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Early Childhood Preservice Teachers' Experiences with Reflective Journal Writing

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Reflective journal writing is considered as a form of reflective practice. The research studies suggested that journal writing allowed the teacher to reflect on their practices, improved their self-awareness and supported their professional development. Even though the research showed that journal writing as an effective tool for reflective practice, the need exists for the studies conducted in the area of early childhood teacher education. Thus, this qualitative study aims to gain a more in-depth understanding of early childhood preservice teachers' experiences with reflective journal writing.

Research Methods: This study is a qualitative study focusing on the experiences of Turkish preservice teachers. The participants were ten preservice teachers attending an early childhood teacher education program. A demographic information form, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals were used to collect data.

Findings: The findings of this study were reported on the basis of two focal points: the *role* of reflective journals and the *content* of reflective journals. For the role of reflective journals, three themes derived from data were as follows: (i) gaining insight, (ii) detailed evaluation, and (iii) developing strategies for the future. At the analysis of the content of reflection, meeting the real classroom environment and positive experiences gained from the field were the two themes that emerged from the data.

Implications for Research and Practice: This study showed that writing a reflective journal can be considered an important tool for self-evaluation and professional growth. In future studies, the role of reflective writing in teacher's professional development, especially a variety of differing types of reflective strategies, can be addressed.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a movement around the world towards the use of reflective practice and reflective journals (e.g. Bain, Mills, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2002; Isikoglu, 2007). Research studies in teacher education have focused on both the importance of reflective thinking, as well as ways of increasing reflective practices (Pavlovich, 2007; Russell, 2005). In parallel with these practices, there are many professional standards that have reported that reflection is an important part of quality teaching National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008). Developing reflection in teacher education, as Pedro (2005) asserted, is a "worthwhile effort" (p. 63).

According to Zeichner and Liston (1996), the interest in reflection can be considered "a reaction against the view of teachers as technicians who narrowly construe the nature of the problems confronting them and merely carry out what others, removed from the classroom, want them to do" (p. 4). Emphasizing the training of teachers as reflective practitioners supports the idea that preservice teachers should be trained from the perspective of "learning facilitator" or "social mediator" (Larrivee, 2008). Reflection in teacher education provides teachers with reason abilities to evaluate and improve their teaching practices (Jay & Johnson, 2002), supports their professional development (Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä, & Turunen, 2016), and acts "as a compass" for better determining their current situation and contemplating their future direction (Farrell, 2012, p. 7).

Although an increasing amount of literature has addressed the definition of reflection and strategies for improving reflection, there continues to be a debate over the meaning of reflection. The term reflection is seen as ill-defined (Hatton & Smith, 1995) and represented as complicated (Clarà, 2015; Griffiths, 2000; Jay & Johnson, 2002; LaBoskey, 1993; Russell, 2005). The roots of the term reflection originated with Dewey (1933) who defined the reflective action as an "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief, or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). Hatton and Smith (1995) basically defined reflection as the "deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement" (p. 40). The elements of reflection are considered from various frameworks, "reflection is situated in practice, is cyclic in nature, and makes use of multiple perspectives" (Ward & McCotter, 2004, p. 245). Schön (1987) suggested the reflection in action and reflection on action. In Schön's framework, *reflection in action* implies "conscious thinking and modification while on the job" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 34). *Reflection on action* occurs before and after the experience while planning and thinking about the lesson or while evaluating what happened (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Reflective teachers are active in asking questions and evaluating their beliefs and assumptions about what they do in practice (Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2006; Larrivee, 2008; Lee, 2008). Zeichner and Liston (1996) stated that acknowledging teachers as reflective practitioners is to accept teachers as active individuals with

ideas, beliefs, and theories related to their work, as well as both problem posers and solvers in the educational context rather than regarding them as merely the implementers of pre-planned programs.

Reflective thinking and practice take into account different trends in the research literature. For example, while one vein of research focuses on the improvement of reflective thinking (Pavlovich, 2007; Russell, 2005), another group of research is interested in describing the levels or classification of reflective thinking (Cengiz, Karatas, & Yadigaroglu, 2014; Collier, 1999; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Larrivee, 2008; Valli, 1997; Ward & McCotter, 2004). The striking finding of these research trends was that descriptive reflection tended to be the most common preference among preservice teachers (Cengiz et al., 2014; Hatton & Smith, 1995). On the other hand, based on their review, Dyment and O'Connell (2011) stated that preservice teachers could write higher quality journals if consideration was made regarding the limiting and supporting factors which influence their writing.

