Collaborative in-service teacher learning model

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This paper introduces an in-service teacher-training model through a process of collaborative learning where the principles undergirding communities of practice, described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as Legitimate Peripheral Participation, assist English teachers of young learners to improve their educational practices. Defining reflective practice and situated learning as the theoretical underpinnings of this model, the study presents the results of its application and offers suggestions for transforming traditional methods of training.

　このペーパーは共同のプロセスによってインサービス教師訓練モデルをもたらし援助の若い学習者の英語の先生コミュニティを支える主義が正当な周辺参加とし てLave及びWenger（1991 年）によって記述されている教育練習を練習する彼らの教育練習を増進するためにところでの学ぶ。反射練習および置かれた勉強をこのモデルの理論的な基盤と定義して、調査は適用の結果を示し、訓練の従来の方法を変形させる為の提案を提供する。

The beginning of the new millennium brings an indubitable fact—the spread of English language has changed the world's language ecology. As Burchfield (1985) notes, English has become a lingua franca. By the beginning of the1970s, a new theory emerged—the belief that the earlier that children start to learn a foreign language, the better. The result of Penfield's (1965, in Yıldırım, 2001) neurophysics studies with young children indicated that children's brains are more able to achieve language improvement. This belief is supported by subsequent research (e.g. Cummins & Swain, 1986; Krashen, 1982).

Acting on the belief that children learn a foreign language easier and better, in 1997 the Turkish Ministry of Education lowered the compulsory introduction of English to grade 4 (9 year olds) with the introduction of the Eight-year Obligatory Primary Education Program (Tebligler Dergisi, 1997). The curriculum prepared for primary schools by the Ministry of Education aims towards learners knowing and speaking English at the

intermediate level by the time that they graduate from high school. However, the implementation of the new program has resulted in a number of problems. Although the goal was to create a generation able to speak English fluently, the current situation indicates that these objectives have not been achieved (Mersinligil, 2002). Following implementation of the program in public and private primary schools, it is clear that teachers unprepared for teaching English to young learners have contributed to this failure.

Aim of the study

It is apparent that there is a critical need for an enhanced in-service teacher training scheme in order to develop teachers' awareness of children's learning at both the theoretical and practical level. Such a scheme must be highly sophisticated to meet the demands of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). In other words, as opposed to traditional teacher training programs in which "knowledge is viewed as content to be transmitted, and then instruction is probably seen as a product to be delivered" (Wilson, 1996, p.6), we hypothesize that a teacher training scheme which assists teachers to "perceive (and acquire) knowledge as personally constructed meaning" (ibid.) through participation in situated tasks, discussions, and reflection would be effective in finding solutions to the problems they face. With this in mind, the study refers to such an approach to teacher training as the *collaborative learning model.* The purpose of this research is to explore the effect of such training on participant teachers' knowledge and skills in TEYL.

Situated learning and communities of practice in teacher education

Situated learning theory is not new. It stems from Dewey's (1904) idea that learning develops from experience and social interaction. Lave and Wenger (1991) have defined learning as the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge, placed in social relationships—situations of co-participation. Situated learning theory in the Vygotskian sense perceives learning as developing an individual awareness unique to the individual's own experiences, yet common to the community, through dialectical movements beginning from the processes of giving and receiving knowledge in the social arena, called the *community of practice*. It is the prime context in which we work out common sense through mutual engagement, producing practice through negotiation of meaning as a recovery process with the constant potential for continuing, rediscovering, or reproducing the old in the new (Hung & Nichani, 2002).

Situated learning approaches have recently gained popularity in the teacher development context both in literature and in practice. In contrast to behavioral and cognitive approaches, situated approaches consider teacher development as building on the personal and the professional meanings that teachers develop in their work (Sawyer, 2002). It views knowledge as inseparable from the contexts and activities in which it is developed. Through new experiences teachers gain in communities of practice, they adjust their personal educational theory, which may lead to changes in teaching practice. For Sawyer (2002), this 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 in which they work. This interaction is crucial because teachers generally work in individual classrooms isolated from the rest of the community, and are thus unable to interact with their peers, to share knowledge or reflect on issues related to their work. In a collaborative network, teachers share expertise and have the opportunity to gain new knowledge and critique their existing knowledge. During this process, collaboration supports teachers' internalization of new meanings via the use of a common language as well as the development of new perspectives and habits of reflection that often arise in collaboration with others before being internalized (Sawyer, 2002). Such a process will enable pre- or in-service teachers to assume meaningful partial roles in schools, as a stepping stone to becoming full participants while constructing knowledgeable skills through reflection-on-action (Schon, 1987).

