

“Teacher” from the Children’s Perspective: A Study by Metaphors

Belgin Arslan Cansever¹ & Neşe Aslan¹

¹ Faculty of Education, Ege University, Izmir, Turkey

Correspondence: Belgin Arslan Cansever, Faculty of Education, Ege University, Izmir, Turkey. Tel: 90-232-311-3156. E-mail: belginarslan6@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the perception of teachers by 10 year-old primary school childrens by the metaphors they developed. The sample covers totally 441 children [224 females (50.8%) and 217 males (49.2%)] living in Izmir, Turkey. Participants were asked to complete the prompt “Teacher is like..., because...”. In identifying their perceptions, the qualitative research model (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002) was utilized, which contributes to the investigation of the individual’s perceptions, feelings, and experiences within the framework of Phenomenological design. At the end of the research female students produced 52 metaphors, and males did 44 for teacher images. However, 7 metaphors were commonly created by both genders. They were categorized in 8 conceptual themes. The children’s perceptions of “teacher” were clustered especially in the conceptual theme of Family Member (25%) and Warm-hearted Person (8%), with emotional and relational feelings which can be explained by the children’s attachment relations (Sabol & Pianta, 2012), that are similar for their families and their teachers. Gender was found to be significantly related with the images of teachers.

Keywords: metaphor, teacher, elementary school children, attachment theory, gender socialization in Turkish culture

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, metaphors have been the subject of increasing attention especially in the social sciences. They are considered to be an individual’s symbols for behaviors that are hard to express in words, and also allow individuals to express everything in the way they imagine it. Additionally, metaphors help structure an individual’s thinking and understanding of events, affecting her or his expressions, behaviors, intuitions and emotional developments (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Jensen (2006) inquires whether metaphors help to understand reality and social context. In such research, participants and researchers often draw on pre-existing knowledge and practice to account for current experiences which have just concluded with metaphors. In other words, metaphors enable the connection of information about a familiar concept with another familiar concept, leading to a new understanding in which the process of comparison between the two concepts acts as a generator of new meanings (p. 5). Steen (1994) notes that “Metaphor is a deeply embedded part of the way we communicate” (p. 5). For Berliner (1990), “Metaphors are powerful forces conditioning the way we come to think of ourselves and others... They affect our thoughts in subtle but powerful ways” (p. 86). And Zhao, Coombs, and Zhou (2010) conclude that “Metaphors are not just figures of speech, but constitute an essential mechanism of the mind allowing the modelling and reification of prior experience” (p. 381).

It is important to consider that words are not ostensibly expressions on the participants *per se* but are instead expressions of the participants’ connections within a social system, meaning in our case their connection with the educational social system. Metaphors have a wide range of usage in daily life (Yero, 2001), bringing about a richer understanding of a concept by its ability to remark on features of similarity that were previously not been noticeable or obvious (Perry & Cooper, 2001). The use of metaphor as an investigative tool in the field of education has been highly appreciated. Metaphors can be used as effective tools to determine the role of teachers in modern education (Patton, 2002b; Perry, 1995; Perry & Cooper, 2001; James, 2002; Vadeboncoeur & Torres, 2003), as well as their roles in guiding education and teaching practices (Botha, 2009; Carlson, 2001; Cerit, 2008; Cochran, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2003; Koçak, 2013; Massengill, Mahlios, & Barry, 2005; Zheng & Song, 2010). Moreover, international literature increasingly supports the study and use of teacher’s metaphorical images to understand how they conceptualize their teaching and themselves in their field of work (Inbar, 1996; Leavy, McSorley, & Bote, 2007; Martinez, Sauleda, & Huber, 2001; Saban, Koçbeker, & Saban, 2006, 2007; Thomas &

