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Collaborative learning in creative writing: A teacher's perspective

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Abstract. This study aims to determine how the impact of collaborative classes on creative writing and how these classes improve students' abilities in achieving learning outcomes. The research question that exposed is how do teachers perceive teaching creative writing through collaborative project. Collaborative learning offers a number of opportunities for students to learn interpersonal skills and character and teamwork by participating in task-oriented learning groups, so that although the content or learning materials continue to develop, collaborative groups are still able to develop various skills that can prepare students to pursue career. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. The primary data in this study were taken from interviews with lecturers in creative writing courses. From the analysis it can be seen that collaborative learning engages all students from diverse backgrounds personally and actively, inviting each individual to contribute knowledge and perspectives to the world of education from their own unique lives and also from their academic and vocational experiences.

Keywords. collaborative learning, learning outcomes, creative writing

Introduction

Collaborative learning still attracts attention because it includes several main focuses related to the development of student learning. Meaningful and lasting learning will occur through personal and active involvement. Students must construct their own thinking through a process of assimilation of information into their understanding. The advantages of collaborative learning are clear when compared to more traditional methods, such as lectures and large group discussions, where usually only a few students can participate.

Unlike in traditional lectures, in which students are usually treated as a single, passive, and unified entity, collaborative learning emphasizes on building meaning by students from social processes that are based on the learning context. This collaborative method goes further and deeper than just being cooperative. The basis of the collaborative method is interactional theory which views learning as a process of building meaning through social interaction

According to Vygotsky's interactional theory, the interaction process takes place in two stages, namely social interaction and internalization. Each actor of social interaction experiences a process of personal meaning, and in social interaction there is mutual influence

between these personal processes so that a mutually accepted meaning is formed. Yackel & Cobb call this process interactive meaning formation (Thobroni, 2016).

Based on Vygotsky's view above, collaborative learning means learning through group work, not learning by working alone. Collaborating means working together with others. Collaborative learning means students work in pairs or in small groups to achieve shared learning goals (BARKLEY et al., 2005). One of the collaborative learning implemented in the English literature study program at Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya is creative writing course. This course is a compulsory course. This course aims accommodate and foster student interest in the field of literary creative writing as well as hone their skills in that field so that they are able to write various types of creative works. This ability is then expected to become one of the life skills possessed by students, including skills as a professional writer. The field of creative writing is broad and does not only concern literature. Not only fiction, but also nonfiction.

From the description above the research question that proposed is how do teachers perceive teaching creative writing through collaborative project. Align with the research question, the theory that will be used is John Dewey Theory of learning by doing. John Dewey (Williams, 2017) stated that students or other persons who are learning must experience reality as it is. From John Dewey's educational point of view, this means that students must adapt to their environment in order to learn.

According to John Dewey (Williams, 2017), progressivism is a forward-oriented philosophical school that positions humans (students) as one of the educational subjects who have the provisions and potential for self-development and have the ability to solve various problems they face. In addition, John Dewey also views that the school is a small community environment, which is a reflection of the school. This is a form of prudence in school management towards the community. At least the school is not just an "ivory tower" that soars far above society. Schools and communities should interact positively with each other. This view needs to be firmly held along with the hope to make it happen. Although in reality it is not merely the result of a literal translation (Barnadib, 1994).

On the other hand, progressivism is a translation in terms of education which is associated with an orientation in the early stages of the emergence of a technological society in America (Barnadib, 1994) (Barnadib, 1994: 80). Dewey once wrote about progressivism education that education requires a philosophy of education based on a philosophy of experience. Dewey alludes to a unified series of experiences. The unity of this series of experiences has two important aspects for education, namely: a) the continuing relationship between the individual and society; b) the continuing relationship between thought and thing. In this case Dewey is in line with Plato, that no individual or society can be separated from one another. Even the mind cannot be separated from mental activity and experience

The continuing relationship between thought and thing is translated into project-based learning. Project-based learning (PBL) is a [student-centered pedagogy](#) that involves a dynamic classroom approach in which it is believed that students acquire a deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems. Thomas Markham describes project-based learning (PBL) thus: "PBL integrates knowing and doing. Students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum, but also apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter. PBL students take advantage of digital tools to produce high quality, collaborative products. PBL refocuses education on the student, not the curriculum—a shift mandated by the global world, which rewards intangible assets such as drive, passion, creativity,

empathy, and resiliency. These cannot be taught out of a textbook, but must be activated through experience."(Markham, 2011)

