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Reflections on Collaboration

Introduction

Reflection on practice often draws on John Dewey (1933), Graham Gibbs (1988) and Donald Schön (1983) who urge us to make the time to reflect in and on action, making conscious what we have done and why, and working out how to do things better next time. This is particularly important in collaborative educational practice where we seek sustainable relationships rather than one-off projects. Arguably, such reflection is the most important source of personal professional development and improvement, as Schön (1983, 61) puts it:

> Through reflection, [we] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which [we] may allow [ourselves] to experience.

A useful tool with respect to reflecting on multi-agency partnerships, partnerships with students and other partners, is Arnstein's ladder (1969). This seminal model considers partnership from manipulation to 'citizen control', with degrees of participatory power and agency increasing up the rungs of the ladder. This is imperative where there might be an unequal distribution of power across the actors: staff working with students, more experienced academics working with those who are less experienced, universities working with community organizations. Authentic collaboration is not about taking control, it is dialogue, recognition and acceptance of the other, with benefits for all. Critical reflection allows us to pay attention to the practical values and theories which inform the partnerships and partnership actions, illuminating them usefully, and leading to the development of fresh and powerful insights and actions.

The reflections offered in this section represent reflective practices that create powerful agency for those positioned as 'outsiders' in academic discourse. All illustrate instances where power has been meaningfully shared to bring more voices into the conversation – with recommendations for the reader with respect to adapting practices for their own diverse contexts.

The Case Study Chapters

Together by Hélène Pulker and Chrissi Nerantzi reports on an open educational picture book created by a self-forming group of international staff and students collaboratively working together. It highlights key features of successful collaborative practice: openness, honesty and inclusivity; listening carefully to all voices and perspectives; bonding as a team and clarifying working practices; keeping communication clear, open and transparent.

In *Autoethnography, Academic Identity, Creativity*, Emma Gillaspy and Anna Hunter reflect on how the creative collaborative approaches they have used to explore identity formation encouraged authentic academic identities to emerge in new staff. The two examples demonstrate how participants 'have grown wings' through the collaborative inclusive conversations in 'safe spaces'. Both examples involved working with 'outsider' academics, reflecting on academic development through collaborative conversation that sparked new ideas to drive sector-wide change.

Values-driven collaborative writing offers an opportunity for communities to share ownership of and responsibility for the writing, editing and reviewing process in a democratic, non-hierarchical environment. In *Working Together* the ALDinHE research vCoP reflects on the potential of collaborative writing for community building through the democratic co-construction of knowledge. The 'team sport' model of collaboration developed by this particular vCoP could be used by other groups both to address questions in the changing HE landscape and to model a more humane HE in the process.

Manuela Barczewski, Keith Beckles and Simone Maier's professional practices were bolstered through the very human relationships that they built as PGCert students. In *Humane Relationships*, they outline how their own trust relationships helped them to support their students. The authors offer a model of how creative practitioners can work collectively to share creative ideas and expertise to democratically develop new knowledge. They stress the need for staff to be given time and spaces to learn how to collaborate with each other.

With *Coaching for Collaborative Autonomy,* Monika Hřebačková, Martin Štefl, Jana Zvěřinová and Tanja Vesala-Varttala reflect on their collaborative European project that created an online English language course built around collaboration and co-creation. The course was integrated into real university courses and attracted ECTS credits. Working in culturally heterogeneous multi-disciplinary groups, student teams problem-solved issues of sustainability, and developed their language skills while actively reflecting on the processes of their collaborative working methods. The authors make light touch suggestions for how to harness non-directive coaching and Learning Journals in the process.

Together: The Story of Collaborating to Create the Open Picture Book

Hélène Pulker and Chrissi Nerantzi

- This case study reports on an open educational product, a picture book, collaboratively created by a self-forming group of international staff and students.
- The case study highlights the following points for such international collaborations:
  - be open and inclusive in your approach to collaboration and avoid making judgement;
  - listen carefully and listen to all voices and perspectives. Everybody has something valuable to contribute;
  - agree working practices and individual contributions and build time for team members to get to know each other;
  - remember that clear and transparent communication is vital; and
  - be flexible in your role as a leader and team member and be prepared to troubleshoot and come up with alternative solutions to bring your project to fruition.

Introduction

Collaborative working is an increasingly necessary part of academic life (Walsh & Kahn, 2009). Traditionally, university culture supported individual research and scholarship; however, working collaboratively whilst it may present challenges – networking, digital and social skills – offers sustaining and sustainable working spaces and practices. In informal learning, collaboration and openness are often the norm (Nascimbeni, 2020). This case study reports on an informal collaborative working experience of a group of distributed HE researchers, including doctoral students, as well as a High School student, an undergraduate student and a professional artist, who came together to create a picture book on the values of open education. The case study provides some background to the picture book project whilst the focus of the chapter is an analysis of this collaboration, using narrative inquiry. It concludes with some recommendations for collaborative staff/student working in HE.

Project Background

The Global Open Educational Resources (OER) Graduate Network (GO-GN) is a network of doctoral students around the world whose research projects focus on open education: resources, practices, pedagogy, policy and MOOCs. Offering a range

of training activities and opportunities to share ideas has connected students and alumni and facilitated self-forming working groups created around common research methodologies or topics of shared interest (Weller et al., 2019). The picture book team is an example of such a self-forming group. With a fellowship from the GO-GN, secured by the project leader, a group of open educators and researchers located in four different continents formed to co-create a story about open education.

Together (Nerantzi et al., 2021) was written and illustrated collaboratively over six months, during the heart of the pandemic (Covid-19), using exclusively the open web and digital tools. The book aimed to raise awareness of open education and what it enables. It was widely shared on the Zenodo platform, including with primary and HE classrooms. The final book is now, thanks to the open education community, available in over twenty languages. An openly licensed drawing programme Doodlefan was also created to accompany the book and extend engagement with the story.

The team included academics, doctoral students and consultants with a variety of roles in a variety of institutions. With the exception of a High School art student, an undergraduate student and a professional artist who were invited to support the illustrations of the story, the team members were GO-GN alumni and HE academics or doctoral students. Although coming from various backgrounds and working in different countries and cultures, the shared values and aspirations about open education helped bring the picture book project to fruition.