Beauchamp, 2011). Considering that schooling is more than the sum of structure process and participants, as such, the process of teaching and learning is more than a process of transmitting knowledge. Inbar (1996) notes that the cognitive process interacts with emotions and predispositions. The students' predispositions about educators and school affect their process of learning. Equally, the educators' predispositions about students shape the process of teaching, and also the way schools are organized. In practice, uncovering some of the basic predispositions and premises teachers have about students, and students about teachers, may be an effective route to a better understanding and a deeper insight into some of the problems and difficulties with which education is faced (Inbar, 1996). Furthermore, in teacher training, changing teacher practices, and school organization, such understanding and insight may turn out to be an effective means for positive transformation. In this process, the examination of metaphorical images may be utilized as a promising and effective way to discover underlying assumptions, premises and predispositions (Inbar, 1996). Alger (2009) draws our attention to an important connection between metaphor and culture: "Oftentimes these metaphors are conventional, meaning that they are prevalent in the culture and their meaning is shared by the culture" (p. 743). Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) supporting this, state that "...although metaphors can provide insight into ways in which people conceptualize experience, they are also culturally bound, which can limit meaning and interpretation, rendering the accompanying explanation crucial" (p. 763).

As such, children's perceptions are thought to be the results of many influences at school and life structured by the values of the culture to which they belong. Thus, it has been important for teachers to get evidence about children's perceptions of school and teachers, which will contribute to build better communication with their students. Eiserer (1954) indicates that "Parents and other adults build into children's expectancies which may hinder or foster desirable school learnings. Many attitudes are learned in very subtle and indirect ways; they are caught, not taught. The kinds of people parents are, their professed values and actual behaviour, and the emotional climate within the home help to structure the psychological world of the child" (p. 409). As such, children start school with some built-in attitudes structured by their interactions with the adults in their close social circles. Eiserer (1954) adds that "In general, children will initially perceive teachers in the ways they have learned to perceive other adults. Thereafter, attitudes may be reinforced or modified depending upon the teacher-child relationship which ensues" (p. 411).

1.1 Teacher-Child Relationships

In literature, the relationship between teachers and children has been a focus of educators' interest for decades. Starting from very early years of the childhood which has been considered as an exceptional period, the quality of relationships has been a great importance in understanding the child. In this process, the child has an increasing number of relationship experiences with adults (Şahin, 2012). As such, the close relationships formed by the young children with critical adults as parents, relatives and teachers have been considered to influence the emotional, social, mental health and even academic success of children (Pianta, 1999). The related research indicates that security of the teacher-child relationship influences children's development in many of the same ways as secure parent-child attachments (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Pianta, 1994). For their teacher, children may have the same sort of "emotional security" that characterises the sensitive, responsive, and socially supportive care-giving of the parent (Howes & Hamilton, 1992). Children may develop encouraging and positive interactions with their teachers. Pianta, Stuhlman, and Hamre (2002) state that teacher-child relationships could even serve as a protective factor for children at risk for academic failure. Furthermore, children's cognitive activities and social competence with peers can be predicted by child-teacher relationship quality (Howes, 2000), and close child-teacher relationships decrease aggressive behaviors, promote self-regulation and develop peer interactions in school settings (Pianta, 1999). Likewise, children's positive and encouraging relationships with their teachers may provide a secure base for a better adjustment, and for exploring and learning process (Beyazkürk & Kesner, 2005). It has been indicated that responding a child sensitively, giving proper feedbacks on time, encouragingly solving problems against frustrations have been thought as valued attitudes of a teacher for effective learning and developing relationships (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003).

1.2 The Attachment Theory

The conceptual framework for teacher-child relationship was probably the most strongly influenced by the Attachment Theory (Pianta et al., 2003; Pianta & Nimetz, 1991; Pianta, 1999; Sabol & Pianta, 2012) which has highly benefited by guiding and inspiring the literature on teacher-child relationships. The attachment behavioral system in children is thought to be responsible for the development and continued adaptation of attachment relationships with their caregivers (Bowlby, 1984). In other words, child development is strongly affected by the attachment between child and parents (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Sabol and Pianta (2012)

suggest that “The attachment framework provides the basis for understanding that children form working models of attachment based on their early experiences with parents and other adult caregivers” (p. 214). During the pre-school years, children form attachments with mothers or primary caregivers. However, since the last two decades, the focus has been enriched by also studying not only parent-child relationships but also adult-child relationships in school. If children develop good relationships at school, this will contribute to their ability to build and maintain supportive networks elsewhere (Schuengel, 2012). However, besides parent-child relationships in the family, inter-personal relationships in school are also considered an important developmental context shaping the children’s adjustment (Verschuere, Doumen, & Buyse, 2012; Pianta et al., 2003). The social domain in which children function expands mainly when they start elementary school, leading to an increased importance of their interactions with peers and teachers (Leflot, Van Lier, Verschuere, Onghena, & Colpin, 2011; Verschuere et al., 2012).

