Can Piaget, Freud or Erikson explain my self-development? Pre-service teachers’ personal evaluation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how pre-service teachers evaluate their personal development on the basis of their experiences. Participants’ written texts within the context of the Developmental Psychology course formed the data in this study. Pre-service teachers have interpreted their own experiences within the framework of theories of classical theorists in developmental psychology such as Piaget, Freud and Erikson. Pre-service teachers stated that this personal evaluation process allowed them to increase their self-awareness and to be more understanding towards children and youngsters. It is suggested that using such kind of stories in teacher education will contribute positively to professional development of pre-service teachers.

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1. Introduction

In terms of professional development, teachers’ ability to understand themselves and to have awareness about their inner selves may affect their attitudes and behaviors towards their students. Teachers with a high degree of self-awareness are expected to be more understanding towards their students because understanding others requires one to understand herself first. Barut (2004) stresses that when teachers understand their students; there will be an increase in students’ learning during the class. The positive relationship between the teacher and student not only increases student’s success, but also helps the students feel more belonged to school and motivated and facilitates creating stronger social bonds with teachers and their peers (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008).

Çetin (2001) states that as well as the actual teaching, teachers can affect students with their personalities. Pre-service teachers’ self-assessment of their personality and acknowledgement of weaknesses as well as strengths result in a high level of self-awareness. In the teacher candidacy process, individuals start to adopt the profession of teaching to their personality and direct their development in accordance with this identity. In the teacher nomination process, they gain some experiences and these experiences integrate with their personal experiences. In other words, personal identity shaped through experiences, memories and interaction within a social environment affects professional identity as well. In the literature, there are a variety of studies showing that teachers’ personal identity is related to their professional identity (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Beijaard,
Meijer & Verloop, 2004, Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Flores & Day, 2006; Sutherland , Howard & Markauskaite, 2010; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). However, how evaluation of experiences that contributed to teachers’ current personal identity affect their self-awareness has not been extensively discussed in the literature. Therefore, this study is expected to fill this gap in this area.

Today, there are numerous universities that offer teacher education programs in Turkey. "Developmental Psychology" course is one of the compulsory classes in these programs. The course involves "basic concepts and principles related to development, development theories, developmental periods, physical, cognitive, personality and moral development during childhood, parent-child interaction, behaviour and adjustment problems in children" (Higher Education Council, 2010).

This research involves pre-service teachers’ evaluation of their personal experiences in the light of theories accepted as classical in developmental psychology. The research problem is formulated as “How do pre-service teachers evaluate their personal development in terms of development theories?” In this study, pre-service teachers did their evaluations over a “story” they lived through. The questions that guided the study were; 1. Which theories and theorists did the pre-service teachers choose while they were evaluating their development? 2. The memories of which age periods did they choose? 3. Which concepts did they choose to evaluate their development? 4. How did the process of evaluating their personal development affect the pre-service teachers?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 77 female and 14 male, 91 pre-service teachers enrolled in Pedagogical Proficiency Certificate Program of Faculty of Education, Yıldız Technical University. Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Thirty three of the participants were graduates and 58 of them were students at undergraduate level. All of the participants were from “English Language and Literature” and “Translation and Interpretation” departments. They attended this program to obtain a teacher certificate that is required to be appointed as a teacher of English.

2.2 Data Collection

The research was conducted within Developmental Psychology course for fourteen weeks during the fall semester. The instructor of the course explained the aim of study in the syllabus she handed out at the beginning of the study. The students were asked to evaluate their personal experiences in the context of a theory within the scope of Developmental Psychology course. The written essays of the participants formed the qualitative data. In order to use personal stories of pre-service teachers, an informed consent was taken from them.

2.3 Data Analysis

Narrative research method was used in this study. Cresswell (2007) defines narrative studies as using texts in which personal experiences are presented. For Clandinin, Puschor and Orr (2007), though, narrative research involves more than telling their stories and they focus on narrative inquiry as a research approach that teachers and teacher educators find beneficial.

