

**Mingling in Paedeia Café – Student Teachers’ Experiences of
Participating in Peer-Mentoring Groups of Pre-Service and
In-Service Teachers**

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the experiences of student participants of Paedeia Café Finland, a part of the European PAEDEIA project. The aim of the project was to build bridges between pre-service and in-service teacher education and to develop practices for supporting new teachers in the induction phase. Five European countries (Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey) participated in the project and in Finland, Sweden and Turkey local induction programs called Paedeia Cafés were implemented. In Finland Paedeia Café was organized as peer-group mentoring for mixed group of pre-service and in-service teachers.

The aim of this study was to find out how student teachers experienced Paedeia Café peer-group mentoring. The research question was: What are the qualitatively different ways of experiencing Paedeia Café? The method used to examine the experiences of the participants was phenomenography.

The results show that student teachers experiences of Paedeia Café varied. The analysis revealed four different categories of description reflecting the ways of experiencing: Paedeia Café as (1) coffee break, (2) peer-support, (3) identity work and (4) professional community. The depth of learning varied between these categories. In further development more emphasis should be placed in promoting professional development through integrating practical experiences with theoretical understanding.

Key words: Paedeia Café, peer-group mentoring, teacher induction, phenomenography

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
1.1	The challenges faced by new teachers	5
1.2	Bridging the gap between teacher education and working life	6
1.2.1	Integrating theory and practice in teacher education	7
1.2.2	Shifting the boundaries between formal and informal learning	8
1.3	Peer-group mentoring as a way of supporting teachers professional development.....	9
2	THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	13
3	THE OBJECTIVES	16
4	THE STUDY	17
4.1	Methodology.....	17
4.2	Data	19
4.3	Analysis	20
5	FINDINGS	22
5.1	Description of categories.....	24
5.1.1	Paedeia Café as a coffee break	24
5.1.2	Paedeia Café as peer-support	25
5.1.3	Paedeia Café as identity construction.....	27
5.1.4	Paedeia Café as professional community	28
6	DISCUSSION	30
6.1	Evaluation of the study	32
	REFERENCES	34

1 INTRODUCTION

The transition from teacher studies to working life is documented to be challenging for most new teachers. Unlike in many other professions, teachers are expected to take the full responsibility of the professional duties and challenges at once, from the very first day they enter the school. (Jokinen, Heikkinen & Morberg, 2012; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011.) Stress, emotional burnout and feeling of inadequacy are common among newly qualified teachers, and in many countries the high drop-out rates of early career teachers is a serious problem (Hong, 2010). Consequently, bridging the gap between teacher education and working life has become one of the main themes in educational policies across the nations, and different kinds of national and local induction programs have been created to make the first steps in working life easier. This study examines one such program, Paedeia Café Finland, which was a part of the European Commission's PAEDEIA project. The aim of the project was to build bridges between pre-service and in-service teacher education and to support new teachers' transition to working life in three levels: professional, social and personal level (<http://www.paedeia.net/>). Five European countries (Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey) participated in the project and in three of them Paedeia Cafés were implemented. In Finland Paedeia Café was organized as peer-group mentoring for mixed group of pre-service and in-service teachers. The aim was to support student teachers transition from teacher studies to working life and to promote the professional development of all the participants. This study examines the experiences of the student participants of Paedeia Café Finland using phenomenographic research method. Before moving to the actual study I will shortly discuss the issue of teachers' transition from studies to working life and the trends in educational research that have contributed to the emergence of peer-group mentoring.

1.1 The challenges faced by new teachers

The challenges faced by new teachers as they enter the working life are various. They consider practical issues such as classroom management, student motivation, planning effectively for the diverse needs of students and incorporating effective assessment strategies into daily planning and teaching, but also issues related to social aspects such as being a part of organization and its micropolitics (Kane & Francis, 2013; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). In the recent years more emphasis has been placed also on the development of professional identity in the early years of teaching (see for example Flores, 2006; Hong, 2010; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). The issue of developing professional identity in the early years of teaching is described by Kane and Francis (2013, 363) in the following way:

...as new teachers navigate the complexity of their new role, their responsibilities to students, their collaborations with colleagues, their relationship with school administration and their contribution to school culture, they still continue to construct who they are as teachers. They are expected to learn in and from practice, and to do so they must learn to use their own teaching practice as a site of inquiry.

According to Thomas & Beauchamp (2011) the development of professional identity is gradual, complex and often problematic process. Also Day (1999, 59) has described the first years of teaching as a 'two-way struggle' in which teachers try to make their work match with their personal vision of how it should be, whilst being at the same time subjected to the powerful socializing forces of the school culture. Studies conducted among newly qualified teachers (NQTs) address that while some of them manage to apply the tools of critical reflection learned in the pedagogical studies, others adopt a survival mode and return to models of teaching from their own schooldays (Flores, 2006; Hansén, Forsman, Aspfors & Bendtsen, 2012).

When examining the factors that affect the experiences of new teachers, both the micro-political features of particular school and the background experiences during pre-service education are identified to have a significant meaning on how NQTs cope with the demands of teaching and its inherent tasks

(Flores, 2006). Therefore it has been stated that the challenge of making the transition phase easier touches both the initial teacher education and schools.

