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Philosophical Change in Education: A Desired Primary School Model of Primary School Student Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Even if the traditional education maintains its characteristics all over the world, it has been widely criticized, as well. This criticism is considered for the development of all school curriculums in Turkey, and proper educational curriculums are prepared in line with the criticism. An attempt to understand the desired primary school model of primary school student teachers basically reveals their educational philosophy. This study aims to scrutinize the philosophical perceptions of primary school teacher students, who study at the Faculty of Education, Pamukkale University, towards educational processes based upon their ideas and experiences. The study based its design on the sequential explanatory design, one of the mixed methods. The study was comprised of 267 primary school student teachers who were enrolled in the Department of Primary School Teaching. Considering the quantitative part of the study based on the understanding of primary school student teachers about their educational philosophy, the participants mostly had popular educational thoughts and applications. The three basic themes were "the school which makes people free", "the school which teaches life" and "the school which makes people think" in terms of the qualitative part of the study.

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Keywords:
Primary school, elementary teacher candidates, educational environment, educational philosophy, mixed method, sequential explanatory design.

Introduction

As in the case of other scientific processes, philosophy add meaning to the processes and concepts related to the education. If a framework is necessary to set objectives, shape educational curriculums and create educational environment, this framework is determined by philosophy. Brauner and Burns (1965) stated that the philosophical part of education cannot be ignored. According to them, education without philosophy is same with a blind man who does not have a guide dog.

The philosophy of education help teachers understand conceptual discussions and researches about educational processes, and make their own way. Therefore, the philosophy of education has a significant role for teachers at the beginning of their career and throughout their teaching career. Without the philosophy of education, it is considerably difficult for teachers or student teacher to understand the applications in the educational process (Winc, 2012; Gosselin, 2007).

Many definitions can be found for the philosophy of education; however, it can be defined as the ideas about the all elements and processes related to the school, and the efforts attempting to explain these ideas. In this sense, many philosophical movements can be found. Among these philosophical movement, Realism, Idealism, Pragmatism, Existentialism, Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism and Reconstructionism are

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the ones in the foreground (Demirel, 2011; Ergün, 2009; Sönmez, 2008 and 2009; Veal, 2007; Labaree, 2005; Red & Davis, 1999; Tozlu, 1997; Turgut, 1996; McNeil, 1996; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988). The aforementioned movements have a host of different features. Furthermore, even the representatives of the same movement have different ideas. Nevertheless, Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) classify these movements in two main groups in terms of their views toward students and teachers. Based on their views toward students and teachers, Realism, Perennialism and Essentialism can be classified in one group, and Pragmatism, Progressivism, Reconstructionism, Existentialism and Humanism in the other.

The group of Realism, Perennialism and Essentialism focus on the constancy of knowledge. The teacher is the one who will transfer this knowledge to students. In this sense, students are responsible for learning from their teachers. The role of teachers or educational specialists is to decide what they should teach, and how they will create educational environments to transfer exact knowledge to the students accurately and permanently. Such an environment introduces the necessary tools and equipment by itself. For instance, pencil, notebook and book are essential tools and equipment for these movements. Concordantly, examinations and standard tests conducted in these examinations become reliable materials which measure to what extent students learn. These movements which are still in use can be called as traditional or classical movements.

The group of Pragmatism, Progressivism, Reconstructionism, Existentialism and Humanist movements underlines the uniqueness of individuals, and supports that individuals and their experiences are valuable (Hamrah, 2012; Saeverot 2011). Furthermore, students – or individuals- have the power to change societies through education (McNeil, 1996; Red & Davis, 1999). These arguments focus on students in educational environment. In other words, these movements suggest that it is necessary to create educational environments regarding the interests, needs and expectations of students. Thus, the teaching role disappears, and the facilitating role of teachers emerges for the student-centered educational process. Such a process focuses on the students to gain experience. Hence, the educational tools and equipment change in line with this approach. Since the emphasis on individuals increase nowadays, this group of movements can be called as popular approaches. The reason for using the definition of popular approaches might be that the understanding of individualism and relativity has become more important recently as Meyer (2009) stated. According to Bingham (2011), the latest developments in technology and communication have led to a great change in educational idea and applications, as well.

