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## Exploring Turkish Social Studies Student Teachers' Development of Identity

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*Abstract: The aim of this study was to explore professional identity development among social studies student teachers in four-year teacher education program in Turkey. Fifty-five student teachers participated in the study. Data were collected about their metaphorical images about teachers and social studies teachers and a series of in-depth interviews was conducted with five of them. All data were analysed across different study years in the teacher education program using inductive content analysis. In the light of this analysis, the experiences of the five student teachers' were examined in detail to gain a deeper understanding of how they had become social studies teacher from student teachers. Practice periods appeared to be highly influential for identity development but not for all the students.*

### Introduction

The reforms to social studies education in Turkey required new approaches to curriculum, instruction and teacher education. The most important innovation in the new social studies curriculum is a student-centered approach and an emphasis on active participation and involvement by students in the learning activities (Doğanay, 2005; Öztürk, 2006; Saftan, 2008; Açıklan, 2010).

As described in the framework for K-12 social studies education, the overarching aim is to prepare Turkish citizens who embrace Atatürk's principles and revolutions, understand Turkish history and culture, espouse democratic values, respect human rights, care about the environment, know about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and think critically and creatively in order to make informed decisions (TTKB, 2009). This goal sets high expectations for teachers, who need to (a), understand what initial ideas students brings to school; (b), construct social sciences-specific content knowledge; (c), understand social scientists' practices, concepts and disciplinary core ideas; (d), understand how students learn social studies; and (e), develop a range of instructional strategies that can support students learning (for example, use of historical sources, geographical thinking, empathy, moral education).

Since it was last revised in 2006, the social studies teacher education curriculum includes social science courses (such as history, geography, anthropology and sociology), civics, education and method courses (for example, educational psychology, social studies method, educational technology and material development), field experience, and a few elective courses.

One important question that emerges is whether elementary teacher preparation programs can cope with these challenges of the 'new' social studies: what kind of

experiences support student teachers' development? How do teachers develop identities for social studies teaching?

Although the most rapid changes occur when student teachers graduate and begin their work in schools and classrooms (Floras & Day, 2006; Luehmann, 2007), the development of a professional identity begins during their pre-service education (Walkington, 2005).

During this period, pre-teaching identity is refined through the processes of reflection as the student teachers develop a more sophisticated understanding of their work as teachers through their formal studies and their work in schools and classrooms (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Adler (1995) notes that teacher education programs need to put more effort into understanding the ideas and attitudes toward social studies education that students develop during their preparation courses. In other words, if we assume that identity is a key factor influencing a teacher's sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment and effectiveness, then it becomes necessary to investigate the positive and negative influences that act upon them (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007, p.103).

A greater understanding of how social studies student teachers learn to be social studies teachers, and, in particular, how they construct their identity will help teacher educators to understand the needs of pre-service teachers and facilitate their successful transition into social studies teachers. The aim of this study was to explore professional identity development among social studies student teachers in a four-year teacher education program in Turkey.

## **Theoretical background**

### **Student teachers' professional learning and identity**

While there are multiple interpretations of the idea of professional identity in the literature (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004), in this study it is considered to be a process of becoming a teacher: a time of formation and transformation, into what one is doing, and who one can become (Britzman, 2003, p.31). This is also the view of Wenger (1998), for whom identity, as the 'who-we-are', includes our experiences and knowledge, our perceptions of ourselves and others and their perceptions of us.

Professional identity can be considered as one component of the multiple perspectives of a person's identity: that associated with their professional status as a teacher (Gee, 2000). Like other aspects of identity, professional identity comes from one's position within society, interactions with others and interpretations of one's experiences (Gee, 2000; Geijsel & Melijers, 2005). Such perceptions develop as we interact with others. Therefore identities exist both within us and in our relations with others. They are constructed as we interact with others and regulate our participation according to the reactions of others to us.