1.2 Bridging the gap between teacher education and working life

It has been argued that one of the main reasons for the praxis shock experienced by new teachers lies in the separateness of teacher studies and working life (see for example Heikkinen, Aho & Korhonen, 2015; McMahon, Forde & Dickson, 2015). During the initial education in Finland, the teaching practicums included in pedagogical studies are often the only links between university and schools and they are criticized for giving unrealistic and narrow understanding about teacher profession (see Heikkinen et al., 2015; Kiviniemi, 1997). Practicums don't for example provide student teachers proper chance to participate in the professional community of the school. Thus, it has been argued that university based teacher education does not prepare teachers enough for the diverse schools in the field. Consequently, when entering teaching profession new teachers encounter a gap between the educational theories and the demanding reality in-service teachers live in the classrooms and in the broader school context. In this situation new teachers may adapt strategically to the given context without confirming their beliefs and theories. (Hong, 2010.) It has been stated that for the purpose of making the transition phase easier it is important that students are provided chances to gain experiences about various schools and also to participate in the professional community of teachers already during the initial education.

The missing links between teacher education and schools is a serious problem also from the viewpoint of professional development of both pre-service and in-service teachers. The separateness of university and schools maintains the perennial tension between theory and practice, which is manifested for example in the views claiming that theories are no use at work, with practical competence being the decisive factor. (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä,

2012; McMahon, 2015.) According to Heikkinen et al. (2012) this division between theory and practice is problematic or even deceptive as it creates the illusion that theory and practice are two separate entities, even though the study about expertise confirms that in skilled activities theory and practice are parts of one entity.

1.2.1 Integrating theory and practice in teacher education

One approach overcoming the gap between theory and practice is integrative pedagogy model, which is developed on the basis of the current research knowledge about expertise development (see Heikkinen et al., 2012; Tynjälä, 2008; Tynjälä, 2010; Tynjälä & Gijbels, 2012). According to the integrative pedagogy model, high-level expertise requires integration of four different types of knowledge: theoretical-conceptual, practical-experiential, self-regulative and social-cultural. The first three of them can be depicted as personal knowledge, while the last one, sociocultural knowledge, is something which is infused in sociocultural environments (Tynjälä & Gijbels, 2012).

The theoretical-conceptual knowledge refers to the knowledge that can be learned from books or lectures and is easy to express in words whereas practical-experiential knowledge refers to tacit know-how learned from experience. The third component of expertise, self-regulative knowledge, refers to the skills of self-reflection needed to gain knowledge about one's own behavioral models and thinking and learning processes. Self-regulative knowledge is essential when reflecting practical experiences in light of theory or applying theoretical ideas in practice. (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Tynjälä, 2008.)

As it was mentioned above, in addition to the three personal components of expertise (theoretical, practical and self-regulative knowledge) people need also knowledge about the social-cultural context in which they are working. For example to be a skilled teacher one must not only be familiar with teaching methods, curricula, learning theories and the content knowledge she/he is teaching but also to recognize knowledge embedded in the operating environments and socially shared practices of the workplace (Heikkinen et al., 2012).

Following the integrative pedagogy model, in teacher education (both pre- and in-service) the aim should be to create learning situations that promote the integration of different types of knowledge.

1.2.2 Shifting the boundaries between formal and informal learning

Another severance between teacher education and working life, in addition and connected to the division between theory and practice, relates to the forms of learning that they represent. According to the often used classification learning has been classified into three categories: 1) formal learning that takes place in educational institutions and leads to some kind of certification, 2) non-formal learning that is organized outside the educational institutions and does not lead to any certification, and 3) informal learning that is unintentional and takes place in everyday life. While formal learning typically generates theoretical and explicit knowledge the informal learning is more about practical knowledge and behavioral models which may be difficult to acknowledge and express in words. (European Commission, 2001; Heikkinen et al., 2012.) Traditionally the university based teacher education has represented formal learning whereas the learning that takes place in working life is both informal and non-formal by nature. However, in accordance to the current knowledge about expertise development, there has recently been a trend of shifting the boundaries between different forms of learning. It has for example become increasingly common in formal education to use learning tasks such as portfolios, work-based projects and mentoring that make use of informal learning and prior experiences of the individuals. (Heikkinen et al., 2012.)

According to Heikkinen et al. (2012) the trend of shifting the boundaries between formal and informal learning is a welcome one. By combining elements from informal work-related learning and formal education the information offered through formal education can better meet people's previous ideas and background experiences, which is a key factor in constructivist view of learning. (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Tynjälä, 2008.) Recognizing the meaning of informal learning in educational institutions is crucial also in light of numerous

studies which have shown that as much as 70 to 80 percent of the relevant know-how at work is based on informal and nonformal learning (Heikkinen et al., 2012).

1.3 Peer-group mentoring as a way of supporting teachers professional development

One way to combine elements of informal, non-formal, and formal learning in service of teacher development is mentoring, which can have many applications, including the use of mentoring in initial teacher education, teacher induction, and transition periods of re-entry and the role changes (Cornu, 2005). In its traditional form mentoring associates with an expert-novice relationship whereby a more experienced person (mentor) gives support and advice to a less experienced colleague (mentee) for the purpose of professional growth (Cornu, 2005; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). However, recently more collegial conceptions of mentoring have emerged, in which the mentoring relationship is recognized as a dynamic, collaborative and reciprocal one (Cornu, 2005; Shank, 2007). These new forms of mentoring have been referred to as 'co-mentoring' (e.g. Kochan & Trimble, 2000; Mullen, 2000) 'peer mentoring' (e.g. Cornu, 2005) or 'peer-group mentoring' (Heikkinen et al., 2012) in order to emphasize the equal and collegial nature of the mentoring relationship. In these approaches mentoring is considered as reciprocal exchange of thoughts and joint knowledge construction in which both the mentor and the mentee can learn. At general level, this change can be described as a shift towards more constructivist assumptions about knowledge and learning (Aspfors, Fransson & Heikkinen, 2012). In this study I will employ the Finnish concept of peer-group mentoring, developed in the Finnish National network for teacher induction 'Osaava Verme'. The model of Finnish peer-group mentoring is introduced below.

