THE NOTION OF HOPE IN THE LIVES OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ PERSPEKTIFINDEN UMUT KAVRAMI

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ABSTRACT

The notion of hope as an educational theme has drawn very little attention amongst the teaching community. Ironically, one the strongest factors influencing why individuals choose the field of teaching is an aspiration to change the lives of their students. This study explores the notion of hope in the lives of prospective teachers in the US. The respondent group for this study consists of pre-service teachers in their senior year of undergraduate work. A semi-structured interview captures how each prospective teacher interprets hope as a part of their teaching philosophies and practices. Findings reveal the notion of hope almost always exist in the lives of prospective educators since they choose the profession with the hopes of making a difference in children's lives. In fact, there are more factors found in this study that influenced teacher hope such as quality of family life, physical health, sense of belonging, vitality, financial statement and so on. Future research should mention how personal factors such as character, living condition of teachers, family life and physical health influence teacher candidates' hopefulness. Further studies should also explore the views of practicing teachers about hope.

Key Words: The notion of hope, pre-service teachers, teaching

ÖZ

Bireyler öğretmenlik mesleğini öğrencilerinin hayatını değiştirmeyi umut ederek seçmelerine rağmen bir eğitim teması olarak umut kavramı öğretmen eğitiminde gereken ilgiyi çekmemiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı umut kavramının öğretmen adaylarının hayatındaki yerini araştırmaktır. Bu amaçla A.B.D deki son sınıfta okuyan on öğretmen adayıyla röportaj yapılmıştır. Yapılan röportaj kaydedilmis ve birebir tercüme edilmiştir. Bulgular göstermiştir ki öğretmen adayları umudun öğretmenlerin hayatında her zaman var olduguna inanmaktadır. Özellikle öğrencilerinin başarılarını görmek öğretmenlerin umudunu ayakta tutan, motive eden en büyük faktördür. Bununla birlikte destek veren bir okul çevresinin olması da öğretmenleri daha umutlu hale getirmektedir. Katılımcılar çalışmada umutlarını zedeleyen konulara da dokunmuşlardır. Öğretmenlik mesleğinin toplum gözünde düşük görülmesi, öğretmenlerin veliler tarafından sürekli eleştirilip, şikayet edilmesi, öğretmenlerin okul yönetimi tarafından gerekli şekilde desteklenmemesi umut kırıcı faktörler olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Gerçekte öğretmenlerin umut seviyesini etkileyen daha birçok faktör vardır: aile hayatı, sağlık, maaş gibi. Gelecek çalısmalar da bu faktörlerin çalışan öğretmenlerin umudunu nasıl etkilediğini daha kapsamlı şekilde araştırılmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Umut kavramı , öğretmen adayları, öğretmenlik

1.INTRODUCTION

Inherently, hope embeds itself into the nature of teaching; Sonio Nieto states, "hope is the essence of teaching," (cited in Nolan& Stitzlein, 2011, p.2). Believing that every child can learn and that every teacher will make a difference in their student's lives is essential to why education exists. Witnessing a small child reading for the first time, and seeing students reach their growth and

potential to become imaginative, active, productive members of society are all rewards of teaching. One does not go into teaching without the confidence to believe they will make the world a better place through their education contribution.

Birmingham (2009) notes that teachers are familiar with a range of hope, from lighthearted hope that arises when a small child attends the first day of school with new school supplies, new classrooms, and new exciting experiences, to activism hope that, "arises, strengthens, and defies adversity," (Birmingham, 2009, p.27). Furthermore, Birmingham discusses how the elements of hope are invisible, yet essential to the disposition of teachers. Hope may serve as the main foundation by which all other dispositions are built. She states:

When hope is diminished, other more observable dispositions weaken as well.

> A teacher with little hope may not have the moral strength to the challenging moral work required to be caring, fair, honest, and responsible, much less to promote social justice, maintain high standards, and commit to a safe and supportive learning environment. (Birmingham, 2009, p.34).

