

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: AN INVESTIGATION INTO ITS IMPACT ON ELT STUDENTS' PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ÖZET

Öğretmenlerin grup içinde işbirliğine dayalı çalışmalarının profesyonel gelişimlerine katkıda bulunduğu öğretmen eğitimi literatüründe sıkça vurgulanmaktadır (Hung & Der-Thanq, 2001). Hizmet öncesi veya hizmet içinde böyle bir sürece dahil olmak, öğretmenler için başta kısmi ama anlamlı roller almalarını ve giderek öğretmen topluluğunun tam bir üyesi olmaları kolaylaştırmakta; bir yandan da geri-düşünme yoluyla yeni beceriler kazanmalarını sağlamaktadır. Söz konusu olan mesleki öğrenme yönteminin “Uygulayıcı Topluluk” kuramına dayanmaktadır. Bu yöntemde öğrenciler topluluğun diğer üyeleri ile sürekli iletişim içinde kavramsallaştırma yoluyla öğrenirler (Wenger, 1998). Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma Uygulayıcı Topluluk yönteminin uygulanmasının İngiliz Dili ve Eğitimi öğrencilerinin kişisel ve mesleki gelişimleri üzerine etkilerini saptamayı hedeflemektedir. Çalışmanın verileri 18 İngiliz Dili ve Eğitimi öğrencilerinin üç ay boyunca tuttıkları haftalık günlükler ile onlarla yapılan görüşmelerden elde edilmiştir. Sonuçlar Uygulayıcı Topluluk yönteminin katılımcı öğrencilerin kişisel ve mesleki gelişimleri üzerine çok yönlü etkisi olduğunu göstermektedir.

ABSTRACT

It is well documented in the literature of teacher training that working in collaborative groups enable teachers to reconstruct their professional knowledge (e.g. Hung & Der-Thanq, 2001). Such a process assists pre- and in-service teachers to take on partial but meaningful roles on the way to becoming full participants in a teacher community while constructing knowledgeable skills through reflection-on-action. The notion underlying this type of professional learning is grounded on the theory of Communities of Practice (CoP), where student teachers try to solve problems through interactions with others in the community and through conceptualizing and re-conceptualizing (Wenger, 1998). In this respect, the aim of this study is to identify the impact of adopting a CoP approach to pre-service English Language Teaching (ELT) students' personal and professional development. The data for the study were obtained from 18 ELT students' weekly journals they kept for three months and semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that

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applying CoP approach to pre-service ELT teacher education has multidimensional impacts on students' personal and professional development.

Keywords: communities of practice, pre-service teacher education, personal and professional development

1. Introduction

Situated learning approaches to learning and teaching have been researched and evaluated in the process of finding a contemporary conceptual foundation for the field of teacher education (e.g. Schinke-Liano, 1993; Appel and Lantolf, 1994; Donato and McCormick, 1994). These approaches advocate that, in contrast to behavioral and cognitive approaches, teacher thinking should be perceived as a development of interaction with their environment, inside and outside the educational establishment and thus, knowledge construction is situated in context and culture (Jarvela & Niemivirta, 1999). In this respect, the activities of the person and the environment are parts of a mutually constructed whole in situated cognition. Rather than being static, the process of learning is viewed as interactive, relational, dialectical and /or transactional (Hung & Der-Thanq, 2001). "Meanings are perceived as inseparable from interpretation, and knowledge is linked to the relations of which it is a product. In other words, knowledge is not just a mental state; rather, it is an experienced relation of things, and it has no meaning outside of such relations" (p.4).

Based on the premises of situated learning theory, which elevates the connection between knowledge and activity, there has been a tendency toward guiding learners to become participants in communities of practice in any given professional development context. Smith (2003), for instance, states that whether at work, school, home or civic interests, we are generally involved in a number of communities of practice. Although the characteristics of such communities of practice vary, shared practice is the only characteristic which is common to all types of communities of practice. Wenger (1998) identifies the three basic key components of an effective CoP in a professional context: 'mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire' (p. 152). Wenger (2002) redefines communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion, about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p.4).

