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Prospective Elementary Teachers' Views on Their Teachers and Their Effectiveness

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Abstract

In this paper future elementary teachers reflect on their past experiences and talk about their teachers and the way they were taught, and portray the characteristics of effective and not so effective teachers. The study also highlights Turkish teachers' way of instruction and the strategies they use. Participants were 41 sophomore and 62 junior prospective elementary teachers enrolled in a small university in northeastern Turkey. Data were collected using mostly the document analysis techniques. Findings show that effective teachers are caring, loving, funny, and patient, show special in and out of class interest in students, and are fair to everyone. Not so effective teachers are out of temper, fear imposing, using abusive language, authoritarian, using violence, unfair and discriminating between students, and boring in class.

Keywords

Reflective Practice, Pre - service Teacher Education, Prospective Teachers, Teacher Effectiveness, Elementary School Teachers

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Prospective Elementary Teachers' Views on Their Teachers and Their Effectiveness

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In this paper future elementary teachers reflect on their past experiences and talk about their teachers and the way they were taught, and portray the characteristics of effective and not so effective teachers. The study also highlights Turkish teachers' way of instruction and the strategies they use. Participants were 41 sophomore and 62 junior prospective elementary teachers enrolled in a small university in northeastern Turkey. Data were collected using mostly the document analysis techniques. Findings show that effective teachers are caring, loving, funny, and patient, show special in and out of class interest in students, and are fair to everyone. Not so effective teachers are out of temper, fear imposing, using abusive language, authoritarian, using violence, unfair and discriminating between students, and boring in class. Keywords: Reflective Practice, Pre-service Teacher Education, Prospective Teachers, Teacher Effectiveness, Elementary School Teachers

Introduction

Murnane and Steele (2007) argue that if the United States is to equip its young people with the skills essential in the new economy, high-quality teachers are more important than ever and if this is important for the United States, it is much more important for developing countries such as Turkey. As is the case with the United States pointed out by Murnane and Steele (2007), perhaps the most urgent problem facing Turkish education is the unequal distribution of high-quality teachers (Batuhan, 2007; Eckert, 2013; Ucar & Sanalan, 2011). Poor children and children from eastern Turkey are disproportionately assigned to teachers with the least preparation and the least experience. In response to these challenges, policymakers in Turkish Ministry of Education have proposed a variety of policy instruments to increase the supply of effective teachers and distribute those teachers more equitably across schools. Such proposals include pay increases for teachers working in eastern and less developed parts of Turkey, reorganizing its educational system according to constructivist learning theory, and bringing restrictions on who is allowed to teach by administering national wide teacher certification exam. These proposals are already being implemented, but their effectiveness remains largely unknown. To measure how well these policies attract effective teachers to the profession and to the schools that need them most, rigorous evaluations are essential. Murnane and Steele (2007) also note that policymakers may benefit from looking beyond U.S. borders to understand how teacher labor markets work in other countries. Although policies rooted in one nation's culture cannot be easily and quickly transplanted into another, it is important to understand what challenges other countries face, what policies they are using, and how well those policies are working to enhance teacher quality and improve student achievement (Murnane & Steele, 2007). However, teachers implement these policies and quality teachers are the main instruments of implementing any policy. This study tries to look at what are the characteristics of good and not so good Turkish teachers and what makes them effective and not so effective teachers by asking prospective elementary teachers to reveal their experiences from elementary through high school. Ekiz (2006) voiced, in his study, the prospective elementary Turkish teachers' views on effective

teachers and “for them, to be effective teachers dominantly required loving children and teaching, and showing patience to the children” (p. 76). Moreover, teachers teach in a manner they are taught, so figuring out how future elementary teachers were taught may help them reflect on their teaching and may improve it.