One of the most important points to be considered in supporting reflective practitioners is to provide preservice teachers with "mediation structures" to aid them in systematically focusing on their experiences, as well as to take action (Larrivee, 2008). To help teachers become more reflective teachers different types of strategies are beneficial, such as portfolios (Kaasila & Lauriala, 2012), e-portfolios (Oakley, Pegrum, & Johnston, 2014), video journaling (Parikh, Janson, & Singleton, 2012), video analysis (Tripp & Rich, 2012), action research (Vaughn, Parsons, Kologi, & Saul, 2014; Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000), and narratives (Larrivee, 2008). Also, it is important to use multiple systematic aids, not limit preservice teachers to one approach, and to use several strategies (Lee, 2005).

Journal writing is characterized as a form of reflective practice (Al-karasneh, 2014; Bain et al., 2002; Farrell, 2013; Lee, 2008; Pavlovich, 2007; Pedro, 2005; O'Connell & Dyment, 2011; Uline, Wilson, & Cordry, 2004; Valli, 1997; Yost et al., 2000). In other words, it is seen as a "device for working with events and experiences to extract meaning from them" (Boud, 2001, p. 9). Journal writing is a vehicle for reflection that fits the 'reflection on action' category of Schön. Journal writing is not only a place for writers to record their experiences and events but also a forum in which these events and experiences can be restructured (Boud, 2001). Collier (1999) stated that reflective writing allows students to become "aware of the sound and the character of their own voices" as well as to learn "how they think and how they convey what they think to others through their words and actions" (p. 179). Journal writing entries also create personal space for students to reflect upon their knowledge, feelings, experiences and the reasoning behind their choices (Valli, 1997).

Several studies which addressed the role of writing reflective journals revealed that journal writing supported teachers' ability to reflect on their teaching practices, increased their understanding regarding the complex nature of teaching (Tadesse Degago, 2007), and also improved their self-awareness and professional development (Al-Hassan, Al-Barakat, & Al-Hassan, 2012; Francis, 1995; Larrivee, 2008). In addition, reflective journaling is considered as a tool for preservice teachers

to foster dispositional development (LaBelle & Belknap, 2016). Around the world, the studies conducted with preservice and in-service teachers in early childhood area (Beavers, Orange, & Kirkwood, 2017; Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014; Durand, Hopf, & Nunnenmacher, 2016; Foong, Binti, & Nolan, 2018; Kahles, 2015; Riojas-Cortez, Alanís, & Flores, 2013) have addressed on different aspects of reflection and reflective thinking. In Turkey, a few studies have focused on reflective journal writing of preservice teachers in different areas of education, computer and instruction technology (Akkoyunlu, Telli, Cetin, & Daghan, 2016), science (Cengiz et al., 2014) primary education (Ekiz, 2006; Koc & Yildiz, 2012), and child development and early childhood education (Isikoglu, 2007; Kucukoglu, Ozan, & Tasgin, 2016; Sahin, 2009). Although a wealth of research literature has considered journal writing as an effective tool, there continues to be a need for conducting further research in this area with early childhood preservice teachers. Reflective teaching is more important than ever, especially for early childhood teachers who are working in diverse classrooms (Thomas & Packer, 2013). As a result, this qualitative study aims to gain a more in-depth understanding of early childhood preservice teachers' first experiences with reflective journal writing. Based on this aim, the research questions for this study were as follows: (1) What are the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the role of reflective journal writing? (2) What is the content of the pre-service teachers' reflective journals?

Method

Research Design

This study utilized the methods of qualitative research, which aims to better understand the experiences and ideas of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) and basically involves "an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). This study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of preservice teachers concerning their experiences and the role reflective journal writing played. Regarding the qualitative research tradition, to increase the trustworthiness of this study, the strategies, including prolonged engagement and triangulation, suggested by researchers (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) were utilized. Throughout this study, observing the participants while they implemented their activities, as well as holding pre and post-conferences with them, allowed the researchers to become more familiar with and better understand the participants. The experiences of the participants were provided in detail, along with rich descriptive accounts. To provide triangulation, three researchers worked together in each stage of this study, and this provided the opportunity to enhance the quality of this study by providing multiple perspectives. Furthermore, the journals and interviews were used together in understanding the perspectives of the participants regarding journal writing.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were ten preservice teachers enrolled in an early childhood teacher education program and registered for an undergraduate course focusing on movement education and play in childhood. The researchers employed *purposive sampling* (Patton, 1990) and selected participants who volunteered to take part in this study and from which it was believed rich data could be obtained. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. The participants in this study were all female, and their age ranged from 21 to 25 years old, and had a high school degree from different type of schools, and had diverse experiences related to young children. During the research process, only the preservice teachers who participated in this study wrote reflective journals. The participants were provided with the information on the content and their role in this study and not offered any incentives for the participation of this study.