The Finnish model of peer-group mentoring

The basic idea in the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring (PGM) is that a group of teachers from different phases of career gathers together approximately once in a month to discuss work-related issues in an open, respectful and confidential atmosphere. The groups are facilitated by mentors who have completed a one year long mentor-training course (8-12 ECTs) organized by Osaava Verme. Even though the group facilitators are called mentors, the relationship between participants is equal. In peer-group mentoring all the participants aim to act as co-mentors and co-mentees in their mutual professional development (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors, Edwards-Groves 2014). The aim of the meetings is to create an informal learning situation that provides chances for group-reflection with colleagues.

According to Heikkinen et al. (2012) the theoretical foundation of Finnish peer-group mentoring model is on critical constructivist tradition, which is based on two theoretical mindsets. One of them is critical theory, aiming at learning to question the existing knowledge, and the second theoretical background idea is the basic hypothesis of constructivism, according to which new knowledge is constructed by drawing upon individuals' prior knowledge and experiences. In practice, the critical constructivist approach in peer-group mentoring means that 'new teachers are encouraged to pose questions, challenge existing practices, and alter the way of acting as teacher' (Heikkinen et al., 2012, 23). The aim in peer-group mentoring is not to transfer the existing practices as such but to examine them critically and renew them. From the constructivist perspective peer-group mentoring is about exchanging of ideas and joint knowledge construction. (Heikkinen et al., 2012, 22-24.)

To promote the open sharing, emancipation and learning of all the participants, the Finnish peer-group mentoring practices are guided by the six principles of *constructivism, dialogue, narrative identity-work, autonomy, equality and integrative pedagogy*. These principles of the Finnish peer-group mentoring model are introduced more closely in the Table 1. (Heikkinen et al., 2012.)

Table 1. The Principles of peer-group mentoring

Constructivism

Peer-group mentoring is based on constructivist view of learning. According to constructivism knowledge as such cannot be transferred between individuals because people always interpret new knowledge on the basis of their prior knowledge, conceptions and experiences. Instead of transferring knowledge from one to another, people always form their personal conception in social interaction which is a mutual process. In creating shared understanding discussion plays essential role. Relying on constructivism as its core principle, peer-group mentoring is much about discussing and reflecting with colleagues. It resembles learning through informal conversation in which the participants acquire relevant professional knowledge and develop their skills on the basis of their prior experiences. (Heikkinen et al., 2012.)

Dialogue

The ultimate aim of the interaction in peer-group mentoring is to create dialogical relationship between participants. In a dialogic relationship no one has a better or more valid vision of reality, as all of the participants understand that their visions are incomplete. In a mentoring dialogue, all parties participate in verbalizing their conceptions, experiences and mindsets. In this reciprocal exchange of ideas and joint construction of knowledge everybody can learn and no one can fully control the process as true dialogue is always open-ended and unpredictable. (Heikkinen et al., 2012.)

Narrative identity-work

In the Finnish peer-group mentoring model teacher profession and professionalism is understood as narrative identity building, which takes place in social interaction with others through narratives and other manifestations. Identity is seen to be fluid and changing rather than stable and changeless. The process of narrative identity building is supported in peer-group mentoring by using different narrative- and action-based exercises. (Estola, Heikkinen & Syrjälä, 2014; Heikkinen et al., 2012.)

Table 1. The Principles of peer-group mentoring

Autonomy

The Finnish peer-group mentoring draws on the idea of professional autonomy as collective meaning-making and will-formation. It is based on the view that teachers are not in the service of any ideology, any political system or any other external party but they serve, above all else, growing children's or young people. Their ultimate goal is to promote these learners' opportunities to learn and lead a good life (Heikkinen, Moate & Lerkkanen, 2014; Heikkinen, Tynjälä & Kiviniemi, 2011; Heikkinen et al., 2012) The principle of autonomy is concretized in peer-group mentoring for example in the way it is organized: there is no ready-made model or contents for meetings but the groups determine their working and decide themselves what themes they see meaningful and relevant for discussion. Neither there are elements of assessment, standardization or control involved.

Equality

Equality between participants is a basic starting point for peer-group mentoring. However, it is recognized that there are different levels in the concept of equality: existential, epistemic and juridical level. At the existential level all people are equal no matter which position they hold. At the epistemic level knowledge is unequally distributed as people have different competences depending on the field of knowledge. At the juridical level people have different duties, responsibilities and rights. In peer-group mentoring the inequality at epistemic or juridical level should not affect the feeling of existential equality. (Heikkinen et al., 2012.)

Integrative pedagogy

The aim of integrative pedagogy model is to promote educational practices where different elements of expertise are integrated: theoretical, practical, self-regulative and sociocultural. In peer-group mentoring the idea of integrative pedagogy is implemented by using constructivist and holistic approaches such as small group discussions and different narrative and action-based exercises. The idea is that teachers are provided a chance to reflect and conceptualize their experiences in a group of colleagues. (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Tynjälä, 2008.)

