

Watching Teacher Candidates Watch Themselves: Reflections on a Practicum Program in Turkey

Observación de candidatos a profesores que se observan a sí
mismos:
reflexiones sobre un programa de práctica docente en Turquía

Sumru Akcan

Bogazici University, Turkey

akcans@boun.edu.tr

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This article presents the findings of a study that investigates pre-service English teachers' reflections on their teaching performance after watching their videotaped lessons in company with their university supervisor. This study, conducted during the spring semester practicum program in the 2007-2008 academic year, examines how the teacher candidates felt about their teaching while watching a video of a real lesson taught in a classroom. The findings of this study suggest that after the teacher candidates watched their own teaching with the supervisor, they made specific comments about teacher talk and about students' participation and interest in the lesson. The findings also show that the use of video recording in the practicum program provided opportunities for reflection and helped teacher candidates evaluate their performance more critically.

Key words: Non-native speaker pre-service English teachers, practicum, reflective teaching, videobased reflection sessions

Este artículo presenta los hallazgos de un estudio que investiga las reflexiones de futuros profesores de inglés respecto a su desempeño docente después de haber visto con su asesor de practica de la universidad las grabaciones de sus propias clases. Este estudio, realizado durante la práctica semestral de primavera en el periodo académico 2007-2008, examina como se sintieron los practicantes respecto a su forma de enseñar cuando veían un video de una clase dictada en un salón de clase real. Los hallazgos del estudio sugieren que después de que los practicantes o futuros docentes observaron en compañía de su supervisor su forma de enseñar, hicieron comentarios relacionados especialmente con la forma de hablar de los profesores y con la participación e interés de los estudiantes en la clase. Los hallazgos también muestran que la grabación en video en el programa de practica docente generó oportunidades para reflexionar y ayudo a los practicantes a evaluar su desempeño de una forma mas critica.

Palabras clave: profesores de inglés no nativos en formación, práctica docente, enseñanza reflexiva, sesiones de reflexión basadas en videos

Introduction

Reflection on one's teaching should be encouraged from the beginning of the "learning to teach" process in order to help teacher candidates to become reflective practitioners. Reflective teaching helps teachers become more confident in their actions and decisions and enables them to make more informed decisions about their teaching practice. Reflective teaching helps teachers to reflect critically on their work and to develop strategies for change (Farrell, 2007; Lee, 2007). "The reflective practice movement involves a recognition that teachers should be active in formulating the purposes and ends of their work" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 5). As Zeichner and Liston indicate, a reflective teacher makes the effort to solve the challenges of classroom instruction and takes responsibility for his or her own professional development.

Historically, John Dewey provides the foundation for understanding reflective teaching. According to Dewey (1933), reflective action involves active, consistent and careful consideration of any practice or belief. For instance, the issue on which the teacher reflects must take place in a social context where teaching occurs. The issue should come from a teacher's own practice and his/her ideas need to be confirmed through the practice of teaching. Once ideas about teaching are tested through practice, this should lead to an action. Dewey views reflection as a holistic way of responding to problems. It involves more than rational problem-solving processes; reflective action also involves intuition, emotion, and passion (Zeichner & Liston, 1996; Barlett, 1997). Schön (1983) expanded the meaning of reflective practice and showed how reflection can operate in a daily teaching practice. According to Schön (1983; 1987), "reflection-on-action" can occur before and after any teaching situation. Reflection-on-action may occur before a lesson when teachers plan their lesson and also after instruction when they think about what happened during their lessons. Schön indicates that reflection can also occur during classroom instruction, or "reflection-in-action". Practitioners might be in a situation in which they need to identify and find solutions to the problems that occur at that moment. Teachers might adjust instruction based on the students' reactions while they are teaching. Farrell (2007) also points out the third type of reflection, "reflection-for-action", in which teachers think about their future approaches. Farrell states that reflection-for-action is the outcome of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, since teachers can prepare for future professional action by using actual classroom experiences and their reflections after they have finished a lesson.