The search for effective teachers has been going on for more than hundred years (Aagaard & Skidmore, 2002). Witty (1947) conducted a qualitative study where he explored the characteristics of teachers that students felt had been most helpful. He analyzed 12000 letters from students in grades 2-12 and found that flexibility, varying interests, cooperative attitudes, and interest in the students’ problems were frequently mentioned by the students (as cited in Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). Most of the literature on effective teachers argues that both personal characteristics and teaching methods seem to be important (Cotton, 1995; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Gresh, 1995; Norton, 1997; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, Minor, 2001; as cited in Aagaard & Skidmore, 2002; Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Eckert, 2013; Gao & Liu, 2013). The present study aims to find out whether these characteristics of effective teachers are shared by Turkish teachers too or are there other characteristics. Moreover, research on teacher education effectiveness suggests that the impact of teacher education in practice is slight and one of the reasons is that teacher educators do not pay enough attention to student teachers’ prior – explicit and implicit – beliefs (Bullough, 1997; Lunenberg, Korthagen & Swennen, 2007, as cited in Timmerman, 2009; Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Eckert, 2013; Gao & Liu, 2013). Prospective elementary teachers “who did not have the opportunity to address prior family and school experiences which had a significant impact on their views during teacher training were found to tend to ignore different, new models of teaching suggested by their teacher educators once they started teaching in schools” (Perry & Rog, 1992, as cited in Timmerman, 2009, pp. 225-226). Other researchers argue that teaching views and practices are inextricably linked to teachers’ personal lives (Aslup, 2005; Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Loughran, 2007; Zemblyas, 2001). Van den Berg (2002) argues that teacher educators should sift their research and focus more on the personal aspects of professional identity. Studying teachers’ personal lives and histories, prior beliefs and teaching perceptions may add significantly to our knowledge about the professional development of teachers (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Eckert, 2013; Gao & Liu, 2013; Goodson, 1992; Rogers & Scott, 2008; Timmerman, 2009;). Socialization as teacher includes informal processes occurring in the family and in primary and secondary school (Pajares, 1992, as cited in Timmerman, 2009). This study explored the impact of teaching models in elementary and secondary schools in Turkey on the prospective elementary teachers and explains the characteristics of the effective and not so effective teachers. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the characteristics of effective teachers and how and why they impressed the prospective elementary teachers?
2. What are the characteristics of not so effective teachers and how they influenced the prospective elementary teachers?
3. How do prospective elementary teachers describe the type of teacher they want to be?

Researcher Context

I am a researcher from Turkey and I studied science education. I entered this research project interested in questions that explored effective teaching methods, so that I can improve my own teaching. That interest started in one of my first science methods classes. I had hard times relating to and reaching students, so I started looking for effective teaching strategies. I read several articles on the topic and wondered what my students’ experiences in their early

education were, what kind of teachers they had, why they loved some of them and why they hated some of them. That is how I became interested in this topic.

Methods and Participants

Participants were 41 sophomore (21 male and 20 female) and 62 junior (29 male and 33 female) prospective elementary teachers enrolled in the primary education department in a small university in northeastern Turkey. I used convenience-sampling methods (Maxwell, 2005), because of subjects' convenient access and proximity to the researcher. Participants were mostly from eastern and rural parts of Turkey. The research started as an action research study to improve my own teaching, then it turned into narrative research to generate data based on real-life stories of effective teachers in which "individuals tell their personal, firsthand accounts to researcher" (Creswell, 2002, p. 521). Narrative "ascribes a meaningful and coherent order to discrete activities and events in the classroom and exists in the recollection of life events and other forms of communication between teacher and students" (Gao & Liu, 2013, p. 87). This study focused on the lived experiences of prospective elementary teachers. Before entering teacher education programs, prospective teachers have acquired a set of beliefs about teaching based on their own schooling experiences (Kagan, 1992, as cited in Gao & Liu, 2013). Data were collected using exit interviews and particularly document analysis techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Creswell, 2002), which provided for including such a large sample in a qualitative study. As Creswell (2002) says "Documents represent a good source for text (word) data for a qualitative study. They provide the advantage of being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them. They are also ready for analysis without the necessary transcription that is required with observational or interview data" (2002, p. 209). Furthermore, I used elicited texts to address my research questions, which, as Charmaz points out, "involve research participants in producing written data in response to a researcher's request and thus offer a means of generating data" (2006, p. 35). Elicited texts "may elicit thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the thinking, acting subject as well as give researchers ideas about what structures and cultural values influence the person" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 36). Elicited texts work best when participants have a stake in the addressed topic, experience in the relevant area, and view the questions as significant (Charmaz, 2006). Participants were asked to write in Turkish an essay on their most effective teachers, not so effective teachers, and the way they intent to teach as they graduate. They were asked to write these essays as a course project in two different courses that the author was teaching in the Spring semester of 2009. Sophomore course was Teaching Methods and Techniques and junior course was Science Teaching Methods. Each student was given a month to think about these three questions and answer them according to his or her experience. All of the students returned their essay on time, except one male junior student. So, total of 102 essays were collected. The length of the essays varied from one page to six pages some written on a Word document on a computer (18 male + 16 female sophomores and 21 male + 20 female juniors) and some hand written (3 male + 4 female sophomores and 7 male + 13 female juniors). After returning the essays, the author told students that the essays have been collected for a study and whether they want to give their consent to participate in the study. All of the prospective elementary teachers gave their consent to participate in the study. I conducted exit interviews with 10 of the participants to reflect on their essays after I analyzed their essays. Interviews varied in length some lasted 10 minutes and some more than one hour. I analyzed life histories produced by the participants again using qualitative techniques as recommended by Creswell (2002) and Bogdan and Biklen (2006). The life history method links personal experiences and views to the social relationships in important social context in which

