

## MY OWN PAST: AN EXAMPLE OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PROJECT APPLIED TO IMPROVE 48 – 54 MONTHS OLD CHILDREN’S PERCEPTION OF THE PAST

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### ABSTRACT

Preschool period is highly important in the sense that children generate their individual identity and perceptions related to their own past. In addition, based on the principle that learning experiences start from children’s close environment to far; considering “proofs” such as daily objects, clothes, photo album and verbal witnessing students have an opportunity to create their own past and constitute a historical narration. Built upon this theoretical framework, the study makes use of pretest – posttest without control group model. Teacher Observation Form was adopted as a pretest in order to determine 48 – 54 months old thirteen children’s the perception of the past, who constituted the research group of Prof. Dr. Ayla Oktay’s Application Unit at Atatürk Education Faculty at Marmara University during 2012 – 2013 Academic Year. As for the application of the study; within an hour allocated for them in the company of their families, students made presentations in front of their friends regarding their own past using things, clothes, photos, etc. from their

infancy. Posttest which was based on Teacher Observation Form showed that consisting family involvement and project based application process resulted in significant changes in terms of students' perception of the past.

**Key Words:** Preschool, Perception of the Past, Historian Skills, Project Based Learning, Family Involvement

## INTRODUCTION

Preschool education is of utmost importance for child development. During this period the child develops socially, emotionally, physically and mentally. The child who shows a great development process after birth is integrated into society as a successful individual when proper education is provided. Preschool education which constitutes the beginning of education process is described as the process of reinforcing child's development, providing children with educational opportunities their families are unable to bring in, and supporting and acquainting families with pedagogic knowledge (Oktay, 2007).

Preschool period is an important period during which several concepts that the child will need in her future life are actively acquired. These concepts are products of an individual's personal experiences. An individual constantly interacts with his environment and as a result of this, has experiences with the entities, events and situations around him and tries to make sense of them in their own right. The individual finds similarities between his/her experiences and categorizes them. After that, he/she names these categories. The cognitive structure that an individual attains by such abstraction is a concept. In the process of socialization, an individual generates, arranges or changes his/her concepts according to the society (Özçelik, 1989; Akt. Kol, 2012).

Several researches have proven that for children, abstract concepts are relatively difficult to learn (Piaget, 1969; Block, 1989; Zakay, 1989; Akt. Kol, 2012). Time concept is one of the concepts that preschool child have great difficulty in learning. On the one hand time concept is abstract, the child has difficulties to make the right connection between past, present and future that are necessary to understand time concept. Time concept needs to be learned because like speech, it is a skill that the child is born with and that he/she needs to develop through social interaction. However, children have difficulties in understanding and comprehending time concept quickly since time by its nature is abstract (Naylor and Diem, 1987).

For a child to understand time concept, it is essential to concretize the concept. The idea of teaching by personalizing and visualizing the time concept in other words concretizing is an important phase (Şen, 2004). For a child who uses concept of moment in her daily life easily, past and future concepts are more difficult to acquire and perceive. According to the Turkish Language Association (2013), the level of child's memory, attention, perception and language development plays an important role in acquiring past concept which is described as the time that stays behind compared to concept of moment. In order to develop the perception of the past, a child needs to remember what happened in the past, to pay attention to specific details, and to express those verbally which is merely possible with the stimuli from his/her parents and teachers.

Whilst performing activities related to perception of the past, it is necessary to start from children's close environment to far. Therefore, it is indispensable to work on children's perception of their own past first since all children have memories related to their own personal experiences and most of them are willing to recount those memories to listeners who are eager to give an ear (Reese and et al., 1993).

Parents or adults are mostly listeners and as well as listening, they should support children regarding the consistency of the stories. Whilst talking about a child's memories related to the past, filling out missing fragments or correcting wrongly remembered parts by an adult who witnessed or knows the event will gradually enable the child to recount his/her memory more elaborately and more consistently (Fivush, 1994).

