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A Self-Study of Factors Affecting Success in Two Collaborations on the Teaching of Social Justice

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This paper describes a self-study of two collaborations. The first collaboration focused on an attempt to study the teaching of social justice issues to pre-service student teachers. The second collaboration was an attempt to understand why the first collaboration was only partially successful. The study charts the process of collaboration over two years. The methodology is highly reflective, depending primarily on sources that were seen as being significant in retrospect rather than collected with a sense of purpose. Data include emails, conversations noted at the time or remembered, notes made of discussions at conference presentations, and reflective journal entries. Conclusions are drawn with significance beyond this self-study. They include clarification of the nature of collaboration and the parts played by the role and personality of the collaborators, factors to be taken into account for success, reasons for collaboration, and the importance of focusing on the self who is inviting or persuading others to collaborate rather than on anyone else. Presented as a narrative in dialogic form, the paper demonstrates the growth of understanding over the period of the self-study and illustrates the development of one kind of collaboration among congenial colleagues.

This is a self-study of collaboration. It arises from an attempt by two researchers to collaborate on the study of the teaching of social justice issues to pre-service student teachers. Morwenna was teaching on the course with three colleagues; Dina was a researcher in the faculty. There were two collaborations: The first and less successful collaboration was between Morwenna and the other tutors teaching on the course; the second and more successful collaboration was between Morwenna and Dina, the co-authors of this paper.

Morwenna tried to make the self-study collaborative because of her view of the place of collaboration within both knowledge construction and social action, and because of her personal commitment to social justice. A range of reasons for

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developing a partnership or collaboration is discussed in Griffiths (2000). They include the epistemological, the ethico-political, and the pragmatic. The first two of these are significant for self-study. Bodone, Guðjónsdóttir, and Dalmau (2004) begin their useful overview of collaboration in self-study with the following observation:

Self-study research is situated within the discourses of the social construction of knowledge, reflective practice and action for social change. The strong presence of collaboration in the practice of self-study of teacher education is a natural response to this ethical and theoretical location. (p. 743)

Similarly, Beck, Freese, and Kosnik (2004, p. 1261) discuss the self-study paradigm, contrasting its “personal-constructivist-collaborative approach” with a “technical-transmission approach.” Within self-study itself, a lively debate continues about whether collaboration is essential to self-study or only congenial to it. That debate has not yet been resolved. For instance, Korthagen and Lunenberg (2004, p. 443) include the following guideline for quality in self-studies: “It is important to realise both the value of individually oriented self-studies and more collaborative studies and their interrelationships.” Whether it is essential or only congenial, successful collaboration is highly significant within self-study.

For Morwenna, collaboration is especially significant because it is itself a social justice issue; achieving justice always involves collaboration at some point. As argued in Griffiths (2003), action for social justice includes collaboration, partnership, and co-operation, even among those who disagree. Collaborative research is characteristic of self-studies that have focused on social justice and diversity (Abt-Perkins, Dale, & Hauschildt, 1998; Guidry & Corbett-Whittier, 2000; Johnston, Summers-Eskridge, Thomas, & Lee, 2002; LaBoskey, Davies-Samway, & Garcia, 1998). Reasons for this can be found both within some paradigms of self-study and within approaches to social justice and diversity.

Bodone et al. (2004) comment on how little attention has been paid to the issue of collaboration in self-study in spite of its pervasiveness among self-studies. Among those few studies of collaboration, only some are concerned, as our study is, with relationships among co-researchers. Some are concerned with, for instance, the “critical other,” that is, the collective voices from their intellectual and emotional histories (Hamilton, 2002; Loughran & Northfield, 1998). Others investigate how their collaborative professional relationships can inform and affect their own individual research; Johnston et al., 2002).

Our self-study focuses entirely on collaboration with others. We were helped and inspired by the fascinating dialogic studies of collaboration by Johnston with the Educators for Collaborative Change (1997) and by Clift, Allard, Quinlan, and Chubbock (2000). The self-study described in this paper explores some of the reasons why collaboration works and why it fails, even when personal and professional relationships are seen as being first-rate. It will be seen that, at the start, Dina had a very small role in the study; her role grew as the study progressed. Morwenna had expected the study to be collaborative between herself and the other tutors

on the module. Instead, the collaboration with Dina assumed an increasing importance over time. Dina had not expected to do more than contribute a modest amount of data to somebody else's research. Instead, as time passed, she found herself increasingly involved in a piece of collaborative research. The paper explores some of the reasons for these occurrences.