In the schooling process, teacher-child relationships develop as a product of individual teacher and child characteristics that influence each other; such as, a child’s previous relational models with adults may guide her/his interactions with the teacher. The teacher can be seen as significant adults who may guide children in developing secure and sound relationships (Pianta, 1999). A sensitive teacher, for example, may reshape a child’s relational models, succeeding behaviors, and relationships (Pianta et al., 2003). Furthermore, Sabol and Pianta (2012) add that “the within-and cross-level interactions shape the patterns of interactions between children and teachers that are the basis for the formation of teacher-child relationships. The temporal interactions and subsequent relationships form the primary contexts in which children develop and learn” (p. 214). It can be contemplated that an individual’s understanding of the world around him/her cannot be separated from the world she/he lives in (Olsson, 2007) which has been structured by the related cultural contexts.

1.3 Childhood Socialization in Turkish Culture

The child’s relationships with his/her teacher have been considered to be closely related to the childhood socialization in cultural contexts which may contribute to explain the parent-child attachment relationships. The research (Mizuta, Zahn-Waxler, Cole, & Hiruma, 1996) has generally found inter-cultural differences in the patterns of attachment suggesting that secure and insecure attachments may be described differently across cultural contexts. Attachment related behaviours that appear insecure in one culture may be appropriate and evidence of a secure attachment in another. In Hofstede’s cultural dimension of national values research (2001), Turkey is found to be a collectivist society—only 37.0% individualist. In this society, people belong to in-groups, such as immediate families, relatives or organizations, in which loyalty is much valued. The relationships are morally based. Maintaining harmony is also important, and open conflicts are not desired (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). The emphasis on close group ties, accountability and loyalty rather than on autonomy and individualism results in a somewhat fused, undifferentiated framework of a system of relationships within family systems (Aslan, 2009, p. 161). However, in decision making, the individual would seem to have relatively low differentiation and a lack of autonomy. Individuals would tend to fuse with others when normative expectations do not guide their emotional behavior (Aslan, 2009, 2016). As such, individuals are primarily motivated by the norms and duties imposed by those collectives. Child-rearing practices are thought to be the mechanism through which the combination of differentiated role expectations and fused emotional relationships, characteristic of the total system get transmitted to each new generation (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2002). The gender roles are strictly designed for females and males. Females, socialized to be attentive and homemaker, tend to develop close relationships with the mother and sister or the other female groups. Males, socialized to behave more tolerated, tend to spend time with other male circles (Aslan, 2009). The product of these practices is an individual who is dependent, externally controlled, and lacking autonomy. The relations between parents and children in traditionally structured Turkish nuclear families, the general atmosphere surrounding children is one of love and control, in contrast to Western families in which love tends to be coupled with permissiveness, and a preponderance of control usually implies an insufficiency of love (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2002, 2010).

It is therefore with the expectation of contributing to building a better understanding by teachers in their teaching practices, and of their roles in class, and also in building a good communication with children, this study focuses on the children’s perceptions of the teacher by the metaphors they created.

1.4 The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to identify the perceptions of the elementary school children (aged 10) related to “teacher” by the metaphors they created.

Specifically, the guiding questions for this study were the following:

- 1) What metaphors do the elementary school children produce to describe “teacher”?
- 2) What conceptual themes can be derived from these metaphors?
- 3) How do these themes differ based on the participants’ gender?

2. Method

2.1 Study Design

This study aims at identifying children’s conceptualization of the teacher by utilizing the qualitative research model (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998), which contributes to the investigations of social life and the problems related to humans by its own methods within the framework of Phenomenological design (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Moreover, Mayring (2000) indicates that there are some specific designs reflecting different perspectives and traditions in qualitative research methods in social sciences. Perception possesses two variants in Phenomenology: memory and imagination. They represent internal fields of experience (Sokolowski, 2000). As Patton (2002a) explains the Phenomenology, it is how humans conceptualize, describe, and feel about phenomenons. Phenomenons emerge as experiences, events, perceptions, inclinations, concepts and states. The Phenomenology-based research studies may not reflect a certain or common result as expected in qualitative research. However, the Phenomenology studies may contribute more to have a better understanding of a phenomenon by examples and explanations. In this way, it has important contributions to the literature (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 75).