Children realize that their ideas and their parents' ideas are unlike when they wonder why and how things happen. The situation is confusing as much as thrilling. As a result, some children stop wondering and believe in

their own ideas while others stop wondering to believe in their parents' ideas, and some others keep on wondering and try to gain new experiences about whys and hows. Many families would like their children to be creative thinking individuals. In addition, they want their youngsters to wonder and show interest to the past as well as the present. Provided that children's perception of the past is reinforced by their families, children get more consistent in terms of the past (Wahler and Rowinski, 2009). By means of performing activities related to past, children become interested in changes in their lives and hold a view about concepts of change, reform and development. In this way, they can have a better understanding of the order of the events (Zembar and et al., 2013).

In addition, preschool period is an important period in the sense that children step into history and develop historian skills in this period. Before answering the question "Who are we?" that history seeks to answer as a social science, children need to come up with an answer to the question "Who am I?". So as to give an answer to the question "Who am I?", students are supposed to constitute a *narration*. Narration, which appeared orally or in writing in the form of epics and chronicles during traditional level, is defined as "the most successful and effective way of re-creating the past" (Safran and Şimşek, 2011). Several proponents of postmodern theory of history approach history only as a way of narration. For this reason, skills that students gain while transforming their past into a narration are crucial in the sense that they become acquainted with the concepts of history and/or historiography and have their primary experiences in this regard. Additionally, whilst creating narrations related to their past, pupils benefit from concepts related to past and concepts that describe past, and they establish a former-latter (chronological) relationship between events. This process constitutes a significant factor in developing history skills. Students make use of concrete objects from daily life while creating narrations related to their past which in turn contribute to their first experiences to work on proofs – a skill they are going to use in their history classes in the ensuing years of education.

Past time and historical time are two different concepts. Also, there are some who consider historical time as "a thing of the past, an element of past time which is used to describe the events that affected a society deeply and left a mark on it" (Safran and Şimşek, 2009). Nevertheless, postmodern theory of history shows us that besides macro narrations that deal with universal history, micro narrations that deal with daily lives of ordinary people have become a subject of history. In this context, students' personal narrations about their own past gain meaning.

When analyzed in terms of early childhood education, it should be noted that education at home or school is not sufficient to provide sustainability in education. Including children's families into education at school is of utmost importance in the sense that it yields sustainability and retention in education (Temel and et al, 2010; Çağdaş & Şahin Seçer, 2011; Cömert& Erdem, 2011). In the view of such information, the purpose of this study is to help 48-54 months children develop "perception of the past" with a family involvement project named "my own past".

## METHOD

### Research Design

The design of this research will be experimental in nature. Experimental model is a study area in which the researcher generates necessary data to be observed in order to discover cause – effect relationship between the variables (Büyüköztürk, 2000; Karasar, 2005; Sencer, 1978). In this study, one group pretest – posttest model from pre-experimental models has been used.

### Research Group

The research group of the study consists of 13 children; 5 of which (38,46 %) are girls, 8 of which (61,54 %) are boys who attended Prof. Dr. Ayla Oktay's Application Unit at Marmara University in Kadikoy, Istanbul during the Fall Term of 2012 – 2013 Academic Year. Mothers of 11 (84,61) and fathers of 13 children have a profession and work somewhere. At least a parent of 9 children is a personnel at Marmara University.

### Data Collecting Method

A list of 24 questions which was prepared by the researchers was adopted in order to determine what the children knew about their past. The questions were intended to evaluate the information children provide about themselves (name, surname, age, birthday, date of birth as moth-season-year, parents' names), what they remember related to their past and time expressions used to convey those pieces of information.

