Taking an Active Role in an International Project: A Report of a Collaborative Research with Teacher Trainees in UK, Norway and Pakistan

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Abstract

This report introduces an innovative research project about the dialogue among teacher trainees from UK, Norway and Pakistan, about a literary work, in a virtual environment. This project involved us, five English in Education academics from the three contexts, as researchers who gathered, analysed and reported on the international data collaboratively. We reflect on our experience as international researchers and the benefits we found in this type of association across borders for future teachers. This work has implications for teacher education and the methodologies used can be beneficial for future researchers and teacher educators.

Keywords: collaboration, international, research, literature circles, research, teaching of fiction.

Introduction

International collaborations are said to have a positive impact on the research culture and ethics of the participating researchers and their institutions (Fanelli 2016; Freshwater, Sherwood & Drury 2006). Because of this universities are increasingly providing incentives to researchers to engage in collaborative research across national and regional borders. This report introduces a collaborative research project which provided five researchers from UK, Norway and Pakistan to engage their undergraduate students in an online dialogue about the same literary text, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. We report on our experiences as researchers and the benefits we found in this international collaboration.

The Project

In March 2018, we started a collaboration between our respective institutions to provide our students with a platform to engage in a literary dialogue across borders. We conducted a two-stage study. The first stage comprised of in-class, student-led literature circles (structured group work with their prepared roles) on Golding's *Lord of the Flies* where students from each context, separately, talked to each other about the novel. The use of literature circles was expected to help them create a social dimension to the reading of literature (Naylor & Gibbs 2018) and become engaged critical readers (Levy, 2011). The second stage constituted online interactions between students from the three different contexts over google groups which as Hoskins (2012) argues were expected to help the participants own and engage with the topic. Six groups of 5-8 students were formed on google and students' interaction in these groups were analysed thematically as the data for the project. We held Skype meetings over the course of the data collection process. Each of us coded the data separately and in September 2018 we met in Bergen for a week-long research symposium to code and pen out our research article.

Reflections on the Collaborative Methodology of the Project

The experience of collaborating across borders and coming to an agreement about various decisions including journal choice; coding categories; focus, title and research question of the article; writing an abstract was all part of a valued and beneficial process. In terms of journal choice, Norwegians and Pakistani academics had separate lists of journals that they could publish into, provided by their respective institutions. So, the journal chosen had to be not only relevant to

the content written and of a good peer-review quality but also part of the two lists. It was important to start with the two lists and then look at the aim and scope of the journal. We chose to look at some articles from the current issues to check if our work was a fit. Finally, when a decision was made we took one article from our chosen journal as a model and devised our work's outline based on that. Parts of the outline were then divided among colleagues with one in-charge of the overall editing to avoid giving a disjointed look. Even though, the work might pen out to be different in the end, it still provided us with a good starting point.

While designing coding categories, we all read our initial individually created codes and came up with a set of collated categories together. Analytical decisions were made and our key argument came out of the decisions and discussions made during the process. It was very important to agree on a research question and various versions were created throughout the week and beyond. A question had been set out at the beginning of the project to give us focus, 'How does working in literature circles help students from different contexts discuss *Lord of the Flies* in a virtual environment?' However, during the coding and data analysis process we realised that we need a much narrower focus because students were responding to the technique of the novel, connecting to other texts as well as connecting to their lives and society. As a group we made an informed decision based in our coding to focus on the third dimension as most of our students responded in that manner. Data related to the particular dimension was further analysed to finalise the third stage of coding as suggested by Richards (2015). The question was then focussed to be, 'What political, social and historical connections do international students make when sharing their responses to Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in a virtual environment?'

Writing an abstract together was important to do while we were in one place as we collectively agreed that writing a paper should start with writing an abstract. Using phrases that will gain readers' attention and give them a complete picture of our work, we wrote a 150 word abstract together. Writing an abstract was a useful start to the writing process as it brought everything together, gave us a clear direction to follow in the rest of the paper and put our main argument clearly in words.

Conclusion

International collaboration like ours are hard to achieve but once attained they are beneficial for all participating contexts. It becomes a great learning experience for concerned collaborators. The lessons learnt can be applied to other such collaborations.

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