The setting of this study. As a requirement of a four-hour compulsory course in their program, participants attended the theoretical part of the course, conducted observations of early childhood classrooms, planned movement and play activities suitable for 5-6-year-old children, and implemented their plans in actual classroom contexts. Practicing part of the course lasted five weeks in a public school. The students also participated in post-conferences with the professors of the course and completed reflective journal entries after each week of teaching practice. Course-related information is summarized in Table 1. For selected participants, reflective journal writing was a new concept, and before this experience, the reflective journal was not used as a reflective tool in any of their courses. An introductory session regarding the nature and practice of reflective journal writing was provided to the participants, and questions relating to the program were answered at the beginning of this study. In selected weeks, preservice teachers were provided with a reflective focus related to their practices.

Table 1.

Course Information

Section of the Course	*Content of the Course*	*Active Roles*
Theoretical-Section (in-university)	Have knowledge related to motor development, play and movement education and how to design activities for preschool children	Participation-Course instructor Preservice teachers
Practice-Section (in pre-K class)	Plan, implement and evaluate activities in classrooms	Implementation-Preservice teachers Observation-Instructors
Pre-Conference	Review and discuss the planned activities	Preservice teachers-Instructors
Post-Conference	Discuss and evaluate their own practices	Preservice teachers-Instructors

Research Instruments and Procedures

In this study, a demographic information form, semi-structured interviews, and other related documents were utilized as data collection tools. A demographic information form was completed by each participant. The form consisted of participants' demographic information, as well as the participants' previous experiences with children. The primary data collection tool for this study was face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The questions, which sought to address the thoughts and feelings of the participants regarding their practices throughout the course, as well as their thoughts and feelings regarding journal writing, were prepared by the researchers in light of the literature. Participant interviews were conducted at the office of one of the researchers who was not the instructor of the course following the completion of the course and after the collection of the student journals. Each participant interview lasted approximately 25-40 minutes, was recorded, and later transcribed verbatim. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers, "to respond to the situation at hand" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74) and to integrate additional questions into the interview when deemed necessary for gaining further understanding. Another data collection tool was the analysis of weekly reflective journals and the review of weekly activity plans, which included a section for assessment. In the creation of their reflective journals, participants were asked to use freestyle writing and to focus on important events that had happened that day, as well as on specific incidents that they faced in their practice.

Data Analysis

In this study, data were analyzed using a constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To prepare data for analysis, a total of 50 reflective journals and 50 activity plans were organized chronologically for each participant. Data analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage was to analyse interview data and journals regarding the first research question. The second stage was to examine data from journals for the second research question. Overall, in this study, rather than using preconceived categories for analysing the data, the analysis was instead data-driven, which "involves constructing a category system from the evidence that has been collected" (Edwards, 2001, p. 132). The analysis of the data was inductive; therefore, in the first phase of data analysis, the researchers reviewed the data multiple times to determine recurring issues and then coded them manually. The process was iterative, with the primary aim of identifying emerging codes. After determining emergent codes, the three researchers collaborated on the recoding and revising of the codes and also on determining the categories derived from the data.

Results

The reflective journal contents and the writing styles of participants varied and were individualistic based on their context. In this study, findings from the reflective journals and semi-structured interviews of the preservice teacher participants were

reported on the basis of two focal points. The first of these focal points was the *role* of reflective journals, and the second focal point was the *content* of reflective journals.

The Role of Reflective Journals

In general, in this study, the findings showed that reflective journal writing for preservice teachers served as a tool for professional awareness and evaluation. In particular, reflective journal writing supported preservice teachers' ability to gain greater confidence and to be objective when making personal evaluations. In addition, a majority of the participant preservice teachers expressed that reflective journal writing had become a new and important part of their professional life. In this context, a preservice teacher stated, "*It was important to write, it made a big difference in reflective journaling, and I realized that I needed to use it not only in the field of education, preschool education but also in my other daily life. I realized that it was a need for me"* (Elif, Interview).

The reflective journals of the participant preservice teachers had both similarities and differences, with each research participants' journal possessing both a common theme, as well as differing perspectives based on their own context. For example, a participant expressed her views regarding reflective journals, which she described as, "*pouring and embodying experiences on paper*", by stating, "*I think the reflective journal is effective in every respect, even when I entered into my professional life, I also like to make a notebook like this one every day and write everything there"* (Aylin, Interview). Aylin shared her view relating to the benefits of writing reflective journals during teaching practice through her journal entry:

> *The reflective journals that we wrote after the implementation process were obviously very useful to me. I can see where I made a mistake when writing my reflective journal. I think what I must do and find solutions. I saw my deficiencies in my reflective journal. It is also nice to express my thoughts and emotions after the implementation on a blank page. I think in your reflective journal, you have the opportunity to share everything like I'm talking to myself* (Aylin, Journal-Week 5).

Another participant journaled that, "*Reflective journal writing allowed me to recognize my mistakes and the good things I did. I think it is more effective and useful than the evaluation that we normally write*" (Gizem, Journal-Week 5). As a result of the analysis, three salient themes defining the role of reflective journals were determined as follows: Gaining insight, detailed evaluation and developing strategies for the future.