In addition, Bullough's (2011) investigation into the role of hope in teaching and learning finds that hope is the essential element of happiness for the well-being of teachers. Noddings (2003) draws attention to the strong link between hope and happiness saying, "there is no lasting happiness without hope" (p.2).

In the current education arena, teacher's attrition rates are very high (Parker& Martin, 2008). Evidence of teacher performance is now linked heavily to their student's test scores; therefore, "teaching is becoming ever more stressful, intense, and much less personal" (Bullough, 2009, p .33). At this point, the notion of hope plays a vital role in teachers' lives by helping them to " live with confidence that their efforts are worthwhile, even when the fruits of their labor remains elusive" (Nolan & Stizlein, p.6). It seems beneficial to incorporate hope as a common theme throughout education.

Although hope serves as a " foundational motivation" (Birmingham, 2009) for education, the notion of hope gains little academic attention in education in contrast to other areas including psychology, art, literacy, and religion. Few studies theoretically discuss the importance of hope in teaching; the bodies of current literature that empirically explore hope in teaching are quite limited. Consequently, this study hopes to fill a small portion of the gap existing in literature concerning education and hope. By interviewing student teachers in their senior year of undergraduate work, this study distinguishes itself from previous data collected. While other studies may have investigated current teacher's views on hope, this study investigates prospective teachers' sense of hope. Student teachers in the senior-year are purposefully selected in order to examine whether prospective teachers are only hopeful prior to entering the teaching arena and if they feel ready to survive in an unpredictable teaching environment. The broad researches questions of this study include are:

> 1.) How do pre-service teachers interpret the notion of hope in teaching?

> 2.) What concepts/beliefs/ideas about hope do pre-service teachers have and how do they view these concepts/beliefs/ideas within the context of teaching?

> 3.) Which aspects of teaching promote or hinder teacher hope?

2.FRAMING THE STUDY

The notion of hope has extensively been studied by scholars in psychology conceptualizing hope in a number of different ways including disposition, emotion, and personal traits. They remarkably apply quantitative methods including surveys and checklist to explore the notion of hope. Numerous scholars in psychology have studied hope as a disposition or personal trait. Synder (1991) and his colleagues are leading figures conducting empirical research about hope as a disposition. In their studies, they have placed emphasis on agency and pathways as the two most

important interrelated elements of hope. Agency means, "a sense of successful determination in meeting goals in the past, present, and future" and pathway refers to "a sense of being able to generate successful plans to meet goals" (Bullough, 2011, p. 570). Snyder (1991) created the Hope Scale, including self-reports to measure the level of hope in adults and children and used it for identifying the differences between high hope and low hope people. According to his studies, higher hope individuals seem happier and are reported to have a greater overall well-being than lower hope individuals. The reason behind this conclusion, Synder (1991) claimed, is that individuals with higher hope scores are more optimistic, having high self-esteem and a sense of agency; consequently they are well-skilled in problem solving, overcoming obstacles, and finding alternate ways when their ways are blocked.

Building upon Synder's ideas, Peterson (2006) also approached hope as a disposition. Using the Hope Scale (Synder, 1991), he examined the relationship between hope and job performance choosing different samples of employees at different job levels. The findings of the study revealed higher hope employees, mortgage brokers; management executives had more job satisfaction and offered more qualified solutions to work-related problems.

The psychologist Lazarus (1999) defined hope as a combination of emotions. He discussed hope in terms of its negative counterparts like despair, helplessness, hopelessness, and depression, with the belief that the value of hope is most evident when the meanings of its negative counterparts are understood. For instance, he gave the definition of despair as, " the utter of loss of hope." Based on this definition, he made the further claim that "if we cannot hope, we despair" (p. 659). According to him, hope is a vital resource and coping strategy for humans to maintain life. For Lazarus (1999) hope was not only a desire or belief; rather, it served as a catalyst for human actions to sustain life in unsatisfactory situations. He admitted, "Hope is never merely a wishful fantasy about how good things will be, but is a mixed state of mind that also entails underlying distress about what the present might imply for the future" (p.655).