According to Flinders and Thornton (2004, as cited in Veal, 2007), the history of education has seen many debates between Essentialism and Progressivism which are probably the most important two representatives of traditional and popular understanding. Even though Progressivism, which was started with Frobel and developed by Dewey, was in the forefront at the beginning of 20th century, Essentialists were more effective in terms of educational processes all over the world (Veal, 2007). The representative of Progressivism, John Dewey, criticize the old educational understanding in the U.S. by complaining about the lack of educational tools and equipment which make students active, and he considers this situation as a synopsis of the understanding of traditional education (Dewey 2012).

The critical pedagogy also criticizes the understanding of traditional education. Illich (2012) states that the structure of traditional schools deprives individuals of their freedom, passivizes them, and makes individuals someone else. Friere (2013) points out that the structure of traditional schools not only passivizes individuals but also creates disadvantaged individuals. By approving the situation, McLaren (2011) supports the view that this education system both creates disadvantaged individuals and trains personnel for the capital. A pedagogue Sir Ken Robinson defines the understanding of traditional education as fast food in his talks called as “Schools are killing creativity” and “Learning environments are changing” (Vitamin Öğretmen, 2013). According to his views, the diversity and alternatives are not possible in the traditional education, and it harms human spirit similarly to fast food in that it harms people. Creativity mitigates in such an understanding which promotes achievement, and unhappy and monotype people, who are evaluated with their achievement, are brought up in the traditional education. However, the freedom, self-confidence, interests and needs of individuals should be of top priority. The educational process should take these into the consideration.

The understanding of traditional education, in other words the philosophy of traditional education, has been criticized in Turkey, too. In 21st century, the modern world demands qualified individuals; however, it does not seem possible to educate qualified individuals with the traditional education. For instance, Soykan (1997) emphasizes the existence of traditional education in the word "eğitim" (education) ironically. According to him, "eğitim", a Turkish word, originates from bending, and it refers to a shaping activity. For Turgut (1996, p. 165), the people who think, criticize, evaluate, do research, argue instead of accepting directly, and learn more than taught are not only the people of this century but also the people of next century. On the other hand, does Turkey educate people desired for this century? According to Ortaylı (1996), the last 150 years of Turkey is no more than a system which is educating just technicians not highbrows. In his last article, Ertürk (1998) states that idealism and realism is dominant in Turkey, and Turkey could not adopt pragmatism and essentialism which are effective in the U.S and Europe. Turgut (1996, p. 166) thinks that this can be understood from the educational objectives: "I think that countries such as Turkey educate citizens and make them have a profession. However, the educational systems should focus on doing research and educating self-confident individuals. Doing research and educating self-confident individuals are global. However, citizenship and making them have a profession are local and national."

Based on the criticism, the efforts to gain changing values have been embraced in the light of leading scientific paradigm, changing social understanding and technology, and the educational curriculums of educational institutions have been developed. Communication, media, intercultural communication and travels play a leading role in this change. Governments accept this change or they become obliged to do so. The most concrete evidence of the change in education process is to shape curriculums with progressivism as in Turkey. When the reasons for developing primary school curriculums, which have been applied since 2005-2006 academic years in Turkey, are analyzed (TTKB, 2005), it can be understood that changing values in scientific knowledge and new life conditions have a significant effect. However, another issue as much important as the development of curriculums is to train the teachers, evaluate and develop the curriculums used for their trainings. Therefore, the curriculums of education faculties have been developed in line with the curriculums of primary schools in order to prepare students for the life conditions of today and tomorrow and meet the expectations of the society, and new teacher training program has been applied since 2006-2007 academic year (YÖK, 2006). In addition, determining the educational thoughts of student teachers who will apply the curriculum is highly crucial for the success of curriculums.

The question of "Why education?" and the answers to this question help education gain a philosophical process, in other words a spirit. Each individual has a philosophy of life, and it is natural that each individual might have a philosophy of education. However, since, with their understanding of education, thoughts and applications, teachers will be the people who will actualize educational processes through educational programs, the important one is the philosophy of teachers. Attempting to understand the desired school system of student teachers means manifesting their philosophy of education. The aim of the current study is to scrutinize the thoughts and experiences of primary school student teachers, who study at the Faculty of Education, Pamukkale University firstly, and then to investigate the school system they desired and their philosophical perceptions towards educational processes.