Prior research has shown various adaptations of the concept of CoP (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991; Salomon, 1993; Wilson, 1996). The scope of applications in teacher education includes collaboration between different parties such as university education institutions and schools (e.g. Powell, 2000; Sutherland, Scanlon and Sperring, 2005; Mule, 2006, etc) as well as collaboration among prospective teachers in different fields like Mathematics (Van Zoest and Stockero, 2008), Science (Akerson, Donnelly, Riggs, and Eastwood, 2012; Poole, 2001), or early childhood education (Moran, 2007). The aim of these adaptations is to provide learning situations where learners work collaboratively together on authentic problems by interacting and exchanging ideas. The communication environment serves the context where learners are able to create a

community of learning and thus, can construe new knowledge and skills in authentic situations (Jarvela and Niemivirta, 1999).

1.1. Learning How to Teach in CoP

The theory of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) in communities of practice sees learners both at micro and macro level in the context of their individual world and the social world they live in (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The degree of participation determines the individual's learning. Instead of abstract rule learning, the learner is involved in real situations and tries to solve the problems through interactions with others in the CoP and through conceptualizing and re-conceptualizing. In the field of teacher education, learning in a CoP means collaborating and negotiating meaning through situated learning opportunities.

Butler et al. (2004) advocate collaborative models of professional development against traditional models, which include a top-down approach to transfer knowledge to be translated into action. Rather, teachers should be supported to work in collaborative groups to reconstruct their professional knowledge. Such a process will enable pre-service or in-service teachers to take on partial but meaningful roles in schools on the way to becoming full participants while constructing knowledgeable skills through reflection-on-action (as termed by Schön, 1987). Especially the newcomers to the teaching profession are likely to become motivated to shape their learning processes.

The term collaboration, as it is used in this study, is an "interpersonal collaboration" which "is a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (Friend and Cook, 1990, p.5.). Drawing on the Vygotskian sense of the term, a collaborative learning environment supports sharing, negotiating, and constructing knowledge to promote effective learning and knowledge building as a group (Maddux, Johnson, and Willis, 1997).

Via situated interactions in a CoP, teachers develop a grounded knowledge which includes personal system of knowledge, skills, attitudes about work and building of a subjective educational theory. Through the new experiences teachers gain, they can adjust their personal educational theory, which may lead to changes in their teaching practice. For Sawyer (2002), this kind of process creates an interaction between the individuals and their cultural context, creating a dynamic between teachers' subjective educational theories and histories and the complex cultural contexts they work in. This interaction is crucial in that teachers generally work in their individual classrooms isolated from the rest of the community, and thus, they are not able to interact with their peers, share knowledge and reflect on issues related to their work. Enabling teachers to gain the habit of working with other members of the community can lead to the development of social networks where learning is seen as distributed knowledge "in which thinking, knowing, and learning are distributed across people and their environments" (Sawyer, 2002, p.735). In such a network, teachers also have the opportunity to gain new knowledge and critique their existing knowledge. Collaboration can also support teachers' internalization of new meanings via the use of common language and development of new perspectives and habits of reflection before becoming internalized (Sawyer, 2002).

Studies of teacher communities provide evidence as to the potential for teachers to build effective communities of practice (e.g., Calderwood, 2000; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2000). Pre-service teacher development would be an ideal time to introduce teachers to collaborative patterns of learning and practice with a view to overcoming the culture of “presentism, individualism, and conservatism” as Lortie first described in *Schoolteacher* (Poole, 2001). To encourage such collaborative manner to learning in a CoP also seems essential among pre-service teachers in Turkish context since individualism has recently been attached a higher value than collectivism (Gormus and Aydın, 2008). In this respect, applying CoP approach to pre-service teacher education, the study attempts to identify its impact on pre-service ELT students’ personal and professional development. In particular, the study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. Does adopting the CoP approach to pre-service teacher education produce any impact on pre-service ELT students’ professional development?
2. Does adopting the CoP approach to pre-service teacher education produce any impact on pre-service ELT students’ personal development?
3. What are the pre -service ELT students’ perceptions of working in a CoP?

