


Chapter 8

Exploring Prospective EFL Teachers' Beliefs About Teachers and Teaching Through Metaphor Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore prospective EFL teachers' metaphors of "teachers, teaching and being a prospective EFL teacher" at the beginning and the end of a ten-week practicum course. A total of 110 Turkish prospective EFL teachers voluntarily participated in the study. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and metaphor-elicitation forms. Results lead to three major conclusions. First, the participants' prior beliefs about the role of an EFL teacher and teaching were affected by their previous experiences as language learners. Second, although the content analysis of the metaphors revealed a limited change throughout the practicum experience, the analysis of the interviews showed the dynamic nature of beliefs held by the prospective teachers. Finally, data analysis of the interviews revealed that the variation in beliefs and practices mainly derived from individual experiences with mentoring practices of the cooperating teachers and the socio-professional context of the practicum school.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher education programs face challenges in training highly motivated and competent teachers. The primary aim of teacher education departments is to provide the necessary circumstances for prospective teachers (henceforth, PTs) to access professional learning opportunities. Therefore, it is essential to identify the development of teaching motivations throughout the initial teacher education (ITE) experiences of the PTs (Rots, Kelchtermans, & Aelterman, 2012). A number of motivational sources for PTs to enter teaching profession are listed in the literature (see, e.g., Sinclair, 2008). Field experience, in particular, has a notable effect on PTs' professional learning experiences (Roness & Smith, 2010; Sinclair, 2008).

These experiences of PTs have been addressed in a number of ways in terms of data collection techniques, such as self-narratives (e.g., Dyson, 2007; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013), journals (e.g., Appel, 1995; Bailey, 1990; Numrich, 1996), in-depth interviews (e.g., Borg, 2006; Cheng, Cheng, & Tang, 2010) and classroom observations (e.g., Mattheoudakis, 2007). Metaphor analysis has also been widely used in mainstream and language teaching studies both internationally (see, e.g., Beijaard, Meijer, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2004; Ellis, 1998; Farrell, 2007) and in the Turkish context (see, e.g., Eren & Tekinarslan, 2012; Saban, Koçbeker, & Saban, 2006, 2007; Saban, 2010; Yeşilbursa, 2012; Yeşilbursa & Sayar, 2014).

These studies are based on the notion of metaphor as a cognitive process, rather than the traditional view of metaphor as the ornamental use of language in the literary sense (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Marchant, 1992). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor is a means of understanding new concepts with reference to familiar ones and 'is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action' (p. 3) and stressed that our conceptual system is essentially metaphorical in nature'. Given that, as Nespor (1987) pointed out 'to understand teaching from teachers' perspectives we have to understand the beliefs with which they define their work' (p. 323). Given that and that metaphor analysis may provide a 'comprehensive picture which reveals how PTs envision their teaching-related future' (Eren & Tekinarslan, 2012, p. 435), we considered it to be a suitable approach to adopt in the current study.

Although PTs are one of the primary participant groups of practice teaching, the extent to which they professionally benefit from the process has not been addressed to date in the researchers' knowledge in the Turkish EFL context. Thus, the current study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of prospective EFL teachers' (henceforth, in the current paper all PTs referred to will be those in the field of EFL) reflections on their professional learning throughout their field experience. In addition, it aims to attract the attention of teacher educators and other stakeholders of practice teaching to the fact that beliefs and perceptions are important in understanding the way PTs approach the profession. Although most of the studies on practice teaching in the literature focused on the problems, perceptions, beliefs, and practices of PTs (e.g., Atay, 2007; Merç, 2012; Seferoğlu, 2006), or the processes of change were labeled (Oxford, Griffiths, Longhini, Cohen, Macaro, & Harris, 2014; Yuan & Lee, 2014), concepts of change in their professional learning processes have not been addressed in the EFL teacher education literature. Therefore, the present study aims to address the conceptual changes in the metaphorical descriptions of PTs, in addition to the reasons of change they propose as the agents of change.

Very recently the possible extension of beliefs through real classroom experiences has been emphasized in the international literature (e.g., Tang, Cheng, & Cheng, 2013; Rusznyak & Walton, 2014) and is considered as a useful way of accessing participants' conceptions of teaching and the profession as well as tracking the process of how the conceptions develop over time. However, the dynamic nature of beliefs held by PTs has not been addressed throughout their practicum experience. Thus, the study aims to fill this gap in the extant literature. The following research questions have been formulated to this aim:

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