

The ‘Speaking Clubs’ as a Social Learning Place**Gamze EMIR**

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Autonomy refers to having the possibility of exercising one’s agency within a space, and thus, space is identified as one of the dimensions of autonomy. Spaces provide affordances to become places by giving rise to opportunities for interaction in which participants practice their autonomy. To put it differently, spaces can turn into places through social relations and actions. The ‘Speaking Clubs’ (SC) emerged as a metaphorical learning space in this study. Wherefore, this study, informed by the basic tenets of mediated discourse analysis, sought to explore whether the SC as a space could turn into a place. It also sought to explore how participants ascribed meaning to the SC and how their practices in the SC influenced their understandings of this place and their learning experiences. To this end, this study employed language learning histories, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with six EFL student teachers to understand the semiotic process of the SC as a social learning place.

The findings revealed six possibilities of the SC as a social learning place. First, the SC served as a place for EFL student teachers to practice their target language skills. The SC also became a place to learn in an intimate and relaxing environment, which encourages them to take risks in using the target language, and as a result, made them more confident speakers of English. Besides, the SC served as a place to socialize, which provides additional support to fulfill their social and psychological needs. In addition, the SC provided a place for student teachers to exchange their ideas and learn from each other. Furthermore, the SC served as a place to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in their language skills and characteristics. Finally, the SC provided a place for student teachers to practice their future teachings. Overall, the SC served as a place to facilitate student teachers’ practices of autonomy. As such, autonomy appears in the form of student teachers’ freedom to exercise their agency, in the form of learning within the ZPD, and in the form of taking action.

Keywords: Speaking Clubs, Social Learning Place, Autonomy, Foreign Language Learning.