Method

Research Design

This study was carried out with descriptive survey method. The mixed method which combines the qualitative and quantitative research methods was used in the study. The study based its design on the sequential explanatory design/strategy. The sequential design is a strategy which starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, goes with the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the light of the results of quantitative data, and ends with the integration of the results and evaluations of qualitative and quantitative data (Wiersma, 2003).

In the qualitative studies, perceptions and cases are attempted to be presented in a realistic and holistic way within their own environment while quantitative studies test hypothesis with numeric values (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In this sense, the researcher attempts to investigate the experiences and understandings

based on these experiences in a contextual integrity instead of finding a global truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Seidman, 1998). It is also important to use different methods in the same research by making use of each method's strengths.

Participants

The quantitative study group was comprised of 267 primary school student teachers (86 sophomore, 94 junior and 87 senior students) selected through simple random sampling who were enrolled in the Department of Primary School Teaching, Faculty of Education at Pamukkale University. The numbers of female and male students were 189 and 78 respectively. The qualitative study group was comprised of 9 (4 junior and 5 senior) student teachers who also participated in the quantitative part of the study. The numbers of female and male participants were 5 and 4 respectively. Enough data was obtained has been found sufficient to sample. Qualitative studies do not try to make generalizations mostly. Therefore, the priority is to be able to catch a learning opportunity and understand the situation deeply (Stake, 1995).

Research Instruments

The collection and analysis of the quantitative data. As a quantitative data collection instruments developed by Kumral (2014), the Educational Thoughts and Applications Inventory (ETA] was used. ETA presents the educational thoughts and applications of teachers or student teachers in two sub category: traditional and popular. The inventory has two subcategories (traditional and popular) and 42 items. The variance percentages which the factors of the inventory accounted for were as follows: %37.54 for traditional subcategory and %23.99 for the popular subcategory. Two of the subcategories accounted %61.533 of the total variance. The subcategories of the inventory significantly and moderately correlated with each other (r= -,58 p<0,01). Furthermore, the results of confirmatory factor analysis for the inventory [χ^2 (the chi-square) value is significant (χ^2= 1665,08; p<.01); df= 818, other fit indices were found as follows: RMSEA= .062, NFI= .97, CFI= .98, SRMR= .048, GFI= .85, AGFI= .83] indicates that the model of the inventory has a good fit. The parametric and non-parametric one-way variance analyses were carried out with the help of SPSS 15.0 package program.

The collection and analysis of the qualitative data. According to Creswell (1998), open-ended questions in qualitative studies allow participants to share their feelings, thoughts and experiences inventively, and determine a road map or guideline for collecting highly reliable data. Therefore, a semi-structured interview form which consists of three open-ended questions was used in the study. The first question asks their experiences and opinions related to how they have been educated in the schools by now. The other two questions aim to determine their opinions regarding how they would like to educate their students with the reasons behind their opinions. The original data of the study were 32 pages. It took over one academic year to collect the qualitative and quantitative data.

A content analysis was conducted on the qualitative data of the study. Content analysis has been defined as making inferences by identifying, counting repeated subjects, problems and concepts in the data set (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This process make possible to determine the themes and categories which are not explicit beforehand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). For this purpose, meaningful parts were marked, and the codes were written on the edges of the pages while reading the data. The themes emerged through repeated examination and comparison with the help of inductive content analysis (Stake, 1995). At the end of this process, the key themes which were given in the findings and results section were identified for each research question.

The Validity and Reliability of the Study

For the quantitative part. For the validity of the study, the results of explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses were used with the EDU Inventory which has internal consistency. According the results of the analysis, the subcategories of the inventory significantly and moderately correlated with each other (r= -,58 p<0,01). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed again with the total score of the inventory and the scores of two subcategories. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found α=, 86 (n= 267) for the complete inventory, α=, 97 (n=267) for the subcategory of traditional approaches and α=, 96 (n= 267) for the subcategory of popular approaches.

