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## Learning To Become An English Language Teacher: Navigating The Self Through Peer Practicum

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*Abstract: Pre-service English language teachers' school practicum is key to their learning to become a teacher. However, a number of challenges are observed in its implementation. This paper addresses this issue by investigating how engaging in practicum as peers can function as mentoring support and how this process can influence their selves. A cohort of 16 senior pre-service English teachers was invited to participate in the study from a state university in the west of Turkey. We collected qualitative data through dialogic verbal records and post-practicum interviews. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results show that pre-service teachers provided for each other different forms of sustained psychosocial support in discovering knowledge about teaching and developing a sense of self as a teacher through dialogic interaction with peers. The paper discusses the implications of peer practicum for reconstructing practicum models already in practice in the research context and beyond.*

**Keywords:** pre-service English teachers, peer practicum, teacher self

### Introduction

It is widely accepted that school practicum is a key component of initial processes of teacher education programs and remains at the heart of pre-service teachers' professional training (Tang, 2004; White & Forgasz, 2016). It is the arena where pre-service teachers bring theory and practice together as they are learning to teach (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Yet, the practicum process still remains problematic for English language teachers in Turkey. As argued by Eret-Orhan, Ok and Capa-Aydın (2018), according to 1856 pre-service teachers, the practicum is the least adequate component of teacher education programs. The sources of practicum-related problems within Turkish context include insufficiency in several classroom competences such as classroom management, discipline issues, time management and classroom language use (Başyurt-Tüzel & Akcan, 2009; Tülüce, 2016), affective dimensions including lack of sustainable and assertive support from the school and university mentors (Yangın Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016), negative effects of being observed and assessed (Coşkun, 2013; Yangın Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016), psychological fatigue (Yıldız, Gecikli & Yesilyurt; 2016), lack of genuine reflective practices (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013), and lack of teamwork and collaboration between practicum stakeholders (Yıldız, Gecikli & Yesilyurt, 2016). Besides, there is no specifically adopted mentoring approach throughout the process. The mentor teachers in schools are assigned by Directorates of National Education within the

city according to seniority and they are often not trained to mentor pre-service teachers' practicum involvement.

To overcome these problems while participating in their practicum, pre-service teachers need support, which is also highlighted by Farrell (2008), who argues for the necessity of support while developing teaching skills and experiencing emotions during the practicum. While this support can be provided by university and school mentors, it can also be given by practicum peers in different forms and interaction patterns (Ambrosetti, Dekkers & Knight, 2017; Dang, 2013; Harlow & Cubb, 2014; Nguyen, 2013). Collaborative and interactive practicum models which we call in our case 'peer practicum' have recently been in practice and used either formally or informally in many teacher education programs worldwide, yet it is still an underexplored process which needs to be investigated in different contexts such as Turkey. This study addresses this contextual gap with a methodological innovation which involves verbally recorded peer discussions as well as other data collection methods at different stages of the practicum experience. To explore the process of pre-service teacher learning through such a peer practicum model, we developed the following two research questions:

1. How do the pre-service teachers engage in peer practicum?
2. How does their peer engagement influence their self?

### Literature Review

The experience of school practicum has often been an individual process of engagement in learning to become a teacher. Since it is the first contact with the classroom with a new, growing role after so many years of being there as learners, pre-service teachers might experience "a psychological struggle", as Childs (2011) puts it, which is rather challenging, stressful and even scary. They usually experience psychological distress and are cornered by feelings and emotions of anxiety, fear, anger, sense of weariness and vulnerability (Caires, Almeida & Vieira, 2012; Kokkinos & Stavropoulos, 2016; Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019) which may hinder their learning and professional growth.

This new role in the real classroom even during the practicum and the conflicting emotions pre-service teachers experience in handling the various aspects of this new role construct them as English language teachers and lead to the (re)construction of their professional identities (Lucera & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019; Yuan & Lee, 2016; Zhu 2017). That is why, the practicum process can and should be approached in consideration of this sensitive issue. As this study addresses the lack of support or insufficient support from university and school mentors during practicum and lack of reflective practices during this process (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Yangın Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016), the opportunities to access cognitive and emotional support can be created through generating collaborative and interactive models that involve open, healthy and supportive relationships between and among peers (Childs, 2011). There is a dearth of research in Turkish context on the practicum experiences, particularly on the collaborative and interactive peers-based engagement. However, we found some studies that investigated the process of conducting practicum through the joint engagement of pre-service peers in other contexts. For example, Nguyen (2013) who suggested formal peer-mentoring as a strategy for receiving psychosocial support from peers in the Vietnamese context and implemented the model with a group of English as a Foreign Language pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers who participated in a formal, structured peer mentoring process reported they received psychosocial support from their peers in terms of emotional support, sharing, talking and befriending. Dang (2013)

investigated student teacher learning in a paired placement context in Vietnam and observed qualitative development in their teaching identities in a collaborative setting. In New Zealand, Harlow and Cubb (2014) studied the impact of pair placement in the practicum period of first-year pre-service teachers. They found that the continuous and collaborative placement experience provided a supportive structure enabling pre-service teachers' transition from a student to a teacher.