participants live (Timmerman, 2009). In this study prospective teachers' elementary and secondary school period was explored and special attention was paid to role models for teaching and other significant influences on participants' conceptions of teaching. At the beginning of the analysis, the data were organized and categorized by coding prospective elementary teachers' views into as many categories as possible as recommended by Creswell, 2002 and Bogdan and Biklen, 2006 and called 'open coding' (there were more than 280 codes, such as knowledgeable in his area, good communicator, loves his job, motivating, consultant, visits the family, encourages question and answer in class, uses grades as scaring tactics, cannot control the class, not consistent, creates blackboard fear, boring, comes to class unprepared, does his job for money, smokes inside the classroom, brings his/her personal problems inside the classroom, reads from the book, talks too fast, insults in front of everyone). Some of these codes, for example special interest in students code was mentioned more than 88 times and visiting the family code was mentioned only 3 times in the essays. Then, their views were placed into categories that showed the properties of initially identified three research questions (115 codes for best teachers, 97 codes for worst teachers, and 70 codes for what kind of teacher I want to be). In the last stage of the analysis, 'data reduction' stage, categories were integrated into general themes such as teachers' personality, teaching style, job attitudes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Creswell, 2002). The information was selected in relation to the three research questions with the aim of looking for patterns and structures in prospective elementary teachers' personal life stories (Atkinson, 1998, as cited in Timmerman, 2009). In this study, a realist mode was used to represent prospective teachers' views through closely edited quotations and interpretations of those quotations (Creswell, 2002; Van Maanen, 1988, as cited in Karakas, 2009). Thus, the researcher lets the participants share their experiences. In presenting the findings pseudonyms are used for each participant in the extracts and 2f refers to sophomore female student, 2m refers to sophomore male student, 3f refers to junior female student, 3m refers to junior male student. Although participants are only 102 in number the generalization of the findings would still be achieved not in the quantitative manner, but in qualitative research tradition utilizing the term 'fuzzy generalization' which means that something is happening in one place and it may also happen elsewhere (Ekiz, 2006). Therefore, the results only reflect prospective elementary teachers' views in the present study and there is the possibility that prospective teachers elsewhere might have similar views.

Statement Addressing Ethical Concerns

In the present study pseudonyms were used for each participant in order to prevent any ethical concerns and all of the participants gave their consent to participate in the study. Moreover, the name of the institution, where the study was conducted, was kept anonymous to prevent leaking of names of the participants. I received IRB approval from my university and from the participants' university.

Findings

Findings are presented in three categories; good teachers, not so good teachers, and what kind of a teacher I want to be, with an aim to answer the three research questions. Each category is divided in sub-headings starting with the most occurring themes in the essays. Quotation used as an example for one emerging theme may also explain another emerging theme. Also every quotation used in this study was taken from a different participant.

Good Teachers

Codes that emerged about the good teachers are collapsed in three sub-headings and they are as follows.

Good Teachers' Personality

Prospective teachers talked the most about their good teachers' personality. In more than 124 places participants said that their most impressive teachers were "loving, full with love, sweat talker, had a smiling face, does not get angry, tolerant, friendly, genuine, had alight eyes, natural, shows parental caring, good hearted, soft spoken, gentle, angel, self-sacrificing, warm, candid, congenial, serious in class." Here are some excerpts that show this:

The way he entered the class impressed me. The way he opened the door and his way of saying 'good morning' was different form the teachers I have known so far. He had a smiling face, but serious manner. He valued students. He was answering every question students were asking. He wasn't discriminating among students. He had a neat pronunciation and was a good speaker. (Msm-2m)

My fourth class teacher had a smiling face, but she was serious in class. However, her seriousness lasted for 10-15 minutes, because when she saw we were bored she started telling jokes. She was careful when speaking with us. She was tolerant to us. She wasn't beating us. When we had problems she was dealing with them and trying to solve them. You know, she was showing parental caring to us. She was really self-sacrificing. (Emr-2m)

Ahh, my elementary teacher! I am happy to share the same name with him. He was giving me excitement. He was the one who made me wake up early in the morning to go to school. I wanted to be the first to say "good morning" to him. A teacher must give such kind of excitement to his students. He was a teacher and a parent to us... My elementary teacher had such a lovely smiling face that a person wanted to look at this face as much as he can. He made us love him with this smiling face. He was participating in our games and I loved it. I loved playing games with him. If we didn't know the answer to a problem or weren't able to do something he wasn't getting angry with us. He was rushing to help us. (Rcp-2m)

In more than 40 places participants said that their most impressive teachers were "witty, humoristic, entertaining, funny, sympathetic, outgoing, social." Here are some excerpts that show this:

I thought I wasn't good at mathematics. Then this teacher came and I loved mathematics with him. He was very funny in class. He was first motivating students and then starting the lesson. He was sympathetic, too social, objective, and honest. He had a personality that was in peace with his students. And the most important thing there wasn't any distance between him and his students. That is why his lessons were very effective. (ZhrD-3f)

The thing that I liked about my middle school math teacher was that, when he felt that we are bored with the lesson, he started telling jokes, and of course after the joke we were returning to the lesson with full attention. (Cnn-3f)

In 7th grade a male teacher was teaching Turkish. His attitude towards us was very different than the other teachers. When he entered the class no one was talking, everyone was listening to him and his lessons were very entertaining. He was telling different jokes and was always making us talk in class. The things that he wanted to teach us, he was teaching by telling stories from his own life and this was increasing our curiosity. (FtmU-3f)

And in more than 12 places participants said that their good teachers were “patient, calm, considerate, and who don’t get angry quickly.” Here are some excerpts:

My second grade teacher had a smiling face, was easy going, and very understanding teacher. Our relationship with him was very different. I was seeing him closer than a teacher. He approached everyone with love. And most importantly he was very patient. Not for once I saw him screaming at a student. He never discriminated between students and had an equal approach to everyone. I don’t remember him even harshly warning anyone for 4 years. Our lessons were enjoyable; we were playing games and doing different activities. Our every year was very fruitful. In short he was a wonderful teacher. For me his place is still special and we are still seeing each other as a family. (Ozg-3f)

We had a female English teacher. She was very lovely and always smiling, if we didn’t understand something she patiently repeated it. I want to be a teacher like her. She was very patient. In school everyone loved her. (Kevser-3f)

From the excerpts above we can see that the good teachers for the participants in this study were the once who were loving, caring, funny, and patient.

Good Teachers’ Teaching Style

In more than 88 places in their essays participants said that their good teachers’ showed “special in and out of class interest in them, and who were concerned with their problems.” Here are some excerpts that show this:

My first grade teacher was so warm and candid that he managed to earn my and my classmates hearts. My classmates and I always wanted to stay in school, because our teacher was interested in us. He wasn’t just giving us lessons, he was zipping our coats, and he was even tying up our shoelaces. (EsrS-3f)

In high school we had a Geography teacher. He was medium height and had a brawn curly hair. When he first entered the class he nicely introduced himself and asked us how the instruction should proceed and defined the rules. In the further lessons the noise increased. No one was interested, but he was still

trying to teach. After a while the teacher started to get angry. He didn't know what to do only few students were listening. He got more tough, but still no success. There was only one way left, he occasionally started beating few guys. Students from poor neighborhoods started making more noise. Our teacher got more interested and involved with them. Sometimes on brake times he will take one or few of them to the school canteen (snack bar) order them tea and talked with them. After a while these students who wouldn't bring even a notebook to school started studying Geography and started participating in the class. The teacher, after solving the classroom management problems, started bringing different books and different magazines. The lesson wasn't constrained with the textbook only. We understood that his only aim was to make us love Geography. Every day he would bring a different material to the class. At the beginning he would ask recall questions and later he started asking compelling questions. (Vys-2m)

I didn't like mathematics in elementary school, but in high school our mathematics teacher was so good and understanding in class and out of class that he made me first love his lessons, and later his attitudes in class, his interest in students, his successes in making every student take part in the lesson made me understand the lesson and forced me to study more. Our teacher was giving us more opportunities to participate in the lesson, if we were unable to understand and answer the questions he didn't get angry. He was letting us do over and over again the questions. He was always patient and tolerant. He influenced us with his sincere and understanding personality. (Fzlt-3f)

In more than 45 places participants said that their good teachers' were "not discriminating and in equal distance to everyone, and fair." Here are some excerpts:

My elementary teacher was treating every student equally and was in equal distance to everyone. He was listening to all the students. He didn't use words such as 'quiet, stop talking, etc.' if we do something wrong, he would warn us and talk to our families. He made us feel that every one of us is special. He was praising us if we were successful, and encouraging us if we were shy and not doing something right. He valued our opinions and ideas. He was listening carefully to us like we were telling something very important and was answering our questions. (Srp-3f)

Our seventh grade Turkish teacher was paying special importance to us. She was always seeing the good side of us and trying not to offend us. She was treating us fairly. Her grading was just. She was trying to increase the morale of the ones who got low grades by treating them sincerely and not distancing them from the course. (Zkry-3m)

There were numerous other teaching style examples of good teachers in the essays, but their frequencies were less than 19 and so excerpts from the participants are not given, they are just mentioned. I would not give excerpts from the participants. Prospective elementary teachers said that their good teachers were "ones who created discussion environment, who allowed freedom in class, who let students speak freely in class, who used question and answer techniques in class, who had good classroom management skills, who were

disciplined, tough, and serious, who visited students' families, who valued students, who didn't insult the students, who gave examples from everyday life, who prized students, who gave confidence and motivated students, who used games in instruction, who organized picnics and trips, who used visual materials in lecture, who told stories in class, who motivated students to read books, who didn't sit in his desk, who came prepared to class, who connected different contents, who didn't stick only with the textbook, who was planned.

