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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Recollections of Prospective Teachers for Career Planning.

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#### Abstract

Career planning has been shaped by the early experiences of an individual. In order to reveal the latter, autobiographical studies, in which self-understanding were often occurred and preferred. This study aimed to investigate the role of elementary school years on prospective teachers' early experiences analyzing their autobiographies during their higher education. Data for this analysis included narrative data from autobiographies focusing on the development of career plan of individuals within a sample of 27 undergraduate students including 12 girls and 15 boys. This study revealed that negative and positive recollections on elementary school years were influential shaping the career plan of prospective teachers.

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#### Introduction:-

Elementary school years might be accepted as the starting point of one's career planning. Even though individuals' career plan vary by age, their perspectives on elementary school years are significant in order to understand their current career plan. In this regard, past recollections, especially autobiographies are a path to self-understanding and career plan (Kelley, 1955; Greene, 1978; Bruner, 1986; Bruner, 1990; Woods, 1985; Powell, 1985; Butt & Raymond, 1987; Olson, 1988; Ayers, 1990; Holt-Reynolds, 1991; Bruner, & Weisser, 1991). Taken as a whole, they claim that by recollecting one's own past in autobiographical story telling of life, the narrating individuals conveys a basic order and identity structure to his or her life that is lived and recollected. In this regard, Greene points out that each person has a distinctive autobiography shaped by the particular standpoint from which one looks on the world (Greene, 1978). As Bruner (1986) makes clear, one provides meaning and coherence to and perspective on experience and one's social traditions. Citing Rushton (2001), narrative educational experts have also provided to gain insight on how children perceive teachers (Lincoln, 1995) and how school works (Thomas & Montgomery, 1998). Weber (1993) claimed that narrative research re-conceptualized career plan that is needed a detailed examination of the individual's experiences. In this regard, it is necessary to figure out the characteristics of teachers in elementary schools. Teacher represents the only authority figure in the classroom that applies direct influence toward students (Chang, 2003). Teacher warmth has been accepted as a wide range of positive effects for students' social and academic development (Brody et al., 2002; Wentzel, 2002). The findings of these studies suggested that teacher warmth could be considered as umbrella variable that included positive effects of a supervising adult (Chang, 2003). In contrast, a bullying teacher is defined as the one who uses his/her power to punish, manipulate, or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure (Twemlow & Fonagy, 2005). Direct bullying refers to open attacks as kicking, pushing, hitting, teasing and threatening (Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1991). Indirect bullying refers to social isolation, exclusion and nasty gossip (Olweus, 1993; Ronald, 1989). Gender is another factor examining bullying. Boys are more likely than girls to acknowledge that they have bullied others (Ziegler & Pepler, 1993).

Given the abundance of education research, it is surprising little attention has been given to prospective teachers' autobiography in higher education. Few educators have investigated what undergraduate students' experience in their early education for their career plan. However, elementary school years are the years in which career planning

start to be established. This research investigates the key elements throughout their elementary school years that have influenced prospective teachers' career plan, analyzing their autobiographies.

### **Method:-**

#### **Participants:-**

The participants of this study consisted of 27 (15 boys and 12 girls) during 2011-2012 spring semester in a state university located in Istanbul. Participants were in their last semester in the school of education and enrolled in a course did their teaching practicum.

#### **Procedure:-**

Before two weeks of the end of the semester, an assignment on writing an autobiography voluntarily was given to participants. They were provided with a focus, asking them to write about their early recollections in elementary school. The structured autobiographical questions addressed the possible factors that influence prospective teachers' career plan.

“What are good and bad recollections on your elementary school teachers that you could remember?” Please, write your autobiography considering your career plan.

The students were told to write this autobiography in two weeks. Then, they submitted to the course lecturer. Then, all participants shared their experiences in the class. As a feed back of this discussion, it was necessary to indicate here that most of the students claimed that after this assignment, they became aware of significance of elementary school teacher. And, the teachers became the key figures of students' current habits, characteristics that should be linked to the elementary school life.

#### **Data Analysis:-**

Narrative analysis was utilized in order to figure out the significant experiences and perspectives of students for their career plan. As Bruner (1986, 1990) has noted that narrative analysis both provided meaning and coherence to and perspective on experience and constructs individual's knowledge. In this study, the analysis was started by reading through each autobiography for several times. Each common theme discussed by the students were identified and noted as specific influences for their career plan. These themes were highlighted and color coded. In order to protect the confidentiality of participants, their names were changed. Many categories were emerged covering a wide range of issues: Bullying teacher (teacher aggression), dislike teacher (teacher unfair to students), teacher warmth (lenient teacher), student self-confidence (students' belief their abilities), school adaptation (like to go to school), school abstention (not like to go to school).