2 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The context of this study, Paedeia Café Finland, was a local implementation of the European PAEDEIA project. The aim of the project was to build bridges between teacher education and working life and to develop practices for supporting new teachers' transition to working life in three levels: the professional, the social and the personal level (<http://www.paedeia.net>). Five European countries (Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey) participated in the project and in three of them, i.e. Finland, Sweden and Turkey, local induction programs called Paedeia Cafés were set up and piloted during the academic year 2013–14. The structure and theory to set up the cafés was agreed by the project partners but the organization of practical activities and working methods varied from country to country. In Sweden Paedeia Cafés applied the method of learning dialogue and were organized as common meetings for teacher students and novice teachers mentored by teacher educators (Martinsson & Olsson, 2015). In Turkey Paedeia Cafés were organized as many-to-many-mentoring for teacher students, teacher educators and teachers (Akyol & Ulusoy, 2015). In Finland, which was the context for this study, Paedeia Café was organized as peer-group mentoring for mixed groups of pre-service and in-service teachers. The Finnish Paedeia Café was designed and implemented in collaboration with the Finnish Network for Teacher Induction 'Osaava Verme' and the Department of Teacher Education of University of Jyväskylä. The aim of the course was to support teacher students' transition to working life and to promote professional development of all the participants.

For teacher students, Paedeia Café was an elective university course of advanced studies in educational science. The course was organized first time in the academic year 2013–2014, worth 3 ECTS credits, and during 2014–15, a slightly revised version of Paedeia Café was offered. This study is based on the data of the pilot course in 2013–14. According to the course description, the

main objectives of the course were to 1) promote students professional identity work 2) combine theoretical, practical, sociocultural and self-regulative knowledge following the idea and principles of integrative pedagogy and 3) build bridges between university studies and working life.

The course was arranged as small group working of pre-service and in-service teachers. The groups consisted of 2-3 students and 2-3 teachers and 1-2 mentor-facilitators who were called *baristas* referring to their roles as hosts who serve coffee and make the café meetings possible. One reason to use the word *barista* was to fade the hierarchical connotations of traditional mentor-mentee relationship. The groups met approximately once in a month, so that each group had altogether 6-8 meetings during the year. Meetings were held in varying places, for example in the university campus, schools, coffee houses or other public places. Usually the groups preferred to have the meetings somewhere else than in a school so that teachers could take some distance to the everyday school settings. One of the key principles of the course was to combine informal and formal learning in flexible ways. In accordance with the informal nature of the meetings, the group meetings often were started by having some coffee and pastry. (see Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2008; Heikkinen & Tynjälä, 2011; Aspfors et al., 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014.)

In the first meeting groups decided a schedule, place and in some case also the discussion topics for further meetings. Usually the themes of discussion rose from the interests and needs of the group members and varied between the groups. However, there were some common topics that almost all groups discussed about. These general themes were teachers' well-being and coping at work, collaboration with colleagues, working community, teachers' responsibilities and freedom, collaboration with parents and professional development. Also values, feelings and self-knowledge were discussed. An example program of one of the Paedeia Café-groups is introduced in Table 2.

Table 2. Program of one Paedeia Café group

1st meeting: Parents - threat or possibility?

- Discussion about cooperation and communication with parents
- Practical hints for parents' night

2nd meeting: Privacy in teacher profession

- How to separate work from private life? Is it necessary?

3rd meeting: Self-examination

- What kind of person and teacher am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What are my values?

4th meeting: Supportive networks

- School as a working community and collaboration with colleagues and other professionals.

5th meeting: Good teacher?

- What is considered to be "a good teacher" or "a good student"? How about "a good parent"?

6th meeting: Lifelong continuum of teacher profession

- Where am I now? How does my future look like and how do I feel about it?
-

The structure of the meetings was rather similar in all the groups: Meetings started with an informal unwinding when everyone could share one's feelings and experiences of the day. After that, discussion was focused on the topic of the session. To invoke ideas and stimulate discussion, baristas had usually prepared some collaborative and action-based exercises. However, sometimes informal discussion about topical themes and recent experiences took so much time that there was hardly time for the actual theme of the meeting.

3 THE OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research was to discover and describe the qualitatively different ways in which student teachers experienced the Paedeia Café meetings. The research question was:

How did the student teachers experience Paedeia Café-meetings?

The ultimate aim of describing student participants' experiences was to provide a deeper understanding about the different meanings of Paedeia Café. Such an understanding was seen to have pedagogical use when developing Paedeia Café or courses similar to it further. It was also seen to have a wider contribution for the development of induction practices, peer-group mentoring or other learning settings that bring together pre- and in-service teachers.

4 THE STUDY

4.1 Methodology

The research methodology used to examine student teachers' experiences was phenomenography. It is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to find out the different ways in which people understand a particular phenomenon in a collective level (Huusko & Paloniemi, 2006; Kettunen, Vuorinen & Sampson, 2013; Marton & Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2005). The aim of phenomenographic research is to reach what can be described as a collective understanding (i.e. a collection of all the possible ways in which the target phenomenon can be understood among a certain group of people) rather than an individual state of mind (Huusko & Paloniemi, 2006; Marton & Booth, 1997; Paakkari et al., 2011). In practice this means that the outcomes from phenomenographic studies are based on the variation across all of the data transcripts, not on a categorization of each individual in the study (Ashwin, Abbas & McLean, 2014; Marton & Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2005).

In phenomenography one of the central premises is that it has a non-dualistic ontological perspective, where the world and the people are considered inseparable (Bowden, 2005; Huusko & Paloniemi, 2006; Kettunen et al., 2013). This means that it is impossible to investigate world or reality as such, separated from human interpretation. To highlight this point, phenomenographic approach makes a distinction between a first order perspective, studying reality, and second-order perspective studying conceptions of reality. In phenomenography, researcher always investigates the target phenomenon from second order perspective—not describing the reality as such but the human conceptions of reality (Dahlin, 2007; Marton, 1986). This ontological premise holds true in most of the research approaches, even though it may not always be as clearly articulated. Another basic idea in phenomenography, related to the inseparability of human and the world, is that the conceptions of reality or ways of

understanding or experiencing are seen as relations between the person and a specific phenomenon in the world. They are not of an individual or psychological nature, located in minds of particular human beings, but rather they are cultural, lying in the relations between people and the world (Dahlin, 2007; Kettunen et al., 2013).