Gaining insight. Preservice teachers in the study group indicated that reflective journaling helped in developing a better awareness of their mistakes from the implementation process during teaching and also raised awareness of their strengths and weaknesses more than external evaluation. Melis expressed her views on this topic by stating, "*I think it was very helpful for me to see the negatives because realizing my own mistakes benefitted me more than someone else telling me*" (Interview), and Oyku emphasized that the reflective journal is helpful for *"realizing mistakes easily"* and

"noticing good things more easily" (Interview). Another example of evaluating the reflective journal as an instrument utilized for gaining insight was provided by Aylin, stating, *"It was like a human talking to herself. In a reflective journal, people actually admit things that they cannot admit to themselves"* (Interview).

Preservice teachers also pointed out that keeping journals makes it compulsory for the person to be objective on self-evaluation in addition to their gaining increased and renewed insight. Excerpts from the preservice teachers' opinions are as follows:

> *I think [keeping a journal] allowed me to see myself from the outside. It helped me to see myself not with my own eyes, but with someone else's. It allowed me to see more detail about my mistakes or what I did correctly or maybe to be more objective. Otherwise, I might feel like I was successful even if I was not, but it did not make me feel like it when I got into the reflective journal work* (Yesim, Interview).
>
> *It is a bit difficult for people to put their negative side on the paper. Let's say a person cannot criticize himself. Every time you must criticize from any aspect. If you are not at peace with yourself, it is difficult to write a reflective journal* (Oyku, Interview).

Detailed evaluation. At the beginning of this study, preservice teachers reported similarities between the reflective journaling and the three-dimensional assessment (program, teacher and children). At the end of this study, though, the preservice teachers who had gained reflective journaling experience through their weekly practice, instead stated that the reflective journaling process provided a much more comprehensive and detailed (e.g., holistic) evaluation and added more to three-dimensional assessment. In this regard, Gizem stated:

> *Because while you actually mean to write a little review and leave the scene, you find a good opportunity to think about the one-hour period you have experienced, and you find a lot to think about. Well, it may not have much effect on the material, but it is effective for evaluating the program* (Gizem, Interview).

The participant Aylin, who also believes that keeping a reflective journal can help one to consider, recognize, and note in a more detailed way, *"the missing and ignored ideas"* (Interview). Yasemin's view concurred, stating that, *"Because reflective journaling is much broader, it enabled us to see everything from a wider perspective. It enabled us to see everything in detail. We evaluated things in a more detailed way rather than only negative comments. It provided a great contribution to us"* (Interview). Moreover, Elif commented that writing a reflective journal helped her to open up opportunities to *"analyze, consider deeply and give some ideas for further activities"*, as well as directed participants to think in a more *"multidimensional"* way (Elif, Interview). Another participant, Beril, shared the belief that reflective journal writing requires certain contributions because the process involves emotions, as well as calls upon a three-dimensional assessment:

> *With the evaluations, we realized that we usually ignored our emotions. This can be a daily plan or a single activity. Also, we observed all of our behaviors, positive or negative, children's behaviors and attitudes. A detailed evaluation is something*

positive. I think we can see where we make mistakes much more easily in this way (Beril, Interview).

While the participant, Yesim, stated similar beliefs that reflective journaling provides both a space for detailing and also for expressing emotions:

> *In planning, I was able to do this, when I wrote the reflective journal, I made the effort to do more detailed planning, perhaps because I wrote the mistakes along with my own feelings. I figured I could not do things when they were implicit. I realized this through the reflective journal, but I may not have thought about it when I left the activity, how I felt that is, why did I feel this way? I would not have thought of them* (Yesim, Interview).

Developing strategies for the future. A majority of the participants found that reflective journals acted as a sort of facilitator for defining practice strategies and also for evaluating these strategies. Some preservice teachers expressed this in their interviews, while other preservice teachers instead utilized their journal to reflect these sentiments:

> *I tried not to do something that I said, 'I did it because I did that' in my previous practice. Or I tried to use a situation that children liked in the next implementation, too. When I do this thing, I cannot attract their attention, I must not do that, I must make changes by doing this* (Interview).

> *I will continue to keep a reflective journal for myself during my upcoming implementations. During this period, keeping that journal affected my behaviour before, during, and after the event. I'm getting more detailed and trying to plan the next step* (Elif, Journal-Week 5).

Melis expressed her belief that writing a reflective journal is an effective way for "*taking action*" in implementations she will plan and use in the upcoming weeks in the following statement:

> *It made me see the mistakes I had made. Maybe it prevented me from making those mistakes in the next week. Of course, it contributed to the plans. Then, I changed my approach to the children, thanks to reflective journals. I used to have the wrong attitude. There were words I had used in the wrong way. When I wrote them down, I mean, confessed my mistakes to myself, I internalized it. Then, I can say I proceeded with more confidence in the correct way* (Melis, Interview).