Throughout the project, the international team communicated and collaborated via seven live meetings in Skype, Zoom and MS Teams as well as through emails, Twitter DM group and Google Drive. The team's individual and collective journeys were captured through publicly available blog posts, which form the data for this case study.

Together, the Collaborative Open Picture Book

For the story-writing phase of the project, we used a 'seed survey' to gather ideas and input from the wider open education community, also helping us avoid stereotypes. The team was split into two sub-groups. This helped us be more focused and make progress more quickly in the writing process. The challenge was to come up with a viable story that would speak to a cross-generational readership. We had decided to weave the story using animal characters and, in the spirit of OER, snippets of other stories. We also decided to use open licence exhibition pieces from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, seeing this as an opportunity to model the reuse of OER. Throughout the creative process we continued to seek feedback from within and outside the team.

While the first sub-team wrote the skeleton of the story, the second sub-team finalized the story and decided on characters and further details. Once the writing process was completed, the project leader (Nerantzi & Mathers, 2021) together with the High School student did the illustrations, based on the collaborative storyboard developed. During the process, the team reached out to colleagues to get feedback on

drafts; their critical comments and suggestions were extremely important to refine and polish our story and find a clear direction.

Collaborative Blogging as a Reflective Learning Tool

To learn from the project process and evaluate outcomes, team members used narrative inquiry to systematically gather, analyse and represent their experiences. Narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandini & Connelly, 2000). The emphasis is on co-construction of meaning between the participants.

Collective blogs were set up that allowed all project participants to reflect with contributors undertaking concurrent writing, peer review and feedback. Blogging as a team helped us to showcase our thinking processes and share our reflections, ideas, thoughts, feelings, concerns and knowledge, in the open and as they were experienced (Etherington, 2004). The team wrote four blogs collaboratively, at four crucial times of the journey. Each blog had a specific team leader, intention and a time frame.

- Blog post 1 had a focus on the seed survey and the metaphors we used that emerged from this. In this post the team shared the findings from this survey (Roberts et al., 2020).
- Blog post 2 was a reflection on the rationale for joining this team project. It is written with great honesty and openness, and illustrates the joy and fears at the same time about this mammoth task ahead (Pulker et al., 2020).
- Blog post 3 was devised after we had written the story and we used this milestone as an opportunity to reflect on how we connected with the story we co-authored. Our reflections reveal our special individual and collective relationships with this and our personal interpretation and connection (Corti et al., 2021).
- Blog post 4 was an opportunity at the end of the project to look back at what we had achieved and what helped us get there. The focus is how we worked together, collaborated on the different aspects of the book and what enabled us to succeed (Pulker et al., 2021).

The next section provides an analysis of the fourth and final blog: *A Collaboration Like No Other, Reflections by the Team as the GO-GN Picture Book Is Coming to an End* which specifically provides insights into authors' perceptions of collaborative working and what they have learnt from it (Pulker et al., 2021).

Findings and Discussion

A thematic analysis of the narrative inquiries of the final blog (Braun & Clarke, 2006) highlights three key findings:

Openness and Inclusion

All members of the team agreed that the collaboration would be open, inclusive and transparent from the outset, as these are the underpinning values of open education, and in this context, it is understood that no voice is more or less powerful than any others. This provided opportunities for diverse perspectives (Rourke & Coleman, 2009) throughout the project. Team members displayed a clear sense of mutual respect and suspended judgement between themselves. One academic member commented:

> The most enjoyable aspect of our collaboration is the freedom we felt in being allowed to openly share our ideas, our suggestions, our critics. We all welcomed them and took them into account before making choices.

Communication and Listening

The geographical spread of the team members situated in different time zones meant that synchronous meetings were extremely hard to organize. Nevertheless, thanks to collaborators' flexibility and agility, seven live meetings were able to take place. Not all members were present at each meeting but careful planning across the time zones enabled key people to attend when necessary, so that decisions could be made efficiently and in a timely fashion. Due to the project's tight working schedules, the rapid and constant flow of communication via Twitter and Google Drive felt overwhelming at times. However, thanks to team members' listening skills, openness and tolerance, timely decisions were made, and the project progressed through the milestones, even if not smoothly. As an academic member pointed out: 'What worked was being open to, and respectful of each other's ideas. Along with the different skills and perspectives we all contributed.'

Participation and Leadership

Contributions to the blog and particularly the fourth blog post revealed that each member of the team took part in the project willingly and with great enthusiasm. All members were engaged, committed to the same goal and motivated to achieve the set goal. Everyone also participated because they felt appreciated. For example, one academic member pointed out: 'The easiest aspect was certainly the passion we shared: nobody had to push anybody, we embraced our parts.' Team members contributed when possible, using their expertise while developing new skills and areas of interest. At the same time, work or study pressures were evident and self-care was important. However, there was no conflict or criticism when somebody could not respond or take part in a specific activity:

> There is no need to be 'on' all the time. The group has impetus, and it is ok to rely on the collective. You don't need to do everything, and asking questions is actually good!

As also shown in other studies, this collaboration was experienced as immersive and rewarding (Nerantzi, 2017):

> Completing a collaborative global project in the time of Covid-19 helped me better understand what was going on beyond the four walls of my house. […] This collaboration provided me with well needed human interaction and connections in a difficult time.

What proved to be useful was clear and inclusive project leadership (Wuffli, 2016), across a diverse, international collaboration. Team members were able to question and challenge aspects of the project openly and respectfully. The ongoing peer review led to knowledge sharing (Bogers, 2012) and continuous improvement of the story as a result. Even when there were serious doubts about the project at times, the leader was able to move the team on and responded to critical feedback with diligence and finesse:

> Thanks to our frank conversations, the fact that we suspended judgement and appreciated each other made a huge difference, I feel. This did by no means mean that we were not critical, but the criticality was focused on what we were doing, not the other person!

Conclusion

The picture book project *Together* engaged an international team in an imaginative and creative collaboration that embodied and reinforced our strong beliefs in the values of open education. The team navigated unknown territories and ambiguity, appreciated otherness and diversity of views and perspectives, and co-created a positive experience and an output that is truly cooperative.