Reflection-on-action might be seen as a kind of metacognitive action, while reflection-in-action is the ability to identify problems based on previous experiences. Experienced teachers can use their background knowledge of various teaching strategies in order to solve problems that might appear on the spot, but novice teachers may have difficulty reflecting-in-action because they do not have such a developed repertoire of teaching routines (Schön, 1987; Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Schön (1983) thinks that the process of understanding and improving one's own teaching depends on reflection on one's own experience. Schön has been criticized for his lack of emphasis on the interactional dimension of teacher learning. Although he emphasizes the reflective conversations that teachers have about the conditions under which they teach, Schön does not discuss how teachers and other practitioners can reflect together on their work (Day, 1993). Day criticizes Schön's notion of reflective practice saying that reflection needs to be analytic and involve dialogue with others. Solomon (1987) also stresses the idea of reflection as a social practice and argues that without discussion of ideas, teacher development will be inhibited. Ideas become more real and comprehensible when we can speak about them with others.

Opportunities for Reflection

There are different ways of reflecting on one's beliefs about classroom practices, interaction, classroom communication patterns, and language proficiency. These can be explored by the use of journal writing, classroom observations, group discussions, or video recording of a teaching performance. For instance, Lee (2007) conducted a study with pre-service language teachers to show the effect of dialogue and response journals. Data were collected from journal entries and interviews. The findings showed that dialogue and response journals provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in reflective thinking; thus, all of the student teachers found the experience of journal writing useful. Garmon (2001) also noted that the pre-service teachers gave importance to the advice and suggestions from the teacher mentor. The teacher candidates who used a dialogue journal appreciated and valued the opportunities to communicate with the teacher mentor regularly during the journal writing process.

According to some teachers, the need to share their reflective discourse with peers can be met by the use of electronic communications, such as blogs (Ray & Hocutt, 2006). Ray & Coulter (2008) examined 21 language arts blogs created by inservice language arts teachers to find randomly selected entries within the blogs which showed reflection on teaching practice. Results indicated that all teachers in the study used blogs as reflective journals in which they could write and reflect on the events taking place in their classrooms. In support of Ray and Coulter's study, Richardson (2006) indicated that electronic environments can facilitate thinking and collaboration for reflection and decision-making. The use of blogs may provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to discuss their concerns with peers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors.

The opportunity to use video-based technology has also been considered to be useful for student teachers to reflect on their own teaching performance. According to LeFevre (2004) and Perry & Talley (2001), there are numerous benefits of using video in a teaching context. For instance, a video may provide a natural source for increasing the sense of context and realism. It can help student teachers to see the dynamics of classroom interaction and allow teacher candidates to replay events that are not noticed on first viewing. Dymond & Bentz (2006) and Robinson & Kelley (2007) think that videos taken during teaching performance are trustworthy data for student teachers to engage in post-lesson reflection that is based on the actual records. Student teachers may improve the levels of reflective thoughts about their teaching after they watch video recordings of their lessons.

Many of these methods of reflective practice can be used alone or they can be used in combination (Farrell, 2007). Farrell adds that teachers should be willing to give a time period for reflection. During the reflection period, the external input can come from different sources such as peer observations and journals kept by teachers. Teachers can also attend conferences or seminars and report their findings to other teachers. For peer or group discussions on a teaching practice, a nonthreatening environment should be encouraged. Building up trust and empathy is essential if peers are observing each other.

As an external input for the reflection period, a video recording can be replayed and examined several times and can reveal many details of a lesson, such as details of the language used by teachers and learners. Recording a lesson might provide a choice of focus, such as focus on the teacher or on a particular group of students (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). According to Schratz (1992), audio-visual recordings are powerful tools in the development of a teacher's self-reflective competence.

Schatz expresses this power by saying: "They confront him or her with a mirrorlike 'objective' view of what goes on in class" (p. 89).

In this study, the researcher (also the supervisor in the study) aims to explore the use of videotaping as a tool for reflection and to show how videotaped lessons of teacher candidates encourage reflection. The two research questions of this study are these: (1) What are the teacher candidates' opinions about their teaching performance after they watch themselves in company with the university supervisor? and (2) What are teacher candidates' attitudes towards watching themselves on the video?

Methodology

Research Context: Language Teacher Education Program

Coordinators of the practice teaching program in this particular ELT department placed each fourth-year teacher candidate with three cooperating teachers teaching at three different grade levels in both state and private primary and secondary schools in Istanbul. Four university supervisors were also in charge of the supervision of the teacher candidates. The ages of the 27 (21 Female, 6 Male) senior-year teacher candidates who participated in the study ranged from 21 to 24.