2.2 Study Group

To identify the study group of the present research, the general principles of the cluster sampling were beneficial. This type of sampling has been utilized “in case of existing similarities among different groups in the considered universe in a study” (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 105). The reason to prefer this type of sample for this study was that the classrooms present in elementary schools were accepted as clusters. The reason why the 10-year old children in elementary schools in Turkey were studied was that this age group was considered to be mature enough to develop a perception of “teacher”. Likewise, the 10 year old student groups (4th grades) were considered to be old enough to structure teacher metaphors, and explain the reasons behind them. Therefore, this study was carried out with the above mentioned age group. To identify the participants of the research, the systematic sampling was utilized. For this purpose, the classroom lists were helpful, and the students with even numbers in the lists were the ones included in the study. The survey instruments were distributed to 4 elementary schools, covering 470 students. However, 29 survey instruments were invalid, because some of them included more than one metaphor. Thus, 441 of the survey instruments were evaluated. 224 of the participants (50.8%) were female and 217 were male (49.2%).

The pilot study (Note 1) was applied to 42 students (24 female, 18 male) in two elementary schools, which were different from the schools used in the main application. During this process, the researchers explained to the volunteering students what to do in details.

2.3 Instrument

In the process of collecting data, the prompt “A teacher is like..., because...” was used, which has been commonly utilized by some researchers (Karadağ & Gültekin, 2012; Mahlios & Maxson, 1998; Massengill, Mahlios, & Barry, 2005; Nalçacı & Bektaş, 2012; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008; Saban, 2004, 2008, 2009; Saban, Koçbeker, & Saban, 2007; Oxford, Tomlinson, Barcelos, Harrington, Lavine, Saleh, & Longhini, 1998; Patton, 2002b; Perry & Cooper, 2001) in the literature to inquire about perceptions of teachers. The participants were reminded to write their gender, and later to complete the given prompt using only one metaphor. Gender is expected to be an important indicator in this study.

2.4 Data Analysis

The research analysis in Phenomenologic design is aimed at describing the life experiences and their meaning. Thus, in the effort of content analysis, the conceptualization of the data, and the themes describing the phenomenon, have been the main focus. The data are explained in a descriptive manner, and are often stated by quotations of the original material. They are interpreted within the framework of the structured conceptual themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 75). In the process of analyzing the metaphors the participants produced, the content analysis technique was useful. Elo and Kyngäs (2007) reported that in content analysis, induction and deduction approaches could possibly be utilized. Thus, in the present study, the deduction approach covering the Preparation, Organization and Reporting stages was used. In the *Preparation stage*, the survey forms collected from the students were grouped considering the gender, followed by numbering and coding. By examining the

survey forms, 29 forms in total were eliminated either because of some missing explanation or because the metaphor included more than one metaphor. Hence, out of 470 survey forms, 441 forms were evaluated. In the *Organization stage*, the codes were listed and grouped to establish the categories and conceptual themes. These categories were structured by the participants' metaphorical images. Next, the data were entered into the SPSS program to calculate the frequencies (f) and percentages (%) of the metaphorical images in each conceptual category. In total, 89 metaphors were created by the participating children. 7 of them were created in common by both genders. Hence, in total, 82 metaphors were found to be representative. The validity and reliability processes were completed on this stage, benefitting from Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula. To maintain inner validity, the students' perceptions of teacher were compared to characteristics of "teacher" in literature. For outer validity, the participants' characteristics (age, gender) and the research method of this study were explained in detail. To assess the inter-rater reliability rate, which assesses the consistency of a coding system being implemented in a research study, two experts were consulted. In this regard, they were asked to place the participants' metaphorical images into the conceptual categories that were already structured. In estimating the inter-rater reliability rate between the researchers and the consultants, the Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula "agreement percentage=(agreement/agreement+disagreement)x100" was utilized, and it was found that 91% was considered to be valid for this study. As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest, the final inter-coder agreement rate in qualitative data analysis should approach or exceed 86%. Moreover, the last stage recommended by Elo and Kyngäs (2007) was the *Reporting stage*, in which findings were discussed. In this stage, a model related to the research, a conceptual mapping or categories may be developed. The metaphors produced by the participants were categorized considering the gender differences, as well.