From the excerpts above we can see that the good teachers showed special in and out of class interest in students and were fair to everyone.

Good Teachers' Job Attitudes

In 35 places in the essays participants said that their good teachers' "loved their jobs" and ones who were "knowledgeable in their field." Here are some excerpts:

The best side of my high school mathematics teacher was that he didn't do his job for money, he loved his job. Really, the knowledge that he wanted to teach us, he was teaching with love. I didn't want to leave his class. I wanted his class to last till the evening. He was very good knowledge wise too. He was teaching smoothly and without getting bored. He was master of his subject. (HsynD-3m)

Through my 11-year student live the teacher I liked the most was my high school mathematics teacher. In addition to his subject matter knowledge and general cultural knowledge he taught with great pleasure his subject, with his help I liked mathematics. He was in love with his profession. (Erdl-3m)

The side that I liked the most about my elementary teacher was that he did his job with love. (Hrn-3m)

In 20 places in the essays participants said that their good teachers' "cared about their appearance and adjusted their voice nicely." Here are some excerpts:

My elementary teacher, she taught us till fourth grade, is still in my mind. Every time I remember her class control and motherly attitudes I got chills inside. She arranged the classroom so that we can work in groups. She always had one on one dialogue with her students. Her voice neither disturbed anyone nor distracted students from the lesson. She had some equilibrium in her voice. (SmtC-3m)

My high school mathematics teacher ... he cared about his appearance in class. He never brought any cell phone in class and when we ask he said 'I am coming to teach lesson in class not to talk with the phone' He never skipped the places we did not understand, he taught us till we understood. He never gave unnecessary knowledge. And his adjustment of his voice that was something different, we always laughed because he always changed his voice tone (Is-2m)

I had many teachers in elementary school. My first elementary teacher had long hair, dressed nicely, was a sweet talker, and she loved us very much. I saw myself as a very lucky and I was telling everyone around me about my

teacher. It was the first time that I took someone as an example in my life. I wanted to be like my teacher in the future. Her dress, attitude, the way she talked, and her smiling face made me think that she might be an angel. (Aysgl-3f)

We can see from the above excerpts that the good teachers loved their jobs, were knowledgeable in their field, and cared about their appearance and used their voice nicely.

Another interesting theme that emerged from the essays is that most prospective teachers talked mostly about their mathematics teacher as an example of good teacher. This might be due to mathematics being a central subject in secondary school or might be due to teaching hours per week of mathematics being a lot more than other subjects.

Not So Good Teachers

Codes that emerged about the not so good teachers are collapsed in two sub-headings and they are presented below:

Not So Good Teachers' Personality

Prospective teachers talked again the most about their not so good teachers' personality. In more than 126 places participants said that their worst teachers were "out of temper, angry, irritable, ear-bashing, down faced, harsh, strict and indifferent, fear imposing, cursing in class, using abusive language, vociferous, insulting and humiliating students, not smiling at all, authoritarian, repressive, not letting students approach her/him, depreciatory, bully, had some complexes, satisfying his/her ego by insulting student, and mocking student." Here are some excerpts that explain this theme:

We had another teacher, he was very grumpy, harsh, and a cruel man. Students were afraid of his gaze, we were afraid of speaking in class. He was getting angry and vociferous even if we did not do anything. (TgbG-3f)

I had another teacher that year (*7th grade*). He was a math teacher and the only thing that he was doing in class was calculating the days left till the next salary. He did not value the students at all. In class he wasn't condescending to teach the topic. He even liked insulting and humiliating students and the best example of that is his screaming to students as losers. His nick name in our school was the same word 'loser'. (Yns-2m)

I did not like and still don't like the teaching of my second grade teacher, because our teacher was very strict and out of temper. If we do something wrong he would punish us by beating or by finding some other punishment method. He did not have any patience for failure. Instead of searching for the reasons behind the failures he assumed that threatening students would be the solution. For this reason, I hated school and my teacher, and I was afraid of making mistakes in school and was hesitant. (Sdk-3m)

In more than 65 places participants said that their not so good teachers were "using violence and beating student" and some said that they personally experienced it or saw their friends getting beaten by their teachers. Here are some excerpts that show this:

My elementary teacher would give us some homework to memorize and if some of my friends did not memorize the homework he would beat them with a stick... in middle school I had an English teacher, she was pregnant at that time. If there was some whispering coming out of the students she would insult us. One day one of our friends said something to her. And the teacher instead of beating him she brought everyone in front of the classroom and slam our hands with a stick. (Trk-3m)

In elementary school from first grade till fifth grade we had the same teacher. There were so many things that I did not like about my teacher. My elementary teacher was always out of temper, angry to students, and beating them in front of the class. He was often using corporal punishment. Our teacher was getting angry at anything and was discriminating between students. (Sngl-2f)

I would like to mention my mathematics teacher in middle school. He was very temperamental man. He was always beating. He would start solving problems without explaining the topic and expected us to understand from there. Later he would ask a student to solve the problem on the blackboard. If there was someone who wouldn't be able to solve the problem he would squeeze his nose with a compass. He would always come to class with his big compass. Because of him I hated not only mathematics but the compass too. (Kzbn-2f)

After a while I realized that only I and few friends were attending the lesson and no one else. Our elementary teacher was only interested in me and the few friends and the rest of the students he would call retards and stupid. We were the first ones to learn how to read and write. Only few friends were not able to read even the letters and when the teacher asked them a question they were not able to answer it. Whereupon, he would hit their knees with his pointy shoes that he always wear without feeling any compassion to them. During the break our friends were not able to walk because of the pain and no one of them wanted to come to school. They knew that school for them is not a place for learning it is a place for torture. (FtmA-2f)

In more than 47 places participants said that their not so good teachers were “discriminating between students, discriminating between girls and boys, unfair, showing special interest to students who take private lessons from them.” Here are some excerpts:

In high school I had a Biology teacher till this day I still do not understand what kind of teaching style he was using. This teacher will come to class and ask one student to write something from the textbook on the board and he himself started talking with girls in the class. I asked him why he was not talking with us too and whether our only crime was being boys. He would smile and do as he like. (Ktln-3m)

My high school Literature teacher was never fair. She was discriminating between sexes. She was always angry we were afraid of talking in class. (AlM-3m)

In high school I had a Physics teacher who had a very negative effect on the major I chose in college. He was giving private lessons and the students who did not take his private lesson would get very low grades. (Sbht-3f)

I did not have a teacher that I like. I did not like the school at all. Going to school was equal to death for me. School equals teacher and teacher equals to fear, because they educated us using fear. Any moment we lived with the fear of getting beaten. And in class teachers concentrated on students who know and students who did not know were seated on the back of the class like me. If your family was rich the teacher would get interested more with you. (Ozkn-2m)

There were other examples of not so good teachers' personality in the essays, but their frequencies were less than 10. Prospective elementary teachers said that their not so good teachers were "chatty, no jokes, not motivational, ones who kill the excitement in class, bringing their personal problems to school, ones who try to impose their political views on students."

Not So Good Teachers' Teaching Style

In 49 places participants said that their not so good teachers were "boring in class, they were like voice recorder, ones who did not use the teaching time properly, only the teachers themselves understood the lesson, ones who had wrong problem solving techniques, ones who talked very fast, ones who were getting out of context in class, who made students write constantly in class, ones who did not know how to get down to students' level, who had low communicational skills, bad handwriting, no use of visual materials in class, ones who gave constantly homework, boring homework, asking difficult questions, threaten students with grades, ones who gossiped in class." Here are some excerpts:

I know that my Science teacher in middle school did not give us anything nor was able to give us anything in class. May be he was not able to transfer his knowledge to us. He was really trying to make us memorize everything about science. How can we memorize a science subject without understanding it? It is impossible to memorize a science subject without understand it. I don't think our teacher was aware of that. Even if he solved a sample problem, he would do it in his own short way and he wasn't giving us the necessary explanation. He would use his short ways to solve a problem in one step even if that problem would require four to five steps to solve normally. And we would stare at him without understanding anything about the problem. We were not able to say 'teacher we did not understand it,' because if we say something he would say 'are you stupid you don't understand it' and he would get angry at us. Answers to the sample problems in the textbook and our teachers' solutions were completely different. We would get confused but were not able to say anything to him. If we get low grades on the exams he would humiliate us and if we get good grades he would get suspicions and ask us whether we cheated on the exam and would say 'if you didn't cheat come to the board and solve the same problems on the board' and if we were unable to solve the problem he would get angry and even beat the student. If wasn't for this science teacher I might be a different person or be in a different position now. (MstfA-2m)