2. Method

2.1. Participants and the context

18 second grade students from ELT Department at Cukurova University volunteered to participate in the study. The English Language Teaching Methodology course, taught four hours a week by one of the researchers in this study, provided the context for the research. The course content included Common European Framework (CEF) and its adaptation to the Turkish Ministry of Education curriculum for grades 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 at primary education level. The course was integrated into the curriculum of the education faculties following the decision by the Turkish Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher education to adopt the CEF to foreign language teaching at public and private schools in 1998 in Turkey. The centralized education system in Turkey requires all English teachers to be equipped with similar knowledge and skills as the teachers are required to use the standard national curriculum and plan and organize their yearly and weekly syllabi accordingly. Thus, the course served the purpose of familiarizing pre-service ELT students with the national foreign language curriculum and the fundamental approaches on which it is based.

2.2. Procedure

At the beginning of the semester, 18 students who were taking the course were asked to form study groups of three or four. They chose their group members themselves on the basis of convenience and preference. Following the idea of CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991), we aimed to support students’ learning by creating an authentic activity where collaborative social interaction takes place inside and outside the class. As in the commonality component of a CoP, it is important to have a valid reason for participants to work together in a way that makes sense to them – such as shared interests and problems that require joint effort (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Thus, in

order to acquire the content knowledge and develop the necessary cognitive tools, students came together outside the class hours before and after each lesson and prepared the majority of the assignments in groups during the three-month period of the course.

In the first month, students studied the fundamentals of CEF, methodology for teaching young language learners, and the general objectives of Turkish Ministry of Education for teaching English to young learners. Drawing on Sawyer (2002), the students were expected to internalize the new knowledge by collaborating with group members and by developing new perspectives and habits of reflection.

During the second month, participant students studied the English Teaching curriculum for grades four and five prepared by the Ministry of Education. Their task included the analysis of an individual syllabus in the curriculum and the preparation of sample lesson plans accordingly. This phase served the active participatory phase (Barab et al., 2001) in which students worked on a collaborative activity in order to create ownership for the abstract content being learned. They needed to develop new professional skills and strategies to accomplish the task in groups and to deal with any difficulty that might arise. The same procedure was followed during the last month for grades six, seven and eight.

As course requirements, the students had one mid-term assignment, four reports and one final project for their grades. With a view to identifying students' sense of accomplishment as a member of a group and to enhance peer support within it, they were asked to prepare the mid-term assignment and all the other weekly reports in groups. However, they were expected to prepare their final assignment individually.

Creating an authentic situation where students worked collaboratively by contributing and exchanging personal ideas, sharing knowledge and interests, they were expected firstly to develop new collaborative skills necessary for this new learning environment and to develop a new professional disposition based on any potential transformation as they slowly became members of the new CoP. Following Clancey (1995), the analytic framework of the CoP, which entails "knowledge", "learning" and "tools", we aimed to assist students in the way to form a CoP. For Clancey (1995), "Knowledge is ability to participate in a community of practice. Learning is becoming a member of a community of practice. Tools facilitate interaction in a community of practice" (p.53). In this particular study; (1) knowledge stands for the shared educational content, (2) learning is achieved through participation in weekly collaborative work as members of their CoP, and (3) the course materials and assignments acted as tools for them to work on.

2.3. Research Instruments and Analysis

Data for the study were obtained from two different sources: the pre-service ELT students' weekly journals and semi-structured interviews. At the beginning of the course, the students were asked to keep a journal to record their reflections on the course content and on their learning experience within their CoP. In addition, they were encouraged to note their feelings, comments, or complaints which might emerge during the course.