The result of phenomenographic research is called outcome space. Outcome space is a collection of categories of description that reflect the different conceptions people have expressed in the study (Paakkari et al., 2015; Täks, Tynjälä, Toding, Kukemelk & Venesaar, 2014). The assumption of phenomenography is that different categories of description are logically related to one another and they can be structured as an inclusive or nested hierarchy (Marton & Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2012). The hierarchical nature of the outcome space means that the conceptions lower in the hierarchy represent less complex, advanced, powerful or sophisticated ways of experiencing something, whereas the conceptions higher in a hierarchy represent more complex, advanced, powerful, or sophisticated ways of experiencing the same phenomenon (Paakkari et al., 2015). Categories higher in the hierarchy may include aspects from categories lower in the hierarchy, but not vice versa (Täks et al., 2014).

In addition to indentifying different categories of description it is also important to identify the aspects which differentiate the categories from each other and reveal the quality differences between them. These aspects are called dimensions of variation. Dimensions of variation express and describe the difference between the less and more complex conceptions. (Paakkari et al., 2015.) What is interesting from the viewpoint of educational practices is that the dimensions of variation can reveal what needs to be changed to gain a more complex or advanced way of understanding or experiencing the target phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997).

As it is the case in all qualitative research, the result of a phenomenographic study is always constituted in the relation between the researcher and the data. Hence, the outcome space of a phenomenographic research is not the only possible that could be constituted from the data. It only represents and

argues for one interpretation about the phenomenon, which at its best is meaningful and reveals something new about the target phenomenon. What is important for the reliability of the study is that the categories of description can be argued for convincingly on the basis of the data. (Ashwin et al., 2014; Åkerlind, 2012.) In phenomenography the quality of the results, i.g. categories of description can also be assessed by reflecting them to Marton and Booths (1997, 125–126) three criteria that categories of description should meet:

- each category should describe something clear and distinct about the experienced phenomenon;
- each category should stand in a clear and logical relationship to other categories and
- there should be a limited, parsimonious number of categories to capture the variation in the data.

4.2 Data

The data of this study consisted of reflective reports written by the student teachers who participated in the Paedeia Café Finland in the academic year 2013–2014. The sample was 13 master degree students of teacher education, who were in the final phase of their studies. All of the participants had some experience about teaching, at least from the practicums included in pedagogical studies. The reflective reports used as research material were the requirement for the course completion. They were gathered in the end of the semester after all the Paedeia Café meetings were held. In the essay students were asked to reflect their experiences about Paedeia Café meetings and their growth to teacher profession. The length of the reports varied from 6 to 14 pages. The assignment for the essay was following:

After the final meeting, write a 5-10 pages long report about your experiences in Paedeia Café. You can construe your essay as you wish but you can also use the following questions:

- (1) Why did you choose to apply for teacher education?
- (2) What do you think about teacher profession now?
- (3) How do you see the teacher education?
- (4) Why did you apply for Paedeia Café group?
- (5) What did you expect from the course?
- (6) What did you learn? How did you experience the meetings?
- (7) How does this experience effect on how you think about teacher profession and teacher education?
- (8) How did your group work? What are the things that enchanced/constrained your groups meaningful working?
- (9) What thoughts you have now when you are graduating?

4.3 Analysis

The analysis was started by identifying and describing the meanings that student teachers had given to Paedeia Café meetings. Quotations found to be of an interest for the question being investigated were selected, marked and coded (at this point there were dozens of codes/names for meanings expressed in the data that were not put into categories yet). In this process the phenomenon in question was narrowed down and interpreted in terms of these selected quotes, whose length varied from one sentence to a paragraph or a page. During the repetitive readings the data was treated as a whole and the boundaries between individuals were abandoned. However, the quotations were not cut off from their original context, because the context was considered important when interpreting the meaning of each quotation more closely (see Huusko & Paloniemi, 2006).

In the second phase of the analysis the meanings were grouped and re-grouped into categories based on their similarities and differences in order to form a draft set of descriptive categories. When the draft of the categorization was formed, the focus was turned to the dimensions of variation that differentiate categories from each other. The aim was to find out what are the things that distinguish one way of experiencing Paedeia Café from another, a broader one. The categories were organized to a hierarchical and inclusive structure, based on both logical argument and empirical evidence. Finally the categories were

defined and the most characteristic features of each category were described, with constant reference to the data. In concrete terms, the process followed Åkerlinds (2012, 118) description of the analysis process: quotes were sorted into piles, borderline cases were examined, and eventually the criterion attributes for each group were made explicit. In this way the groups of quotes were arranged and rearranged, narrowed into categories and finally defined. During the whole analysis process it was kept in mind that one essay or quotation or even one sentence might contain more than one way of experiencing the Paedeia Café meetings.

5 FINDINGS

On the basis of the data analysis the respondents' experiences on Paedeia Café were grouped into four categories: (1) Paedeia Café as a coffeebreak, (2) Paedeia Café as peer-support, (3) Paedeia Café as identity construction and (4) Paedeia Café as a way of participating in a professional community. These qualitatively distinct categories were reflected through five different themes which were: meaning given to the meetings, topics of discussion, relationship between theory and practice, relationship between participants and the main learning experiences gained in the group.