Throughout this project, we reflected on how we worked together, our values, beliefs, habits, struggles and achievements (Etherington, 2002). Active participation in blogging reinforced the reflective learning cycle and led to deeper learning, new insights and better learning skills (Gibbs, 1988). One team member reflected: 'What I did learn about myself is that collaboration requires less talk, and more listening.'

As this project reaffirms, authentic collaborative projects require trust and openness, high levels of ethical and critical engagement, mutual and sincere communication, reflexive engagement throughout, and tolerance of ambiguity. Motivation and outcome should also be carefully considered when developing such collaborations in and across HE. A project like this could be considered in a range of learning, teaching and assessment situations with educators and students to experience inclusive collaboration that harnesses diverse voices and perspectives and fosters creative explorations and stimulates learning.

Autoethnography, Academic Identity, Creativity: Transitionary Tales from Practice to Teaching and beyond

Emma Gillaspy and Anna Hunter

- Creative collaborative approaches encourage authentic academic identities to emerge.
- Collaborative inclusive conversations in 'safe spaces' create much-needed peer support networks in HE.
- Reflecting on academic development through collaborative conversation sparks new ideas to drive sector-wide change.

Introduction

This chapter is a collaborative reflection on how each author adopted a different but linked creative approach to exploring emergent academic identity, one, with those who are 'becoming' teachers – the other with those who are exploring their academic identities. In bringing together these distinct yet complementary narratives, we have found synergies across our academic development praxes and sparked ideas for future practice. We hope our stories stimulate engagement in such collaborative activities to encourage reflection on, and development of, professional identity amongst our diverse readers. Academic identity is complex, multiple and always-shifting (Quigley, 2011). This fluidity carries great potential in terms of allowing academics to move between roles; however, the conflicting pressures to develop as a facilitator, researcher and leader can also result in ontological insecurity and imposter syndrome (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Parkman, 2016). This is particularly true for academics from working-class or practice-based backgrounds who may be navigating the challenges of a dual professionalism and the destabilizing effect of moving from an expert in one field to a novice in another (Smart & Loads, 2017).

Case Study 1: Using Collaborative Collage Making to Explore Academic Identity: Becoming Teachers

Staff at the University of Central Lancashire who are new to teaching in HE typically enrol on one of the taught Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes offered to help them enhance their skills and knowledge in teaching and learning. These range from CPD-only programmes to formal postgraduate qualifications; one thing they all have in common however is that many new academic staff embark on these courses with little or no sense of their own academic identity. Colleagues in this position reported feelings of dislocation between past and present selves, as if they needed to forget who they had been previously in order to succeed in their present incarnation.

In order to facilitate engagement with these diverse identities, in the early stages of all our taught programmes, staff are invited to take part in a collage-making activity as a prompt to reflectively explore what teaching and learning means to them. Working collaboratively in small groups, participants use pre-selected materials to produce a shared group collage in response to the title 'What teaching and learning means to me'.

Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield (2021) articulate the value to participants of different potential approaches to collage making, specifically the conscious and unconscious acts of the collage maker in choosing and placing images. For this exercise, source materials were provided by the facilitator, which in itself was a conscious choice designed to promote deeper engagement with the visual metaphors elicited in the act of selecting images. The source material provided was copies of the *Times Higher Education* magazine, which was chosen for its availability, visual qualities and education-related content. Having trialled the exercise at the 2017 Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) conference, participant feedback indicated that when dealing with images chosen from sources that are not of their own choosing participants need to think more carefully about how they can construct metaphors to explain their experiences of teaching, based on the images available to them.

The results are often deeply revealing, as the collaborative identification of visual metaphors leads to the uncovering of shared experiences, facilitating the development of a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998) of novice educators. Coming from a place of disparate, often conflicted and conflicting professional identities, the collage artists can claim a new, shared identity forged in the here and now, and out of the creative process. The collage itself becomes a vehicle by which participants are able to tell their own, individual stories about *becoming teachers*, whilst the collaborative effort and shared experience of storytelling allow some of the more difficult narratives to surface. For example, the act of choosing and ascribing meaning to images for the collage creates a safe space in which participants can say 'this image represents something that I've found difficult'; 'yes, me too'. The collaborative focus on the images and what they represent creates a filter for the sharing of lived experience, allowing individual narratives of identity-formation to emerge through the creative collaborative act. To view an example of one such collage, see Hunter and O'Brien (2019).

Some participants have said they found the experience uncomfortable at first, as it challenged their assumptions of teaching and learning in HE, believing collages 'aren't academic enough' and the creative approach is too childish or playful to learn anything significant from. Those that pushed through that discomfort have commented that the collage-making process enabled them to form a bond within their groups based on shared experiences and recognize the power of the dialogic in enhancing learning. This in turn caused them to feel less isolated in the early days of their academic careers.

All participants are invited to return individually to their collaborative collages later on in the course, for further reflection on how they, and their teaching practices, have developed. Some have taken this a step further, using the collage as part of an autoethnographic account of their development as teachers (Hunter & O'Brien, 2019). A number have now adopted collage making into their own teaching, as a means of fostering collaboration and group identity formation (Hunter, 2020) with their students.

The transformative outcomes of the collage activity led the author to identify the possibilities of visual autoethnography as a means of capturing and developing the ideas arising from this work. As this research began to take shape, the two authors came together to discuss the potential for a creative autoethnographic activity as the vehicle to explore academic identity within another community: early career academics from a working-class background. From this starting point, Emma Gillaspy developed the project detailed in Case Study 2.

Case Study 2: Fostering Academic Belonging through Conversation

The second case study illustrates how a collaborative autoethnography approach (Chang et al., 2013) can promote belonging in academia. In this empirical research project, seven female educators at the University of Central Lancashire investigated how working-class roots shaped their academic values and identities (Gillaspy et al., 2022). The group followed an iterative cycle of individual and collective multimedia data collection and analysis to build on each other's academic identity stories and create meaning for themselves and the wider academe. The result of this project was not just a clearer sense of individual and collective academic identity but a realization of belonging in academia and a celebration of collaborative 'otherness' from a group of self-identified marginalized academics (Edwards-Smith et al., 2021).