3. Results

In this research, female students produced 52 metaphors for teacher images, and males 44; furthermore, 7 metaphors were commonly created by both genders. They were as follows: tree (f=13), mother (f=60), friend (f=6), gardener (f=10), lantern (f=13), sun (f=9), guide (f=9). The remaining 82 metaphors were unique. They were put in order as follows: elder sister (f=2), fair person (f=1), elder brother (f=7), respected family member (f=1), family member (f=1), store of knowledge (f=6), smart-phone (f=2), parent (f=13), encyclopaedia (f=3), coach (f=8), investigator (f=7), bee (f=8), ant (f=3), walking dictionary (f=4), father (f=9), white rabbit (f=1), sophisticated person (f=3), computer (f=4), garden of knowledge (f=2), angel of knowledge (f=1), scientist (f=7), my dear (f=1), hardworking person (f=2), flower (f=1), farmer (f=3), cheetah (f=1), uncle (f=3), lighthouse (f=5), laptop (f=1), world (f=1), candy (f=1), rose (f=5), Google (f=11), glasses (f=5), judge (f=16), expert of knowledge (f=13), second mother (f=3), second father (f=1), spring (f=7), expert in technology (f=1), Internet (f=13), angel of goodness (f=1), warm-hearted person (f=1), candle (f=8), tiger (f=3), captain (f=3), red carnation (f=2), life (f=6), book (f=6), leader (f=19), angel (f=12), torch (f=1), my family at school (f=2), ocean (f=7), forest (f=7), trainer (f=11), cotton (f=2), cotton candy (f=1), love (f=2), angel of love (f=1), butterfly (f=4), dictionary (f=6), water (f=1), sound of water (f=4), sponge (f=1), chief (f=2), waterfall (f=3), IPAD (f=9), greyhound (f=3), technical director (f=1), aunt (f=3), balance (f=3), rainbow (f=3), rain (f=1), star (f=1).

The students' metaphors were categorized in 8 conceptual themes regarding their content, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the metaphors by conceptual themes

Conceptual Themes	Metaphors	Female		Male		Total Frequency	Total %
		f	%	f	%		
Technology Literacy	Computer, expert in technology, laptop, IPAD, smart- phone, Internet	9	2,04	21	4,76	30	6,8
Sophisticated person	Encyclopaedia, sophisticated person, rainbow, book, dictionary, waterfall, walking dictionary, store of knowledge, angel of knowledge, garden of knowledge, expert of knowledge, ocean, Google, forest, scientist	42	9,53	40	9,07	82	18,6

Family member	Mother, father, parent, elder sister, elder brother, uncle, aunt, family member, my dear, respected family member, second mother, second father, my family at school, friend	73	16,55	39	8,85	112	25,4
Guide	Candle, coach, torch, sun, water, leader, guide, glasses, lighthouse, technical director, captain, trainer, sound of water, star, lantern	33	7,47	65	14,73	98	22,2
Productive person	Tree, bee, gardener, world, hardworking person, farmer, ant, life, spring, investigator	14	3,76	40	10,74	54	14,5
Fair person	Balance, judge, chief and fair person	22	2,7	-	-	22	2,7
Warm-hearted person	Cotton, sponge, warm-hearted person, angel, love, rose, angel of love, rain, butterfly, red carnation, flower, cotton candy, angel of goodness, candy	31	7,08	4	0,92	35	8,0
Energetic person	White rabbit, cheetah, tiger, greyhound	-	-	8	1,8	8	1,8
Total		224	49,13	217	50,87	441	100

3.1 Conceptual Themes

3.1.1 Teacher as “Technology Literacy”

This conceptual theme covered 6 metaphors, produced by 30 participants (9 females and 21 males). They were stated as: computer, IPAD, laptop, smart-phone, technology, Internet. Some of the original statements were:

Teacher is just like an expert in technology, because she/he uses projector the best in our classes. (M-102)

Teacher is like a computer, because she/he prepares animations. (M-89)

Teacher is like an Internet, because she/he follows everything by it. (F-25)

These statements of children may reveal that the teacher was considered to be an expert in utilizing media, and this has been more supported by males.