Identity, then, develops through negotiated experiences of self (Wenger, 1998, p.150). Such experiences lead us to develop beliefs, commitments and intentions adjusted to a particular community (in form and content). They give us a sense of who we are in relation to the community and its aims, how we must participate, where we belong and what we are becoming in the community. Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to professional identity as a process of socialisation in a profession, through which the individual assumes the roles, values and norms of the professional group. During the pre-

service period, the student teachers' professional identities arises from their images of teachers, their initial beliefs and concepts of what constitutes a good teacher and their implicit theories of teaching.

There are multiple interpretations of the meanings of a professional identity in the literature. It is impossible to give a unique and unchanging answer to this question 'Who am I as a teacher?' (Çulha Özbaş, 2012, p.822). The society in which individuals live (Flores & Day, 2006), their background knowledge (Lipka & Brinsthaupt, 1999), their professional experiences, the level at which they work (Sachs, 1999, p.39) and how they define themselves will certainly affect the answers they give to the question above.

Teachers' identities are central to the beliefs, values and practices that guide their actions within and outside of the classroom (Walkington, 2005) and their professional identities come from their interpretations of their experiences (Gee, 2000; Geijsel & Meijers, 2005). In short, it is clear from the relevant literature that the construction of identities of student teachers is a social process, embedded deeply within their life histories and sociocultural contexts.

### **Social studies student teachers' beliefs about social studies**

Although there is a lack of consensus about the meaning of social studies itself (Nelson, 2001; Evans, 2004; Adler, 2008), the definition of social studies has significant implications for the school curriculum, teacher/classroom practice, the teacher education curriculum, and the forms of research valued in the field (Nelson, 2001, p.15). Because it is assumed that teachers' knowledge, beliefs, thinking, and attitudes serve as the bases for the decisions they make about their practices and student learning (Adler, 2008, p.340), teachers are far more than mere conduits of information or of curriculum developed by the experts. Teachers are the keys to what happens in classrooms (Thornton, 2005).

To use Thornton's (2005) term, teachers are the 'curricular-instructional gatekeepers'. As such, they actively shape the instructional program. Teachers can interpret what counts as successful passage through the gate and open the gate a little or a lot, according to what they believe students can or should profit from on the other side: they can allow innovation through or block it according to their estimation of its educational or practical worth, and so forth (Thornton, 2005).

Student teachers have predispositions toward specific beliefs about the nature of a subject, how it should be taught, and its significance in the total school curriculum (Groosman, Wilson & Shulman, 2005). Research by Shulman in particular inspired extensive scholarship that would span several decades about effective teaching practices in various disciplines, including history and social studies. This research found that knowledge bases varied among teachers, depending upon their own schooling experiences and years of teaching in the classroom (2005).

A lack of subject matter knowledge and appropriate instructional strategies may contribute to the ineffectiveness of social studies classroom teachers. Adler (1984) reported that research on beliefs about social studies indicated that prospective elementary teachers had uncertain ideas about its purpose and content. Thornton (1988, 1992), in his work on teachers' beliefs in social studies, observed several connections between instructional beliefs and instructional practices. Zeichner and Tabachnick's (1985) study, which followed social studies teachers from their student teaching into their first year of teaching, found no significant change occurring in the pre-service teachers' beliefs.

However, VanSledright emphasises limitations of existing research with regard to epistemological beliefs and states that a lot of research has to be done to clarify the

connections and implications for teaching and learning (VanSledright & Limon 2006, p.551). Research into teacher beliefs in the narrower social and civic education domain (mainly associated with the academic disciplines of sociology, economics and political science) stays even behind the existing analysis and remains *terra incognita*, even in the international social studies education research community (Adler, 2008): if we are to really understand and improve teacher education, longitudinal studies and coordination of data will be necessary (Adler, 2008, p.347).

The questions to be addressed in the present study are: What conceptual themes (or categories) can be derived from social studies student teachers teacher and social studies teacher metaphorical images? Is there a change in student teachers' metaphorical images of teachers and social studies teachers between the beginning and the end of the social studies teacher education program? How do student social studies teachers construct their professional identities?

## **Method**

The research reported in this paper is part of a larger study that examined the identities, learning experiences and professional development of social studies student teachers. A mixed methods approach was used in the main study but for this part of the study only student teachers' metaphorical images about teachers and social studies teachers and think-aloud interviews with five student teachers were analysed.