### Application

The study is designed to improve 48 – 54 months children's "perception of the past" with a family involvement project named "my own past". In order to achieve that purpose, a 15 week project process was planned. Prior to the beginning of the project, a parents' meeting was organized and parents were informed about the project and an application calendar was formed taking parents' preferences into account. All of the parents received a written project application calendar. Besides the work calendar, families were enlightened about the application process. Families were asked to make a presentation along with their child on the date specified for them. The content of the presentation was comprised of; posters or PowerPoint presentations showing the child's photos taken from the day the child was born to the day of presentation, video clips, their toys from different periods of time, and albums introducing the family members. Families were requested to make a presentation with the materials and objects they chose and prepare to share it in the classroom with their child. Families were provided with guidance during their preparation process. Following the first presentation, the children were administrated My Own Past Questionnaire and data of the pretest were gathered. In the first week, the class teacher carried out the presentation. In the following 13 weeks, presentations the children had prepared were made in the company of their families and My Own Past Corner was created in the class with the posters, belongings and photos they had brought. In the 15<sup>th</sup> week, a conclusion meeting was held and the project was completed with short presentations the children made with a photo they chose. At the end of project application process, posttest was administrated.

### FINDINGS

Before and after the application of the project, pretest and posttest were executed. The number of correct answers, arithmetic average, and standard deviation values were provided in Table 1 and Table 2.

According to table 1, all children answered their names and their mothers' names correctly; 12 of them provided their surnames and their fathers' names straightly. 11 kids told their age; 7 children told the name of their favorite toy/book/thing. 6 students were able to tell 3 physical differences between then and their infancy; to construct regular sentences; and to expresses themselves in a group. 5 children told names of 3 close family members; told/explained things/behaviors/situation they could not carry out as a baby but then they could; and expressed themselves in various ways. Only 4 kids were able to tell an anecdote they remembered about their past; told 3 objects they used during infancy; and told their story about the past using their photographs. 3 of the children were able to tell/explain things/behaviors/situation they could not carry out at that time but later he/she might be able to; to use past expressions while speaking; and to use indicative past tense for events he/she personally remembered. 2 kids were capable of telling the month they were born and 1 child was able to tell the season he/she was born. None of the children was capable of telling the year they were born and using inferential past tense correctly for events they personally did not remember.

Table 1: The correct answers given to Pretest questions

Answers expected to be given to pretest questions	Number of correct			
	N	answers	X	sd
Tells his/her name	13	13	1,00	,00
Tells his/her surname	13	12	,92	,28
Tells her age	13	11	,85	,38
Tells the day he/she was born	13	2	,15	,38
Tells the month he/she was born	13	2	,15	,38
Tells the year he/she was born	13	0	,00	,00
Tells the season he/she was born	13	1	,08	,28
Tells his/her mother's name	13	13	1,00	,00
Tells his/her father's name	13	12	,92	,28
Tells names of 3 close family members	13	5	,39	,51
Tells an anecdote he/she remembers about his/her past	13	4	,31	,48
Uses indicative past tense for events he/she personally remembers	13	3	,23	,44
Uses inferential past tense for events he/she personally does not remember	13	0	,00	,00
Tells/explains things/behaviors/situation he/she could not carry out as a baby but now he/she can	13	5	,39	,51
Tells/explains things/behaviors/situation he/she cannot carry out at that time but later he/she may be able to	13	3	,23	,44
Tells 3 physical differences between then and his/her infancy (teeth, hair, height)	13	6	,46	,52
Tells 3 objects he/she used during infancy	13	4	,31	,48
Tells what he/she uses now instead of those 3 objects	13	1	,08	,28
Tells the name of his/her favorite toy/book/thing	13	7	,54	,52
Uses past expressions while speaking	13	3	,23	,44
Constructs regular sentences	13	6	,46	,52
Expresses himself/herself in various ways	13	5	,39	,51
Tells his/her story about the past using his/her photographs	13	4	,31	,48
Expresses himself/herself in a group	13	6	,46	,52