#### **Results:-**

To answer to the question of “What are good and bad recollections on your elementary school teachers that you could remember?” students were free to list more than one recollections that they could remember as shown in Table

As seen on Table 1, 16 students mentioned about teacher violence, dislike teacher and abstention. 11 students mentioned about teacher warmth, student self-confidence and school adaptation. Boys and girls seem to show similar trend in getting influenced by those six factors. Next, how those factors influenced students' career plan in the context of their perspectives was analyzed qualitatively.

#### **Bullying Teacher, Dislike Teacher and School Abstention:-**

Bullying teacher referred to students' statements in which they mostly claimed that their teachers bullied them directly, as kicking, pushing, hitting, teasing and threatening.

“Our teacher had kicked us even if we could not have said the words correctly. It was really unbelievable considering punishment for the first class student could not read and write by beating for not to pronounce the words correctly. And my self-efficacy has certainly been shortcoming” (Bora)

Dislike Teacher was related to the statements of students indicating that they disliked their elementary school teachers.

“I could remember those days in which I was scared of attending to the class considering if there was any beating. Then, how one could think that I liked my teacher; of course I disliked. And this behavior prevented my dreams for the future.” (Eren)

“Due to my teacher’s severe behaviors, I was hesitant to be in the same place with her. She prevented me to adjust both to the class and school. This school atmosphere has gone on for me. I wish I would not have such feeling in my working place. But, I am not sure.” (Arzu)

“One day our teacher started to check our schools bags to look what books we brought into the classroom. One of my friends brought all his text books to the classroom. Then, our teacher asked why he had brought all these books. But my friend did not answer. Then the teacher had promised him not to say anything to him if he would have replied. Then, he said that had lost his schedule so he had brought all of his books scaring from his teacher if he had come to the class forgetting any of his books. While he was telling his excuses, the teacher started to shout hitting his head to the wall. I was so scared from this event that although the teacher had promised not to do anything, he both shouted and beat him. My friend did not believe the teacher anymore, neither did I.” (Eda)

For this student, it is noted that she has negative perspective on personal guidance describing a violence event in the classroom that enables the student not to believe her teacher anymore and severely influence her personally. The student starts saying “our teacher” transforming into “the teacher” while introducing the negative event that she comes across. She also remembers all details on this event even 18 years have passed. While describing her teacher as “our teacher” in terms of checking their bags asking questions, the description turns into “the teacher” describing when her teacher starts to shout and hit her friend in which the inference might be explained as the student considers her teacher has some rights while checking their bags and asking questions but the teacher does not right to shout and hit the students saying as “the teacher”.

Another student defined the violence in the classroom: “The only precaution against all negative events was defined as beating, the teacher always told us. She was telling the storied about beatings when she had been at the elementary school. She believed and made us to believe that beating was inevitable during schooling.” (Nermin)

In this statement, the student indicated “her teacher” as “the teacher” not “my teacher” which also referred that the student did not have any belonging feeling to her teacher while she was telling the story about feeling. This statement has relation with above statement. She also confessed that the teacher made them to have such a habit that they could beat their student when they came across a negative event.

“My teacher did not contribute anything to my personal development. Rather, she made me dislike from the school. She neither adapted me to the class nor school. When we think this situation in terms of my educational guidance, I think it negatively affected my attitude towards lectures. I did not want to attend to the school. I was crying every morning not to attend to the school and I was vomiting. I hated school.” (Murat)

“Since I hated my teacher and hesitated to be with her in any place, she prevented me to adjust to both class and school.” (Selin)

What could be derived from the both statements is that the teacher’s attitudes towards the student influenced her so much that she even did not want to see her, attend to the school or study. Moreover, her health was also affected.

Abstention referred to students’ statements indicating their refrainment to do something either in the school or classroom.

“Due to my teacher’s severe behaviors, I was hesitant to be in the same place with her. She prevented me to adopt both to the class and school.” (Selcuk)

“Since I hated my teacher and hesitated to be with her in any place, she prevented me to adjust to both class and school.” (Pinar)

### **Teacher Warmth, Student Self-Confidence and School Adaptation:-**

Teacher Warmth referred to teachers' supportive, soft manners which enabled students self-confidence.

"My teacher was so warm-hearted that I could share all my problems to her and she always tried to help me. We had a guidance teacher room but I never went there. My teacher behaved me like my mom. I'm so self-confident that I would be a good teacher." (Lale)

"My teacher taught us how to learn. He also provided many teaching methods to provide optimum learning. Projects, videos, learning by doing were some of them. These methods were rare at those times." (Mehmet)

'Self-confidence' referred to consciousness of students in their ability and judgment.