The outcome space is introduced in Table 3 in which the categories of description are structured as an inclusive and nested hierarchy. The first category reflects the narrowest way of experiencing the Paedeia Café meetings and the fourth category reflects the most advanced, complex or deepest way of experiencing the same phenomenon. The inclusiveness of the hierarchy means that the elements from the first category "coffee break" can be included to the category "peer-support" and elements from "peer support" can be included to the category "identity construction". Finally, the category "professional community" includes elements from all the other categories

Table 3. Student teachers' experiences of participating in Paedeia Café

DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION	CATEGORIES			
	"Coffee break"	Peer-support	Identity construction	Professional community
Meaning given to the meetings	unwinding, relaxation, refreshment, amusement, chatting	emotional support, sharing experiences, giving and receiving mutual support, encouragement	self-investigation, identity work	sharing expertise, professional and communal development, constructive learning, critical reflection
Topics of discussion	informal "catching"	feelings and experiences	self-knowledge, values, principles, philosophical questions, own life history, dreams and future plans	teacher profession, school as a community, values and principles, school development, educational theories combined to practice
Relationship between theory and practice	no theoretical viewpoints; theory is seen to be something un-useful and separate from practice	reflective but dualistic; theory as separate from practice	reflective, philosophical	integrative and critically reflective
Relationship between participants	casual	peer	collegial	collegial
What is learnt?	nothing necessarily	"I'm not alone with my ideas..."	self-knowledge, tools for identity work	practical tools and new perspectives, school as a community

5.1 Description of categories

5.1.1 Paedeia Café as a coffee break

In the first category Paedeia Café was conceived as a coffee break in the middle of daily life. Meetings were described as catching with the other group members over a cup of coffee and the main meaning given to the meetings was relaxation, unwinding, refreshment, chatting and amusement. Also the social aspect was conceived important.

The meetings felt more like having a cup of coffee with friends than studying --- afterwards I felt always refreshed.

In our meetings the coffee had significant meaning. Our meetings were held in the afternoon, most often at 14.30 - 16.30, straight after the work- and schoolday. Often we were little bit weary. The coffee and cake had twofold meaning in our meetings. They refreshed us both physically and mentally and promoted relaxed and joyful atmosphere.

Sometimes we could spend an hour just talking what came to mind, before moving to the actual topic...

The topics of discussion in this category could be something related to teachers' work or studies, but not necessarily - for example weather, hobbies, family business or topical themes in media could be talked about in addition to school and work. It was typical for this category that the discussion didn't seem to be goal-directed or reflective and it stayed on a superficial level. There were no theoretical views included in discussions and theory was seen to be un-useful and separate from practice. In this category Paedeia Café was commonly experienced as a nice change for other university studies which were conceived to be too theoretical and far from the day to day life of teachers' - a view that was reinforced by the dominant discourse in this category.

In the group I realized that teacher education is quite far from the reality of teacher's job and that the most important "school" for teacher profession is the working life.

University studies are often far from the real life.

The relationship between participants was casual and no such deep relationships that were typical for the categories higher in the hierarchy were formed. Sometimes the changing group composition prevented the group formation.

One thing that constrained groups working was that often some of the members were absent.

The changing group composition prevented group formation, especially in the beginning of the semester.

Elements from this first category were often describing the beginnings of the meetings, when there was time for informal catching and unwinding before moving to more goal-oriented discussion. The relaxed and informal atmosphere that was typical for this category was a prerequisite for moving to the other categories higher in the hierarchy. However, as such, category 'Paedeia Café as coffeekbreak' reflects the narrowest way of experiencing the meetings. If it was the only or dominating way of experiencing the course the whole experience could be disappointing especially if the expectations were high.

My high expectations for the course were not fulfilled---Often we used most of the time just chatting and drinking coffee.

5.1.2 Paedeia Café as peer-support

In the second category Paedeia Café was conceived as peer-support and the main meaning given to the meetings was the emotional support that the participants received from each other. In this category student teachers emphasized how useful it was to get a chance to share their feelings and thoughts with others who had gone through similar experiences. Especially the support and encouragement from more experienced teachers was considered valuable.

It was encouraging and comforting to hear how the others had gone through the same feelings when they were starting their careers as teachers. I realized that excitement, fear and anxiety are normal reactions.

The topics of discussion concerned often the practical experiences and problems faced in teacher's work and the feelings they had evoked. Also the rush and well-being as well as student teachers' questions, worries and fears were experienced as important themes of discussion in this category. Often the discussion got started from some very practical real life case that someone had faced and the perspective was widened so that everybody could reflect their own experiences and ideas about the phenomenon. However, it seems that sometimes there was a risk that sharing of negative experiences started to resemble bemoaning if the perspective was not constructive. The discussion in this category can be described as practical and reflective, but it did not reach integrative level, in which theoretical ideas and concepts are used to conceptualize practical experiences. Instead, the relationship between theory and practice was dualistic and practice was valued over theory.

We discussed about wellbeing and coping in teacher's work, teachers' responsibilities and collaboration with the parents. Theoretical perspectives didn't get much attention in our discussions.

Often we ended up talking about the challenging situations like problems in classroom management. Sometimes it seemed that there are no means to solve these problems.

The main learning in this category was the understanding that one is not alone with his/her feelings and worries. Students learned that sharing of experiences can offer great relief and promote their well-being in work. They also got lot of confidence, which made the transition phase look easier.

I'm not afraid of the working life anymore---In the group I got some tools to reflect my own wellbeing and coping in work. I know I'm not alone with these thoughts. I've learned to be compassionate to myself and I know how important it is to ask help when it is needed.

5.1.3 Paedeia Café as identity construction

In the fourth category Paedeia Café was conceived as professional and personal identity work. In this category, the discussions and exercises made in the group promoted participants self-knowledge and gave them tools to reflect on who they are as teachers and persons. The focus was on individual growth that was supported by the group.