Similarly, in Australia, Ambrosetti, Dekkers and Knight (2017) explored an alternative mentoring model that placed two pre-service teachers as peers with a classroom teacher. The results demonstrated that the participants' practicum experience was characterized by a supportive, collaborative and collegial working environment in which they shared similar circumstances through a common language. Lang, Neal, Karvouni and Chandler (2015) presented a paired practicum model in an Australian university context and highlighted that the model led to an enhanced learning experience characterized by cooperation and collaboration between people. Considering the varied positive roles peers played within the practicum process, the present study explored an alternative peer-driven practicum model which involves joint planning, observing, teaching and reflecting through dialogic verbal records, which we discuss in the next section.

### **Transforming the Practicum Process through Dialogic Verbal Records**

From a Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical perspective, the domain of thinking is not only intrapersonal but also interpersonal. Aligned with the ideas of thinking as an individual and social activity and language as the prime instrument of thought and social action, the notion of interthinking is defined as "how humans use language to carry out joint intellectual activity and to make sense of experience" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p.48). Considering language as a communicative or a cultural tool and as a psychological tool, Johnson and Golombek (2016) explain:

*As a cultural tool, language is used for establishing interpersonal relationships and for sharing and jointly developing knowledge. It also functions as a symbolic tool that allows for collective cultural knowledge to carry over from generation to generation (i.e., cultural transmission). This cultural tool can in turn be employed as a psychological tool to shape individual thinking; through language, collaborators can jointly organize, plan, and regulate their actions to solve problems (p.49).*

"Mediation develops through internationalization of socially constructed activity" (Lantolf, 2007, p.693) and thinking together. Thus, sustained and prolonged participation in goal-directed social activities helps internalization and leads to conceptual development over time (Johnson and Golombek (2016, pp.3-4). This provides us with a *theory of mind*, as Johnson (2009, p.13) explains, "that recognizes the inherent interconnectedness of the cognitive and the social".

The idea of social interaction "as a primordial site where identities are produced and made relevant" and "the idea of identity being inherently relational" (Gray & Morton, 2018) changes the focus of English language teacher education. In this sense, social peer interactions in educational settings and dialogic speech in these interactions are regarded as a mediating tool to restructure thoughts, control inner mental functions (Devos, 2016) and develop a sense of self as a teacher. In a study examined by Johnson and Golombek (2016), the use of dialogic video protocols and the co-construction of the videotapes by the teacher and the teacher educator during a microteaching experience in an MA TESL program creates joint communicative space for "interthinking" and "structured mediational spaces for

responsive mediation” throughout the practicum. Similarly, dialogic verbal records used for pre-service teacher development in this study open the jointly observed classroom interactions and jointly experienced practicum instances to “analysis”, “social influence” and “restructuring” (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p.60). According to Barkhuizen (2011, p.393), as peers co-construct narratives of meaningful practicum moments, they “make sense of their lived experience; they understand it; give it coherence; make connections and unravel its complexity”. Through dialogic verbal records in this study, the peers co-reflect on different phases of the observed lessons and the overall peer practicum experience and talk through their jointly constructed analysis of shared pedagogic instances. In their discussions, the peers discuss not only the practicum moments, but also their previous experiences as learners when confronted with a similar situation in the present. Their knowledge about schools, classroom and pedagogical practices as well as their core beliefs and experiences concerning teaching which strongly affects the formation of their teacher identity (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Walkington, 2005) are continually (re)constructed as the pre-service teachers are involved in dialogical interaction with their peers in the peer practicum process. As proposed by Kubanyiova (2015, p.579), through specific interactional events like the peer practicum interactions in our study, the pre-service teachers “negotiate multiple images of desired future selves” shaped by their past experiences and the practicum context. Thus, through co-reflection and talk in an enriched learning environment, the pre-service teachers develop a critical lens in what happens in the classroom during practicum, which helps construct their sense of self as a teacher.