Methodological considerations and research procedure

This study is qualitative in nature and aims to search for an explanation and understanding of participant teaching behaviors during an ongoing process. The study consisted of two phases during which awareness-raising and practice meetings were conducted. Data collection was completed employing several tools.

Participants

Three grade 4 public primary school teachers participated in this study. The sample was chosen on the basis of convenience. However, the development of only one of the teachers, Aslı, is discussed in this paper.

Table 1. The Participants Characteristics

Participants	Age	Gender	Field of study	Teaching experience (years)	YL teaching experience (years)
Didem	28	Female	ELT	5	3
Aslı	29	Female	Linguistics	6	3
Bilge	27	Female	English Philology	3	3

The sample was homogenous in respect to age, gender, general teaching experience (from 3 to 6), and experience in teaching English to YLs (all 3 years). None of the participants had taken any specific course for TEYL.

Researcher's role

Considering the scope of the study and its aim as to gain naturalistic data from collaborative group discussions, the researcher acted as a participant observer. This data collection method compensates for "the circumstances of being in or around an on-going social setting for the purpose of making a qualitative analysis of that setting" (Lofland, 1971, p. 93).

Data collection procedure

The research was carried out in two phases. The phases accommodated both data collection and implementation of the collaborative learning model. The first phase served the purpose of implementing the first stage of the collaborative

learning model, i.e., awareness-raising. Participants met once a week and to discuss the readings they had already done. The readings concerned topics relevant to teaching Yls, such as characteristics and skills of YLs, the way YLs think and learn, methodology, materials and activities, and classroom management.

The discussions were recorded for the purpose of obtaining data about their perceptions and the existence of any potential change in these perceptions. In both phases of the research, the participants were also asked to record their experiences of the collaborative learning process in their journals.

Table 2. The Representation of the First Phase of the Data Collection Process

1st Phase				
Purpose	**Action**	**Data collection tool**	**Data acquired**	**Data analysis**
Identifying teachers' initial perceptions of TEYL	Utilizing Rep-Grid	1- Rep-Grid (prior to launching collaborative learning sessions)	Teachers' initial perceptions	Rep-Grid Manual (Focus)
Raising awareness of TEYL	Weekly sessions of discussions and reflections on TEYL readings	2- Audio-recordings of sessions 3- Journals	Gradual development of teachers' knowledge and potential change in perceptions	Content analysis

Upon completion of the first phase, geared toward assisting development of theoretical knowledge, the second phase of the study—aimed to assist participant teachers' practical

skills in teaching Yls—was implemented. During this phase, the participants held weekly meetings in which they were required to prepare sample lesson plans to be applied in their classes, including the activities and the materials to be used. They prepared four sample plans in total and applied them in their classes. The foci of the common lesson plans were chosen from the syllabus suggested in the curriculum of the Ministry of Education. The procedure followed in this phase is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Representation of the Second Phase of the Data Collection Process

2nd PHASE				
Purpose	**Action**	**Data collection tools**	**Data acquired**	**Data analysis**
Enhancing effectiveness of classroom applications	1- Weekly sessions of brainstorming and preparing lesson plans and materials 2- Application in classrooms 3- Weekly discussions and reflections	1- Audio-recordings of sessions 2- Journals	1- Teachers' perceptions of classroom applications 2- Gradual development of teachers' skills in TEYL	Content analysis
Identifying teachers' final perceptions of TEYL	Utilizing Rep-Grid	Rep-Grid (after completing collaborative learning sessions)	Teachers' final perceptions	Rep-Grid Manual (Focus, Exchange)

Data collection tools and analysis

The data were collected using a triangulated approach to attempt to identify the impact of the collaborative learning

model on enhancing the teachers' knowledge and skills in TEYL through several windows "with the strengths of one method compensating for the limitation of another" (McCarty, 1987, p.236).