Table 2: The correct answers given to Posttest questions

Answers expected to be given to posttest questions	Number of			
	N	correct answers	X	sd
Tells his/her name	13	13	1,00	,00
Tells his/her surname	13	13	1,00	,00
Tells her age	13	13	1,00	,00
Tells the day he/she was born	13	4	,31	,48
Tells the month he/she was born	13	5	,39	,51
Tells the year he/she was born	13	0	,00	,00
Tells the season he/she was born	13	3	,23	,44
Tells his/her mother's name	13	13	1,00	,00
Tells his/her father's name	13	13	1,00	,00
Tells names of 3 close family members	13	7	,54	,52
Tells an anecdote he/she remembers about his/her past	13	6	,46	,52
Uses indicative past tense for events he/she personally remembers	13	6	,46	,52
Uses inferential past tense for events he/she personally does not remember	13	3	,23	,44
Tells/explains things/behaviors/situation he/she could not carry out as a baby but now he/she can	13	7	,54	,52
Tells/explains things/behaviors/situation he/she cannot carry out at that time but later he/she may be able to	13	5	,39	,51
Tells 3 physical differences between then and his/her infancy (teeth, hair, height)	13	8	,62	,51
Tells 3 objects he/she used during infancy	13	8	,62	,51
Tells what he/she uses now instead of those 3 objects	13	4	,31	,48
Tells the name of his/her favorite toy/book/thing	13	11	,85	,38
Uses past expressions while speaking	13	5	,39	,51
Constructs regular sentences	13	7	,54	,52
Expresses himself/herself in various ways	13	6	,46	,52
Tells his/her story about the past using his/her photographs	13	6	,46	,52
Expresses himself/herself in a group	13	8	,62	,51

According to posttest results, after the application of the programme all of the children were able to correctly say their name, age, and their parents' names. 11 of them told the name of their favorite toy/book/thing. 8 kids were able to tell 3 physical differences between then and his/her infancy; to tell 3 objects he/she used during infancy; and to express themselves in a group. 7 students were capable of telling the names of 3 close family members; telling/explaining things/behaviors/situation they could not carry out as a baby but then they could; and constructing regular sentences. 6 of the children were able to tell an anecdote they remembered about their past; to use indicative past tense for events they personally remembered; and to tell their story about the past using their photographs. 5 children told the month they were born correctly and used right past time expressions while speaking. 4 kids told the day they were born and 3 children told the season they were born correctly. However, none of the children was capable of telling the year they were born correctly.

Table 3: Wilcoxon signed-rank test results for My Own Past Questionnaire pretest – posttest results

Pretest – Posttest	N	Rank Average	Rank Total	z	p
Negative rank	0	,00	,00	-3,201*	,001
Positive rank	13	7,00	91,00		
Equal	0				
Total	13				

\* Results were organized based on negative ranks.

According to the obtained results, a significant difference was found between the scores of pretest and posttest for the children of the research group ( $z=-3,201$ ;  $p<,01$ ). Considering all the scores and the rank average of difference scores, it is understood that the difference observed here is for the benefit of positive ranks, namely posttest. In relation to these findings, it may be announced that the programme applied proved to be effective.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to the present study, it has been concluded that using activities inclusive of family education that aims at development of perception of the past regarding their own past among children in preschool period is beneficial for the child with regards to identification of differences between past, present, and future and improvement of perception of the past. It has been observed that in accordance with the findings above; 48-54 months children in preschool period were able to concretize the abstract past by recounting their own past and capable of successfully using concepts in daily life which are related to past.

As Zembat and et al. (2010) mention in their study on perception of the past, introduction of history education among preschool children is considered to make a great contribution to develop a sense of history in older ages. Likewise, it has been concluded that implementing suitable preschool activities in accordance with children's age, development level, and interest under proper conditions in order to introduce and improve perception of the past among 48-54 months children in preschool period is beneficial in developing targeted concepts.

In accordance with studies carried out in national and international literature, it has been found that further research is indispensable within the field and researchers need to direct their attention towards the study area. In line with the literature review and experimental results, the following ideas have been offered.

- Increasing the number of history education studies with various age group children in preschool education period,
- Development and categorization of implicit learning and functions which are devoted to history education within the preschool education curriculum adopted in Turkey under the title of history education,
- Planning and implementing various kinds of activities in order to improve children's perception of the past,
- Developing studies with various age groups in the field,
- Increasing the number of field trips and museum tours which can concretize abstract past and familiarize the cultural heritage that are oriented to acquisition of concept of time in preschool period.

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