In order to ensure reliability, two other researchers in psychology field were consulted and a consensus on the classification of themes was reached. Content analysis technique was used for the analysis of data collected. In order to carry out the analysis, the categories were identified and the content was coded according to the categories (Büyükoztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2010).
3. Results

3.1. Selected Developmental Theories / Theorists

Table 1. Selected developmental theorists / theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piaget</td>
<td>Cognitive development theory</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freud</td>
<td>Psycho-sexual development theory</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erikson</td>
<td>Psycho-social development theory</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piaget &amp; Freud</td>
<td>Cognitive development theory &amp; psycho-sexual development theory</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freud &amp; Erikson</td>
<td>Development theory &amp; psycho-social development theory &amp;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psycho-social development theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was observed that almost half of the participants preferred Piaget’s cognitive development theory. Piaget was followed by Freud and Erikson respectively.

3.2. Selected Age Period

The developmental stages pre-service teachers narrated in their stories were as follows; 22 participants chose infancy period, 49 people pre-school period, 11 people primary school period and 5 people chose teenage period. Four participants did not limit their evaluation within a certain period and they presented explanations that cover each period.

3.3. Chosen Concepts

While they were interpreting their stories, pre-service teachers referred to the concepts Piaget, Freud and Erikson expressed about development. The details related to these concepts are given below.

3.3.1. Piaget's cognitive development theory

Table 2. Concepts used related to Piaget’s cognitive development theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-operational stage</td>
<td>Assimilation and accommodation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animism</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic games</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Egocentrism</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective monologue</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reversible thinking</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete operational stage</td>
<td>Concrete thinking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal operational stage</td>
<td>Adolescent egocentrism</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon examining Table 2, it is seen that while they were evaluating their personal development, pre-service teachers mainly used the concepts that belong to pre-operational period. Some of the expressions used by the pre-service teachers are as follows:

“In our village we had single storey houses and we used to take off our shoes when we entered the house. The figure of a “building” in my mind was like this. On the first day of school, I entered the classroom taking off my shoes. At that moment, the children warned me about my shoes.” (Assimilation and accommodation).

“I had a teddy bear when I was four – five years old which I could not leave. One day, I climbed up a tree to play with my teddy bear there, but somehow I dropped it and in order to save him, I immediately jumped off the tree after it. I thought that my teddy bear was living.” (Animism).

“During my adolescence period I was a little bit fat. I thought that everyone looked at me wherever I was; on the bus, at school, on the road and they thought how fat I was, and I could not get rid of this thought.” (Adolescent egocentrism).
3.3.2. Freud's psycho-sexual development theory

As shown in Table 3, pre-service teachers frequently used concepts related to oral stage. They relate their characteristics such as thumb-sucking and talking too much to their experiences regarding “suction”. Some of the sentences that belong to pre-service teachers are as follows:

“When I was a baby my mother died and I was not breastfed. Now I talk too much. I think this is a feature of oral period.” (Under breastfed, oral complex).

“I find woman breasts appealing. Whenever I look at a woman, my eyes go to her breasts first. My mother nursed me until I was five. Freud could explain my behavior with “sucking”. (Over breastfed, oral complex).

“My mother was strict about potty training. I think it’s because of her attitude; I’ve been so meticulous and extremely organized. Freud explained anal period as if he had seen me.” (Excessive fussiness).

3.3.3. Ericson’s psycho-social development theory

The pre-service teachers who participated in this study focused on the three periods of Erikson’s eight periods. Samples of pre-service teachers’ expressions were given below;

“The day I started kindergarten and the day I went to Istanbul for entered university... In fact, I felt the same thing on both of them. The same shyness, lack of esteem and a desire not to leave my mom...” (Trust vs. mistrust).

“My mom and dad were very protective. They did not even let me play in the street. At the end of this I became unable to do anything at all. Still I feel anxious when I go somewhere alone.” (Autonomy vs. shame/doubt).