In this particular language teacher education program, teacher candidates take courses in the areas of English language, linguistics, literature, methods and skills courses for teaching a foreign language (English). At the end of the program, they are expected to become qualified teachers of English in primary schools, secondary schools, and higher education institutions in Turkey. Teacher candidates take their school experience course (practice teaching) during the seventh and eighth semesters of the program. For the duration of the two academic semesters of the fourth year of the undergraduate program, the student teachers visit the schools regularly and observe the classes of their three cooperating teachers. In total they observe 45 hours of class and teach six 40-minute lessons in three different grades both at the primary and secondary levels. The teacher candidates are also asked to videotape one of their 40-minute lessons. The supervisor provides the equipment for the recording and peers help to record the lesson. The teacher candidates also do micro-lessons (10-15 minutes of teaching) and peer observations and discuss their experiences with their peers and university supervisors. At the end of the practicum program the teacher candidates submit to the university supervisor a portfolio which includes their lesson plans, selfevaluations, peer evaluations, journal entries about their observations, reaction papers to the articles read in the practice teaching seminar course, and the certificates of the conferences or seminars they attended during the practicum.

The university supervisors work regularly with teacher candidates during the fourth year of the program. Besides observing the teacher candidates in the classroom, the university supervisors interact constantly with the teacher candidates about their teaching experience, providing oral and written feedback after each teaching performance, helping the teacher candidates develop lesson plans, grading the teacher candidates' performance based on a pre-established teacher performance rubric used in the program, analyzing the portfolios teacher candidates submit at the end of the teaching practice, and conducting seminars for school experience courses. Cooperating teachers also work closely with the teacher candidates they supervise during the teaching practice, most importantly providing feedback about

their teaching performance. The cooperating teachers are appointed by their school administrators, who select from teachers with 4 to 10 years' experience.

Data Collection

The data were collected in the spring semester of the 2007-2008 academic year in a language teacher education program of a well-established research university in Istanbul, Turkey. The teacher candidates were senior students who were doing their practicum at various primary and secondary schools in Istanbul.

Twenty-seven pre-service English teachers and a university supervisor participated in the study. Data collection instruments included (a) videotaped samples of the teacher candidates' teaching performance in real classrooms, (b) lesson plans, (c) records of retrospective feedback sessions based on video-based reflection sessions, (d) interviews conducted at the end of reflection sessions to get candidates' opinions about how they felt while watching themselves, and (e) self-evaluation journals kept by teacher candidates during the practicum.

In the video-based feedback sessions, a teacher candidate and university supervisor first watch the 40-minute lesson together in the supervisor's office. Since the supervisor is not present in the actual classroom while the candidate is teaching, the supervisor asks the teacher candidate to bring a copy of the lesson plan (See [Appendix 1](#) for a sample lesson plan prepared by a teacher candidate). Before watching the lesson together, the supervisor examines the lesson plan briefly and asks about the profile of the class, such as the number of students, age of the students, and their language proficiency level. The objectives of the lesson are also presented in the lesson plan so that the supervisor has some background knowledge about the lesson before viewing the tape. Then the candidate and the supervisor start to watch the lesson. Both during and after the video, the supervisor asks the teacher candidate some questions about the nature of activities, the choice of materials for that particular group of students, and the rationale for teaching the strategies used by the candidate. While watching the video, the teacher candidate also reflects on her/his teaching performance by making comments that she/he notices while watching the lesson. After watching the whole lesson, the supervisor makes comments on the lesson and makes some suggestions intended to improve the quality of instruction. At the end of the feedback session, the supervisor asks the teacher candidate to write a self-evaluation journal about the video-taped teaching experience and about the experience of watching the video.