For the qualitative part. To test and increase the validity of the study, Modus Operandi, Searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, Member checking strategies were used to deal with causal validity. The methods and strategies which were followed to provide validity were clarified in a detailed way.

Findings and Results

As the first step of the analysis, variance analyses were carried out in order to understand the philosophy of education which the primary school student teachers have. The results in Table 1 indicate which philosophy of education the participants have.

Table 1. The opinions for the primary school student teachers of philosophy of education

	Group	N	$\overline{X}$	Sd	t	p
The Philosopy of Education	Traditional	267	57,42	22,494	12,602	,000*
	Popular	267	83,79	16,678		

*p<0,05

Considering the mean scores of the groups in the EDU inventory, student teachers had mostly popular educational thoughts and applications, and moved significantly away from the traditional views and applications. The second independent variable of the variance analysis was the gender of the primary school student teachers. It was analyzed whether the gender had an effect on the educational thoughts and applications of primary school student teachers. The results of this analysis were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The philosophy of education of the primary school student teachers regarding their gender

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Traditional	Female	189	124,83	23592,50	5637,5	,003*
	Male	78	156,22	12185,50		
Popular	Female	189	138,57	26189	6508	,132
	Male	78	122,94	9589		

*p<0,05

Based on Table 2 presenting the data about whether the gender had an effect on the educational thoughts and applications of primary school student teachers, the mean scores of the male participants were significantly higher than the mean scores of the female participants in the traditional group. For popular group, the mean scores of the female participants were higher than the mean scores of the male participants; however, this difference was not significant.

It was also analyzed whether the grades of the student teachers had an effect on their educational thoughts and applications. To be able to analyze the data, the equality of variances were assessed with Levene's test, and the results of the test concluded that the variances are not equal. Therefore, Dunnett C test was applied in order to find where the differences occurred between groups, and the results of the test were presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The philosophy of education of the primary school student teachers regarding their grade

	Grade	N	$\overline{X}$	Sd	F	p	DunnetC
Traditional	2nd Grade	86	63,97	25,67	10,52	,000*	2.Gr-4.Gr 3.Gr-4.Gr
	3rd Grade	94	58,51	20,22			
	4th Grade	87	49,25	18,22			
Popular	2nd Grade	86	78,22	18,42	8,92	,000*	2.Gr-3.Gr.&4.Gr.
	3rd Grade	94	84,33	14,98			
	4th Grade	87	88,39	15,07			

*p<0,05

Based on Table 3 presenting the data about whether the grades had an effect on the educational thoughts and applications of primary school student teachers, the significant differences were found between 2nd and 4th grades, and 3rd and 4th grades. In the popular group, a significant difference was seen between 2nd, and 3rd and 4th grades. Considering the mean scores of the traditional group, the mean scores decreased gradually from 2nd grade to 4th grade. On the other hand, the mean scores of popular group increased gradually from 2nd grade to 4th grade. These results were meaningful in the teacher training process in which the constructivist approach was promoted.

To be able to reveal the philosophy of education, as stated in the method section, the qualitative data were collected in addition to the quantitative data. In the content analysis, the three main themes emerged as the answer to the question of "What kind of primary school do primary school student teachers desire?" These themes were as follows: "the school which makes people free", "the school which teaches life", and "the school which makes people think". The themes and their subcategories were presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Primary school student teachers desire about primary school

Theme	Subcategories
The school which makes people free	Not to restrict
	To see from different perspectives
	To help students use their potential
	Not to automate (dehumanize)
	To provide opportunities
The school which makes people think	To make students question everything
	To give opportunities for freedom and originality
	To encourage students to change
	To arouse curiosity, to lead to the research
The school which teaches life	To prepare students for the life instead of exams
	To be life itself
	To gain experience
	To make students solve problems
	To make students produce something

The primary school student teachers imagined their first place of duty as a school which makes its students free. According to the participants, primary schools should not restrain students in classrooms and desks. The children in the period of play should be "saved from their chains" [Participant 2] such as pencils, notebooks, books, desks, classroom walls. In this way, a free environment should be presented to them. Primary school students should not be regarded as "court clerks" [Participant 5]. In other words, they should be saved from the position of writing and learning what is said. According to them, the school should not be "a cake mold" [Participant 1], and it should be a unique environment which "enables different personalities to come out" [Participant 8]. In this sense, the participants emphasize individual differences. Schools should enhance self-knowledge, and create environments for students to develop and realize themselves. In such an environment, the first thing which should be considered is their interests and needs.