## **Participants in the study**

Fifty-five student teachers in the first to fourth years of the primary school social studies teacher education program participated in the study.

## **Data collection**

Qualitative educational researchers suggest that metaphor analysis is a unique heuristic tool for bringing implicit beliefs and tacit knowledge to awareness (Patchen & Crawford, 2011). Metaphors are not merely poetic embellishments to language: they have the potential to affect their users' perceptions and actions and to be affected by them (Patchen & Crawford, 2011). The seminal study of Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.223) explores how the regular use of metaphors enables us to make sense of our lives.

In the present study student teachers were asked to complete in writing the stem 'teacher like...because...; social studies teacher like... because...' using a metaphor four times over the teacher education program.

<b>Year of the Program</b>	<b>Metaphorical Study</b>	<b>Longitudinal Study</b>
First: September 2006-2007	A teacher is like... A social studies teacher is like...	Survey about earlier learning in social studies Metaphors
Second: September 2007-2008	A teacher is like... A social studies teacher is like...	Metaphors
Third: June 2008-2009	A teacher is like... A social studies teacher is like...	Metaphors
Fourth: June 2009-2010	A teacher is like... A social studies teacher is like...	Metaphors, TAPs interview, focus group interviews
<b>Table 1: Data collection process and triangulation of data</b>		

Think Aloud Protocols (TAPs) were used to trace student teachers' identity development, especially their changing and unchanging beliefs, over four years. TAPs enabled the research to elicit the 'what' of teacher and social studies teacher, and the 'how' and 'why' behind their choices of metaphors. Five participants were chosen because of the richness of their interview data, and their extensive descriptions and examples of what it was like to be a teacher and social studies teacher and their willingness to volunteer for this study. And, on the basis of the maximal variation sampling principle (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), many different metaphorical images were involved. Think aloud interviews were used both to triangulate data and to understand choices of metaphors.

The data collection process is summarised in Table 1.

### Data Analysis

Data were analysed through the following four stages:

1. The metaphorical images supplied by the participants were coded.
2. The coded metaphorical images were scrutinised to choose a sample expression that represented each best. Open-coding techniques used reveal patterns and themes related to the ways in which the student teachers characterised teachers and social studies teachers.
3. Major conceptual categories were identified, each of which encompassed those metaphoric images with similar emphasis.
4. The conceptual themes were compared across the years of the teacher education program.

Think-aloud interviews (TAPs) were also examined in terms of the instructors, curriculum and field experiences categories. The interviewees were given the interview results and asked to make proposals or comment on the texts.

## Findings

### Metaphorical images of teachers

Four main metaphors were identified: teachers as lighteners, guides, nurturers and transmitters.

Table 2 shows definitions and examples of teacher metaphors.

Metaphor	Definition	Examples
Enlightener	Teacher passes on information and knowledge, enlightens students.	Candle, lamp...
Guide	Teachers leads students to knowledge. Guides students to achieve goals, discovers students knowledge or hidden potential, which becomes revealed through learning.	Movie director, guideing, travelling in a foreign country...
Nurturer	Teacher provides environment to promote growth, fosters potential capabilities of students.	Mother, gardener, parents...
Transmitter	Teacher passes on information and knowledge: knowledge is externally determined product.	Electric circuit, book...

Table 2: Definations and examples of teacher metaplors

### Teacher as enlightener

The student teachers viewed teachers as being like a *candle, lamp, sun*, etc. For them, the teacher as an enlightener must light everywhere by passing information and knowledge. The metaphor also describes a teacher-center approach. The concept is that a teacher must devote herself/himself to the students. Nalan described her understanding of teacher as enlightener:

*For me a teacher is like a candle. She/he teaches her/his students essential information and knowledge. He/she is always devoted.*

### Teacher as guide

The student teachers who viewed teachers as guides used metaphors such as *movie director* and *guide to travel in a foreign country*. They guide students to achieve goals and enable their skills and talents to be revealed through learning. Alp described his understanding thus:

*A teacher is like a guide because she/he discovers students' knowledge and hidden potential and helps them to find right way.*

### Teacher as a nurturer

The student teachers used metaphors such as *mother, gardener, and parents*. As a nurturer a teacher provides a positive environment for students to grow. A teacher who can nourish the character of the child by making him or her feel loved and important is creating the emotionally-positive atmosphere needed for the child's growth. Again, a teacher-centred approach was mentioned. Ahmet described his understanding of teacher as nurturer:

*A teacher is like a mother because teachers fosters the potential capabilities of students and love them.*

### Teacher as transmitter

Student teachers viewed teachers like an *electric circuit, book, computer, etc.* A teacher passes on information and knowledge. Knowledge is an externally-determined product. Ayşe stated that:

*A teacher is like an encyclopaedia. You can find every kind of knowledge in an encyclopaedia.*

### Metaphorical images of social studies teacher

<u>Metaphor</u>	<u>Definitions</u>	<u>Examples</u>
Enlightener	Social studies teacher passes on information and knowledge, enlightens students.	Lamp, candle...
Guide	Social studies teacher leads students to knowledge. Guides students to achieve goals, discovers students' knowledge or hidden potential, which becomes revealed through learning.	Movie director, guide to travel in a foreign country...
Nurturer	Social studies provides environments to promote growth, fosters potential capabilities of students.	Mother, gardener...
Transmitter	Social studies passes on information and knowledge: knowledge is externally-determined product.	Electric circuit, gatekeeper...
Life adjustment	Social studies teacher helps students prepare for to real life outside the school	Life, society...
Social reconstruct or	Social studies teacher emphasizes social constructivism, equitable distribution of power and ethic of care. All participate in the search for	Bomb, snowdrop



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	knowledge, shared teacher and student control encouraging multiple viewpoints in a community of learners.	
Social Studies	Social studies teacher teaches branches of the social sciences such as history, geography, civics, sociology, anthropology	Star, salad...

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**Table 3: Social Studies Teacher metaphors**

### **Social studies teacher as a life adjuster**

Social studies teacher helps students to adjust to life. Su described her understanding thus:

*A social studies teacher like a life because she/he helps students to adjust to life and teaches them how to live in society.*

### **Social studies teacher as a social reconstructor**

Within this metaphor, the student teachers viewed a social studies teacher as a *bomb* or *snowdrop*. The teacher shared control with students, encouraging multiple viewpoints in a community of learners and supporting change in society. Emre stated:

*A social studies teacher like a bomb. Because when bomb explodes, the people nearby are affected dramatically.*

### **Social studies teacher as social studies**

The student teachers likened a social studies teacher to a *star* or *salad* because the subject involves teaching social sciences such as history, geography, civics, sociology, anthropology. Zuhail described a social studies teacher as being:

*...like a salad, because she/he teaches all the branches of the social sciences.*

Having formed an overall understanding of the identity processes and patterns across the years of study, we explored the findings of TAPs of five student teachers.

### **Findings from TAPs**

In this section, the impact of the processes within the teacher education method course was examined (the instructors, curriculum and field experiences), because these all seemed to have an impact on pre-service teachers' understandings about being a social studies student teacher.

### **Instructors**

All the participants mentioned the importance of university instructors on their identity development. They perceived especially keenly the influence of their teachers'

pedagogic activity on themselves and expected them to be their role models or not. Ayşe noted:

*All the instructors wanted us to do our lessons based on active learning instructions but noone showed us by doing these forms of lessons. They only wanted us to do something but they never modelled for us how to can we do a lesson plan or how to teach social studies using cooperative learning or other active methods. So I never believe I can use these active methods in the real classrooms.*

As mentioned earlier, the most important innovation in the new social studies curriculum is a student-centered approach with an emphasis upon active participation and the involvement of the students in the teaching/learning activities (Doğanay, 2008; Saftan, 2008; Öztürk, 2009; Açıklan, 2010). It appears that student teachers may not be learning how to plan teaching activities in an active way.