## **The Study**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a phenomenological approach to qualitative research with an exploratory and interpretive scope since we do not seek conclusive explanations, but potential understandings of an experience (Creswell & Poth, 2017), of peer practicum. More specifically, this approach helped the researchers better understand the peer mentoring experiences of the pre-service teachers by interpreting their lived realities through a multidimensional perspective generated through dialogic interactions and individual conceptualization of sociocultural teacher learning. The phenomenological methodological stance also enabled the development of a reflexive and reflective lens while exploring new “situational contours and contexts of social processes” (Mason, 2006, p.16). In the current study, the phenomenological research design also offers insights into the phenomenon of peer practicum as experienced and perceived by several peer groups (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

### **Context and the Participants**

This study was conducted in the context of a four-year pre-service English language teacher education program at a state university in Turkey during the 2018-2019 academic year. In the English Language Teacher Education Program (2018) centrally prepared by the Higher Education Council and applied countrywide, the teaching practicum is completed over two semesters in the final year. During the practicum process, each university supervisor is assigned two cohorts of pre-service teachers, each of which is composed of eight students. The study group composed of 16 ELT pre-service teachers (7 males and 9 females) was under the supervision of the first author. At the beginning of the first term, the students were placed in the same high school in the center of the city and two English teachers from that school were officially assigned as their mentor teachers by the Provincial Directorate of

National Education. Within the context of the present study, the mentor teachers are senior teachers determined by the Directorate. Mentor teachers are neither voluntary nor trained to work with pre-service teachers. In the practicum, pre-service teachers are expected to observe teacher practices, student practices, the use of materials and school rules etc. and to write weekly reflective reports concerning different aspects of school practices. They also complete micro teaching sessions under the supervision of their mentor teachers at school.

### **Research Implementation**

Since the English Language Teacher Education Program (2018) does not contain a component that fosters collaboration and/or reflection among peers throughout the practicum process, this model was new to pre-service teachers. We explained to them how they would engage in peer practicum and sought their consent. We specifically reminded them that they could opt out of peer practicum any time they wanted and continue individually. To avoid coercion, we also added participation in the study would have no effect on course grading. All agreed to participate and provided verbal and written consent. We then asked the students in our cohort to form pairs/groups for collaborative reflection. The students independently formed five pairs and two groups of three. We observed that the pairs and groups were formed based on established relationships since these students had known each other for four years, which facilitated dialogue and reflection. We asked the pairs/groups to record their co-reflections of different phases of the practicum experience. Our aim in using dialogic verbal records was not for research purposes only, we aimed to provide some comfort space within the practicum experience characterized by support, mutual interaction and reflection among peers so that they could make meaning of their observation and teaching practices. We paid particular attention to ensuring that we adopted an ethical stance that “does not exploit participants for information but genuinely cares about and learns from them”, as Saldana and Omasta (2018, p. 287) proposed. During the peer practicum process, we provided a safe space for students where the hierarchical dialogic pattern between mentor/mentee was replaced by a non-hierarchical dialogic interaction between equal peers who observed the same classroom. We also avoided judging their personal experiences and stories to support the safe space created.

The pre-service teachers had the opportunity to develop an interactional, verbal relationship with their supervisor by recording their voice and sharing it through WhatsApp. Although it was asynchronous, this even helped them develop motivation, commitment, and devotion to the process of learning while they were collaborating on the various phases of planning, in-class implementation and follow-up discussion with peers before sending the recordings to their supervisor. Sending a mutual verbal interactional response to their supervisor through verbal reports developed the relationship in different ways other than the traditional one which is usually done in the form of individual written reports.

### **Data Collection**

The present study was conducted during the participants' 12-week teaching practicum period in their final year of study. Multiple methods were used to collect data, including dialogic verbal records and interviews conducted at the end of the practicum.

### *Dialogic Verbal Records*

Dialogic verbal records were used to understand how peers co-plan, co-observe and co-reflect on the classroom; how they see the classroom life and how they interact about pedagogical issues. The peers were asked to record their voice during pre- and/or post-practicum processes. Although the practicum lasted 12 weeks, the pre-service teachers were able to visit their teaching practicum school for only eight weeks. Hence, they submitted a total of 20 verbal records to their university supervisor, the first author, through WhatsApp. The students were given the freedom to decide how often and where to record their verbal discussions. They were allowed to discuss in Turkish in the verbal records as it might facilitate deeper reflection and insightful criticality in the discussions.