The main data collection tools employed were:

1. Repertory Grid

2. Journals

3. Audio-recordings of discussions

Data analysis

The content and structure of one of the participant's personal theories at the beginning and at the end of the collaborative learning phase are presented. The constructs regarding the participant's personal theories about effective young learner English teaching were elicited utilizing the Repertory Grid.

The Rep-Grid was utilized to identify the teachers' perceptions of TEYL both prior to and following their involvement in the collaborative learning process in order to specify the potential changes in their perceptions. The grid creates a basic numerical pattern of ordinal ratings of elements on dichotomous constructs. The elements come from a pool of elements with which participants were familiar during their experiences at the public schools they were working. The constructs are bipolar descriptors, produced by participants from comparisons of elements (i.e. different teachers).

In order to help participants choose their elements, they were asked to think of nine teachers, three of whom are effective (e1, e2, e3), three who are typical (t1, t2, t3), and three who are ineffective (i1, i2, i3). Constructs that "were identified as concrete/observable teaching behaviors and/or teacher characteristics that were important and meaningful to the participants" (Sendan, 1995, p.94) were elicited one by one through randomly grouping elements. That is, the participants were asked to choose three elements out of nine (e.g. e1, t1, i1) and mark them on the *triads* column of their grid forms (See Appendix). They were then asked which of the two teachers were similar in terms of teaching Yls behavior and which differed from the other two in that respect. The construct similar for the two teachers was recorded on the *Similarity (emergent) Pole* in their forms, and the contrasting constructs were noted on the *Contrast (implicit) Pole*. The constructs recorded on the same line as the similarity and contrast poles are meant to represent the emergent and implicit constructs of participants on the teaching behavior they state.

After the element and construct elicitation processes, the participants were required to rate each element on the basis of every single construct. In this phase, the Rating Scale Method (Sendan, 1995) was used. Accordingly, the participants rated each of the elements compared to each of the constructs using a 1 to 5 rating scale to define the position of each element in relation to each pole.

Following the rating phase, the participants were to rate themselves as a teacher of YLs in the *Self as teacher* column and their ideal teacher in the *Ideal self as teacher* column of the grid form. The rating of "self" and "ideal" elements was completed using the same constructs considered for the other nine teachers. This stage was employed to determine participant teachers' perceptions about themselves as

teachers in relation to the other elements they had included and also to elicit their reflections on the English teachers of YLs that they would like to become.

The data was analyzed utilizing Focus and Exchange analyses of the Repertory Grid computer program package (Rep-Grid Manual, 1993). The Focus analysis revealed the relationship among constructs and elements recorded in the grid. Upon completion of these analyses, the obtained participant constructs were sorted into a linear order in such a way that the closest constructs are grouped together and hierarchically arranged. A link between constructs indicates that the participant perceives a connection in either synergistic or negating fashion. If only two constructs are linked, they form a pair. A link among more than two constructs indicates a cluster, signalling a more complex relationship among the constructs. The Exchange analysis, on the other hand, displayed only the same constructs in the first and second grids with the implication of the differences in their ratings. This allowed us to find if the participant held only different constructs at the end of the year or if they held the same constructs with different ratings. Displaying also the elemental links, the Exchange analysis showed links among elements indicating the place of self and ideal. This provided the opportunity to compare the positions of self and ideal elements in the groupings completed in both grids.

Content and structure of Aslı's personal theories at the beginning of the study

The Focus analysis of Aslı's grid at the beginning of the collaborative training process displays 13 constructs and 11 elements. Figure 1. shows links formed at the 80 % level.
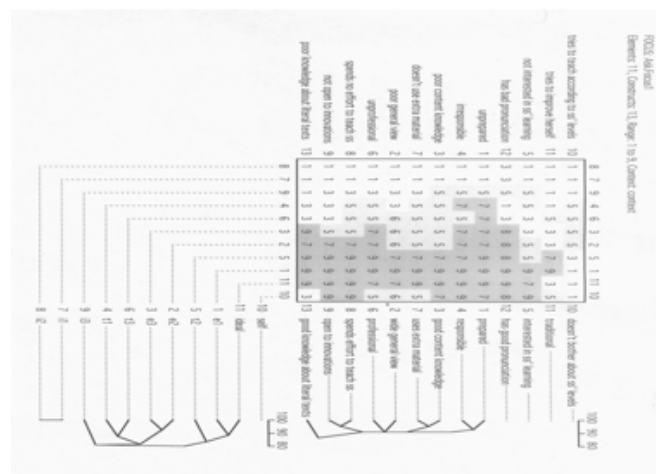