### **Teacher education program**

Another important factor in shaping identity is the teacher education program. Most of the student teachers indicated that their program affected their beliefs about social studies, especially in regard to its context. Semih commented:

*When in my first year at university I only know that social studies is history, geography and civics, but in the second year we take anthropology, sociology... And now in my last year of the program my opinion about social studies and the purpose of teaching social studies has changed. But the reason of this is not only teacher education but also field experince.*

### **Field experience**

All the student teachers indicated that they felt their field experiences were simply too short but it is clear that this process also helped to change their beliefs about being a social studies teacher. It gave them an opportunity to observe what it means to be a social studies teacher, as Hakan explains:

*When I first go to field experience I feel that I am a social studies teacher. It was first time I was in the teachers' lounge. As you know if you are a student you can't easily enter a teachers' lounge so if I am in the teachers' lounge I will be a teacher. Being with other teachers I felt that I will be a teacher. This time is very important for my life.*

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

In this study, the professional identity development of a group of social studies student teachers in a four-year teacher education program was examined.

At the start of their teacher education, first-year student teachers try to understand themselves in term of who teachers and social studies teachers are and what they do. The metaphors they provided for teachers were usually 'enlightener' and 'guide', their teacher images being those of people who devote themselves to the students and try to provide positive environments in which the students can grow.

On the other hand, 'transmitter' was a commonly-used metaphor in several previous studies (Saban, 2004; Saban, Koçbeker and Saban; 2006, Cerit, 2008, Çulha-

Özbaş, 2012). The traditional learning and teaching process in Turkey may be the reason of this perception.

Throughout the teacher education programme teacher metaphors did not change greatly: 'enlightener', 'guider', 'nurturer' and 'transmitter' appeared in the same order from the beginning to the end. This finding shows that although student teachers completed all their coursework and teaching practice their images and beliefs about teachers and teaching remained fairly constant. The society in which individuals live (Flores and Day, 2006), their background knowledge (Lipka and Brinsthaupt, 1999), their professional experiences and the level at which they work (Sachs, 1999: 39) must be taken into account in the development of their professional identity.

In comparison to their metaphors for teachers, 'transmitter' and 'nurturer' were the most commonly-used metaphors for social studies teachers. It appears that when social studies student teachers start teacher education, for them a social studies teacher is someone who passes on information and knowledge to the students and knowledge is an externally-determined product. In their first year, student teachers do not focus on change. For example, the course of *Introduction to Educational Sciences* was referred to in terms of expectations rather than experiences.

In the second year of the study, the metaphors are nearly the same as those in the first year but in the third and the fourth years some different metaphors that showed the character of social studies education appeared: 'life adjuster', 'social reconstructor', 'social studies'. In the third year, the students began to explore themselves as social studies teachers and some learner-centered references emerged. This may be due to the impact of the social studies teacher education program, because in its third year of the course *Teaching Social Studies* was referred to in relation to providing good examples of teaching methods and practices and innovative approaches. In the fourth year, student teachers start their first actual teaching: up to this point they have been observing and teaching parts of lessons. It is evident that this experience affects their beliefs. For some fourth-year students, a desire to function as agents of change in society was an important motive for becoming social studies teachers. Their reflections also align with research findings that prospective teachers' ideas in both their course work and student teaching are filtered through their prior experiences, beliefs and images of teaching and learning (Grossman, 1990).

The present study suggests that students perceive especially keenly the influence of their university teachers' pedagogic activity on themselves and expect them to be their role models. The results of our study support Loughran & Berry's (2005) findings on role models.

Adler (1995) notes that teacher education programs need to put more effort into understanding the ideas and attitudes toward social studies education that students develop during their preparation courses. It is clear that the student teachers who participated in the present study entered the social studies teacher education program without any strong prior beliefs about being social studies teachers, because their metaphorical images about them changed over the four year.

This finding is important for social studies teacher educators because it suggests that there are unique opportunities to influence social studies student teachers' beliefs by helping them to demonstrate innovation in their teaching of social studies.

Some questions raised as a result of this study require further investigation: How does teacher education support individuals' transition from student teachers to teachers? What pedagogical strategies are most effective in achieving a positive transition?

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