Data Analysis

To investigate the opinions and attitudes of teacher candidates as regards watching themselves on video, a qualitative approach was employed. Qualitative data were coded and categorised by using the constant comparison method based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The post-lesson videotaped feedback sessions and interviews conducted at the end of the feedback sessions were transcribed and analyzed by the researcher/supervisor in order to find the most common emerging patterns. The transcriptions of videotaped feedback sessions and interviews were read and reviewed by the researcher several times for accuracy. The lesson plans were also analyzed in order to understand the content and focus of the lesson. At the end of the triangulation of the data, which come from the video-based reflection sessions, retrospective interviews, and journals, recurring categories (i.e. teacher talk, maintaining students' attention and interest in the lesson) emerged in two themes for reflection sessions, to wit: (1) "reflections on the videotaped lesson" and (2) "reactions about the use of videotaping". The

emerging categories are explained in detail within the themes of reflections on the videotaped lesson and reactions towards the use of videotaping in the next section

Findings

The findings of this study show that watching videotapes of their own teaching helped the teacher candidates notice particularly strong and weak points in their teaching, their use of the target language (English), and the students' involvement and interest in the lesson. The videobased reflection sessions consisted of participating with the university supervisor in a dialogue that required thinking about aspects of the lesson and teachers' teaching practice, reflecting on these, and exploring possible ways of improving the lesson.

Reflection-on-action: Teacher candidates' opinions on their videotaped teaching performance

While watching the teaching performance with the university supervisor, the teacher candidates made comments particularly focused on teacher talk, on maintaining students' attention, and on increasing students' interest and communication.

While watching themselves, the teacher candidates noticed immediately how they looked in front of the class i.e., whether they were nervous or confident. They reported that they had not been really aware of how they looked since they needed to concentrate on the flow of the activities while teaching. The teacher candidates also made comments about their gestures and the tone of their voice. Some of the comments they made are presented below:

Watching yourself is something really different, um, you see yourself as a separate person from you. You realize that sometimes you behaved very differently from what you thought... um, I always thought that I was very confident... I was not stressed; um, while watching the video, I saw that if I did not think in the same way, it could be understood I was very stressed. (Reflection Session)

Um, it was a bit irritating to watch myself and see that it was totally different from what I had visualized in my mind: a strange tone of voice, incomplete bodily movements and no clear facial gestures... um, it was quite different from what I had in my mind... I could have used my voice more effectively. Voice is the most important factor that affects students' thoughts about the lesson in general. Um, as a teacher, I need to improve the way I control my voice; it should be audible enough so that every student in the classroom can hear what I am talking about. When I was asking questions to the whole class, I could have raised my voice and got their attention. I should improve my use of gestures and especially my voice, because these two factors will contribute to my teaching. (Retrospective Interview)

When I watched the video record of my practice teaching, I realized that I made mistakes which I couldn't realize during the lesson. The videotape helped me to think about my English. I had never had the chance before to listen to myself while speaking in English but the record helped me recognize that I made some pronunciation and grammar mistakes. (Journal)

Video-based reflection sessions increased the teacher candidates' awareness of their use of English during classroom instruction. Teacher candidates noticed their grammatical and pronunciation mistakes while watching their videotaped lessons and worked on correcting those mistakes with the university supervisor.

'Watching oneself teaching' increased awareness of a teacher candidate's own teaching practice

Reflection sessions based on videotaped lessons and the interviews conducted at the end of these sessions show that watching their taped lessons made teacher candidates more aware of how they teach in actual classrooms during the practicum. The teacher candidates answered the question, "How useful is it to watch yourself teaching?" with such statements as this:

Um, when I watched my lesson, I could evaluate myself... My awareness towards my teaching increased... I was a little bit quick while passing from one activity to another... um, videotaping gave me the chance of revising my way of teaching critically and noticing the parts that need improvement. Now I know which parts of my lesson need improvement, and if I do it once again I would make necessary changes. (Retrospective Interview)

The teacher candidate and supervisor analyzed the nature of the activities and how those activities went during classroom instruction. The candidates reflected on how they would teach differently or more effectively if they taught the same lesson again. The teacher candidates also realized what went well and what they needed to do in order to improve the instruction. During and after video watching the candidate and supervisor discussed the actions the candidate would need to take to achieve a better performance. The supervisor made her comments while watching the video and suggested ways to improve teaching. For instance, time management and tactics to increase students' use of English might be discussed in reflection sessions. The quotations below show how teacher candidates expressed their feelings toward their own teaching performance:

Because of time limitations I had covered the lesson more rapidly than I had planned and as a result of this situation the lesson seemed too activity-oriented rather than communication-oriented... I could have skipped one of the activities and completed the rest of the activities in a more communicative way. (Reflection Session)

While they (students) were answering the questions, there was a great silence in the classroom- um, a silence not ordinary for a language classroom. I gave them 10 minutes to read the text and answer the questions; during the lesson I thought that it was normal; but while I was watching the video I saw that silence period was too long. Besides, I realized that I was so quiet during the lesson; it would have been better if I had been more active and energetic. (Reflection Session)