In determining their future strategies, participants addressed that they most utilized the "*reminder*" function of reflective journaling. In her interview, Ceren also explained that it was important to reflect upon any planned process which could not previously be performed because the journaling acted as a data source for preparing later implementations. Another participant, Elif stated:

> *If I hadn't written a reflective journal, I would have only remembered the most apparent or the worst or the most interesting or the best memories. I would not have remembered more from the remaining experiences. Thus, I felt like the process had been done* (Elif, Interview).

The Content of the Reflective Journals

Along with attempting to understand the participant preservice teachers' perceptions regarding the role of reflective journal writing, it was also a part of this research to dissect the content of the participant teachers' reflective journals. For example, what experiences the teacher candidates emphasized in their reflective journals. Through analysis of their reflective journal entries, two themes emerged as follows: meeting the real classroom environment and positive experiences gained from the field.

Meeting the real classroom environment. When the contents of the reflective journals were examined, subcategories from contact with the real classroom environment were identified. The subcategories that were established from the findings were as follows: (1) the difficulties experienced in the real classroom environment and (2) concerns regarding the transfer of theoretical knowledge into practice. The challenging experiences that the preservice teachers experienced were most prominently witnessed in their classroom management practices. For example, Yesim emphasized the impacts of external factors on her experiences by stating:

> *I could not manage the classroom. Although it is because I am inexperienced, the overwhelming number of students was also a factor. It was really hard for me to respond to all the needs of 20 different children with different problems and needs as a single teacher. While I was trying to control some of the children, I could not manage the others* (Yesim, Journal-Week 2).

Aylin expressed her experiences regarding this issue with the following words; *"I had difficulty in classroom management during my practices […] Disorganized children made the practice difficult"* (Journal-Week 5). Moreover, Betul exemplified her concerns regarding classroom management by stating, *"I had many concerns about organizing children when their attention was distracted from time to time. However, when all children joined in all activities, it helped this concern pass quickly"* (Journal-Week 2). Gizem expressed her perceptions regarding classroom management in her journal from the second week in the following words: *"I don't think I will have more difficulties if I gain the ability to manage the classroom. Because, if I manage the classroom, I will feel less anxiety as I confide in myself more, and I will feel more comfortable"*.

Another subcategory of experiencing the real classroom environment is the concern of transferring theoretical knowledge into classroom practice. In their reflective journals, the preservice teachers often stated that they had difficulty in transforming the information they had gained in their undergraduate coursework into their real-world classroom practice. Among the participants, Gizem and Sibel, both noted in their journals their negative feelings towards putting their theoretical knowledge into practice.

While Gizem stated, *"I tried to use the pitch and intonation of my voice as our lecturer constantly told us, I tried to act as if I was one of them when I was with the children, but I feel that this actually caused them to ignore me because they were not used to such things"* (Journal-Week 2), Sibel wrote the following, *"I realized that it was not applicable to a*

group that did not recognize you, as we learned in school, that we could draw children's attention with a song" (Journal-Week 5). On the other hand, some participants stated that they had problems in transferring the knowledge they had learned because of their general "*lack of practical experience*". For example, Elif expressed her concerns regarding this situation in the following way, *"I think it is important to know the personality and developmental characteristics of the child as well as his name to have effective group work"* (Journal-Week 3).

Positive experiences gained from the environment. When the reflective journals were analyzed, the second theme was the positive experiences preservice teachers had during the implementation process. In their reflective journals, preservice teachers included positive experiences from their field experiences, as well as the personal lessons they felt they gained working with particular age groups during the implementation of planned activities. Gizem's journal entries regarding her experiences over time were:

> *I had too much difficulty preparing activities for the first week. It took me a week to do the materials, but when I looked back at the last week, I recognized that I got more used to and gained practice. With all of this, I can now control myself easier. I'm not overly panicked like I was in the first week. The closer I got to the last week, the less panicked I was* (Journal-Week 5).

Oyku also emphasized her positive experiences, stating, *"Even when I said a sentence, I learned how careful I needed to be. Because I saw what can happen if you do not provide a clear directive. At the same time, I realized that using sound tones is an effective tool to attract children's attention to a game"* (Journal-Week 5). On the other hand, Melis stated that she integrated the information obtained from the field during practice with her acquired theoretical knowledge:

> *Before attending the practicum sessions as a requirement of movement education class, I did not fully understand the purpose of having the children carry out movement activities. In practice, though, I recognized that the children were constantly doing desk activities and could never fully use their energy […] Thanks to these (movement) activities, children were able to use their energy in a positive way. From this point of view, when I become a teacher in the future, instead of saying 'don't run, don't hit your friend', I figured that I need to include what the child wants to do by planning movement activities like this* (Journal-Week 5).