Blumenfeld et al. elaborate on the processes of PBL: "Project-based learning is a comprehensive perspective focused on teaching by engaging students in investigation. Within this framework, students pursue solutions to nontrivial problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artifacts"(Blumenfeld et al., 1991). The basis of PBL lies in the authenticity or real-life application of the research. Students working as a team are given a "driving question" to respond to or answer, then directed to create an artifact (or artifacts) to present their gained knowledge. Artifacts may include a variety of media such as writings, art, drawings, three-dimensional representations, videos, photography, or technology-based presentations. Proponents of project-based learning cite numerous benefits to the implementation of its strategies in the classroom – including a greater depth of understanding of concepts, broader knowledge base, improved communication and interpersonal/social skills, enhanced [leadership](#) skills, increased [creativity](#), and improved writing skills

Methods

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. Qualitative research methods are concerned with opinions, feelings and experiences. The primary data in this study were taken from interviews with three lecturers in creative writing courses. As Pariyanto(Pariyanto & Pradipta, 2020) said that employs the interview question help the researchers to find out the experiences and teacher perceived. The characteristics of lectures are used interchangeably. This study was conducted to understand teachers' perception regarding collaborative project in creative writing course.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the present study, exploring teachers' perspectives of collaborative project in creative writing, are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Teachers' Perspectives of Collaborative Project in Creative Writing Subject

No	Teachers' Perspectives
1	Collaborative project fosters student engagement
2	Collaborative project allows students to develop creativity, perspective, and innovation
3	Collaborative project encourages student higher order thinking skills
4	Collaborative project allows students to learn from each other
5	Collaborative project encourages student to complete the task faster

As can be seen from Table 1, the teachers see that collaborative project in creative writing course foster student engagement, allows students to develop creativity, perspective, and innovation, encourages student higher order thinking skills, allows students to learn from each other, and encourages students to complete the task faster.

Collaborative project fosters student engagement

The three lecturers interviewed believe that collaborative project foster student engagement. When asked about what they think about collaborative project they assigned to

students, they synonymously responded “*mahasiswa cenderung terlibat aktif dalam pembuatan narasi cerita rakyat saat mereka diberi tugas melalui proyek kolaboratif ini* (students tend to actively engage in writing narratives of folktale when they were given a task through collaborative projects)”. Further discussion in the interview is shown in the following extract.

Researcher: *bagaimana mahasiswa terlibat aktif dalam tugas membuat cerita rakyat?* (how were students engaged in the task?)

Participant: *mereka saling berkontribusi dalam menyusun cerita, menyumbang ide agar ceritanya tersusun dengan baik* (they contribute to story writing, sharing ideas to make the story readable)

Collaborative project allows student to develop creativity, perspective, and innovation

In the interview, the teacher also sees that collaborative project allows students to develop creativity, perspective, and innovation. The extract below indicates such statements.

Researcher: *bagaimana bapak melihat pembelajaran proyek kolaboratif dalam mata kuliah creative writing?* (How do you think of the collaborative project in creative writing course that you teach?)

Participant: *pembelajaran proyek kolaboratif pada mata kuliah creative writing dapat mengembangkan kreativitas, pola pandang, dan inovasi mahasiswa tentunya* (collaborative project in creative writing course develops students’ creativity, perspective, and innovation for sure)

Researcher: *bagaimana bisa, bapak?* (How can it be?)

Participant: *ya, dengan bediskusi dengan temannya, ide-ide kreatif mereka muncul untuk membuat sebuah cerita yang menarik. Pola pikirnya semakin luas karena saling tukar gagasan dan hasilnya sebuah inovasi cerita yang enak dibaca* (well, through discussion with their peers, their creative ideas appear to make more interesting story. Their perspective is more multidimensional as a result of sharing opinions and therefore the students’ written work tends to be innovative.

Collaborative project encourages student higher order thinking skills

In addition, the teacher claims that collaborative project encourages student higher order thinking skills when asked about collaborative project in creative writing course. The following conversation confirms this claim.

Researcher: *seperti apa ibu melihat proyek kolaboratif di dalam mata kuliah creative writing?* (how do you see the collaborative project in creative writing course?)