At the end of the term, we collected the student journals and broadly examined the entries (n=184) which provided a part of the raw data of the study. A systematic

content analysis was followed to examine students' descriptions and explanations of their learning experience recorded in the journals. Following a model of "stakeholder research" (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 1999), we adopted an interpretive approach in order to reach a complete understanding of perceptions and reflections of the students in CoP they formed during the course. First, the two researchers read all the entries and recorded the important themes. Based on these themes, the initial categories emerged and were refined through discussion. Then, these initial categories were re-read and evaluated by each researcher separately. During this independent analysis of the themes and categories, ambiguous points were noted and later re-examined in further discussion by the two researchers.

To support the data acquired from the weekly journals, six out of 18 students were interviewed. They were asked questions to explore their perceptions of their experience in their CoP; focusing on the following points:

- a. Description of their experience in a CoP
- b. Perceptions of working in a CoP
- c. An unforgettable incident in the course of working in a CoP
- d. Potential contributions of working in a CoP.

Interviews lasted about forty minutes, were audio-recorded and then transcribed for data analysis purposes. In the content analysis of the interviews, special attention was paid to identify the themes regarding students' perceptions of each point of investigation described above.

3. Findings

The following sections present the findings acquired from the analysis of students' journal entries and interviews. From the analysis of both students' journals and interviews, the themes emerged were grouped under four major categories. Of these four themes, while the first concerns the impact of learning in a CoP on students' professional development, the second theme is related to how working in a CoP influenced students' personal development. The third theme is about students' positive perceptions of working in a CoP and the fourth deals with negative perceptions of working in a CoP.

3.1. Working in a CoP and Students' Professional Development

Table 1 below presents the themes regarding the impact of working in a CoP on students' professional development. The elicited themes are presented on the basis of the frequency of their citation in both students' journal entries and interviews:

Table.1

The Themes Related to Working in a CoP and Students' Professional Development

| No | Themes | f |
|----|--|----|
| 1 | Facilitating learning | 57 |
| 2 | Learning from one another | 29 |
| 3 | Helping retention | 16 |
| 4 | Helping prepare better assignments | 8 |
| 5 | Enhancing knowledge through different perspectives | 7 |
| 6 | Enhancing motivation for transferring CoP to the future teaching context | 5 |
| 7 | Eliminating bias toward the course content | 2 |

As is seen in Table 1, an overwhelming majority of the themes regarding the influence of working in a CoP on students' professional development is related to the process of acquisition of content knowledge. The most frequently cited theme is that working collaboratively in a CoP made the learning process easy for the participating students (57 citations). This is supported by the following remarks:

Excerpt 1:

Whenever I heard that we had an assignment, I felt I would not be able to do it alone because it might be difficult. However, when we started to do it in our group, I realized that it was not that much hard (Serap, journal entry, 8th week).

Excerpt 2:

Working on the tasks as a group facilitated the process (Burcu, interview).

“Learning from one another” (29 citations) seems to be the reason why the students claimed that working in a CoP speeded up the learning process. The students stated that the main reason for considering learning to be easier via collaboration was the exchange of knowledge they had during their meetings. There were a significant number of comments that cited the value of their friends' help in the process of acquiring complicated content in the course. This is evidenced by the students' following remarks:

Excerpt 3:

Firstly, I read the chapter individually and it seemed a bit complex to interpret the sentences in detail. Then I read it again and again and took some notes. I put a mark at the points I could not understand. Then I met my group friends to analyze the chapter. It was so nice to exchange ideas and help each other to overcome the difficulties. Thanks to this group work, complexity became simplicity for us. (Gülşah, journal entry, 3rd week).

Excerpt 4:

Working with my peers in the group was effective because we shared our knowledge and learned many things from each other (Fulya, interview).