Lazarus (1999) also distinguished the notion of hope from optimism, noting that hope was not necessarily tantamount to optimism, expecting favorable outcomes. Instead, he understood hope to be a mixture of emotions, including both the belief that circumstances could get better soon and the anxiety about the possibility of a negative outcome. Lazarus underlined that life was uncertain and full of both favorable and negative situations that continuously cycle. Nobody can know the future with confidence. At this point, hope is a necessary emotion, serving as a coping mechanism in terms of providing a ground for people to continue their engagement in life.

3.METHODOLOGY

3.1.Context and Participants

The data was collected at a Midwestern university in the United States applying purposeful sampling. The sample was also of some convenience because participants were selected from an easily accessible teacher education program. Patton (2010) maintains that purposeful sampling enables the researcher to select a specific number of information-rich settings that fit the purpose of the research. I purposively selected pre-service teachers in the senior year to explore their reflections on the notion of hope in teaching based upon their experiences both at the teacher education program and field experience.

With this in mind, the study was first announced in two courses taken by senior pre-service teachers. In these two courses, twelve pre-service teachers– five male and seven female– volunteered for the study, however the respondent group for this study consists of 10 pre-service teachers, four majored in Elementary Education, and six were secondary social science student teachers. All ten participants were white and came from different areas throughout the Mid . Their socioeconomic conditions were varied between middle and working class families.

3.2.Instrument

In order to acquire in-depth information from participants about the notion of hope a qualitative method, which included collection of the interview data, was applied. The semi-structured interview was the main instrument of the study; in this way "some questions will be developed in advance with follow-up questions on the spotlight of participants' responses" (Patton, 2010, p. 77). The interview questions remained focused on key points in relation to the research questions of the study .To maintain the privacy of the participants, their personal information including their identity and interview records remained confidential.

The length of the in depth and semi-structured interviews were range from 30 minutes to one hour. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the places selected by participants. Each interview was recorded and transcribed in verbatim. To maintain the privacy of the participants, their personal information including their identity and interview records remained confidential and was kept in a password-protected file. The aggregate data and findings will be presented and published anonymously through the use of pseudonyms.

3.3.Data Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis (Saldana, 2009& Boyatsiz, 2008) was applied following an inductive, iterative approach that enables researchers to see recurring patterns and repeated statements throughout a set of data (Saldana, 2009). Recognizing patterns depends on the extent to which the researchers immerse themselves in their data (Saldana, 2009). In order to become familiar with the data, each transcript derived from semi-structured interview was reviewed several times by reading, revisiting the data again and again, and taking initial notes about emerging issues (Saldana, 2009).

According to Paulus et al. (2014), "Coding refers to the process of attaching a meaningful label to a specific portion of the data" (2014, p. 127). Coding serves as a map of a qualitative study, therefore it is at the center of data analysis. Data coding process occurred in several times. Initial patterns were first coded using descriptive codes that refer to summarizing the basic topic of data in one word or in a short phrase (Saldana, 2009). In the second phase, codes were categorized based on commonalities and differences within and across interviews. In the last phase, themes were generated combining codes. Five broad themes occurred in the study: different entry motivation to teaching, initial doubts about becoming a teacher, hope is inherent in teaching, students are main source of teacher hope and interaction is key action in dealing with challenges.

3.4.Validity

In any type of research, validity is a concern. Qualitative research uses several techniques to address threats of validity. This research is a small size interview study and using interviews as the main instrument of study brings some weaknesses. Patton (2010) suggests that an interviewee's state of mind or feelings at the time of the interview can distort responses to questions. To improve the validity of my interview data, I used face-to-face member checking to add some credibility. I checked with participants to see whether they are sure about their claims in the interview. I also discussed my understanding and interpretations of their claims, to ensure that it is consistent with theirs. In order to verify findings, participants reviewed the transcriptions and research report.