### *Post-Practicum Interviews*

At the end of the practicum period, seven semi-structured interviews (in Turkish) were conducted with the five pairs and two groups to understand the overall evaluation of peer practicum experience. The participants were guided to reflect on the whole peer practicum experience including the use of verbal records before and after the practicum experience. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were transcribed, read independently and analyzed simultaneously, employing Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun's (2018) approach to thematic analysis. A total of 26.382 words of 183-minute voice recording and a total of 22.846 words in the interviews were transcribed. For familiarization with the data, each researcher read and reread the textual data independently. Having generated the initial codes, each researcher reviewed the coded data to identify areas of similarity and overlap and generated themes. The potential themes identified independently were reviewed and negotiated mutually by the two researchers. Any discrepancies or disagreements were discussed, and consensus was reached on the two main themes and sub-themes. To increase the credibility of the findings, we discussed the main themes with the two pairs who elaborated more deeply on the issues during the peer practicum process and solicited their feedback. They all agreed that the themes we identified were accurate. The names of the participants in the study are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

### **Findings**

The qualitative thematic analysis of the data yielded two major themes: cultivating mutual psychological support from the peers paired/grouped during the practicum and developing a sense of self through joint observation of critical incidents and co-reflection on the observed classroom practices, which are also detailed with relevant sub-themes. The first overarching theme emerged from the data drawing on diverse but extensive experiences of all seven partnerships the pre-service teachers formed. However, the data for the second overarching theme came only from five partnerships. We (the two authors) both agreed that the two pairs who did not contribute to the second theme were unable to delve into this deep reflection on their teacher selves.

### **Cultivating Mutual Support Among Peers**

The pre-service teachers in all seven partnerships frequently expressed that they received various sources of emotional support from their peers during and after the verbally recorded reflections on the classroom observations and teaching practices. The verbalization of the personal insights into the classroom also appeared to make the practicum a less stressful and more motivational process for them. The following excerpts illustrate that the peer practicum process helped create a mutually supportive environment that promoted an improved psychosocial wellbeing of the participants. Through sharing feelings related to the experiences of practicum with peers, the participants also highlighted that they were able to depict the in-class observed incidents, realize different perspectives of teaching and learning and develop mutually inclusive pedagogical mindsets. The findings also show that this would have been superficial and uncritical if individually written in a reflective report. Under these themes we identified four sub-themes which we support with the dialogues from the verbal records and interviews.

The first one is the emotional support that the peers provided for each other during peer practicum. In the following interview excerpt, for instance, Emel reassured and encouraged Filiz, who seems to be anxious to do everything correctly:

#### ***Excerpt 1. Providing Emotional Support***

*Filiz: I was frankly worried about whether it was going to be all about presentations or something like that. You know, thinking I'd have to do it all correctly. I have to do this and that, and I have to do it well, but Emel made me feel very comfortable.*

*Emel: I'm a little more relaxed. Yes, I'm a calm person.*

*Filiz: Emel is more laid-back. I mean, I was explaining to Emel that we needed to do it in such a way, and she said; "Filiz, we can do this. What can go wrong?"*

*Emel: Right. That's what I needed.*

*Filiz: Yes, exactly. Definitely. Emel already helps me in many ways and gives me feedback so while I was working with Emel, she encouraged me a lot whenever I was feeling a little apprehensive. (Post-practicum interview)*

The second sub-theme concerns cultivating a mutual lens between peers and is best exemplified by the way Emel and Filiz develop an awareness of diverse ideas as they engage in dialogues and record them. They express the process of developing a mutual lens which helps them look from different perspectives. This also sets a good example of how they develop the critical role of the third eye as well as of others' views:

#### ***Excerpt 2. Cultivating a Mutual Lens***

*Emel: Different points of view. That is why I realize different things while Filiz notices some others.*

*Filiz: Yes, we have somewhat different perspectives when Emel explains something from a perspective that is different from mine, I say: "Yeah, that's true. It is like this here, Emel". I realize that I should look from this perspective, too. For example, Emel observes the students better. She sees some points better than I do from a different perspective: Right at the point, I also look at things from that perspective, too. I say to myself: "Ok, I'll also do it like this". As a matter of fact, being together*



*has been a relief for me because the two of us can do it. What's the deal?  
It's doable. (Post-practicum interview)*

The third sub-theme, as exemplified in excerpt 3, shows how verbally recorded reflections during the practicum generated a sense of mutual motivation. Emrah emphasizes the support they provide each other while Burak expresses how his motivation to engage in the practicum reflections changed when he was paired and conducted verbal dialogues rather than writing a report instead:

**Excerpt 3. Developing Mutual Motivation**

*Emrah: We constantly support each other.*

*Burak: As a matter of fact, we are used to working together. Because we do presentations together at school as well. The same goes for the lessons and we work in the field. There is always sharing between us about the courses, teaching and the English language.*

*Emrah: Because we are a pair, I know that I'll have fun when working with Burak even if it is academic work. This gives me additional motivation. When I have to prepare a lesson plan or a presentation on my own, I think to myself: "God, what am I gonna do?" But when I have Burak with me, it gets both easier to fulfill these tasks and we also have fun. In other words, we don't regard this as persecution, saying "We'll prepare it; we are together anyway". (Post-practicum interview)*

The fourth sub-theme points to the role of verbal reflections in deepening ideas as the peers interact. For instance, the length of the talk, as Gozde expressed in her first utterance below, kept them thinking more in-depth and generating more ideas. Verbal reflections also allowed them to talk with more ease as highlighted by Gozde and Nalan about a wide range of aspects of teaching including students' and teachers' attitudes, teachers' treatment of students, individual student analysis, and teachers' interaction:

**Excerpt 4. Deepening Reflective Pedagogical Thoughts**

*Gozde: If we did it on our own, we wouldn't go into this much detail. When we talk together, one goes into more detail. Sometimes we find ourselves making suggestions, that is, acting like the teacher. Like it should've been like this or like that. I really wouldn't go into this much detail on my own. I would just scribble things down superficially. But it will drag on when you talk. Sometimes we find it has been 20 minutes that we have talked a lot.*

*Nalan: As we talk, I guess we also start looking at the students' attitude, the teacher's attitude, how the teacher should behave etc. from a pedagogical point of view.*

*Nalan: Definitely.*

*Gozde: I think writing is boring but other things come to one's mind when we discuss like that student did this; the teacher did that etc. through our observations. I mean the discussion will flow easily and quickly. (Post-practicum interview)*

### **Developing a Sense of Self as a Teacher through Peer Practicum**

The development of self as a teacher during pre-service phase is commonly related to and formed by previous experiences as learners and the practices of teachers who taught them. As the peers jointly narrate the critical incidents they have observed in the practicum, they reflect on their previous learning experiences and (re)construct themselves as English language teachers. The positions they take in these critical moments and the interactional space the peer practicum provides also shape their imagined teacher identities.

#### ***Discovering “Self in the Past” and Developing “Self in the Present” Through Jointly Observed Critical Incidents***

The study showcases a number of instances where the peers elaborated on the mentor teacher’ practices by retrospectively reflecting on their past learning experiences, which shaped or strengthened their present self in the face of the specific critical incident experienced in the lesson. Jointly observed critical incidents led to a better understanding of *self in the past* which emerged through learning experiences and *self in the present* which developed through hypothetical arguments on these incidents. Such incidents which the peers were at odds with or agreed on provided critical opportunities to rethink and revisit previous learning and classroom experiences, which might enrich the depth and construction of *self in the present* as a teacher.

#### ***Critical Incident 1: Holding Back Questions***

Gozde and Nalan are not complicit with the way the mentor teacher reacts to a learner asking a question, and Nalan relates a negative previous experience to what she observes in the classroom. With the help of how the teacher reacted to the student’s question, she highlighted how intimidated she was when she was developing a question in her mind, as the following verbal record excerpt illustrates:

*Gozde: The student at the back asked for the rule again. The teacher asked “What is it that you don't understand about it?” I mean, she did something there. She should have listened more. We need to listen.*

*Nalan: It kind of suggests not listening with your brain. But things can go over our heads sometimes even we don't catch everything. He (the student) may not have understood at that moment. This is discouraging. I think like this because I was such a student- I was afraid to ask questions because I wondered if the question was worthy of being asked.*

*Gozde: Definitely. I wouldn't usually ask a question.*

*Nalan: Yes. It was always like that. Those questions just stayed inside of me. (Verbal record)*

#### ***Critical Incident 2: Superficial Engagement and Memorization***

Revisiting previous language learning experiences, Idil and Melek jointly reject the way the activities are carried out in class since they do not create deeper learning opportunities for students. In this verbal record excerpt, they reflect on how the lesson flow rushes to complete what is supposed to be done rather than enhance actual learning:

*Idil: When I look at the class in general, I do not find the 10 minutes given for an activity sufficient.*