Figure 1. Aslı's first Focus Grid

The analysis of Aslı's grid reveals three main clusters and four isolated constructs, with 11 elements and 13 constructs in total. *Prepared* (C1) and *responsible* (C4) form a construct at the 93 % match level. This shows Aslı believes that if a teacher of YLs is responsible, she will also be prepared. For Krause (2004), a good preparation necessitates a basic lesson plan that includes warm-up, checking and assigning homework, reviewing previously taught material, introducing new material, and practice. None of these points were indicated by Aslı in the first grid.

Good content knowledge (C3) and *uses extra material* (C7) constitute a pair at the 95 % match level and are subordinated by *wide general view* (C2) at the 94 % match

level. Here, good content knowledge necessitates using extra materials, and these two characteristics depend on having wide general view.

Another pair is formed by constructs *spends effort to teach ss* (C8) and *open to innovations* (C9) at the 95 % match level. This pair is subordinated with *professional* (C6) with associated at the 91 % match level. Aslı thinks that if a teacher *spends effort to teach his/her students*, she is *open to innovations*, which both correspond to being professional. *Good knowledge about literal texts* (C13) subordinates these three constructs at the 85 % match level. *Doesn't bother about ss' levels* (C10), *traditional* (C11), *interested in ss' learning* (C5), and *has good pronunciation* (C12) are isolated constructs. This may indicate that she had not yet formed a clear basis for the assumptions and could not relate them to other teaching behaviors at the beginning of the training.

The content and structure of Aslı's personal theories at the end of the study

Aslı's grid at the end of the year comprises 17 constructs and 11 elements. The Focus analysis illustrated in Figure 2 displays the construct and element trees drawn at the 80 % level.
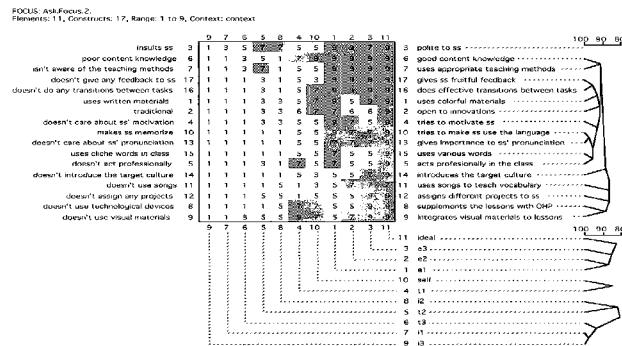

Figure 2. Aslı's second Focus Grid

There are three main clusters. The smallest cluster consists of two constructs, *good content knowledge* (C6) and *uses appropriate teaching methods* (C7) associated at the 90 % match level. In her first grid, Asli had associated having good content knowledge with using extra materials and with having a wide general view. This indicates that Aslı has not changed the construct itself (C6), but has associated it with another construct (C7) more related to TEYL practice.

The second cluster comprises nine constructs. *Gives ss fruitful feedback* (C17) and *does effective transitions between tasks* (C16) form a pair at the 94 % match level. These two constructs are new to Aslı's repertoire. Reading the article on lesson planning for young learners (Krause, 2004), Aslı started to prepare lesson plans regularly and shared her experiences with the group. She explained the reason for this change:

Extract 1:

> I realized that I wasn't aware of the importance of sequencing the parts of my lessons after reading this article. Also, as we discussed it in our meetings and planned the lessons by deciding on sequence and transitions beforehand, I had the chance to see the difference it made in my teaching. Transitions are really very important. In sample lessons I applied, I realized that my students were able to follow what was going on more easily. That kept them involved in lesson. And also, I could follow them and give them feedback more easily. (2nd Phase / Final Meeting)

The constructs *uses colorful materials* (C1) and *open to innovations* (C2) subordinate this pair at the 90 % and 91 % match levels. Lobo (2003) highlights the importance of using colorful and various materials because, unlike older learners, they are open to new ideas and materials, so novelty in terms of materials used in class will help arouse curiosity and interest. However, he warns teachers of YLs to choose only those adequate for each particular class situation. This was of crucial importance in this study. In the second phase, participants tried to make lesson plans and choose materials and activities considering their specific classroom situations, enhancing the feasibility of the plans they applied.