In qualitative studies, researchers serve as instrument for their own study. Therefore researchers' subjectivities and interpretations might influence the qualitative study at every step starting from data collection to data analysis. To increase validity, researchers should disclose their beliefs and biases (Cresswell& Miller, 2000). This requires me to be aware of my own subjectivity while actively engaged in the research process (Peshkin, 1988). At this point being reflective is the one of the vital validity procedures for my research (Pillow, 2003). Thick and rich description is vital validity procedure to makes a study credible. I pay attention to describe the setting, research procedure, participants and the findings of the study in rich detail.

4.FINDINGS

4.1Hope is inherent in teaching

The construct of hope shared by the participants partially reflects a common discussion about how hoping is the central theme in education. Participants reveal the notion of hope always exist in teachers' lives since they all have wishes for their students to become effective citizens in society. Further, teachers choose the profession with the hopes of changing children's lives, and helping them grow into better people. What constantly pushes people to pursue teaching is the belief and hope that what they do will create positive change in student's lives. Throughout the study of the theme, hope always exists in teaching, resurfacing with the statements of the participants. All ten participants remarked that teachers' hope is derived from two sources. First, is the belief that teachers have the capability to change children's' lives every single day. The second is seeing the mental, physical, and social growth taken place in their students by learning. The second source gave the teachers the biggest hope.

The statement of one participant best summarizes what participants think about hopefulness in teaching. She said, "I think teachers are generally more hopeful people because it takes an extremely hopeful person to believe that as a teacher they can change the life of a student and make them care about what it is they are teaching".

4.2.Students are the main source of teacher hope

Participants displayed that students are at the center of their lives, in particular, their teaching career. Students are the main factor making them either hopeful or happy; the reverse is also true for what makes them lack of hope. Their hope grows with the success of their students. They used similar phrases like " the impact you have on students' lives", "the growth of students", " the potential I have to make an impact on the youth of America", " student success" or "being in a classroom with students and being able to talk to them" to denote their sources of hope. However, when the active participations and learning of their students' decreases and their students pay less attention to lessons, or they failed; teachers become less happy in their teaching abilities.

This issue stood out from participants' responses in that hope and happiness are tied to each other and might be increased if students do well in schools. Participants seem to believe that they could overcome other problems in teaching including: issues with parents, unhelpful principals, low pay, public criticism and so on, if their students are fine. The participants believed that intrinsic rewards and student accomplishments became the most rewarding part of teaching. The ability to access students and change their lives outweighed all bad problems.

4.3.The importance of support

The first couple of years seem overwhelming for novice teachers. Novice teachers who can survive in teaching during the first two years gain flexible approaches to staying in teaching (Kelly &Berthelsen, 2000). In this study, participants were asked what their first action would be if faced with any challenges in their teaching career.

Participants felt that asking their colleagues for help was pivotal. New teachers may not have the ability to access problems as well as teachers who have been in the career for a long period of time. Many of their colleagues may have been through similar situations and provide the support and answers they are looking for. When they ask others to provide solutions to the problems, they may gain a fresh sense and more objective view. All participants agreed that they would consult with someone within their administration to help them figure out problems. The responses to who they would consult did vary, while many said colleagues, others found PLC (professional learning communities), principals, mentors, teachers, spouses, and family to all be useful sources in helping them solve teaching problems. One participant said, "If I experience a difficulty I would seek a mentor or find someone who may have had the same struggles and see if it isn't something that I can work through". Two participants stated that they might ask their mothers who are teachers to

gain a suggestion. According to one participant her mom is an incredible teacher and "Always seems to know what to do in regards to problems in a classroom". The other participant prefers to talk with his PLC team, because in his words "They will most likely have experienced the situation that I am currently facing and will hopefully have good advice to help me out''.

As distinct from other participants, one teacher candidate likes to ask his wife for help over anyone else. He reflects " My wife, knows me better than anyone and can help me build the confidence it takes to overcome issues that may come up". From the participants' responses, it can be agreed that novice teachers prefer to ask for help from somebody with experience in teaching.

4.4. Obstacles to access hope

Findings also shows the barriers in front of teachers to access hope. First, administrative support was most often found lacking in teaching situations. Several participants stated beliefs that asking the principals for help would make them appear incompetence to their ministers. Only one participants out of ten claimed that she might ask the principal for giving support.