Especially high school teachers undervalue the teaching profession, because they do not understand the nature of this job and they do it only for the money. Many of them teach like they are lecturing an empty classroom and leave. And most of the time I felt like I was a voice recorder. Also, I saw teacher who not only spoke slang, but used insulting language to female students too. I don't know whether we can call them teachers. (MstfK-3m)

My middle school mathematics teacher would behave differently to students who participated in the class and ones who did not and he would not hide it. If we did not understand something or do something wrong he would use humiliating words in front of everyone. That is way we would be inhibited and scared to speak if we did not understand something. The lecture was very boring and I wanted the lesson to be over soon. (OzgK-2f)

In more than 24 places participants said that their not so good teachers were “constantly sitting on the table in the classroom, constantly reading from the textbook, made students teach the lesson instead of themselves, who came to class unprepared and with no plans, who did not let students say their opinions in class, who were inconsistent, who gave homework and did not control it, and who let students do their personal business.” Here are some excerpts:

Our high school history teacher was constantly reading from the textbook. He was very temperamental. He was not open to any criticism. He would instantly turn to violence. (EsrD-3f)

I did not like at all my fourth grade teacher; the reason was that he did not like us either. This was reflected on the lessons too. We did not understand anything from the lessons. He made student clean his shoes during the lessons. Indecently, he would lie on the teacher's table like a bed sheet and let students massage him on the shoulders, made me not to like him. (Brsn-3f)

I had a mathematics teacher who would not have any plan and program while teaching a lesson. We didn't know what he will teach in the class. He would teach us as he pleased. He never came prepared to class. He was not able to use the time properly, because he did not make any plan and program. At the end of the year he was not able to finish all the topics he had to cover. He was not able to show well-balanced, positive, and consistent attitudes. He did not show any interest in the students. Because of this he was not loved by the students. (Bytlh-2m)

We can see from all the above excerpts that not so good teachers were “angry, fear imposing, using abusive language, authoritarian, using violence and beating student, discriminating between students, and boring in class.”

Again an interesting theme that emerged from the essays is that most participants talked mostly about their mathematics teacher as an example of not so good teacher. This might be again due to mathematics being a central subject and the teaching hours per week of mathematics.

What Kind of a Teacher I Want to Be

On the third research question prospective teachers gave various answers but there was not any particular feature that sticks out. The most mentioned feature that participants (23 of them) said they want to be when they become teachers in the future were being “compassionate, loving, charming, and friendly.” Here are some excerpts:

In my teaching understanding first comes the love, because nothing can be achieved without love... Another important thing is not to discriminate between my students in class. If students feel that there is something like that in my class they would feel animosity against me and the students that I show favor in class. And this would disaffect them from school and me... I would give more importance to group work, if my class is not too overcrowded... I am in favor of constantly asking questions to students. (IbrhmS-2m)

However, the same student also said that he “now gets angry to some teachers who use memorizing, but there certainly should be memorizing, because some rigid knowledge certainly must be memorized otherwise learning will not materialize.” He also said that in his teaching “there would be reward, because reward both excites students and makes them more willing to participate in class.” This might be due to him being a sophomore student and not being aware of some classroom management techniques.

Other 13 prospective elementary teachers said that they want to be “just and not discriminating among students.” Here is one example:

What kind of a teacher I should be so that all students in my class graduate as honest, with good personality, and happy people. For me in teaching profession first comes the honesty and justice. The same opportunities should be given equally to all students and there should not be any discrimination and the attendance of every student in class activities should be ensured. (ZhrB-3f)

Other participants said that they will “connect their content with real life examples,” some said they would “not use memorization in class.” Others said they would be “guides and use group work in class, be patient, keep the interest alive in class, not use violence in class, use play in class, make contact with the parents, and teach students how to think critically.”

Few participants said that they are aware that elementary teaching is the most important teaching in a student’s life and that is why they are afraid of teaching. Here is an excerpt:

Frankly, I am afraid of teaching. I don’t think I can teach something to my students. At the end, we are the first ones who will teach students how to read and write. After their family we will be the ones who will prepare students for life. If I was a high school or middle school teacher I won’t be afraid like that. However, I am really afraid of this profession, because you should know every subject. We should be able to keep students in class for forty minutes. It is in the name they are kids. When we speak with them we should be aware of every word and every behavior, because a tree can bend when it is young. (Aysl-2f)

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings show that the perceived characteristics of teachers with positive instructional attributes for the participants in this study are loving, caring, funny, and patient and ones who show special in and out of class interest in students and are fair to everyone. Also, the good teachers love their job, are knowledgeable in their field, and care about their appearance and use their voice nicely. Another interesting theme is most prospective teachers talked mostly about their math teachers as an example of a good teacher. This might be due to math being a central subject and having more teaching hours in a week as described above.