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

This qualitative study aimed to understand the perspectives of early childhood preservice teachers who were not accustomed to using the journals regarding reflective journal writing process and analysis of the content of the reflective journals. To summarize, the results suggested that for the participants of this study, journal writing acted as a tool for *"gaining insight"*, *"making detailed evaluation"*, and *"developing strategies for the future"*. *"encountering real classroom life"* and *"positive experiences they had"* were the primary focus of their journals.

One of the main results of this study was that the participants' reflective journal writing served as "*a useful tool for self-evaluation*". Results from this research study corroborated with the previous research literature suggested that reflective journal writing is a crucial practice for one's professional development (Al-Hassan et al., 2012; Jay & Johnson, 2002), as a self-awareness tool (Farrell, 2013; Francis, 1995), and a meaningful activity (Brown, Cheddie, Horry, & Monk, 2017). In this study, the primary contribution of reflective journal writing for participant preservice teachers was the ability for them to utilize journaling for not only recognizing their successes but also their failures. As a result, participants understand that they have a concrete tool that can be used to evaluate better and understand their classroom experiences. As Thomas and Packer (2013) stated, "Reflection leads to a greater self-awareness-the first step toward positive change and both personal and professional growth" (p. 12). Since preservice teachers should be active stakeholders in the daily process of the classroom, reflective journal writing can serve as an objective facilitator in their self-evaluation process, as suggested by the results of this study. In addition to ensuring preservice teachers understand not only aspects that do need improvement but reflective journal writing also allows them to query themselves about, "Why did I make this mistake, how did I do it, what should I do? As a result, reflective journal writing supports teachers in reviewing the complexities of teaching, both the successes and failures, in the pursuit of self-development (Tadesse Degago, 2007).

Another important finding of this study was that writing a reflective journal is not only about preservice teachers reliving the practice but it is also about considering what they can do in their future teaching. A very fitting metaphor was used by Farrell (2012), compared reflective journaling to orienteering with a compass by describing reflective practices as, "stop, look, and discover where they are at that moment and then decide where they want to go (professionally) in the future" (p. 7). In this study, reviewing and revisiting their classroom practices through their reflective journals acted as a reminder, which enabled them to be more cautious in the future, as well as revealed clues regarding the important aspects of the teaching life. Sahin's (2009) study with child development preservice teachers showed that participants determine goals for future practices in their journal. In a study, Lee (2008) showed that journals provide opportunities for preservice teachers to develop features that will support their future careers. The present study also pointed out that the teacher can review and evaluate the important factors which influenced the teaching process through reflective journals.

This study showed that one of the most important and effective roles of writing a reflective journal for participant preservice teachers is the addition of the emotional dimension to the multidimensional structure of evaluation. Reflective journal writing assists participants of the study by providing detailed depth to their practice experience, as well as facilitating the opportunity to view extenuating factors of the process. Similarly, Lee's (2008) study of preservice teachers revealed that reflective journals functioned as a tool that allowed teachers to be more introspective regarding their own thoughts and feelings. The use of reflective journals did support the

participants in providing more detailed and in-depth assessments along with their own self-evaluation.

In this study, when the participants' reflective journals were examined regarding content, it was recognized that the preservice teachers' problems were primarily related to aspects of classroom management. Likewise, in related studies, classroom management was seen as the problem most frequently addressed by teachers (Al Hassan et al., 2012; Veenman, 1984). In this vein, Ozturk, Gangal, and Besken Ergisi (2014) stated that prospective preschool teachers did not benefit from the classroom management courses they had received during their undergraduate education and that these teachers also did not associate the experiences they had learned in the classroom to problematic behaviors. Uline et al., (2004) also reported that classroom management was the most frequently stated concern in teachers' reflective journals. Similarly, classroom management was the central part of journals for the participants of the present study.

Another important aspect derived from reflective journal writing in this study, as Al-Hassan et al., (2012) also pointed out in their study, is the "difficulty in converting the theoretical learned knowledge into practice". The difficulty in bridging the gap between theory and practice was emphasized by Unver and Kursunlu (2014), who stated that the sequencing of the undergraduate teacher training curriculum lessons regarding theory and for applying that theory into practice was occurring at different times. As a result, preservice teachers were not gaining sufficient opportunities for learning and applying that learning into real-world practice within an actionable time frame.