*Melek: Yes. I felt a difference of level among the students. There are both very good students and also very poor ones and one student sitting in the front is asking about the exercise to another one sitting behind him instead of learning the topic. I believe that some different things can be done about this.*

*Idil: It seems to me like rote learning. That's why the communication among the students should be paid attention to. It was like this when I was a student, too. I read the exercises and wrote the answers quickly. I don't think I learned anything at all at the time. (Verbal record)*

### **Critical Incident 3: Reflecting on the Advantages of Board Use**

While Idil and Melek co-elaborate on the teacher's use of the board in class, they remember the past and embrace the teacher's strategy. They both agree that using the board is of importance while presenting forms and meaning of grammar since they both felt the need for displaying grammar in such a way:

*Idil: When beginning the class, the teacher started by writing the topic on the board. She wrote it in the form of a short formula. I felt so comfortable with this because when I was a student, I wanted the teacher to write on the board whenever I felt I had made a mistake. That's why I was so happy for them (the students). What do you think?*

*Melek: I think the teacher wrote the 'since' pattern on the board. She wrote with what tenses 'since' is used etc. I also think that this was effective for the students. When they see the thing written on the board, they would associate it with what is written on the paper and they will not forget it when they see it again and will learn it thoroughly. When I go back to my days as a student, I also felt more comfortable when our teachers wrote (the topic in question) on the board. (Verbal record)*

### **Critical Incident 4: Supporting use of L1 to Express Humor**

In the following verbal record excerpt, Idil and Melek, based on their previous experiences as language learners in adolescence, make joint sense of the experience concerning a learner using the mother tongue to express himself in class and the teacher responding positively with a joke:

*Melek: One student said in Turkish that he couldn't do the exercise and the teacher warned him not to use Turkish. There were some playful, teasing remarks in the classroom. They also had some fun. They laughed all together. I felt that was fun and the student was not upset with the teacher although she warned not to use Turkish.*

*Idil: When I was in high school, such things happened between us and our teacher. We couldn't speak English or would make lots of mistakes when we did. I remember feeling good when our teacher burst out laughing. I felt that I could make mistakes and that was not a problem. What do you think?*

*Melek: I agree with you because it's important for the teacher to engage in humor as well in order for the student to feel at ease.*

*Idil: After all, we also lived such things. These kids are in adolescence because they are high school students. They could be sensitive even to the slightest warning. (Verbal record)*

### **Constructing Future Self as an English Teacher**

Discovering *self in the past* and/or developing *self in the present*, the participants constructed *future self* as a teacher on the basis of the two in the interactional space the peer practicum process created. In the following verbal record excerpts, the peers co-reflect on the observed classroom practices and construct knowledge of their own practice, a process which shapes their *future self* as a teacher. The peers were found to reflect on correcting errors, giving positive feedback, and degrading the value of English lessons:

#### **Excerpt 1: Correcting Errors**

*Idil: Some of the students made some mistakes while doing the exercise. The same thing happened during the previous lesson as well and our teacher directly corrected the mistakes made by the students without telling them anything about their mistakes. That is, she pronounced the same word herself. I believe this was very positive for the students. I think that the teacher directly corrected the mistake without saying anything harsh to the student. She made sure that she did not distract the students and that the student did not feel embarrassed in front of their classmates. It is also better for the teacher. I believe this is a great convenience for the teacher, too. I'll definitely do the same thing in a similar situation in the future.*

*Melek: I absolutely agree with you. I also believe that this topic is very important in terms of teacher-student relations as well. (Verbal record)*

#### **Excerpt 2: Giving Positive Feedback**

*Gozde: Another thing we noticed in general was that no praise or positive feedback was given at all. That's what we observed.*

*Nalan: Yes. In fact, by using 'Good' or 'Well-done', she could have encouraged the students. Even at our age we like being praised. And then we say "Yes, I did it".*

*Gozde: Praise must be given. Especially to encourage them at that age.*

*Nalan: Definitely. I wonder if it is a question of the teacher's getting tired and losing energy in the last hours of the class day. We need to understand it from the teacher's point of view, too.*

*Gozde: It's probably not something the teacher did consciously. Something was just overlooked. As you say, the tiredness of teaching through years of experience. (Verbal record)*

#### **Excerpt 3: Degrading the Value Of English Lessons**

*Melek: Do you remember when one of the students asked the teacher whether he could study for the math's exam in the last 15 minutes of the class?*