Several elements were critical to the unexpected level of success of this project. This project began with a *call to action*. Each member of the team shared a visceral and personal connection to the theme of working-class academics. As a result, the team who came together to collaborate on this project were highly committed, both to the project itself and to the wider purpose of celebrating voices of underrepresented academic groups (Wilson et al., 2020).

The development of *trust* was critical in this project as has been documented in other collaborative autoethnography research (Lapadat, 2017). Trust created a developmental space where individuals in the team could expose their vulnerabilities without fear of judgement. As a result, the group felt able to share openly their honest reflections and memories, safe in the knowledge that these would not be exposed more widely unless the whole group agreed. This shared understanding and authenticity resulted in deepening both individual and collective reflective and reflexive practice.

Space and time for *storytelling* were created throughout this project which provided valuable insight on both the theory and practice of teaching (Spooner-Lane et al., 2008). Conducted entirely during a pandemic, the group embraced the flexibility of digital tools such as Padlets for data collection which encouraged meaningful reflective practice congruent with the preferences of the individuals in the group. For example, some collaborators chose to create diagrams or reflect using imagery, whilst others recorded video diaries or wrote blogs. Consequently, when the group came together regularly in live online sessions to tell their stories, the multimedia reflections could be articulated in greater depth whilst the rest of the team encouraged, challenged and deepened thinking through the use of open, coaching-style questions (Whitmore, 2017).

The collaborative, holistic and co-coaching approach to *peer support* meant that those new to research felt supported throughout and had a positive first experience of the research and publication process. The outcome of this developmental approach was identification of and increased confidence in individual strengths and authentic academic identities. The project team collaboratively agreed 'We have grown wings in our research and teaching ambitions' (Gillaspy et al., 2022).

Lessons Learnt

A shared interest in collaborative creative activities and autoethnographic approaches brought the two authors together to explore the outcomes of their separate projects. Through collaborative reflection we identified common themes and outcomes. In both activities showcased within this chapter, using creative materials and flexible tools enabled collaborative non-verbal ways of knowing to emerge which are resonant with individual core values and beliefs. Lessons drawn from these experiences include the importance of adopting a flexible approach to working with academics around their identity-formation and thinking carefully about how we can create spaces that allow authentic identities to emerge. In both of these instances, the use of creative and collaborative media has been pivotal and a conduit that has afforded flexibility within the process; this flexibility has then allowed participants to create their own safe space within which they can begin to explore nascent identities.

Academics at any stage of their career, but especially in the early years, often begin from a position of 'deficit' and 'imposter', focusing on what is missing from their skillset or how little they feel like 'proper' academics. This deficit model is unfortunately prevalent across HE within marginalized groups where pressure to assimilate can be the norm (Shukie, 2020). We hope the stories shared in this chapter illustrate that taking a strengths-based 'Appreciative Inquiry' coaching approach through collaborative reflection can build confidence in, and ownership of, academic identity. Working holistically and creatively with groups encourages the identification of congruence, authenticity and individualism in academic identity (Gillaspy, 2020), celebrating the collective strengths of the diverse academe.

Academia is traditionally an individualistic, competitive endeavour which is highly stressful with excessive workloads and multiple competing pressures (Persson, 2017) resulting in escalating poor mental health and staff insecurity (Morrish & Priaulx, 2020). The examples shared in this chapter show that collaborative conversations and creative exchange build academic confidence through surfacing, refining and celebrating the known and unknown aspects of individual and collective academic identity. Collaborating creatively with peers fosters emergent and authentic thoughts and feelings in much-needed 'safe spaces' in high stress environments, deepening support networks and resulting in a stronger sense of belonging to the profession.

Ultimately, this chapter aims to showcase the value of collaborative conversation, creativity and storytelling in the understanding and activation of self. The authors would like to thank all those academics who have worked with us on exploring their academic identities, it has been a pleasure observing their transitionary tales.

Working Together: Reflections on a Non-hierarchical Approach to Collaborative Writing

Karen Welton, Kiu Sum, Victoria Rafferty, Jane Nodder,
Ralitsa Kantcheva, Ian Johnson, Paul Chin,
Silvina Bishopp-Martin and Ed Bickle

The authors are a group of geographically dispersed UK HE Learning Developers interested in research-related topics. Due to Covid-19, the ability to meet in person at the annual 2020 ALDinHE conference was thwarted, resulting in the evolution of a research Virtual Community of Practice (vCoP).

- Collaborative writing offers an opportunity for communities to share ownership of and responsibility for the writing, editing and reviewing process in a democratic, non-hierarchical environment. Such activity can foster the overall growth and development of the community.
- Organizing collaborative writing as a shared, democratic responsibility, without a traditional leader figure, smoothed out concerns among the contributors about their previous writing experience, the validity of their ideas and their written input.
- Writing collaboratively, rather than alone, produced effects on contributors which were akin to participating in a team sport; it spurred individual contributions, encouraged self-selected responsibilities and acted as a safety net.
- The model of collaboration developed by this particular vCoP could be used by other groups to address questions in the changing HE landscape that are relevant to them, and plan activities to strengthen their vCoP's group identity, especially now that technological advances have opened up additional opportunities for communities to engage in collaborative writing for creating scholarly knowledge.

Introduction

The process of writing is a cornerstone for academia, reflecting values such as rigour, critique and engagement (Mountz et al., 2015). Academic writing is typically valorized as an individual endeavour, but with the advancement of technology such as synchronous online writing platforms, opportunities to construct scholarly knowledge collaboratively have multiplied (Nykopp et al., 2019). Collaborative writing (CW) involves 'sharing the responsibility for and the ownership of the entire text produced' (Storch, 2019, 40), factors that have certainly been enhanced by developing technologies. CW differs from cooperative writing, which involves a division of labour with each individual being assigned to, or completing, a discrete sub-task (Storch, 2019).

This chapter discusses the reflections of ten authors from a UK-based research virtual Community of Practice (vCoP) on the challenges and positives encountered during the CW of a research journal article using a shared Google Document.