In the course I've started to think of my own growth as a teacher, on what components does my professionalism consist of? During this spring I've been updating my teaching philosophy intensively.

The exercises were done only for oneself and the sharing was obligatory

Topics of discussion that were conceived meaningful in this category concerned values, principles, philosophical questions, own life history and future visions. The relationship between theory and practice was reflective and philosophical.

We examined our own professional identities , lifehistories and dreams by using pictures and narrative methods as tools.

It has been useful to think also the question of what are the things that I don't want to renew in my own teaching.

The relationship between the participants was collegial but also personal. Participants appreciated each other's otherness and the interaction was described as dialogical. In this category the most significant learning experiences were related to self-knowledge. Students told that they had learned more about themselves and got new tools for identity work. They came aware of their values and principles and learned to share them with others. Many students also told that in Paedeia Café they had learned to understand and accept the incompleteness of an educator.

Paedeia meetings gave me lot of tools for self-development and identity work. I learned to share my thoughts, to tell sincerely about my experiences and to take in hints and advices from others.

One of the most important insights that I had in the group, was that as a teacher one can never be ready.

5.1.4 Paedeia Café as professional community

In the fourth category Paedeia Café meetings were conceived as participating in teachers' professional community. The main meaning given to the meetings in this category was the sharing of ideas and experiences about teacher profession and school development. The discussions were described as constructive learning and sharing of expertise. Compared to the previous categories, especially the communal development and learning got more attention in students' views. Also critical viewpoints were included in discussion. In this category elements from all the other categories got combined and composed a multifaceted whole.

Paedeia course represented a very rewarding way of learning. Discussions in nice atmosphere gave me lot of advices and tools for my future career. It was easy to be in the group since you knew that you would be heard and you could draw a lot from others experiences. It was great to have the feeling that we are on the same line, learning and guiding each other, even though our group consisted of students and teachers of different ages.

Different views and ideas inspired people to see things from different viewpoint, to question their own habits and to try something new.

The best thing about Paedeia Café was a kind of personal and emotional development. It consisted of the feeling of being a part of a community (this Paedeia group but also wider professional community) and strengthening of own personal (and professional) identity (Who am I as a teacher?).

The themes of discussion that were experienced important in this category considered teacher's professionalism and school community. The perspective was wide and it covered everything from practical hints and ideas to the principles and values that form the basis for all school work. Some meaningful themes were for example teaching methods, challenging situations faced in the work, collegial and multi-professional collaboration, and values and principles.

The topics of discussion were about development discussions, team-meetings, personal goals, giving and receiving feedback and being critical.

We shared lot of ideas and I myself learned for example many games and plays that can be used to make language learning more interesting.

We discussed about how to act if your own values and parents' values conflict or if a student questions your authority as teacher. We also looked to the future: How does the future of teaching profession look like?

The relationship between theory and practice was integrative and critically reflective. Theoretical ideas and conceptions were applied to practical experiences

and practical experiences were reflected to educational theories. Student teachers emphasized the usefulness of the interaction between pre-service and in-service teachers as in the discussions they could apply their theoretical knowledge to the practical experiences of the working teacher. The ideal of shared expertise was realized as everybody brought their own special knowledge and experience into the group and shared it with others. The relationship between participants was described as dialogical and collegial.

In the meetings the learning theories that students had learned got combined to teachers' field-experiences. Everyone brought their expertise to the discussion and everyone could learn.

In our Paedeia group, working teachers had more practical knowledge about teachers work, but we students had clearer picture about the things that are taught in teacher education. We could compare the practices in different schools based on our experiences as substitute teachers.

I think there was true collegiality and dialogue between our mentor and other participants. We all participated in the discussions as equals.

In this category Paedeia Café offered students a chance to participate in the professional community of teachers already during the studies. Paedeia Café worked as a bridge between studies and working life in a twofold meaning: it supported students' transition phase but it also promoted mutual interplay between schools and university. Students told that Paedeia Café had broadened their understanding about education and school as a community. They had learned communication skills and got lot of tools to develop their own professionalism, teaching practices and future working community.

I felt that I learned a lot from others experiences. The discussions in the group broadened my understanding about being a part of a working community.

Peer-group mentoring provided a unique chance for in-depth multiprofessional collaboration.

The learning (in peer-group mentoring group) was pleasant, interesting and on-going. Problems were shared and you got new solutions and viewpoints. Suddenly the problems seemed to be much smaller. Different views provoked all the participants to see things from different angle, to question their own way of doing things and to try something new. After each meeting, I felt lightened and had got lot of new tools for facing new challenges.

6 DISCUSSION

This study revealed four different categories of description reflecting the ways how student teachers experienced Paedeia Café meetings. The categories of description ranged from conceiving Paedeia Café as nice coffee breaks in middle of day to day life to conceiving it as identity work and constructive professional learning. The dimensions of variation that differentiated conceptions from each other were: meaning given to the meetings, topics of discussion that were experienced meaningful, relationship between theory and practice, relationship between participants, and the main learning experiences gained in the group.