When we were at the primary schools, teachers would utter and we would jot down. Now, I can understand well. Indeed, we were not different from court clerks. To write or learn what is said was only task for us. It was not just primary school. Maybe we spend all our school life like that. Well, how can we think and when will we share our opinions, then? Schools should give us the opportunity to be ourselves. I believe that I can create such an environment [Participant 5].

Secondly, the primary school student teachers imagined their first place of duty as a school which makes its students think. According to the participants, it is only possible with creating suitable environments to educate the individuals who produce, solve problems, and do research. In such environments, students should question everything, learn to be open to criticism, and broaden their

viewpoints. Furthermore, individuals grow up with self-confidence, democracy and self-discipline thanks to the environments which make people think. A society which is formed of determined, free and revolutionist individuals will certainly be successful, and the school which makes people think is required for this.

We become students who memorize course notes and write them as they are. How can the individuals who choose from the given alternatives be creative? {…} we do not think, and any environment has not been provided for us to think. As we do not think, we cannot be productive. When I become a teacher, I will strive for students to think and develop different viewpoints [Participant 2].

Thirdly, the primary school student teachers imagined their first place of duty as a school which teaches life itself. The participants share the same expectation that schools should be prepared for the life instead of exams. Such schools will help students gain new experiences. The individuals who have these experiences become the individuals who adapt to social living, show effort for social problems and find solutions. According to the participants, schools should teach the problems of the society to students, and encourage them to solve these problems.

If we answer the questions in exams, we are successful or we become university students. However, we do not have abilities or knowledge about the problems of daily life. I learned what is square and what is rectangle but I learned after a long time that our farmland is rectangle. I know how many decare is our farmland but I do not know it with other measures such as hectare. I sometimes hear in the news that some hectares of forests burned in the fire. However, I cannot imagine how big it is [Participant 4].

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of the quantitative part of the study which investigated the philosophy of education of the primary school student teachers, the participants had mostly popular educational thoughts and applications. Furthermore, the male participants had more traditional philosophy of education than the female participants, and their tendency for popular educational thoughts and applications increase from 2nd grade to 4th grade. Considering the findings of the qualitative part of the study, this study corroborates with the latest studies analyzing educational philosophy of teachers, student teachers and other staffs in the education field in terms of different variables (Ekiz, 2005 and 2007; Duman, 2008; Duman & Ulubey, 2008; Karadağ, Baloğlu & Kaya, 2009; Doğanay, 2011; Altınkurt, Yılmaz & Oğuz, 2012). Furthermore, student teachers mostly accepted popular thoughts in the educational process, and significant differences were found between male and female participants. These results also corroborates with the some other studies (Üstüner, 2008; Çetin, İlhan & Arslan, 2012) analyzing the philosophy of education of student teachers and other staffs in the education field.

In the qualitative part of the study, the three main themes emerged. These themes were as follows: "the school which makes people free", "the school which teaches life", and "the school which makes people think". In this sense, the philosophy of education of primary school student teachers goes with their desired school imagination.

The student teachers were aware of in what kind of a system they grew up, and they were not content with this system. Just to change the curriculum does not mean anything. An amenable environment should be provided in addition to the curriculum. It can be said that curriculum development specialists attempted to create the desired school with the latest changes in 2005. However, it is known that student teachers will have problems related to creating the environment they desire when they graduate and start to work. The biggest obstacles for student teachers are as follows: (I) the content and structure of exams, (II) the understandings of the current teachers in the system, (III) the education faculties which try to teach constructivist approach but still adopt realistic understanding, and (IV) the success expectancy of parents which is created by the system. To be able to create their desired educational environments, it is a necessity to revolutionize the system. Nevertheless, the integration of pragmatic and existentialist curriculums with current student teachers can be a milestone to educate the people of next century.

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