"Reading race was organized monthly. The one who could read the most words won the race for that month. I usually became the winner. I mean this race provided me more self-confidence." (Selim)

"My dearest teacher always became a good model for my life from the first class to fifth. My friends and I easily adapted to the school when we were at the first grade. She always showed us right ways." (Riza)

"I was so excited on the scene but enjoying. I was sure that my self-confidence increased when I was playing the role on the scene in front of many people."

Self-confidence also provided them to adapt not only to the school but also social life easily. Adaptation referred to adjusting to the school, classroom and teachers.

"My dearest teacher always became a good model for my life from the first class to fifth. My friends and I easily adapted to the school when we were at the first grade. She always showed us right ways." (Yeliz)

"I did not have any difficulty adapting to my school, since my teacher was always with me." (Serhat)

"Our teacher organized picnic and trips with the other classes and schools in each semester. This activity enabled us to introduce and collaborate with other peers." (Bora)

"We had social clubs that I considered they developed our responsibility. For example, Health Club, Library Club, Sport Club, Environment and Cleaning Club etc. Each of these clubs had a chair and three or four members. The responsibility of each club belongs firstly to the chair and then members." (Yavuz)

"Our teacher provided us to make team works that enable us to communicate with my peers easily. This experience contributed to my personal and social development positively." (Ece)

As noticed from the samples that the various opportunities provided for the students enabled them to adapt to the school easily. In that case, even though the classroom teachers were the key figure, school administration supported their initiatives.

### **Discussion:-**

The findings of this study have demonstrated the students highlighted two diverse features as negative and positive experiences. In other words, the students consistently reported several important mechanisms that they associated with their positive experiences: adaptation, self-confidence and their teachers' characteristics: teacher warmth, constructivist. On the other hand, they indicated several mechanisms they associated with their negative experiences: teacher bullying, dislike teacher and abstention. These mechanisms are to identify past experiences were the attributes that are vital internal features in their career plan.

In terms of negative experiences of students, they identified elementary school teachers as giving punishments, authoritarian, they were always right, they could lie; whereas students always had to obey the rules considering as if the teachers were always right and they did not have any right to oppose to the teachers. They did not model their teachers. This finding contradicted the researches of Loughran & Russell (2002) in which modeling teacher was claimed as one of the significant contributions to the career plan of students. It is interesting to remark an apparent contradiction here that the manifestation of teacher authority has been defined by the students as they modeled their

bullying teacher in order to take revenge from their teachers. In other words, the students have desired to show how to become a 'good' teacher.

In terms of positive experiences of students, considering the significance of student self-confidence, the results of this study supported Lantz (1964) and Rushton (2001). In the former study, Lantz stated that students should be placed in non-threatening classrooms in order to improve their self-confidence. In the latter study, Rushton maintained that although the student came across with a tough-minded commitment, it could almost be said that the circumstances forced the student to build her self-confidence. The present study has showed that teachers' negative attitudes have influenced students toward aggression. In consistent with the study of Chung (2003) and McEvoy (2005), it has been found that students who were bullied by teachers experienced anger, fear, self-doubt and profound concerns on their academic and social development. Also, bullying by teachers produced a hostile climate in which it undermined learning of students. In consistent with the research of Chung (2003) this study has also reported that teacher warmth had an overreaching positive effect in enhancing peer cooperation among students.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of students: classifications of affirmed recollected categories by gender

Recollections	Number of Students		
	Boys (n=15)	Girls (12)	TOTAL (n=27)
	F	F	F
Bullying Teacher	9	7	16
Dislike Teacher	9	7	16
School Abstention	9	7	16
Teacher Warmth	6	5	11
Student Self-Confidence	6	5	11
School Adaptation	6	5	11

### Conclusion:-

To sum up, this study should be accepted as a preliminary study in order to figure out the role of elementary school, particularly, the elementary school teachers as the key figure in the investigation of career plan of prospective teachers in terms of personality development. In this regard, this study has revealed that elementary school teachers' behavior had an immediate and long-term effect on students. Two diverse parameters as teacher bullying and teacher warmth have directly influenced students' characteristics and behavior as student self-confidence, teacher dislike, school adaptation and abstention. Another significant point has been that the undergraduate students claimed that they have become aware of the elementary school teacher's influences while writing their autobiography. Thus, the sample size of this study should be increased to find out presence of teacher bullying and warmth in elementary schools and their long-term influences on prospective teacher quantitatively. Therefore, consideration should be given in the educational process and in personal life to exposing students to as wide a range of recollections as possible.

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