3.1.2 Teacher as “Sophisticated Person”

In this conceptual theme, 15 metaphors were produced by 82 students (42 females and 40 males). They were: Encyclopaedia, sophisticated person, rainbow, book, dictionary, waterfall, walking dictionary, store of knowledge, angel of knowledge, garden of knowledge, expert of knowledge, ocean, Google, forest, scientist. Their explanations were:

Teacher is an encyclopaedia, because just like a thick one, she/he has the knowledge about all the subjects as Maths, Science, Turkish, Arts... (F-111)

Teacher is a rainbow. So colourful and beautiful. As such, teacher knows everything and every subject which can be thought as a rainbow. All these reflect us the beauty. (F-201)

Teacher is like a waterfall. Each drop of her/his knowledge is increasing more and more, and flowing to eternity. (F-4)

Teacher is a newsmonger having information about everything, and transmitting them to us. (M-7)

Teacher is a walking dictionary, because whatever we ask something, she/he explains it as the dictionary does. (M-16)

Teacher was described as a sophisticated person with her/his broad knowledge in this conceptual theme. Moreover, both genders were almost equally represented here.

3.1.3 Teacher as “Family member”

This conceptual theme covered the metaphors created by most of the participants. It consisted of 13 metaphors by 112 participants (73 females and 39 males). These metaphors were: mother, father, parent, elder sister/brother, uncle/aunt, family member, my dear, respected person in the family, second mother/father, my family at school, a part of my family.

Teacher is like my mom, being very kind. (F-8)

Teacher is like my uncle, spending time with me, teaching me by building a good communication. (M-187)

Teacher is like my aunt, creating funny subjects and making me laugh. (M-157)

Teacher is like my parents; because just like them s/he always protects me and loves me. (F-200)

From the perspective of gender, females were found twice as much than males perceiving “teacher” as a family member.

3.1.4 Teacher as “Guide”

98 participants (33 females and 65 males) created 14 metaphors for this conceptual theme. They were: candle, coach, torch, sun, water, leader, adviser, orchestra conductor, guide, glasses, lighthouse, technical director, captain, trainer, sound of water, star, and lantern.

Teacher is a guide leading us to find the right path on every issue. (M-6)

Teacher is just like water. In the flood of knowledge, runs like water does having us follow her/him. (M-217)

Teacher is a trainer, because s/he is always with me when I am in trouble. (F-33)

Teacher is like glasses making everything clear. (F-10)

Teacher is a lighthouse leading us in the darkness of the oceans of knowledge. (M-2)

From the perspective of gender, males were found to be perceiving “teacher as a guide” twice as much as females.

3.1.5 Teacher as “Productive person”

This conceptual theme covered 10 metaphors, stated by 64 participants (14 females and 40 males). Their metaphors were: tree, bee, gardener, world, hardworking person, investigator, ant, forest.

Teacher is a gardener, because she/he cultivates the garden by teaching her/his students reading and writing, then harvests the ripened crop. (M-173)

Teacher is like a life full of excitement, knowledge, happiness, and sadness. She/he supports us with encouraging words, teaches us many things, and also shares our feelings. (M-65)

Teacher is like a hardworking person, because she/he studies everyday like students. Otherwise, how could she/he know that much! (F-193)

It was found that this conceptual theme was stated by mostly male children.

3.1.6 Teacher as “Fair person”

This conceptual theme covered 5 metaphors created by only 22 females. Examples: balance, judge, chief and fair person.

Teacher is like a balance, because when we have some problems with our friends, she/he listens to both sides, and tries to solve the problem. While doing this, she/he treats us equally. (F-3)

Teacher is like a judge. When there is a problem she/he controls the case, and judges it. (F-98)

Teacher is like a chef dealing with the vegetables equally while cooking. S/he treats us equally. (F-77)

This conceptual theme covered the metaphors created only by females.

3.1.7 Teacher as “Warm-Hearted Person”

This conceptual theme included 15 metaphors, stated by 35 children (31 females and 4 males). Such as: cotton, sponge, warm-hearted person, angel, love, rose, angel of love, rain, butterfly, red carnation, flower, cotton candy, fairy, candy, angel of goodness.