The other issue block teachers' hope is the views of public towards teaching that devaluing teachers task. They stated teaching as generally seen as a low status and an easygoing job. Rather than focusing on positive influences teachers made on children, parents and media easily criticize teachers without thinking how teaching is exhaustive and stressful.In particular, four participants comment on the difficulties of effectively communicating with parents. They state many parents are very harsh in their manner towards teachers and use an argumentative and judgmental language that makes them sound very angry. One participant stated "Sometimes parents call teachers yelling them and say so many negative things. This is very dissapointing for teachers". As this participant stated taking abuse from parents is a major reason for teachers' unhappiness.

5.DISCUSSION

Hope as a concept attached to an inspirational language. It is widely utilized in almost every aspect of the human life including birth, health, religion, and in social life; giving positive notions and feelings. However, its usage remains as an inner feeling and far away in applying real-life problems. It is thought as a fantasy belief, imagination or wish.

The findings of the study illustrate teacher candidate are aware of both the rewards and challenges of teaching. Although they have not obtained their full-time teaching position, based on their volunteer teaching experiences and field experience, they have some sense about what the nature of teaching looks like.

This study reveals that pre-service teachers view the following factors as essential to maintaining hope in teaching: student growth, and a supportive networking system. Statements about interaction are essential for keeping hope and the effectiveness of teachers is a common theme throughout the findings.

The primary motivation for teaching was to shape children' lives and see their personal growth. Participants overly emphasize the possibility of influence and student accomplishment as the most rewarding aspects of teaching. The participants stated their previous teachers left important values on their life and they wanted to do same thing for their future students. Even though the challenges of discipline and working with emotionally problematic students raised concerns for many participants in the study, participants believed that they could overcome all these issues if they saw the progress of their students. To them, intrinsic rewards and student accomplishments outweighed preponderating problems.

A supportive network with other teachers was frequently mentioned as an effective means for professional growth and as rewarding aspects of teaching. In particular, participants believed continuing interactions with experienced teachers showed them alternative pathways and renewed their motivations in teaching. They viewed veteran teachers as primary consultants for asking ideas and gaining feed back. For beginning teachers, participants underlined the importance of

having a good mentor teacher. Having a strong mentor or a network among teachers such as PLC might retain them from feeling alone or isolated.

This study also shows the barriers in front of teachers to access hope. First, administrative support was most often found lacking in teaching situations. The second one was unsupportive parent.

6.CONCLUSIONS& IMPLICATIONS

This study is one of the first qualitative studies to explore how prospective teachers interpret hope in teaching, therefore it is distinguished from previous studies that remarkably applied quantitative methods including surveys and checklist to explore the notion of hope. The implication of this study might include a better understanding of the notion of hope in teaching. The findings and recommendations of this study may motivate prospective teachers to keep their engagement in teaching and learning. The other implication of the study would be related teacher educators. They may develop ways for teacher candidates to sustain their sense of hope in teaching even all challenges in school climate.

Although this study touched issues in relation to the notion of hope in the lives of teacher candidates, it is worth noting several limitation and directions for future research. First of all, as it is general in most qualitative research (Patton, 2010), the small sample size consisting of ten teacher candidates, majoring in elementary and social science potentially limited generalization of findings. Future research should address opinions of teacher candidates from various content areas.

Using interviews as the main instrument of study brings also some weaknesses. Participants' responses to the interview questions might be influenced by interviewee's state of mind or feelings at the time of the interview (Patton, 2002). Further research might be conducted utilizing other types of instruments such as observation, survey, and written reflection to support interview data.

In fact, there are more factors found in this study that influenced teacher hope such as quality of family life, physical health, sense of belonging, vitality, financial statement and so on. Future research should also address how personal factors such as character, living condition of teachers, family life and physical health influence teacher candidates' hopefulness.

As the current literature on this topic is very limited in both scope and quantity, future research should focus on a wider view of teacher hopefulness in order to promote their happiness and well-being. Further studies should also explore the views of practicing teachers about hope.

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