The use of reflective journaling provided the participant preservice teachers a safe space in which they could express themselves through writing, as well as record their assessment information. The participants were more accustomed to completing verbal assessments through post-interviews, yet at the beginning of this study, they pointed out that writing reflective journals seemed compelling. With the completion of this research, the participants now stated they recognized the importance of implementing reflective journal writing into their daily lives and also realized how necessary reflective journaling was as a pedagogic tool. Similarly, Tadesse Degago (2007) noted that preservice teachers should use reflective journals as an instrument for expressing their concerns regarding their education, as well as addressing specific concerns and/or problems. Another study, Francis (1995), reported that some of the teacher candidates showed resistance to voluntary journaling in daily life due to overwhelming course loads. Moreover, McGarr and Moody (2010) also stated that asking students to write journals frequently could lead to a focus on quantity rather than quality. At the beginning of this study, there were some concerns among the participating preservice teachers. Their opinions remained positive even though they had expressed difficulty in understanding how to write reflective journals. The findings of Lee (2008) paralleled these findings, reporting that as preservice teachers gained experience in journal writing, they also gained knowledge and were more likely to favour journaling for their day-to-day writing.

Writing a reflective journal can be considered an important tool utilized by preservice teachers for self-evaluation during their burgeoning professional careers. It has also been suggested that turning reflective journal writing into a habit in one's professional life can be important for supporting overall professional growth (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Koc & Yildiz, 2012) and can be seen as a long-term investment in teacher education. Preservice teachers often receive support through written and verbal feedback from their instructors as feedback relates to the pertinent processes of teaching (e.g., observation, planning, implementation, and evaluation), and especially in the application of their preservice training within the classroom. One can anticipate that in the future, journal writing should better enable preservice teachers to develop their reflective thinking skills, and as a result, better carry out more in-depth and critical self-assessments of their professional practices.

As discussed, reflective journal writing has been seen as a tool for stimulating reflective thinking, and in this study, reflective journal writing was utilized in an attempt to reveal participant preservice teachers' thoughts and feelings regarding their in-class practicum experiences. The use of different opportunities and different reflective strategies (e.g., microteaching, portfolios, and video analysis), as posited by Lee (2005), is expected to contribute to the overall improvement of awareness through self-assessment. Moreover, collective reflection as a method for having deeper reflection suggested by the current studies (e.g. Foong et al., 2018) also could be utilized in this area.

This study provided an opportunity for participants during their undergraduate studies to gain valuable information, knowledge, and experience regarding the use of reflective journal writing. Since the reflection has become a central part of teacher education in the countries, such as Australia, USA, and New Zealand (Han, Blank, & Berson, 2017; Lemon & Garvis, 2014; Myers, Smith, & Tesar, 2017), preservice early childhood teacher education programs in Turkey could more integrate reflective activities into their courses.

This small-scale study was part of a 14 week-course, which focuses on movement education and play, lasted one term of the academic year and reflected the experiences of the ten preservice teachers who participated in this study. Experience of journal writing can be extended to other courses and teaching practicum of the students to see how preservice teachers could benefit from journal writing. In future studies, the focus could turn to the examination of a variety of differing types of reflective strategies. In addition to this, the studies can be conducted by more diverse preservice teachers, such as male participants and different grade levels. Moreover, future research studies should also address whether or not preservice teachers' use of reflective journal writing during their professional lives does in any way influence their teaching development and/or does it influence how they ultimately reflect upon their overall professional development.

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Okul Öncesi Öğretmen Adaylarının Yansıtıcı Günlük Yazma Deneyimleri

Atıf:

Sahin, F., Sen, M., & Dincer, C. (2019). Early childhood preservice teachers' experiences with reflective journal writing. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research, 84*, 93-114, DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2019.84.5

Özet

Problem Durumu: Yansıtıcı günlük yazma son zamanlarda öğretmen eğitiminde ele alınan konular arasında yer almakta ve öğretmen adaylarının uygulamalarında bir yansıtma aracı olarak kullanılmaktadır. Yansıtmanın karmaşık bir terim olduğu ve alan yazında çeşitli şekillerde kavramsallaştırıldığı görülmektedir. Yansıtıcı öğretmenlerin sadece önceden planlanan uygulamaları gerçekleştiren değil, uygulamalar üzerinde düşünen, problem çözen, etkin bireyler oldukları belirtilmektedir. Yapılan çalışmalar özellikle yansıtmanın rolü, sınıflandırması ve yansıtıcı düşünmeyi geliştiren stratejilere odaklanmaktadır. Yansıtıcı düşünme becerilerinin gelişimine katkı sağlayacak uygulamalar arasında yansıtıcı günlük yazma, video kaydı alma, portfolyo/e-portfolyo, eylem araştırması vb. stratejiler gösterilmektedir. İlgili araştırmalar yansıtıcı günlük yazmanın öğretmenlerin kendi uygulamaları konusunda yansıtma yapmalarını, öğrenme ve öğretmenin karmaşık