3.4. Feelings and thoughts regarding the process

When Table 5 is examined, it can be seen that pre-service teachers said thanks to this assignment their awareness increased. They commonly indicated that they enjoyed doing this task, they talked their family members about their childhood and they returned to their childhood. Thirteen participants thought that this assignment was enjoyable
even though they had difficulty while trying to do it. Only two participants expressed that they got bored while they were evaluating their personal development.

“I had so much fun preparing this paper. And I realized that, this memory is effective in my choosing teaching as a profession. I am going to be a real teacher, a good teacher…” (Self-awareness / had so much fun).

“I started to look at children's behaviours with a different perspective. I am more understanding towards behaviours that I found absurd before.” (I understand them better)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Can Piaget, Erikson, Freud, explain my self-development? Pre-service teachers who participated in this study presented statements regarding how these three theorists explain their development accurately enough. One of the participants said that “I was breastfed until I was five or six. Freud would have found this unhealthy but I do not have oral obsessions. Freud's analyses do not fit me.” In his study, Paker (1977) evaluates Freud and how psychoanalysis looks at the past and he criticizes the way Freud explains childhood experiences of the past as reason of pathology.

Even though pre-service teachers have a chance to choose from other theories and theorists in this study, they preferred to work on Piaget, Freud and Erikson. This can be because what these theorists said were interesting for them for work. Another reason could be that there was more emphasis on these three theories throughout the course. In order for pre-service teachers to start their jobs as teachers in public schools, they have to obtain high scores in Public Personnel Selection Examination (PPSE). Only the teachers with the highest score areas can be appointed to the positions limited by the state. In this exam, which has utmost importance for pre-service teachers, there are questions about these three theories every year.

More than half of the participants (49 out of 91 people) have chosen their life stories from pre-school age period. Is it only a coincidence for the teachers candidates to intensively use concepts related to pre-operational stage within Piaget’s cognitive development theory; in a similar vein using oral and anal periods of Freud’s psycho-sexual development theory and taking trust vs. mistrust; autonomy vs. shame/doubt and industry vs. inferiority stages while preferring to describe their stories under the light of Erikson’s psycho-social development theory. How can we explain pre-service teachers’ evaluation of mainly their infancy pre-school periods? The reason for this choice could be the fact that the memories of infancy and pre-school periods gain meaning only when they are explained through rather old and strange theories. Or in Freud's (1955) terms, the first five years are critical for the development of identity (cited in Koptagel-llal, 1984), and teachers give special attention to the memories of those periods.

Thirty three pre-service teachers thought this study increased their self-awareness. Thinking about their personal development and exploring their childhood might have developed the participants’ self-awareness. Clandinin and Connelly (1999) state teachers’ life stories are an indispensable part of their personality development. Flores and Day (2006) stress that personal memories formed by social relations and influences have a powerful effect on the development of pre-service teachers’ professional identity. The following suggestions can be made on the basis of the findings of this study.

The pre-service teachers enjoyed evaluating themselves by using their personal stories. It is thought that the studies carried out with pleasure positively affect their learning behaviors and increase their motivation while developing their professional identity. Therefore, it is recommended that personal stories can be used in programs for teacher education more often.

This study revealed that when pre-service teachers get to know themselves, they understand others more easily and this affects teacher-student relationships in a positive way. Knowledge and skills acquired in the other courses in teacher education programs should also support this.

Pre-service teachers need to teach the strategies required to be effective teachers. Future studies might focus on these strategies. In this study, stories narrated by pre-service teachers within the scope of a compulsory course were investigated. What is interesting is, even though this was an assignment for the students, the participants shared their private memories. This might stem from the relationship that depends on trust with the researcher who was at the same time the instructor of the course. According to the results of the study, the participants say that this study was...
illuminating in terms of providing them with the opportunity of understanding themselves and other people. They state that they become more tolerant and understanding. It is hoped that their tolerance and understanding will be reflected on their professional identities and relationships with students.

References