The analysis displays two pairs within the same cluster. The first pair includes *tries to make ss use the language* (C10) and *gives importance to ss' pronunciation* (C13) linked at the 97 % match level. Krashen (1982) suggests that the only way to acquire a language is receiving comprehensible input. Therefore, teaching activities should be designed to supply the child with enjoyable and easy to understand input. Learners need to be involved in social interactions in which they have to use the target language with others in authentic communication settings. Aslı became aware of this kind of input for young learners. As she noted,

Extract 2:

> In the way I used to teach my students, students were just trying to memorize some language items. And there was nothing for recycling. Now, I try to speak a lot in the class and use the language communicatively. I start to use variety of activities to make them practice new items and repeat what they have learned. It really makes difference. (2nd Phase / Final Meeting).

This highly associated pair is linked to another pair which contains *uses various words* (C15) and *acts professionally in class* (C5). The two constructs are linked at the 93 % match level. For her, having students exposed to various words used by teacher is a characteristic of a professional teacher. And if a teacher is professional and uses various words, she also places importance on student pronunciation and tries to make students live the language.

Tries to motivate ss (C4) subordinates these two pairs at the 91 % association level. For Asli, a teacher who wants to motivate students should encourage the use of the language in class by placing importance on pronunciation, by using various words, and by acting professionally in class.

The last cluster contains five constructs. Within the only pair, *supplements the lessons with OHP* (C8) and *integrates*

visual materials to lessons (C9) has an 88 % association level. Both constructs are about using materials and support *uses colorful materials* (C1). It seems that Asli has repeated the same concept as different constructs and related each to other constructs within her frame of effective YL teacher behavior. In the weekly meetings as well as her journals, she has repeatedly stated the importance of using OHP and colorful materials.

Using OHP and visual materials is subordinated by *assigning different projects to ss* (C12) and by *using songs to teach vocabulary* (C11) at the 87 % match level. The association among constructs 11, 12, 8, and 9 implies that a young learner teacher needs to use various materials, activities, and tasks. Asli further explained:

Extract 3:

> *I loved the activities and games in the articles. Among them, "Twenty Questions", "Memory Game" are the most feasible ones for my classes. I knew I was going to learn practical things in this training. I am definitely going to use them. My teaching will be much more fruitful* (1st Phase / 4th Meeting).

The idea that Aslı expressed as involving YLs in different activities in order to make the lessons more fruitful is supported in the TEYL literature. Halliwell (1996) states

> If we accept the role of the imagination in children's lives, we can see that it provides another very powerful stimulus for real language use. We need to find ways of building on this factor in the language classroom, too. … When they are involved in enjoyable activities, through their sense of fun and play, the children are living the language for real. (p.7)

Introduces the target culture (C14) subordinates both of the last two clusters at the 88 % match level. So introducing the culture is important for Asli in language teaching and could be achieved by using different materials and activities and also by being open to innovations encouraging target language use in class. Several times during the weekly meetings, she stated the importance of introducing the culture through different tasks:

Extract 4:

> *Using stories help them [students] to get to know the rest of the world. I think they also have to know about the target language's culture. I didn't know how to give it. There was generally no extra time for it. But now, I learned that using stories or songs will do the work* (1st Phase / 6th Meeting).

The only isolated construct is *being polite to ss* (C3). The reason of its being not linked to any other construct may be that the others are directly related to classroom methodology, whereas being polite is a feature related to the teacher's attitude toward students and to her social relationship with students.

Changes observed between the beginning and end of the study

1. Content changes

The overall analysis shows that the collaborative process,

which involved group discussions of articles, preparation of sample lessons, and classroom experiences, transformed Aslı's ideas about what constitutes being an effective language teacher for YLs. In her first grid, her constructs were general requirements (e.g. *spends effort to teach ss* (C8), *professional* (C6), *interested in ss' learning* (C5), etc.). Instead of expressing specific qualifications, as she did in her second grid, she had listed wide concepts about general language teaching. This may imply that, at first, she knew she had to be a good language teacher, but had no specific ideas about the features or skills necessary for this.