Teacher is like cotton, because s/he behaves us very tender. Her/his anger is even tender! (F-126)

Like a sponge, teacher is nearly always kind and soft, but rarely strict. (F-43)

Teacher is just like a warm-hearted person, because she/he reflects her/his love to us, and encourages us in hard times. (F-81)

Like rain, teacher pours her/his love on us. (M-46)

This theme included the metaphors produced by females in majority.

3.1.8 Teacher as “Energetic Person”

This conceptual theme covered 5 metaphors, created by only 8 male students. Examples: ant, white rabbit, cheetah, tiger, and greyhound.

Teacher is like a cheetah, because she/he runs faster than us when we are out in the garden for break. (M-160)

4. Discussion

The current study aims to understand the elementary school children’s perceptions of “teacher” by the metaphors that participants created. Thanks to these metaphors, meaningful clues were attained regarding the teacher concept, indirectly describing the teacher-child relationship as well. As mentioned by Sabol and Pianta (2012), “...the temporal interactions between children and teachers are the basis for the formation of teacher-child relationships” (p. 222). Considering that metaphors are the products of the cultural environment in which the child lives and is being taught, they may be very precious instruments to explain the child’s perceptions of “teacher” in that cultural context. Thus, through metaphors, the researchers are able to clarify the inner world of the participant’s perceptions, understanding, and experiences (Jensen, 2006). Greene (1994) indicates that “Metaphor is at the centre of language, and it is the cognitive capacity that allows human beings to construct alternative models of being, and to envisage what might be if things were otherwise. It is metaphor that enables us to make creative sense of what is around us, and what we carry in our memories” (p. 456). Moreover, Dinckmeyer (1989) adds that “Metaphor, that is, giving a thing a name that belongs to something else, helps us make sense of our world, and of circumstances we are involved in. Metaphors can be used as powerful educative tools” (p. 151).

In this study, the children’s perceptions of “teacher” were centered in the conceptual themes of Family member (25%), and also, as Warm-hearted person (8%), with emotional and relational feelings which can be explained by the children’s attachment relations (Sabol & Pianta, 2012), which are similar with their families and with their teachers. It is considered that teacher-child relationships are a product of individual teacher and child characteristics that influence each other (Pianta et al., 2003). Moreover, Sabol and Pianta (2012) add that “... children’s previous relational models with adults may guide their interactions with teachers; however, a sensitive teacher may reshape children’s relational models, and subsequent behaviour and relationships” (p. 214). In this study, one-fourth of the elementary school participants described the teacher as a family member who loves and protects them. In a meta-analysis conducted by Ahnert, Pinquart and Lamb (2006), it was found that children’s security with parents was significantly correlated with children’s security with teachers. Likewise, for describing the “teacher”, mother, father and parent metaphors have been the most common metaphors in studies (Cereseto, 2010; Cerit, 2008; Gillis & Johnson, 2002; Karadağ & Gültekin, 2012; Kasoutas & Malamitsu, 2009; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008; Saban, Koçbeker, & Saban, 2006). It is important that, the participant children’s perceptions of “teacher” as mother, father or parents may be emphasizing the teacher’s traditional role, as Clarken (1997) indicates, relating class and school to a big family. He suggests that “Rules and values of a family should be taken into consideration at school as well. Teachers, like parents, serve both as role models and authority figures at school, teachers treat students as having the same rights, responsibilities and authority, and improve the knowledge and characters of students” (p. 8). In Turkish society, for example, teachers are appreciated and trusted so much that, when the child starts school, on the very first day, some parents tell the teacher that “Our child’s flesh is yours and the bones are ours”. This expression may contribute to explain why parents trust and have sympathy for the teacher in guiding their child’s physical and mental development toward becoming a whole person.

Furthermore, all the emotional descriptions and feelings of relatedness for the teachers as a family member may be the expression and reflection of those children’s attachment to their teacher as it is for their parents. This fact may be revealing that teachers were perceived as caring individuals who provided not only knowledge but also comfort and a sense of security. This conceptual theme was thought to be affirming the students’ emotional needs. Obviously, they would appreciate a classroom with a warm and pleasant atmosphere. It may also be explaining that a well-built reciprocal interaction between teachers and children is appreciated. What’s more, students are more likely to be emotionally and intellectually engaged in classes in which they have positive relationships with their teacher. Thus, a teacher who builds positive relationships with the children possibly increases their interests

and enjoyment with the class, and also contributes to develop their academic achievement. Thijs, Koomen, and van der Leij (2008) state that “Consistent with the extended attachment perspective, it has been assumed that favourable teacher-child relationships are characterized by warm and supportive teacher behaviours” (p. 245). It has been suggested that a teachers’ ability to provide assistance and warmth is a key aspect of the quality of a teacher-child relationship (Pianta et al., 2003). Furthermore, close relationships motivate teachers to support the children's school success whereas dependent and conflicted relationships hinder efforts to promote a positive school environment for children (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Meanwhile, female children in this research were found to create more emotional themes than males in describing “teacher” by metaphors.