My students were too shy and introverted and as their level of English wasn't sophisticated enough, they didn't want to speak and join the discussions. But I could have changed the situation by asking more questions, giving prompts, eliciting responses from them. Um, I was too nervous especially at the beginning of the class, I didn't think of doing any of these... As they didn't speak, I had to rush between the activities running from one to another quickly so the class wasn't as natural as it should have been. (Reflection Session)

The candidate shared what she/he thought and how she/he performed in the class. If the lesson plan did not work, the candidate tried to explain what had caused the lesson to go astray. The candidates could understand the reasons behind their actions better by watching themselves and thinking about their teaching performance.

'Watching oneself teaching' helped candidates notice students' behaviors and participation in the class

By watching the video the candidates became more attentive to how students behave and respond to the lesson. The teacher candidates reported that while teaching the lesson, they were not really aware of how students were doing during the instruction, what their participation patterns were and how they responded to the lesson. The candidates were too occupied by completing the activities they had prepared and by the need to follow their lesson plans step by step. The teacher candidates enjoyed watching students' behaviors that they had not noticed while teaching. In the reflection sessions, the supervisor made comments by pointing out the students' behaviors and responses in the lesson. For example, some students were silent and some of them spoke Turkish most of the time during group work. The teacher candidates, both in their reflection sessions and journals about their students' responses and behaviors, offered such statements as these:

Another issue that I have realized with the help of my supervisor's comments is that mostly I allowed male students to talk. It may be because of that their numbers are more than the girls and also they were more willing to speak. But if I had the lesson again, I would encourage the girls to speak more. Maybe I could have tried harder to involve them. Through the recording I also had the chance to see the students who danced during the song I played. I saw how much students enjoyed the song. (Journal) Um, during the lesson I did not realize that they were speaking in their mother tongue that much while working in groups. Of course, I was aware of that some of them were speaking in L1, but when I watched the video, actually there were also some other students who used Turkish while speaking to their friends. (Reflection Session)

'Watching oneself teaching' gave teacher candidates the chance to evaluate themselves more critically as an "outsider"

The teacher candidates were highly engaged and interested in watching their lessons on the video with the supervisor. The candidates reported that they analyzed their lessons more critically and tried to understand the reasons behind their actions. The teacher candidates were excited to watch their videotaped lessons since they could see the positive and weak sides of their teaching.

Watching the taped lesson helped the teacher candidates see what went well or what did not go well during the lesson. Both in interviews after the video-based reflection sessions and in the journals they kept during the practicum, the teacher candidates used the term "outsider" to describe their perspective while watching themselves. The majority of the candidates reported that videotaping made the reflection process more objective and critical for them. They could see their mistakes more clearly and therefore work toward improvement. Teacher candidates expressed their feelings regarding the watching of their own performance on the video in positive terms as follows:

Watching my own performance on the video really helped me since it gave me the chance to critique myself as an outsider. (Retrospective Interview)

What is different and special about videotaping is that you have the chance of watching yourself again and again which will give you useful ideas and help you look from the perspective of others that observe you. (Retrospective Interview)

Teacher candidates reported that they benefited a great deal from watching their videotaped lesson with the supervisor. They thought that they might become more

objective in future evaluations of their performance since they see themselves as an "outsider, another person" when they watch the tape. The teacher candidates became observers of their own lessons rather than the mere teachers of the lessons, and evaluated themselves as an outsider would, one who was watching a lesson for the purpose of improving the instruction.

Discussion and Conclusion

Videotaping can be used as a tool to increase opportunities for reflection in teacher education programs. The teacher candidates watch themselves and reflect on their own teaching performance in company with a university supervisor. Reflection through video watching can create an environment in which both the teacher candidate and the supervisor listen to each other and reflect on the lesson in order to improve instruction and add to the candidate's professional development.

This study suggested that videotaping can play a significant role in making teacher candidates aware of their strengths and weaknesses, in helping candidates notice students' behaviors and responses (which may not have been noticed during the lesson because of the candidate's nervousness or anxiety), in analysing students' use of the target language, and in helping them to notice details of their own 'teacher talk'. The main purpose in video-based reflection sessions is to create an opportunity for a teacher candidate to understand the way he/she teaches and improve teaching through reflection.