Another frequent opinion that emerged from students' journal entries and interviews was that working in a CoP helped retention (16 citations)

Excerpt 5:

Besides studying the material on my own, discussing it in the group made learning more permanent (Gülşah, journal entry, 3rd week).

There are also themes indicating that working in a CoP affected the quality of their assignments positively (8 citations). According to the majority of the comments, students were able to prepare better assignments more easily and faster thanks to the collective contribution of their friends. They expressed their disappointment when they learned that the final assignment was to be done individually. Excerpt 6 and 7 indicate this opinion:

Excerpt 6:

I was glad to work as a group. We helped each other, we worked together and took the responsibility together (Cemile, journal entry, 10th week).

Some reflections of students as novice teachers indicated that they tried to deduce ideas and strategies that they could use in their careers as teachers (5 citations). Students voiced such reflections as a result of their collaborative studies as given in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 7:

The idea of group work is really efficient. I am learning by learning (doing meta learning). I can use these strategies in my career as a teacher. I am sure that I will learn a lot as time passes (Elif, journal entry, 2nd week).

Excerpt 8:

I will probably use such kind of group cooperation in my summer classes as well. I believe that even younger learners should be aware of the benefits of cooperation. They should be able to learn from each other (Fulya, journal entry, 3rd week).

Excerpt 9:

In our lesson, the teacher asked the groups to sit together to do team-work. While working with the group members, I observed myself and saw that I felt less anxious. In group work, I feel more secure and positive. So, when I become a teacher, I will advise my students to work together. Ahaaa!! Here is another another cue for my teaching career: encourage students to do group work! (Nesrin, journal entry, 6th week).

“Enhancing knowledge through different perspectives” (7 citations) and “eliminating bias toward the course” (2 citations) are two further themes concerning the impact of working in a CoP on students' professional development. As a result of the support and contribution they received from their peers, they gained new perspectives and overcame the bias towards some content items. Excerpts 10 and 11 display stances of these opinions:

Excerpt 10:

Yesterday we came together for group work.. As we did before, we discussed the topic of the week and each of us shared his/her own comprehension and interpretation. Before we met, I had had some questions in my mind and all of them were answered now. (Kevser, journal entry,3rd week).

Excerpt 11:

This week I started to realize that studying CEF is enjoyable. It is not as difficult I expected it to be. When we came together, we were better equipped and knew how to discuss the content. It was useful to come together and work (Yahya, journal entry,3rd week).

3.2. Working in a CoP and Students' Personal Development

Table 2 below presents the themes regarding the impact of working in a CoP on students' personal development. The themes elicited from both students' journal entries and interviews are presented on the basis of the frequency of their citation.

Table.2
The Themes Related to Working in a CoP and Students' Personal Development

| No | Themes | f |
|----|---|----|
| 1 | Enhancing awareness of weaknesses | 18 |
| 2 | Learning how to work in cooperation | 14 |
| 3 | Learning to provide constructive feedback | 13 |
| 4 | Gaining problem solving ability | 13 |
| 5 | Encouraging reflection | 13 |
| 6 | Learning how to manage learning | 6 |

As Table 2 displays, the most frequently cited impact of working in a CoP on students' personal development is "enhancing awareness of weaknesses" (18 citations). However, instead of being frustrated, they were constructive about it. They stated that being a group member was beneficial in feeling more constructive about their weaknesses. The following student's remark indicates this perception:

Excerpt 12:

Today we again worked together and learned a lot. That was really effective especially in terms of realizing my weaknesses and what action I should take to sort them out thanks to my friends' help. I will certainly benefit from their suggestions (Fulya, journal entry,3rd week).