Throughout the categories the experiences of Paedeia Café were mainly positive. Students were happy to get a chance to meet in-service teachers and to discuss with them about the questions that were occupying their minds about teaching profession. Peer-group mentoring as a method got lot of positive feedback from the students. Especially the informal atmosphere of the meetings was experienced positively because it promoted the open sharing of experiences. However, even though the feedback about the course was almost only positive the phenomenographic analysis revealed that the depth of learning, the powerfulness and the complexity of the experiences varied between the categories. In the first category 'Paedeia Café as coffee break' the experience was described as nice, but the educational effect was weak. In the second category 'Paedeia Café as peer-support' the objective of getting peer-support and emotional relief was achieved but the elements of constructive learning and critical reflection were missing. In the third category 'Paedeia Café' as identity construction, the course served the individual growth of the students which, however, did not have straight effect on communal level. Only in the fourth category 'Paedeia Café as professional community' the objectives of sharing of expertise, integration of theory and practice and communal development were all realized. However, when reading the results it is important to recognize that each category in itself

is valuable and includes desirable elements. Thus, the categories of description should be seen as a cumulative continuum, in which each category brings something more to the overall experience. As Marton and Booth (1997) state, different categories of description represent more or less complete ways of experiencing the whole, some coming closer to educationally critical norms than others.

The findings of this study are in line with other studies about peer-group mentoring, which have been conducted among working teachers. They strengthen the view that peer-group mentoring can provide an effective tool for teachers' professional development in different phases of career (see Aspfors, Hansén, Tynjälä, Heikkinen & Jokinen, 2012; Geeraets, Tynjälä, Markkanen, Pennanen, Heikkinen & Gijbels, 2015). Students' experiences from Paedeia Café suggest that participating in a mixed peer mentoring group of in-service and pre-service teachers can relieve anxiety in the transition phase, provide tools for professional development and promote mutual interplay between schools and university. However, in further development of the course more emphasis should be placed in promoting professional development through integrating practical experiences with theoretical understanding. This could be done for example by including more theoretical and critical viewpoints to the discussion about practical experiences.

Altogether the results of this study suggest that the Finnish model of peer-group mentoring served well the objectives set on PAEDEIA project, i.e. supporting students' transition to work in three levels: professional, personal and social level. The experiences from the Paedeia Café pilot course provide a good starting point for further development of the course or other learning settings that combine in-service and pre-service teacher education and/ or apply the method of peer-group mentoring. A task for further research would be to examine the experiences of the in-service teachers who participated in Paedeia Café as this study focused only on the experiences of the student participants.

6.1 Evaluation of the study

When assessing the quality and trustworthiness of this research it should be kept in mind that it is a qualitative research, and it presents only one, well-argued interpretation or truth about the phenomenon being studied. It does not aim to be objective in traditional, positivistic sense, holding that reality is objective and external to the mind, and knowledge is reliable based on observed objects and events. Instead, in phenomenography the world and the people are considered inseparable which means that it is impossible to investigate reality as such, separated from human interpretation (Bowden, 2005). Thus the traditional positivistic concepts of reliability and validity do not apply in this research as such because they derive from positivistic research tradition reflecting whole different ontological and epistemic views than the philosophical foundations of this research (see for example Tynjälä, 1991; Cope, 2004; Sin, 2010).

In all research, however, and especially in qualitative research, the truthfulness, trustworthiness and ethics of the research process, findings and interpretations should be assessable for the reader, even though there are no clear and unambiguous criteria for doing that (see Tynjälä, 1992). Though, there is a common agreement that for securing the reliability or trustworthiness of a qualitative research a researcher must be rigorous in conducting a systematic and transparent research process and credible when stating his/her claims (Sin, 2010). In this research I have followed these guidelines by reporting and describing the whole process accurately and by using data transcripts as evidence when arguing for my interpretations. Also the ethical issues have been considered throughout the research process, so that it would not do any harm to the participants. The privacy and anonymity of the participants was guaranteed and no identifying information about the individuals was revealed in written report or other communication during the research process.

However, there are some issues related to the research settings that might have affected the outcomes of this research and should therefore be raised up to readers' consideration. First issue concerns the data collection and the general settings of the research. As it was mentioned earlier, the data consisted of the

reflective essays of the students, which served also as a requirement for course completion. The assignment for the essay encouraged students to reflect honestly about their experiences, both positive and negative ones. However, even though the assignment encouraged students to be sincere in their answers, the fact that the essays were part of their course completion can be seen as problematic from the viewpoint of the trustworthiness of the data. It might be that in their essays some students, either consciously or unconsciously, wanted to please the university teachers who read the papers. They might, for example, emphasize their learning and positive experiences and put less attention to their negative experiences. The data collection can also be problematized from the viewpoint of research ethics: Is it right to connect data collection to course assignment? Did the students possibly feel pressurized to participate in the study as it was so tightly linked to the assignment? This risk was acknowledged but seen as minor one because after being informed about the research the students could also choose not to participate in it.

Another issue to be raised up is the subjective position of the researcher. In qualitative research the outcomes are always constituted in relation with the researcher and the phenomenon being studied. This means that researcher always investigates the phenomenon through his/her own lenses which are affected by cultural background, values, orientations and previous experiences. Consequently, for securing the transparency of the research the researcher's background must be acknowledged because it is crucial part of the context where the analysis takes place (Cope, 2004; Tynjälä, 1991). According to Sandberg (1997), as the researcher cannot escape from his/her interpretations in the research process, one possible criterion for the reliability in researching conceptions would be the researcher's interpretative awareness. By interpretative awareness he means that researcher must acknowledges and explicitly deal with his/her subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it. In case of this research my subjective perspective as researcher has been affected by the personal experience of participating in one Paedeia Café group as a student participant. The participation did not directly relate to the research

project but necessarily it affected on my understanding about the phenomenon. The analysis, however, is based only on the data collected from the participants. During the analysis process, I strived to hold back my own prejudices and theories in order to fully see what the students told about their experiences. However, I also think that the personal experience and knowledge about Paedeia Café helped me to bracket and contextualize the knowledge that was relevant to the issue at hand and in this way enabled me to gain a deeper understanding about the phenomenon being studied.

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