*Idil: Yes, I do.*

*Melek: Do you approve of the way the teacher reacted? Because she said: "Are you kidding me? "Because she reacted saying something along the lines of "Are you going to revise for the math's exam?" which I deem appropriate. In the sense of making students realize that every school subject is important rather than the students developing a misconception in their minds that one subject is important but another one is not.*

*Idil: I totally agree with you.*

*Melek: She said that jokingly, in an easy manner, which was nice.*

*Idil: Exactly. We all laughed at that moment and I totally agree with you about the importance of the subject. The students must be made to feel how important the English course is for them. At the end of the day, a numerical school subject is not more important than English and the student must be made to feel that.*

*(Verbal record)*

Excerpts 1, 2, and 3 show how the co-reflections helped teachers develop some pedagogical decisions which strengthen their beliefs about what to do and how to act in the classroom, and why to develop a positive sense of English lessons.

## **Discussion**

In answer to our first exploratory research question of how the pre-service teachers engage in peer practicum, findings indicate that our pre-service teachers went through situational shifts in their selves as they engaged in verbally recorded peer practicum interactions. The interaction among peers provided them with "emotional support through the creation of a supportive environment" and led to the co-construction of knowledge (Korthagen, 2010; Nguyen & Ngo, 2018) in a practicum context where there is little support from mentor teachers and few opportunities for reflection and critical inquiry. This lack of sustainable support within the practicum context in Turkey, as reported by previous research (e.g. Ceylan, Ustuk & Comoglu; 2017, Yıldız, Gecikli & Yesilyurt, 2016), is filled in through strong, trusted peer relationships which function as "emotional anchors" (Higgins & Kram, 2001) facilitating the practicum process. As Ragins and Kram (2007, pp.5,6) proposed, psychosocial functions including trust, intimacy, and interpersonal bonds in the relationship and mentoring behaviors such as acceptance, confirmation, counseling, friendship, and role-modeling foster professional novices' professional and personal growth, identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy. Ragins and Kram (2007) suggest that individuals, like peers in our context, may provide these functions without necessarily being mentors.

The shift from supervisor and mentor driven imposed hierarchical talk to more supportive, equally-conducted peer talk and learning, as recommended by Nguyen and Sheridan (2016), led to "an ongoing, co-constructed, shared communicative space for *interthinking*" (Johnson & Golombek, 2016, p.78). Similarly, a practicum based on peer interaction and collaboration rather than the mentor teacher's observation and evaluation entailed that teaching is not an isolated activity, as suggested by Nguyen & Ngo (2018). The pre-service teachers were given the opportunity to co-construct educational and pedagogical meanings through peer talk related to shared experiences and critical incidents in class rather than decontextualized externally imposed general suggestions (Korthagen (2010). Besides, they were given chances to have more time to interpret past experiences as a learner in the present construction of self as a teacher, as proposed by Mercer (2017).

As our second research question sought to explore, the peer practicum processes introduced in this study also aimed to reveal how the pre-service teachers' present and future

selves have been influenced. We now discuss the major areas of developments in the pre-service teachers' selves.

### **Development of Perspectival Understanding**

The findings revealed that the pre-service teachers in the study constructed “a perspectival interaction in joint action” through peer practicum “where one or more of the participants reorganize an understanding they had initially” (Greeno & van de Sande, 2007, pp.17, 21). Such a perspectival view for teachers implies a continuing process of shifting understandings about teaching, endorsed in moment-to-moment interactions with their teaching context (Lee & Schallert 2016). In this study the pre-service teachers were given the freedom to choose which peer(s) they could interact with over their experiences during the practicum. They were also granted time and space to interact with their peers to articulate and evaluate their perspectives of being a teacher.

The practicum is a time when pre-service teachers “are separated from their own teachers and classmates for the first time in their program and forced to work alone” and it is during this time “that they are most in need of support and feedback on their professional competencies” (McLoughlin, Brady, Lee & Russell, 2007). For the preservice teachers in our study the psychosocial support and feedback provided by their peers during this critical time helped them develop personal-professional perspectives. As findings showed, the peers self-identified issues of interaction and self-regulated the direction of the talk without a prompted mode of dialogue. This led to continuously changing contextual moment-by-moment realizations (Lee & Schallert, 2016) and perspective development. The contextualized nature of the discussions also implies development of a situative perspective (Putnam & Borko, 2000), which underlines the prominence of physical and social contexts in relation to the individual, other persons, and tools and the role of social interactions among learners as participants (Greeno, 2011). The resulting perspectival understandings are reciprocally developed through meaningful interactive negotiations (Greeno & van de Sande, 2007). Lee and Schallert (2016, p.78) point to three arguments in pre-service teachers' development of perspectives as they learn to teach:

- past learning experiences are synthesized into the present and used as a reflective mirror for evaluating their current learning and shaping images of themselves as future teachers,
- a teacherly perspective helps develop an integrated understanding about teaching directly connected to what/how they want to teach in the future,
- perspectives about self and teaching grow together and reciprocally influence each other

The perspectival development supported by the peer-practicum process in this study and the interactional space it provided appears to help the pre-service teachers identify how they see their selves internally and shape images of themselves as future teachers.