Another frequently mentioned opinion about working in a CoP was its positive role in improving cooperative skills (14 citations). Excerpt 13 exemplifies their perception of this process:

Excerpt 13:

If it wasn't for group work, I wouldn't be able to learn about cooperative work. Also, this course gave me the opportunity to analyze and especially to criticize myself. Sometimes we had different ideas about the same topic, but we gave reasons and examples so that we could reach a consensus. In short, we shared our knowledge, which helped very much (Ismail, interview).

The students also claimed that working in a CoP contributed to their ability to give their group members constructive feedback (13 citations). The following remark illustrates this:

Excerpt 14:

Our group work was interdependent; so we had to rely on each other. We knew that what we had individually was not enough and we had to learn to share opinions. Sometimes when the things we said was not sufficient or was wrong, we had to comment on each other's opinions without being discouraging (Fulya, interview).

"Gaining problem solving ability" was also cited as a positive impact of working in a CoP on personal development (13 citations). For example:

Excerpt 15:

I understand better the importance of group work now. Our topics are getting longer and more difficult. When we come together, we feel more relaxed. If I don't have an idea about something, one of the others has. We exchange ideas on how to overcome some problems and get better at solving them (Yahya, journal entry, 5th week).

"Encouraging reflection" is a further theme showing the impact of working in a CoP (13 citations). This is evidenced by the following student's remark:

Excerpt 16:

I thought that I have insufficient language skills and I shared this with my group friends. And we all accepted that we are better in receptive skills than productive ones. I asked myself why it is so. Are we really insufficient in creating new sentences? If so, what can we do about it? (Fulya, journal entry, 3rd week).

Students also frequently mentioned the assistance of the group in learning how to manage learning (6 citations). Improving the quality of their study habits made learning more enjoyable and productive for them. Two students state their opinions as follows:

Excerpt 17:

We studied as a group again. This time we were more efficient because we learned how to study and discuss the topics; so every topic was clearer to understand. Studying with my group was really enjoyable because my worries started to disappear about this course (Sebahat, journal entry, 3rd week).

Excerpt 18:

I believe that every lesson prepares you to next ones. By the help of this course, I feel less challenged in my other lessons. I learned to determine goals before I start to study (Yahya, interview).

3.3. Students' Positive Perceptions toward Working in CoP

Table 3 displays the themes related to students' perceptions on working in a CoP.

Table.3
The Themes Related to Students' Positive Perceptions

| No | Themes | f |
|----|------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Providing secure atmosphere | 30 |
| 2 | Increasing self-confidence | 26 |
| 3 | Increasing motivation to learn | 21 |
| 4 | Encouraging to share | 16 |
| 5 | Eliminating bias toward others | 14 |
| 6 | Eliminating competitive atmosphere | 12 |
| 7 | Making lessons more enjoyable | 11 |
| 8 | Strengthening bonds of friendship | 5 |

The most frequently articulated positive remark of the students about working in a CoP is that it provided them with a secure atmosphere (30 citations). The following excerpts exemplify these feelings:

Excerpt 19:

When I study individually, I can't understand many points, but when we come together I feel more secure because the points that I cannot understand become clearer with their help. (Yahya, journal entry, 2nd week). Another frequently cited perception concerns the idea that working in a CoP increased students' self-confidence (26 citations). The students mentioned that they felt stronger and more optimistic about their future endeavors with the assistance of their group, as Excerpt 21 shows:

Excerpt 20:

As the time passes, learning gets easier. Working in a group affects me positively because it had been long that I last studied with a group. For the next lesson, I feel more secure and trust myself. I expect that I will learn better (Sebahat, journal entry, 2nd week).

Another frequently stated opinion was that working in a CoP led them to become more motivated toward learning new things (21 citations). As one student notes:

Excerpt 21:

This week we studied as a group again. I think we are getting more willing to learn (Cemile, journal entry, 3rd week).

In the context of this study, the students stated that working in a CoP encouraged them to share (16 citations) and eliminated bias toward others (14 citations).