Literature Review: Collaborative Writing

Existing literature identifies a number of approaches to CW, including: in-sequence writing, in parallel, one-for-all, multi-mode and reaction writing (Lingard, 2021). Although this categorization suggests CW is a multi-modal dynamic process, generally the progression of CW is linear (Lowry et al., 2004). Hynninen (2018) discusses the creation of a series of synchronous writing clinics in order to produce a collaborative academic publication within the field of computer science. Within that group, the research leader assigned specific tasks to colleagues, with more experienced researchers offering comments on the text. Hynninen's (2018) account suggests that their approach combines horizontal and stratified-division writing, where members have particular roles to perform.

In a similar vein, Ness et al. (2014) created a writing group in order to develop a body of academic literature relating to the authors' teaching practices within the field of nursing. Their approach involved the rotation of the first author between members, with each stage of the writing process being distributed evenly. The first author was then responsible for final editing and submission. Similarly, Collett et al. (2020) discussed their experiences of CW for publication; through face-to-face and online writing sessions the three academics shared and rotated roles such as leader, editor, mentor, indicating that such an approach helped with the cohesion of the group.

From the beginning the aspiration of our vCoP was to be democratic with a shared ownership of and responsibility for the whole writing, reviewing, editing and revising process.

Method

The writing of the original article (Bickle et al., 2021) involved a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous writing sessions. The synchronous sessions included live online discussions interspersed with periods of quiet writing. After completing the research article, the authors reflected on their CW journey, via a further synchronous writing session, recording their responses to two provocation questions: Q1. What challenges did the democratic experience of writing collaboratively present for you?; Q2. What were the positive elements of writing collaboratively? Responses from the authors were numbered A1–10 for transparency. The reflections discussed below are from all ten members of this vCoP, but one member self-excluded from this author list, due to competing time commitments.

Evaluating the vCoP Method

Through a meta-reflection, the research vCoP authors identified how the purely non-hierarchical approach they had taken to CW – creating their research journal article with no leading contributor(s) or initial division of writing tasks – had been pivotal to the quality of their experience. The democratic nature of construction evolved organically, enabling the ten authors to have an 'equal say, and all suggestions were carefully considered and discussed' (Q2.A1), thus demonstrating the 'level of respect that was shown for each other's writing – nothing was deleted or changed' (Q2.A3) without consultation between the whole group – either synchronously via verbal discussions, or asynchronously 'via suggestions or comments' (Q2.A3) on the Google Document. Despite the variation in their previous academic writing experiences, this non-hierarchical process enabled the 'opportunity of drawing out the skills and experiences of individuals and seeing how others work when writing the same topic but from a different perspective' (Q2.A6).

One author noted how they 'really felt like part of a team during this collaborative process, and the discussions we had as a group made me feel like I was contributing to the piece as a whole' (Q2.A3), whilst another compared it with 'a team sport […] being spurred on by it [… but also enjoying] the sense of a security net' (Q2.A9).

The non-hierarchical nature also emanated a strong sense of responsibility – 'a personal pressure to complete bits for meetings out of a sense of responsibility to the group' (Q1.A6). There was 'the feeling of not being alone, [and it] sped up the rate at which I did things and wrote – like a team sport not wanting to let others down' (Q2 A7), while also 'knowing that things wouldn't come tumbling down when turning your back onto the project for a bit was really comforting – and very helpful for writing' (Q2.A9). This intentional focus on equitable inclusion built up a high level of trust between the authors with 'everyone's willingness to put their things out there for comment and criticism' (Q2.A7), and a 'general willingness to let people get on with things and give them a try, rather than worrying about what could go wrong beforehand' (Q2.A7).

The 'lack of hierarchy compared, say, with the supervisor/student type relationship' (Q2.A1), and the absence of predetermined roles, such as those noted in the literature above, provided a level playing field that encouraged peer support. One author noted feeling 'very supported when writing as this was a fairly new experience for me and an area which I had requested some mentoring for' (Q2.A3), whilst more experienced writers who were used to having sole ownership of a text found 'let[ting] go of a thought or a text and then see[ing] it in a new light when coming back because others have worked on it in between' (Q2.A9), a very positive aspect of this non-hierarchical CW process. This level of teamwork led to the feeling of never being 'stuck or blocked; there was always someone there to support you and collaborate with' (Q2.A10).

There were some elements of nervousness, which was an interesting phenomenon since many authors were already-experienced and published academic writers; '[I] worr[ied] a lot at the beginning about saying the wrong thing' (Q1.A1); 'scary to

put your own draft work "out there"' (Q1.A5); 'I was apprehensive about the structure of my sentences, the grammar, the spelling, and also what will my writing reveal about me both professionally and personally' (Q1.A9); 'I felt worried about getting things wrong or doing things in a way that did not fit with everyone else's ideas of writing for publication' (Q1.A2). Perhaps these apprehensions occurred due to the act of sharing the writing process, versus the lone-working which is more commonplace in academic writing endeavours (Lowry et al., 2004).

The literature also discusses how CW can foster elements of professional development, such as extending the learners' knowledge of the topic and/or writing process, learning from peers and combining perspectives to ascertain a shared goal (Abrams, 2019; Šuković & Milanović, 2021; Storch, 2019; Thorpe & Garside, 2017). It is clear that the non-hierarchical CW process provided the opportunity for professional development. The vCoP authors reported how it was 'very helpful and insightful to experience the different writing styles of others and opened my views on how I might write in the future' (Q2.A1); 'the different styles of writing and approaches to writing […] was interesting to see, in real time' (Q2.A2); a positive element was 'everyone's writing styles and […] gain[ing] an understanding of what writing for publication entailed from a range of perspectives' (Q2.A3).