Findings also show that not so good teachers are out of temper, fear imposing, using abusive language, authoritarian, using violence and beating students, unfair and discriminating between students, and boring in class. Again, many participants talked mostly about their mathematics teacher as an example of not so good teacher. This might be due to the same reasons mentioned above.

Also, prospective elementary teachers want to be compassionate, loving, friendly, use real life examples, guide students and use group work. Prospective teachers want to be patient and not use violence. Furthermore, they intend to use play in class, make contact with the parents, and teach students how to think critically, when they become teachers in the future. Few participants are afraid of teaching in an elementary classroom.

This study suggests that the main problem facing Turkish education is the unequal distribution of highly-qualified teachers, as is the case with the United States, pointed out by Murnane and Steele (2007). Participants in this study, coming mostly from eastern and rural parts of Turkey, were taught by few good teachers who are fair, loving, and patient, but mostly by teachers who are violent, angry, and boring in class. There are still many teachers who use fear and violence as their main teaching strategy in class. This suggest that proposals such as to include pay increases for teachers working in eastern and less developed parts of Turkey, reorganizing the educational system according to constructivist learning theory, and bringing restrictions on who is allowed to teach by administering national wide teacher certification exam are not effective and need to be improved. However, given the fact that participant in this study talked about their teachers who taught them 11 to 2 years ago and the fact that above mentioned proposals to improve hiring of quality teachers were implemented 6 years ago, suggests that we need more time to see the effects of the proposals. Moreover, these findings also suggest that there are still beatings, violence, and favoritism to some students in Turkey and may be in developing countries' classrooms, which is may be why they are still developing, because they fail to educate their students in violence free, democratic and equal opportunity classrooms. This also suggests that World Bank and some other international organizations should focus more on these issues and help the developing countries to create equal and democratic classroom environment to all students.

This study also looked at the perceived characteristics of good and not so good Turkish teachers and what makes them effective and not so effective teachers by asking prospective elementary teachers to reveal their experiences in elementary and high schools. As was the case with Ekiz's (2006) study and few other studies (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Eckert, 2013; Gao & Liu, 2013), Turkish prospective elementary teachers in this study also said that their effective teachers were caring, loving, and showing patience to students. This suggest that teacher preparation programs should focus more on graduating future teachers who care, love and show patience to their students to be effective teachers. And to do so teacher preparation programs should include more psychology classes in their programs.

Numbers of teacher educators have indicated that teacher education programs are not graduating teachers adequately prepared to educate future generations (Lee, 2005). Thus,

reflective teacher education has been investigated as an alternative approach in teacher preparation (Dewey, 1933; Lee, 2005; Schön, 1987). This study tried to help future elementary teachers reflect on their past school experiences. The manner in which future elementary teachers are taught and helping them see their past experiences may help them reflect on their teaching and might improve it. Longitudinal study is needed that follows these prospective elementary teachers in their future classrooms to see the effects of these reflections.

Additional findings from the study portray some Turkish teachers' way of instruction and the strategies they use in their classrooms and the findings show that the effective Turkish teachers' pay special in and out of class interest in students, love their job, are knowledgeable in their field, care about their appearance and use their voice nicely. And not so effective teachers mostly sit on their desks, they are boring and do not know how to get down to students' level, and threaten students with grades. These findings support most of the literature on effective teachers, which argues that teaching methods seem to be important (Aagaard & Skidmore, 2002; Cotton, 1995; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Eckert, 2013; Gao & Liu, 2013; Gresh, 1995; Norton, 1997; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, Minor, 2001). The present study shows that these characteristics of effective teachers are shared by Turkish teachers too.

Research on teacher education effectiveness suggests that teacher educators do not pay enough attention to prospective teachers' prior – explicit and implicit – beliefs (Bullough, 1997; Lunenberg, Korthagen & Swennen, 2007; Timmerman, 2009). This study tried to pay attention to prospective teachers' prior explicit beliefs and how these beliefs affect their future plans and found that prospective teachers want to be compassionate, loving, friendly, use real life examples, be patient and not use violence, use play, and teach students how to think critically as they saw them in their good teachers. In this way prospective teachers had the opportunity to address their prior school experiences as suggested by literature (Perry & Rog, 1992; Timmerman, 2009), so that they do not ignore different, new models of teaching suggested by their teacher educators.

This study tried to focus more on the personal aspects of professional identity as suggested by teacher educators (Aslup, 2005; Berg, 2002; Loughran, 2007; Zemblyas, 2001). Studying teachers' personal lives and histories, prior beliefs and teaching perceptions add to our knowledge about the professional development of teachers as recommended by others (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Eckert, 2013; Gao & Liu, 2013; Goodson, 1992; Rogers & Scott, 2008; Timmerman, 2009).

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