Excerpt 22:

Sometimes we had different ideas about the same topic, but we gave reasons and examples so that we could reach a consensus. In short, we shared our knowledge, which helped very much. (Nuray, journal entry, 2nd week).

They also claimed that working in a CoP eliminated the competitive atmosphere in learning (12 citations). Having a new perception about their classmates as members of the same community instead of their rivals was one of the important benefits of their experience in a CoP. As one student puts it:

Excerpt 23:

We gained positive interdependence. Group work eliminated the competitive atmosphere in the class. I can see that my cooperative skills have developed. In this course, in addition to content of the course, thanks to group work, I gained life-long skills which will help me in my teaching career. (Nesrin, journal entry, 10th week).

At the first stages, they expressed that they were not keen on working in a group, especially with some individual classmates. Also, some of them were a little lost and did not know exactly how to study in a group. However, after a while, they developed more positive feelings towards their group members and attributed their success to working with them in collaboration. Some stated that they enjoyed studying in their group more towards the end of the course. In other words, their peripheral participation as illegitimate members at the beginning seems to turn into being an insider by getting involved in a situated practice and sharing a common goal. For instance:

Excerpt 24:

Some weeks ago, I mentioned my tendency to study on my own. I also mentioned the benefits of group work if designed properly with suitable members; otherwise, it would be a catastrophe. Yet, I really enjoyed the group work this week. We learned to use the time efficiently, to respect an idea no matter how nonsense it seems at first, to act like an individual that has four minds, and most importantly to take responsibility both for yourself and your group friends (Fulya, journal entry, 10th week).

A further frequently mentioned idea about working in a CoP was that learning gained an element of fun (11 citations). As one student puts it:

Excerpt 25:

I had fun while working with my group friends. It is very important to enjoy yourself when studying. I had the opportunity to learn with fun (Fulya, interview).

Students also stated that as they started to work in the same group, they had the chance to get to know their classmates better and to strengthen the bonds of friendship (5 citations). As one student expresses:

Excerpt 26:

With this collaborative work, I had the opportunity to get to know my classmates much better. We were already in the same class, but we did not share much. I continued to work together with my group friends even after the course finished. I feel like I met my old friends for the first time (Yahya, interview).

3. 4. Students' Negative Perceptions toward Working in a CoP

Table 4 presents the themes indicating the negative perceptions of working in a CoP.

Table.4
The Themes Related to Students' Negative Perceptions

| No | Themes | f |
|----|--------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Making studying more difficult | 14 |
| 2 | Bringing more responsibilities | 9 |
| 3 | Time-consuming | 7 |
| 4 | Boring | 7 |
| 5 | Feeling under peer pressure | 5 |

According to some students, working in a CoP made studying more difficult (14 citations). They put forward various reasons for this such as handling different opinions in the group or arranging the meeting times. For example:

Excerpt 27:

I can't proceed because I can't work with my group members. We are not a good group and can't come together easily. (Burcu, journal entry, 7th week).

Excerpt 28:

It is sometimes hard to reach a consensus even on very simple points (Meryem, journal entry, 9th week).

The students also complained about the new responsibilities they had when studying in a CoP (9 citations). As one student puts it:

Excerpt 29:

It is frustrating when you feel responsible for the whole group. It is easier if I work by myself (Burcu, journal entry, 10th week).

Few students found working in a CoP time-consuming (7 citations). In the following remark, for instance, one student is articulating how difficult it is to regulate

her learning pace according to the other members:

Excerpt 30:

This week the discussions in my group lasted too long to finish the assignment. If I had been on my own, I could have finished it more quickly (Meryem, journal entry, 10th week).

Another mentioned negative perception was that working in a CoP seemed boring especially in the first meetings (7 citations). The reason proposed by the students was that they did not know exactly what they were supposed to do at the beginning of the term, and this resulted in spending a lot of time together without doing anything productive. As one student states:

Excerpt 31:

At the beginning it was really boring because it was a new experience for us. We didn't know what to do and wasted a lot of time (Şeyhmus, interview).