Variation in writing styles was also noted as challenging for some of the authors: 'my writing style was quite different to many of the other contributors and I was concerned about this' (Q1.A2); 'merging styles of writing' (Q1.A3); 'how my "voice" fitted with other voices' (Q1.A4); 'getting used to the writing styles of different people' (Q1.A6); 'different styles and approaches to writing' (Q1.A7). Although some expressed concerns about 'how one consistent voice could be achieved for the whole paper' (Q1.A4), and 'how would we be able to agree and move forward' (Q1.A7), such concerns soon disappeared as the true benefits emerged as the 'sense of belonging from the community turn[ed] the perceived challenges into positive experiences' (Q2.A6). These comments might suggest, more widely, the need to carefully consider the purpose, focus and author constitution of collaborations. Such considerations could include not only the different styles of collaborating authors but also the varying norms in different disciplines and academic fields (Lee, 2001). However, as our own group evolved organically from a research group with a mentoring aim, these considerations need not be seen as essential to all CW endeavours.

Conclusion

From our meta-reflection we conclude that a democratic, non-hierarchical environment enhances the effectiveness of collaborative writing activities in a research vCoP, and perhaps more widely for academics across the disciplines who are also committed to co-creating a more humane and democratic HE. The opportunity to present, discuss and evaluate a variety of perspectives, freely and democratically, promotes the truly collaborative nature of both the content creation and the writing processes from start

to finish. Therefore, this chapter evidences the importance of not only seeking out opportunities to collaborate with immediate colleagues but also networking beyond an individual's immediate institutional context in their wider field of academic practice in collaborative writing *per se* and thus also of modelling the opportunities and power provided in collegiality and cooperation. We recommend that any CW endeavours should be undertaken following a democratic and non-hierarchical approach to achieve a truly joint authorship of the co-created text.

Humane Relationships: Reflections on Dialogue and Collaboration in a Foundation Art, Architecture and Design Course

Manuela Barczewski, Keith Beckles and Simone Maier

- The authors' professional practices were bolstered, enhanced and even enabled through the very human relationships that they built as they studied together as students of the PGCert.
- Learning to bond, belong and collaborate in real, human ways enabled the authors to form an authentic Community of Practice (CoP).
- When the pandemic struck, the authors drew on their relationships of trust and human bonds to honestly interrogate their own behaviours, worries and concerns, and this in turn helped to support students and create creative, collaborative Learning & Teaching (L&T) spaces.
- The authors offer a model to their students of how creative practitioners can work collectively to share creative skills, ideas and expertise to democratically develop new knowledge.
- To allow for a CoP to develop, the authors advocate for tutors to have time and spaces in which to learn how to collaborate with each other and develop human relationships that in turn bolstered, enhanced and even enabled their L&T practices.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the importance of the development of human and humane relationships between academic staff and that this needs to be developed consciously in and between staff. We argue that courses for staff development, like our University's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE (PGCert), should model, build and enable collaborative teaching and learning practice. Our PGCert makes space for collaborative practice in action, promoting the power of collegiality and the CoP (Smith, 2009; Wenger-Trayner, 2015) and encouraging staff to experience the process of 'becoming' with each other (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). We outline our own

teaching context and the role that the PGCert played in our collaborative professional and practical development. We make recommendations for collegiate L&T practice via our case study example of our own collaborative practices.

Context

We, the authors of this chapter, teach together at London Metropolitan University's School of Art, Architecture and Design (AAD) to deliver the Level 3 Foundation Course. London Metropolitan University was established as a post-1992 institution (Archer, 2003) and maintains a focus on Education for Social Justice (ESJ) which results in the recruitment of largely non-traditional students with complex backgrounds (Abegglen et al., 2020). Successful completion of the course enables students to progress on to one of seventeen Bachelor of Arts offered by the AAD or to apply to other UKHE art schools. The course thus serves as a 'diagnostic' environment for students, to affirm that their making is 'worthy' of developing and to 'test' which creative discipline they choose to progress in to. Unlike many UKHE courses that are required to focus on employability, our course emphasizes 'belonging', helping students find a 'fit' within the AAD's epistemic community through the validation of prior knowledge and their nascent creative practices.

Developing Humane Relationships

In 2018–20 we, the authors of this chapter, studied together towards our Fellowship of Advance HE (formerly known as the Higher Education Academy) via our PGCert. Removed from the immediate pressures of the L&T environment we had an opportunity to get to know, learn from and collaborate with other members of staff and with each other, thus building humane relationships that recognized and value each other's contributions as part of a collective endeavour. Facilitating Student Learning (FSL), the first module of our PGCert, proved to be a particularly important space in which we were guided to learn with and from each other, the teaching team and the other academic staff attending FSL to cultivate a toolkit of resources that we could use to build positive L&T environments for the collaborative co-construction of knowledge. As participants on the FSL module, we the authors collectively developed our pedagogies while also gaining an understanding and mutual respect for what turned out to be a shared belief in the socially just potential of Arts education. We are now able to offer a model to our students of how creative practitioners can work collectively to share creative skills and develop each other's contributions (Gutiérrez, 2008) to democratically develop new knowledge. As we continue to work together our humane relationships strengthen, providing a source of motivation, and adding to our sense of accomplishment as professionals of a wider academic community.

Based on our experience, it seems possible that other creative academics/professionals may also find value in making space for collaboration and human

connection in their L&T practice, for themselves and their student learners, and thus we outline how we have developed two studio modules of the Foundation art, architecture and design course.

How We Worked Together: Collaborative Practice in Action

Throughout 2020–1 we taught together and worked alongside three more senior colleagues to pivot online the delivery of the Foundation course. Like most UKHE courses during the (Covid-19) lockdowns, we first moved online and then to a blended learning pedagogy. This required us to adjust from campus-based, large studio L&T, to delivering our studio modules first online and then in small face-to-face 'bubbles' supported by a single tutor. Further Covid-19 disruptions in early 2021 necessitated us moving L&T to split delivery, for which some students remained online while others came back onto campus. Two of us continued to deliver the studio-based modules in face-to-face bubbles while one tutor remained online. To help retain confidence in our pedagogies we frequently discussed the delivery of the curriculum under these new conditions, working through the ways that our pedagogic dynamics had been disrupted by the pivot to online and then blended delivery.