yapısını anlamalarına ve öz-farkındalık ve profesyonel gelişime katkılarını göstermektedir. Her ne kadar yansıtıcı günlük yazma ile ilgili alan yazında çalışmalar yer almasına rağmen, özellikle okul öncesi öğretmen adayları ile ilgili yapılan çalışmalar sınırlı sayıdadır.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu çalışmanın amacı; okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının yansıtıcı günlük yazma deneyimlerini daha derinlemesine anlamaktır. Bu doğrultuda öğretmen adaylarının yansıtıcı günlükler konusundaki duygu ve düşünceleri ile yansıtıcı günlüklerinin içeriğinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Araştırmanın Yöntemi: Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Çalışmaya amaçsal örneklem yöntemiyle seçilen, dört yıllık okul öncesi öğretmenliği lisans programına devam eden, gönüllülük ilkesi ile araştırmaya katılım gösteren ve süreçte "Beden Eğitimi ve Oyun Öğretimi" dersini alan, yaşları 21 ile 25 arasında değişen on kadın öğretmen adayı dahil edilmiştir. Çalışmada veri toplamak için; demografik bilgi formu, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, haftalık olarak gerçekleştirilen uygulamalara yönelik etkinlik planları ve yazılan yansıtıcı günlüklerden yararlanılmıştır. Veri analizinde tümevarımsal bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Nitel araştırma geleneğine bağlı olarak alanyazında önerilen çalışmanın güvenirliğini arttırmak amacıyla detaylı betimleme ve uzun süreli katılım ve çeşitleme stratejileri kullanılmıştır. Katılımcıların yansıtıcı günlüklerle ilgili deneyimlerini içeren ayrıntılı betimlemelere yer verilmiştir. Çeşitlemeyi sağlamada çoklu araştırmacı ve çoklu yöntemler kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, çoklu araştırmacı açısından erken çocukluk eğitimi alanında deneyimli üç öğretim elemanı tarafından yürütülmüştür. Çoklu yöntemler açısından ise; yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve doküman analizi yoluyla sağlanmıştır.

Araştırmanın Bulguları: Araştırma bulguları araştırma sorularının da temelini oluşturan iki odak noktasında sunulmuştur. Bunların ilki yansıtıcı günlüklerin rolü, ikincisi ise yansıtıcı günlüklerin içeriğidir.Yansıtıcı günlüğün rolü analiz edildiğinde; içgörü elde etmek, detaylı değerlendirme ve geleceğe yönelik strateji geliştirme temalarının ortaya çıktığı görülmüştür. Bu çalışmanın katılımcıları olan öğretmen adayları günlük yazmanın onların uygulamalar sırasında yaptığı hataları farketmelerine ve güçlü ve zayıf yanlarını değerlendirmeleri için içgörü kazanmalarına destek olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Yansıtıcı günlük yazma alanyazında önerildiği gibi, öğretmen adayları için bir farkındalık aracı olarak işlev görmüştür. Katılımcılar ayrıca yansıtıcı günlüklerin normalde yaptıkları üç boyutlu değerlendirmeye duygu boyutunu da eklediğini belirtmişlerdir. Son olarak, katılımcılar yansıtıcı günlük yazmanın uygulanacak öğretim stratejilerin belirlenmesinde ve değerlendirmesinde önemli bir rol oynadığını ve özellikle hatırlatma işlevi gördüğünü vurgulamışlardır. Yansıtıcı günlüklere odaklanan bazı araştırmalarda, günlük yazmanın gelecek öğretmenlik deneyimlerini şekillendirecek yönde desteklediğini göstermektedir. Yansıtıcı günlüklerin içeriği analiz edildiğinde ise bulguların; gerçek sınıf ortamı ile karşılaşma ve alandan olumlu deneyimler edinme şeklinde iki tema olarak belirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışmanın katılımcıları günlüklerinde gerçek sınıf ortamı ile karşılaşma ile ilgili durumlara yer vermiştir. Özellikle gerçek sınıf ortamında yaşadıkları sınıf yönetimi ile ilgili

zorluklar ve kuramsal bilgiyi uygulamaya aktaramama ile ilgili endişeleri ele almışlardır. Alanyazındaki araştırmalarda sınıf yönetiminin en çok belirtilen problem olmasının yanısıra yansıtıcı günlüklerde de en sık yansıtılan endişe olduğu bulunmuştur. Öğretmen adaylarının kuramsal bilgiyi uygulamaya aktarma sorunları olduğu da belirtilmektedir. İçerik açısından incelemede yansıtıcı günlüklerinde öğretmen adayların elde ettikleri olumlu deneyimlere de yer verdikleri saptanmıştır.

Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Önerileri: Bu çalışma göstermektedir ki yansıtıcı günlük yazma, okul öncesi öğretmen adayları için özdeğerlendirme ve profesyonel gelişimde önemli bir araç olarak ele alınabilir. Bundan sonra yapılacak çalışmalarda öğretmenin profesyonel gelişiminde yansıtıcı günlük yazmanın rolüne ve özellikle farklı yansıtıcı stratejilerin öğretmen eğitiminde önemine odaklanabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yansıtıcı Günlükler, Yansıtıcı Uygulamalar, Okul Öncesi, Öğretmen Eğitimi