Peer pressure was also cited as a negative perception (5 citations) as exemplified in the following remark:

Excerpt 32:

In group work, I sometimes have to keep silent with the fear that my friends may misunderstand me or get hurt (Meryem, journal entry, 9th week).

4. Discussions And Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the impact of adopting CoP on pre-service ELT students' personal and professional development. The study also identified the students' perceptions of working in a CoP. The data for the study were collected from students' weekly journals and interviews held with them at the end of the course.

Regarding the first research question which investigated the impact of working in a CoP on students' professional development, the findings showed that CoP had various effects such as facilitating learning, enhancement of knowledge and helping retention. There is evidence showing that most students attributed such positive effect to the interaction and help they received from one another. This finding seems to be echoed in the theory of LPP in a CoP which sees learners both at micro and macro level as being situated in the context of their individual world and the social world they live in. The degree of participation determines the individual's learning which is located in the processes of co-participation, rather than the individual's mind. Moreover, "learning is mediated by the differences of perspectives among the co-participants. It is the community, or at least those participating in the learning context, who 'learn' under this definition. "Learning is, as it was, distributed among co-participants, not a one – person act" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp. 15).

Concerning the second research question, the impact of working in a CoP on students' personal development, the findings revealed that students to a great extent benefited from this experience. Hung and Nichani (2002) state that the application of CoP to any learning setting brings a number of strengths such as access to guidance

from and to community members and everyday engagement in problem-solving. It seems that working in a CoP provided the students with such an environment in which they raised awareness of weaknesses and enhanced cooperative, problem-solving and reflective skills.

In a CoP, new-comers are expected to be willing to be full participants. Hence, the participants' perceptions play a key role since learning activities are seen as inherently social and learning can be improved by addressing issues of membership, participation in a community, and identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Clancey, 1995). Fostering a sense of community can reduce feelings of isolation, improve the learner's attitude toward the course and the content, and ultimately boost student retention (Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap, 2003). Drawing on this, the findings regarding the third research question of the study, it was evidenced that the students' positive perceptions of working in a CoP outweigh the negative ones. The students reported that when working in a CoP, they felt secure, self-confident, motivated and willing to share. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the students developed a positive attitude toward the course thanks to a learning context free of bias and competition.

However, there were also negative comments, most of which were related to impracticality of collaborative work. Factors such as timing and distance of the meeting place were among the frequent complaints. Furthermore, as Smith (2003) points out, members of a community are required to create a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments and memories as well as developing new tools, routines and even vocabulary to work on the accumulated knowledge of the group and allow the CoP to function effectively. Obviously, this is not an easy task to achieve and necessitates significant effort on the part of unacquainted members. Naturally, especially at the beginning of the term, students mainly did not like to have new responsibilities with which they were burdened in the group. For some of them, this increase in the responsibilities made the studying process more complicated.

In the definition of CoP by Wenger (1999), there are three dimensions: First, as the answer to the question of what it is about: it is a joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members. Second, he explains how it functions as the mutual engagement that binds members together into a social entity. Third, the capability it has produced is the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time. These dimensions also form the components of the analytic framework proposed by Clancey (1995), which are referred as "knowledge", "learning" and "tools". From student teachers' perspective, the adaptation of the CoP approach in our context resulted in establishing these components in a way to becoming full participants. The results of this study indicate that students were able to form a CoP where they had a joint goal, shared knowledge, repertoire of communal resources, and emotional support. After the initial phases, they managed to develop a common sense of responsibility, which led to higher commitment and eventually more positive attitudes towards their groups.

This study seems to suggest that it is important to make provision for the ELT pre-service students' learning in a CoP as formed in this study at the earliest stage possible. Pre-service teacher education programmes can incorporate the principles of CoP so that future teachers can enhance their knowledge and skills in a supportive and reflective environment.

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