### **Regulating Situational Selves**

Pre-service teachers often experience particular challenges, tensions, and conflicts as well as complex negative and positive emotions when they engage in practicum. This experience encourages them to develop as a teacher through the emerging idiosyncratic situational selves, referred to as “multiple selves that respond to social encounters by incorporating their beliefs and values” (Nias, 1989). The multiplicity in selves is influenced

by their prior self-images as learners (Hollingsworth, 1989; Lee & Schallert, 2016) as well as by the negative and positive learning experiences which participants recalled during and in the wake of the moment-to-moment in-class incidents as we detailed in the findings section. The jointly observed critical incidents and the hypothetical arguments with the peers on these incidents helped the pre-service teachers in the study understand *self in the past* and develop *self in the present* as a teacher. By discussing those “bumpy moments” (Romano, 2006, p. 974) with the peers, the pre-service teachers unpacked their unexamined reflections and uncovered what knowledge and beliefs they brought to the situation.

The self-images linked to memories of past learning experiences as well as to negative feelings such as anger or discomfort that they sometimes experienced also influenced their initial conceptions of self-as-a teacher (Lee & Schallert, 2016). The developing self-image as a teacher also urged them to project themselves as a future teacher both despite and thanks to the dissonance and conflict between memories of past learning and in-class experiences and current observations as well as the theoretical knowledge (Lee & Schallert, 2016). This experience of identifying the emerging selves emphasizes the shift from “knowing how to” to “being some-one who” for the pre-service teachers (Kelchtermans & Hamilton, 2004). Having developed “a future-oriented focus in their thinking” (Johnson & Golombek, 2016), the pre-service teachers in the study do not only discuss with their peers the ideal teaching practices but envision and enact who they are and who they will be in the future.

## Limitations

In line with its qualitative, phenomenological design, the current study did not attempt to seek absolute truths or make generalizations, but to gain insight into how engaging in practicum as peers can function as mentoring support and how this process can influence the participants’ teacher selves. The available data could be interpreted differently by other researchers; however, we took several measures to increase the credibility of the findings.

## Implications

ten Dam and Blom (2006) state teacher education should contribute to the personal and professional identity development of pre-service teachers by creating “a professional learning community” characterized by participation, dialogue, critical reflection, mutual interaction and a shared interpretation of meaning. Within this framework, Pillen, Beijaard and Brok (2013) underscore the previously recognized key role of teacher educators as “significant others”. In this study, we could reveal the critical impact of peers on each other’s identification and development through peer practicum related mediational talk. We also argue that teacher educators alone are not at the epicenter of teachers’ transformation of self-images but at the metacenter of their struggles to identify their selves. As suggested by prior research (Dang, 2017; Korthagen, 2010; Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen & Sheridan, 2016), it is essential to provide “other types of communities of practice” or collaborative settings of peer supported learning such as peer mentoring or paired placement during the practicum process. Similarly, the implications we drew from our study for teacher educators include helping pre-service teachers reveal their learning experiences and prior images of learning and teaching, monitoring how pre-service teachers project future selves during the practicum, and providing time and space for cultivating potential selves through multiple forms of dialogues. The teacher educators’ roles might include encouragement to plan, discuss, collaborate, and generate ideas within their own peer community, as well as develop dialogue sessions with

them to lead them to higher order thinking processes. Teacher educators should also stress the idea that learning to become a teacher is not only a matter of learning what to teach, but of thinking about how to become a better teacher over time, which is based on a personal journey during the profession. In this professional journey, identity formation processes are associated with “relationships and experiences that mediate the path of development—planned or pleasant or neither-” (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jacks and Fry, 2004, p.10). Pre-service teachers, therefore, should be aware that they might often go through various dilemmas of who they are (Lee & Schallert, 2016) and experience various complexities in learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2008). However, these emotional, identity-related and contextual challenges are not a threat or impediment but a catalyst and a means for exploring ‘newer selves’.

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