poses.

Excerpt 9: When the students did not understand the meaning of "determine" first you tried to explain it in English but suddenly, you gave the Turkish equivalent. Why did you do it like that? What made you change your mind, can you explain us?

Beside these, we encounter situations when the supervisor provides student-teachers with alternatives to do things (dialogic reflection), and opportunities for focused observation, works in collaboration with student-teachers to identify and solve problems. Finally, as displayed in the excerpt he encourages taking risks and trying out alternatives.

Excerpt 10: Do not worry. If you do not take any risks, you cannot know the answer. Of course you will make mistakes, everybody does. We learn this way, don't we?

In addition, what we see in this excerpt is that the supervisor supports the student-teacher to try out ideas and encourages taking risks. In a similar vein, Bell (2001) proposes that the effectiveness of supportive reflective practice process shows itself in the improvements in the teachers' practice, adds to their confidence and leads to congruence in their espoused theories and theories-in-use as well as their on-going professional development and development of collegiality.

Looking at the above quotations from his sessions, we observe that Sendan's espoused theories manifest themselves in the way he puts them in action.

4. Conclusion

In this study, we elicited a university supervisor's constructs on effective supervision by means of repertory grid technique in an ELT context. Having acquired the constructs, traces of these constructs in the participant supervisor's feedback sessions were sought after in order to determine whether or not the supervisor puts his espoused theories in action during supervision. In the supervisor's grid, we find that Sendan has totally 16 constructs on the qualities of an effective supervisor. These constructs are mainly related with professional development, leading the student-teachers to reflection and creating awareness on their personal theories. The findings reached reveal that all of Sendan's constructs associate above 90% match level showing that he has a clear understanding of the qualities that make a supervisor effective. On the other hand, with a deeper look at the match levels, we also see that he leaves some room for himself for more professional development. In addition, Sendan ranks five constructs as bearing the highest priority in his grid. While four out of these five constructs can concretely be observed during the study, one of them, the highest priority construct, cannot be observed. This may be because this construct remains as an espoused theory that Sendan does not apply or at the time of the study, during the feedback sessions he did not feel the need to utilise this theory. As another assumption, we may suggest that it was not possible to catch such an impression. Regarding the elements Sendan thought of while filling his grid, we can easily say that he has a clear cut pattern in his mind. In other words, each group of elements, that is, effective, typical and ineffective supervisors from his personal background are placed in a separate cluster. Finally, in terms of his self-evaluation, we find that he has self -esteem as a supervisor. He places himself with the ideal teacher, Effective 1 and Effective 2.

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