The video-based reflection sessions also provide an interactional dimension to teacher learning in which the supervisor and the teacher candidate listen to each other, make comments, and discuss issues raised in the lesson. In this particular language teacher education program, different ways of reflection are used as "external input" (Farrell, 2007) to enrich reflection opportunities for teacher candidates. The teacher candidates are expected to engage in reflection from the beginning of the practicum program by incorporating practices and tools such as observation, journals, micro- and macro-teaching, and retrospective feedback sessions with university supervisors. These sources of external input for reflective practice can help teacher candidates deepen their reflections and be more critical about how they teach. Using various tools for self-reflection enhances opportunities for self-inquiry and teacher candidates can collect extensive data about their own teaching performance in order to understand the way they teach.

In this particular teacher education program, video-based reflection sessions were used to provide opportunities for pre-service language teachers to understand the dynamics of how they think and act as they learn to teach. Providing teacher candidates equipment (video camera, tripod) for recording is useful and enhances the quality of recording. Peers might help out by recording the lesson as long as they are as unobtrusive as possible, recording the lesson from the back of the classroom, for example, so as not to disrupt the flow of the lesson. For ethical concerns, permission needs to be obtained from the school administration for videorecording the lessons. The purposes of videotaping should be clearly explained to the head of the department and cooperating teachers in order to make it clear that the video-taped lessons will be used only for teacher training and research purposes in order to improve teacher learning and development.

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About the Author

Sumru Akcan is an assistant professor in the Department of Foreign Language Education at Boğazici University, Istanbul, Turkey. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in teacher education and second/foreign language teaching methodology. Her research focuses on pre-service language education and second/foreign language teaching pedagogy.

Appendix 1: A Sample Lesson Plan prepared by a Teacher Candidate to be used in Video-Based Feedback Sessions

Reading: Ice Cream Machine
Grade: 3D
Class Size: 20
Level: Elementary
Topic: Reading-Ice Cream Machine

Objectives

At the end of the lesson students will be able to do the following:
- Understand the reading text.

- Understand, recognize and pronounce the new vocabulary.
- Answer comprehension questions.
- Practice simple present and phrasal verbs.

Materials

For Warm-up: Listening to the story

- CD2 of Incredible English 3.

For Reading:

- Incredible English Student's Book, pages 60-61.
- Phillips, S., & Morgan, M. (2007). *Incredible English 3*. Oxford University Press.

For Miming Game- Practicing Vocabulary

- Vocabulary Cards.

For Quiz- Checking Comprehension

- Set of questions prepared to check reading comprehension.
- True and False statements, on page 61.

Warm-up: Listening to the story (3 min.)

- The teacher (T) announces that students (Ss) will listen to a story.
- After the story listening is over, the teacher asks where the story takes place and what the people are doing in order to check students' listening comprehension.
- If needed, the story can be heard again.

Reading (10 min.)

- Tasks Ss to read the story. After it is read, T writes the words "faraway" and "traffic jam" on the board in order to introduce the new vocabulary.
- T asks for Ss to underline the two words. T takes two students to the board in order to illustrate what faraway means by locating students in close and away positions. T does the same thing in order to illustrate traffic jam, but this time with more students at the board.
- After that, T asks for students to underline set up, plug in, switch on and put in. T wants Ss, looking at the pictures in the book, to work in pairs and try to guess the meanings of the pictures.
- T elicits answers and mimes the meaning of the words.

Miming Game-Practicing Vocabulary (3 min.)

- T announces that they will play a miming game and gives the instructions and then T gives the vocabulary cards on which phrasal verbs are written.
- Working in pairs, Ss mime the verbs.

Quiz-Checking Comprehension (20 min.)

- T asks for Ss to read the text again carefully because, T says, she will have a quiz between two teams.
- After Ss read it, T gives instructions and forms the two teams in order to set the scene for the quiz.
- T asks each group questions student by student. If a student in a group gives a wrong answer, then someone in the other group should answer it.
- After the questions are over, T tells them that this was the first round. Before beginning the second round, the teams should read the true/false items on page 61.
- After Ss read them, T continues the quiz with true/false items. For each correct answer, teams earn 1 point. T gives ice-cream stickers to the winning team.