At the end of the term, she reported that collaborative training helped her discover how a language teacher of YLs should be equipped for an effective teaching to occur. As she put it:

Extract 5:

> *Maybe because of being graduate of linguistics, I hadn't known so much about the activities, materials, or techniques that should be used in young learner classes. However, by the help of this study, I have learned many games and activities to motivate students. I learned how I can transform boring lessons to enjoyable and effective ones.* (1st Phase / Final Diary)

It appears that for Aslı, the collaborative learning process helped her in the form of raising awareness of TEYL methodology in general.

2. Structural Changes

The structural changes reported are based on the Exchange analysis at the 80 % level of the two grids completed by Aslı

at the beginning and at the end of the collaborative training period. The construct consensus between the two grids is 100.0 % and the element consensus is 36.4 %. This indicates that Aslı reorganized the structure of these constructs and underwent a process of reorganizing of some of her elements.
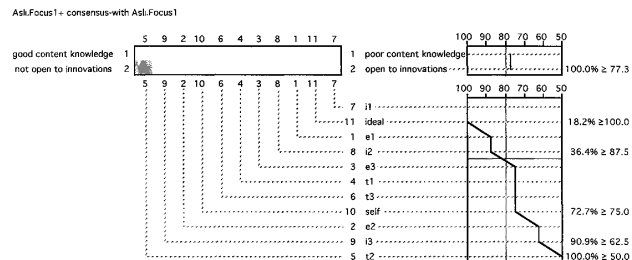

Figure 3. Exchange analysis of Aslı's two grids

Since Aslı changed almost all constructs in her second grid, she had only two constructs that were consistent: *poor content knowledge* (C1) and *open to innovations* (C2). Both constructs went through structural change the 77.3 % level, indicating that the meanings she attached to these constructs totally changed by the end of the collaborative learning phase.

As seen in Figure 3, one third of her elements show structural change at the 87.5 % level. The elements that thus changed are i1 and ideal (100.0 %), and e1 and i2 (87.5 %). In her first grid, self and e1 formed a pair; that is, she viewed

her ideal self very similar to e1. By the end of the year, they had changed considerably.

Although there was no significant change in her evaluation of self, she placed herself differently at the end of the term. In her first grid, the self was isolated, implying no shared features with other teachers. However, at the end of the term, self and t1 (one of her typical teachers) formed a pair at the 81 % match level, indicating common qualifications. This may suggest that she started to believe that she was only a fair teacher of YLs, and thus needed improvement. This view was also supported in her diary:

Extract 6:

> *I noticed that before participating this study, I thought I knew almost everything about teaching. But now, I realize that it is an endless ocean. No teacher can reach the end. I am somewhere in the middle*. (1st Phase / Final Diary).

From the first and second grid Focus analyses and the Exchange analysis, it can be inferred that by the conclusion of the program, there were considerable changes in the way Asli construed TEYL. She changed most of her constructs and the way she evaluated young learner teachers and herself as a teacher.

Conclusion

The study indicates valuable implications for in-service training for English teachers of YLs. To begin with, participant teachers transformed their perceptions about the characteristics of effective teachers of English to YLs and became aware of a number of issues in TEYL. Furthermore, they stated that this kind of training supported them psychologically. They realized that they were not alone in having difficulties teaching YLs, and were able to discuss problems to find alternative solutions. Readings and follow-up discussions assisted them in finding solutions. In this respect, the collaboration phase was very informative and productive. They also reported that the collaborative training process was different from traditional in-service training they had experienced before. Unlike theoretical overload and authoritative, i.e. top-down, knowledge transmissions in traditional in-service training, they found collaboration to be enjoyable and directed towards their specific problems. They identified benefits of sharing as being motivating, supporting, and able to learn from each other. In sum, the collaborative learning process helped teachers to be aware of the differences between general EFL methodology and TEYL, to create a desire to improve.

Since this study was limited to three participants, the interpretation of the findings can not be generalized to a larger context. In order to gain more reliable and valid results, the study needs to be conducted on a larger scale with a larger number of participants and over a longer period of time. This may enable us to gain a wider understanding of the effects of collaborative teacher learning on teachers' personal development.

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