Participant: *saya kira proyek kolaboratif dalam mata kuliah creative writing dapat mendorong pemikiran tingkat tinggi pada diri mahasiswa* (I think collaborative project in creative writing course help student to think more critically)

Researcher: *contohnya?* (for example?)

Participant: *mahasiswa berpikir lebih kritis saat menemukan sebuah alur cerita yang kurang nyambung dan membuatnya lebih menarik serta masuk akal* (students think more critically when they meet an un-structured plot of a story and make it more engaging and make sense)

Collaborative project allows students to learn from each other

The response of the teachers in the interview also indicate that teachers perceived collaborative project to help students learn from each other. Such perception can be seen in the following conversation.

Researcher: *bagaimana menurut ibu terkait proyek kolaboratif pada mata kuliah creative writing?* (how do you view collaborative project in creative writing class?)

Participant: *proyek kolaboratif pada mata kuliah creative writing saya kira dapat membantu mahasiswa belajar satu sama lain karena setiap diri mahasiswa memiliki pemikiran yang berbeda, khususnya dalam merangkai dan mengembangkan sebuah cerita* (as far as I am concerned, collaborative project in creative writing class helps students to learn form each other since each individual has distinctive thoughts, especially in arranging and developing a story).

Collaborative project encourages students to complete the task faster

Another response that the teachers provided in the interview is collaborative project encourages students to complete the task faster. The extract below shows the interview implying such perception.

Researcher: *Bagaimana bapak melihat proyek kolaboratif dalam perkuliahan creative writing?* (How do you see collaborative project in creative writing course)

Participant: *proyek kolaboratif pada mata kuliah creative writing mendorong mahasiswa menyelesaikan tugasnya lebih cepat* (collaborative project in creative writing course encourages students to complete the task faster)

Researcher: *kok bisa lebih cepat, Pak?* (how come?)

Participant: *iya, kalau mengerjakan tugas sendiri mahasiswa sering bilang idenya buntu karena tidak ada teman untuk diskusi. Akhirnya pekerjaannya juga agak lama. Kalau berkelompok, mereka ada teman diskusi sehingga dapat menyelesaikan tugasnya lebih cepat* (well, when doing the task alone, the students claim that they often get stuck and have no idea because no one to discuss with. As a consequence, the task completed a bit longer. When doing the task in group, the students tend to complete it faster as they have friends to discuss)

The findings of the present study are in line with the previous research by Ashton-Hay and Pillay(Ashton-hay & Pillay, 2010), suggesting that collaborative learning in general promotes greater achievement of the students. Ashton-Hay and Pillay(Ashton-hay & Pillay, 2010) contend that collaboration results in several learning outcomes as “social skill development, confidence, speaking fluency, diagnostic feedback, intensified collaboration, engagement, multidimensional learning, fun and enjoyment, creativity, challenge, responsibility, higher order thinking, civic skills, tolerance, leadership and greater self-efficacy”. Theoretically, the collaborative learning refers to Vygotsky’s zone proximal development as shown in Figure 1 below:

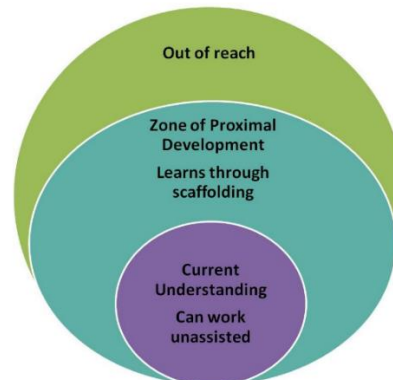


Figure 1. Vygotsky' Zone Proximal Development (1978)

The figure offers an operational view of the learners' actual level of development and a measure of emerging and imminent development. In the context of collaborative project in creative writing in this study, the learners learn from each other to construct more appealing stories of the folktale assigned in the project. The participants in this study acknowledge five merits of collaborative projects on students' academic achievements.

Conclusion

To conclude, the present study uncovers the perceptions of teachers regarding collaborative project in creative writing course. The finding show that teachers perceived collaborative project fosters student engagement, allows students to develop creativity, perspective, and innovation, encourages student higher order thinking skills, allows students to learn from each other, and encourages students to complete the task faster.

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to other learning contexts. Therefore, further studies are required to confirm this finding. Collaborative project with different subject study and with different learners' characteristics may be recommended for future research.

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