The elementary school students’ perceptions of teacher as a guide were gathered as a second common conceptual theme (22.2%) in this study. These images were reflecting the teacher’s role of guidance and support in their learning, in their hard times and in their daily lives. This is also supported by other studies (Karadağ & Gültekin, 2012; Saban, 2004; Sakui & Gaies, 2002).

The third most frequently produced metaphors of “teacher” were centered in the Sophisticated person theme. They were possibly reflecting their adoration for teacher being equipped with vast knowledge. Considering that teachers, especially in the elementary schools, are attached, loved and adored by their students, these metaphors may be a reliably good mirror reflecting the children’s feelings and thoughts. As such, the other conceptual themes as Productive person, Energetic person, Fair person, and Technology Literacy were thought to be supporting the students’ adoration of the teacher.

All through the findings in this study, female children were found to be more emotional than the male children with their images describing teacher as it was supported in conceptual themes of Family member, Fair person, and Warm-hearted person. This may be because the female children feel themselves closer to their teacher as they do for their parents. As such, being socialized by the traditional values of this culture, the female children may have developed the feeling of attachment more than the male children. This is considered to be reflected by their perceptions of teacher. However, there is not much data explaining the quality of child-teacher relationships by gender. Colwell and Lindsay (2003) found that girls spend more time with their teachers than boys, and they have more cooperative and positive interactions with their teachers. Probably, girls prefer to have more close relationships with their teachers than boys who may be preferring to be in less supervised by adults.

Moreover, as a tool for reflection, metaphors enrich the teachers understanding of the situations in which they are engaged. As Perry and Cooper (2001) state, metaphors can provide a good mirror for analysing and understanding the challenges that educators may confront during their careers. The development of positive teacher-student relationships has an immeasurable importance for the students’ academic outcomes and behavior. In this process, Liberante (2012) concludes “It is critical, however, that both boys and girls receive the support and assistance they need, and teachers endeavour to reduce the gender stereotyping that students may hold from the home environment. Teachers also need to ensure time is taken to understand their students’ individual needs... A positive relationship between teacher and students is the fundamental aspect of quality teaching, and student learning” (p. 8).

In conclusion, it was found that the 10 year-old school children’s images of “teacher” were all describing positive teacher-child relationships which fundamentally and positively affect children’s success in school. Over the course of the school year, child-teacher relationships develop through the circles of child and teacher beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and reciprocal interactions. Building supportive and strong relationships with teachers makes children feel safer and more secure in the school environment, contributes to develop self-confidence and good relationships with peers, and to achieve greater academic gains (Ahnert et al., 2006; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). However, in Turkey, there has not been the emphasis needed in teacher training programs concerning the importance of positive teacher-child relationships. Likewise, there is a real opportunity to promote this aspect of teacher-child interactions because of the almost inborn social-relational emphasis found in Turkish culture. Teachers need to be trained on how they can improve themselves both individually, and also professionally to contribute to the social and emotional development of children. By this way, they would gain insight into themselves and their interpersonal relationships required by their professions (Beyazkürk & Kesner, 2005).

By the purpose of contributing to build a better understanding for teachers of their professions, and their roles in class being important figures as significant adults in children’s lives, and also in building good communications with children, this study is thought to be beneficial to educators. In reflecting on the premise of this research, there is an epistemological basis for using metaphors also to serve as a pedagogical tool, and to develop teacher-child relationships in the social context of school. Considering that studies dealing with metaphors

reflecting the children's images of "teacher" are limited in Turkish literature, further studies may be carried out on how metaphors children create contribute to the teacher's attitude toward teaching and learning contexts in the school environment.

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Note

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