We all aim to support active learning spaces in which students can work in partnership with lecturers and peers but found that with the back and forth of online and in-person teaching, studios had become less collaborative and democratic, with the pedagogic hierarchies between staff, and between tutors and students shifting. There was the sense that students required more staff guidance than usual. As tutors, we recognized that online education was curtailing spaces for 'emergence' and 'creative conflicts'. From our collaborative PGCert experience, we knew open discursive spaces to be essential to both the students' educational experience and the maintenance of our own humane relationships. Without space to reflect with each other and thereafter adjust our L&T, the pandemic conditions would have led to a diminished awareness of the importance of collaboration in creative practices. Attempting to address this we frequently had to remind ourselves that the co-construction of knowledge means accepting silences as critical thinking time, both for our students and for ourselves (Giroux, 2010).

Our ongoing collaborative dialogue allowed us to find adequate language (Orr & Shreeve, 2018) to discuss the situation we all found ourselves in, making space for creative ideas to emerge, finding different ways for the students to engage with the L&T. We found that moving online introduced

> blocking, freezing, blurring, jerkiness and out-of-sync audio […] confound perception and scramble subtle social cues. Our brains strain to fill in the gaps and make sense of the disorder, which makes us feel vaguely disturbed, uneasy and tired without quite knowing why.
>
> (Murphy, 2020)

As a CoP we discussed and fundamentally adjusted our teaching approach, introducing additional asynchronous online spaces for use by both the F2F and

online students. Our Padlets and Miro boards allowed students to display work, leave comments, connect, collaborate and develop their creative work with each other and with us. To facilitate the creative exchange, we encouraged peer-to-peer engagement, asking the students to post comments, thoughts and questions to each other to create a sense of belonging as they developed their work in these different settings.

Evaluation: Human Bonds as the Cornerstone of Humane Relationships

Looking back, the pandemic conditions impacted our L&T practice. Moving online, then to a face-to-face and blended studio delivery, made us increasingly aware of the importance of connection to each other and our students. The basis for this built our joint experience as co-educators and co-learners. Our pedagogies evolved through our ongoing dialogic collaboration and the dialogic encounters we facilitated between our students (Bahktin, 1981). We created spaces and places for students to connect and be with each other, to both display, comment upon and validate each other's work. These spaces proved to be successful and have since become an integral part of our ongoing inclusive pedagogy that strives to provide opportunities to both staff and students to think critically, pose problems and engage in a culture of questioning where everyone has a say in the modes of knowledge-claims and identities at play in and across the curriculum. When students are provided with such L&T spaces, there is a surge in energy and a strong sense of collective knowledge fabrication. Conversation – in the context of the powerful trust relationships that we had built in and from FSL – is the best way to respond to and reflect on super-complex L&T challenges. It was through discussion that we came to recognize issues at play in our pandemic practice and together we brainstormed ways to better scaffold students' creative practices in online L&T spaces. As a result of our experiences, we fervently encourage staff to develop their humane relationships as a means to support and sustain their creative L&T practice as they scaffold cooperative learning.

Concluding Recommendations

During the challenges of the past two years, we, the authors, have set aside time to discuss and evaluate our pedagogy and continue to build the bonds and respect between us. As a result of making a space for reflection and collaboration, we have continued to develop the humane relationships that we initially established during professional pedagogic development. Via sharing ideas, knowledge and our different skills, we found ways to create creative, collaborative spaces. As a result of our experiences, we advocate for teaching staff to have time and space to collaborate with each other, to share creative skills to improve the quality of the L&T and ensure an inclusive critical pedagogy in which everyone, tutors and students, has a say in the creation of new knowledge.

Coaching for Collaborative Autonomy: A Reflection on an Inter-university Course

Monika Hřebačková, Martin Štefl, Jana Zvěřinová
and Tanja Vesala-Varttala

- As part of a project focusing on language coaching, a team of European HE teachers and educators organized an online course built around collaboration and co-creation.
- The inter-university course was open to thirty-five international bachelor and master students asking them to produce outputs related to sustainability and product marketing to develop their language and transversal skills online.
- Working in culturally heterogeneous multi-disciplinary student teams presupposes a good deal of collaborative autonomy as well as the ability to give and receive non-directive feedback.
- Reflecting on the collaborative process through Learning Journals and coaching tools facilitated the development of collaborative autonomy and cross-cultural inter-dependent learning.

Introduction

To remain relevant beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, HE institutions need to reflect on their approaches to Digital Education and effectively complement the newly reinvented educational environments. Teaching online does not just change teaching and learning but offers opportunities to transform teachers from transmitters of knowledge into co-creators, facilitating collaborative learning as coaches, mentors and evaluators (Richardson, 2003).

Aiming to fortify collaborative autonomy in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning and teaching, a European team of researchers have been developing interdisciplinary, collaborative, coach-oriented language teaching tools, methods and resources as part of Erasmus+ project CORALL. The CORALL project is a transnational initiative developed as a strategic partnership to support students in becoming effective multi-cultural collaborators, and well-oriented, reflective and inter-dependent learners. It also informs HE teachers on how to harness coaching skills to develop students' autonomous language and transversal skills online, whilst encouraging students' reflection about the learning process (Kleppin & Spänkuch, 2012). This chapter discusses how a team of European HE academics and educators organized an online course built around collaboration and co-creation to develop students' skills such as cross-cultural communication and critical collaborative autonomy.

Coaching and Collaboration

The CORALL project is a cross-European project, with many different partners/partner institutions. The CORALL team organized a nine-week inter-university collaborative course KREA (an abbreviation derived from a Scandinavian word for creativity, *kreativitet*) inviting thirty-five international bachelor and master students to participate. The course was integrated into students' language curricula, offering up to five ECTS credits, and was promoted among the students of partnering universities as a unique opportunity to collaborate and network internationally whilst practising English in a multi-cultural academic/professional community. Interested students were selected based on their motivation letters.

In practice, the course participants collaborated to produce outputs related to sustainability and product marketing. Teams of four to five students were coached by international teacher-coaches who facilitated a dialogue with the intention to involve students in problem solving through effective questioning and listening. The coaches did not give directive feedback but used specific coaching tools – e.g. questioning, mirroring, journaling, framing – to facilitate students' collaborative journey. The teachers came from subjects including marketing, project management, and language teaching, and had been trained as coaches as part of the project. The aim was to develop students' critical collaborative autonomy, defined as the process of 'assuming control of one's language learning within a community' (Myskow et al., 2018, 361), whilst also making them reflect on the collaborative process, and learn from it.

Collaboration as the Cog in the Engine of Team Performance

The course responded to current issues of sustainability and aimed at developing collaboration where students co-constructed meaning as members of a group (Kesser & Bikowski, 2010). Collaboratively, student teams focused on sustainability challenges of chocolate production by co-creating digital marketing solutions (Instagram Story videos) to inspire sustainable consumer purchasing decisions. As the course featured culturally heterogeneous multi-national teams, effective collaboration was of utmost importance.

Although students recognized the importance of collaboration in the co-creation process, some were reluctant in certain circumstances. One of the issues that surfaced was breaking the myth that getting input from people automatically means reaching a consensus. This was addressed by emphasizing that team collaboration is more about pursuing new ways of working and developing ideas and different perspectives to gain better/shared solutions and to learn from one another.

The course supported collaborative behaviour in the strong belief that a team's success or failure at collaborating reflects the philosophy of its leaders (Gratton & Erickshon, 2017). Here the proposition is that professional teams do well when leaders invest in supporting social relationships, demonstrate collaborative behaviour

and create a 'gift culture' in which trainees experience interactions with leaders and colleagues as something valuable and generously offered – a gift.

Below we will focus on strong learning moments that were frequently reflected upon in the participants' Learning Journals and should be of interest to educators planning similar collaborative projects.

Collaboration, Autonomy and Learning Journals

Collaborative learning presupposes some degree of learner autonomy, especially when it comes to the type of autonomy which allows 'speakers' to interact within a group (Myskow et al., 2018). Learning languages involves students in some sort of collaboration, thus here, autonomy in learning does not equal learning individually. Therefore, the course focused on four key principles of collaborative autonomous learning: maximum peer interactions, equal opportunities to participate, individual accountability and positive interdependence. The teacher-coaches helped teams feel comfortable in the culture of their learning environment through socializing, facilitating collaborative choices and observing each other's learning styles. While students examined how to use what they learnt to benefit the team and progress towards their shared goal, stepping beyond individual empowerment was important.

As journaling is generally recognized as an effective coaching tool promoting student autonomy (Langer, 2002; Ning et al., 2011; Veiene et al., 2020), students were encouraged to reflect on their experiences in Learning Journals (LJs), noting their reflection as autonomous learners and as members of a multi-cultural interdisciplinary team. This further scaffolded the sense of a community of learning and underscored the value of collaborative process and team dynamic.

Participants also received multiple rounds of strictly non-directive feedback from their teacher-coaches, further fostering collaborative co-creation and partnering between lecturers and students. Students' LJs thus became a linchpin of collaborative autonomous learning by reflecting, engaging students in observation, speculation and awareness-raising, especially in relation to collaboration and their status as language speakers and learners.

Upon securing an agreement of all involved students, we analysed the challenges reported in the LJs to understand the role of learner autonomy in collaboration within online interdisciplinary teams in more detail. Key findings were shared and discussed with the students during the last course session.

Collaboration and Evaluation

The coaches' experience and the participants' LJs revealed takeaways which are crucial for anyone planning a collaborative project with a constructivist mindset. From the socio-cultural perspective (Oxford, 2003, 2015; Sudhershan, 2012), the students seemed to agree that the experience made them realize that autonomous collaboration

is a complex dynamic process and that the non-directive feedback they received allowed them to reveal and tackle their own attitudes to collaboration, collaborative successes and related frustrations. They also realized that non-directive feedback requires their active reflection in order to help them in their effort – this coaching dialogue needs to be engaged prior to (if possible) and throughout any collaboration. Our experience thus confirms the principles of the multi-disciplinary teaming model (Edmondson & Harvey, 2018, 347–60) which demonstrates that multi-disciplinary collaborations tend to work as a complex adaptive system, allowing collaborators to go beyond traditional systems thinking.

Both students and teacher-coaches learnt that working collaboratively presupposes collaborative autonomy and that bottlenecks emerging in collaborative settings – including shyness to communicate, express thoughts or feelings, and a lack of knowledge and trust in the power of an individual to drive change – can be best mitigated through collaborative effort. Awareness of these bottlenecks is of key importance to educators planning collaborative projects.

To address these issues, teachers planning to work with students collaboratively and/or as coaches need to motivate both individual students and student teams by providing supportive yet non-directive feedback and by encouraging reassuring peer feedback, creating an atmosphere of critical collaborative autonomy 'characterised not by independence but by interdependence' (Little et al., 2002, 7).

To promote collaborative autonomy, teacher-coaches have to clearly frame student/teacher roles and be very clear about what they can and cannot do – not giving directive feedback might surprise many students. However, they should be directive when explaining the conditions and/or rules of the collaboration, for instance, explain what happens if one of the team members drops out or actively encourage peer feedback, but remain strictly non-directive in providing feedback on the students' work. With this sort of clarity, a good deal of frustration on both sides can be avoided. These observations reflect the idea of 'autonomy-supportive teachers', who are ready and able to 'promote intrinsic motivation by understanding learners' perspectives' (Némethová, 2020, 154).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The CORALL project enabled the development of a unique nine-week inter-university collaborative course. The experiences collected throughout the course confirmed that collaborative work in intercultural interdisciplinary teams offers an opportunity to develop co-creativity and collaboratively innovate but also explains common lexis and the accuracy of communication. Making students individually and collaboratively reflect on their intercultural experience means making them aware of and appreciate positive cultural difference: people 'not only know different things, but also know things differently' (Dougherty, 1992, quoted in Edmondson & Harvey, 2018, 352); they may look at the same phenomenon and each see different opportunities and/or challenges. This repeatedly surfaced in project-related discussion groups and the follow-up

findings, including students' LJs. The project findings communicate important implications for educators who wish to embed coaching oriented collaborative autonomous learning in HE teaching during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, emphasizing the social and transformative character of collaborative autonomy, which 'not only transforms individuals, [but] also […] the social situations and structures in which they are participants' (Benson, 1996, 34; see also Benson, 2001).

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