The form of the paper is dialogical. Some sections are written by both authors together, like this one. Some are written individually and in those we use the first person. This is a collaborative form in itself: the perspective of each of the co-authors is presented, each in response to the other. Both Johnston et al. (1997) and Clift et al. (2000) use dialogic forms in their explorations of collaboration. The dialogic form is powerful in two ways. Firstly, it is highly personal: the self of each author is expressed. Secondly, it illuminates some of the differences between consensus and collaboration because it demonstrates how a successful, fruitful collaboration can come about even when the individuals involved have different perspectives. As Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, and Placier (2004) claim in their discussions of dialogic approaches, central to the nature of dialogue is the dilemma of reaching consensus or truth in contrast with embracing multiple interpretations. In our dialogue we hope to show one small example of a resolution of this dilemma.

Beginnings (Morwenna)

This self-study focuses on two collaborations: my attempt to collaborate with three other tutors in researching a module that I co-taught with them, and the growing collaboration between Dina and myself during the research. This self-study, the "Collaborations Self-study," arose out of another self-study, the "Diversity Self-study." The latter study came about as a result of a semi-formal discussion at the Herstmonceux Castle Self-Study Conference in 2002 about the paucity of self-studies related to diversity. Possible reasons for this are discussed in Griffiths, Bass, Johnston, and Perselli (2004). As Schulte (2004, p. 736) later commented, "there is a dearth of teacher educator self studies in mainstream teacher education journals, and even fewer that deal with issues directly related to the issues of multicultural education." The group discussed how there are never any easy answers to questions related to social justice and diversity. Moreover, they often show the researchers' uncomfortable truths about their own collusions in injustice. The issues concern deeply held values and can be uncomfortable and unsettling to confront, yet dealing with them requires such a confrontation.

I felt I had to take this discussion seriously in my own professional life. Accordingly, I decided to investigate my own part in co-tutoring a 10-week module that teaches issues of diversity to 100 pre-service student teachers who were organised into four seminar groups. The module was organised as a kind of carousel. As well as two plenary sessions, each of the four tutors taught each seminar group for two weeks. The four topics were Disaffection/Emotional and behavioural difficulties, Inclusion and complex needs, Inclusion and race, and Diversity/equality/self-esteem. The last of these was my teaching topic. I hoped to involve my co-tutors in the Diversity

Self-study because, as I argued earlier, action for social justice needs to be collaborative. Elsewhere I have argued that research for social justice should follow principles of working collaboratively and inclusively (Griffiths, 1998).

My research question for the Diversity Self-study was “What effect did our teaching have on the students?” For me, the most important question about such a module is the long-term effect it has on the students’ future behaviour. It matters if students learn about their roles related to social justice. It matters that they learn about them in such a way that they are likely to improve matters once they are in school. It would be unfortunate, to say the least, if such teaching had the opposite effect to that intended: if it had the effect of hardening racist, sexist, or class attitudes, or if it induced a paralysing guilt, for example. The dilemma is stark. Doing nothing will, at best, not improve matters, while doing something may improve matters or it may make them worse.

My Diversity research question is a difficult one to answer. The effects of teaching about inclusion and injustice are hard to ascertain. The kind of knowledge gained is wisdom and understanding, rather than information (Griffiths, 1998; Lyotard, 1984), so it cannot be measured easily. Moreover, it is notoriously difficult to measure the long-term effect of teaching. There are many reasons why such longitudinal studies are difficult to carry out. Gaine (2001) offers one of the few examples related to teacher education for social justice.

During the first year, the Diversity question was explored using thematic analysis of various sources of data, including anonymous questionnaires with open questions, notes taken while marking, taped focus group discussions and individual interviews with students. The first two of these data sets were collected in Morwenna’s classes. Dina carried out the focus group discussions and individual interviews. The standard module evaluations filled out by all students were also photocopied and analysed.

While the Diversity Self-study had some success over 2 years, as described in Griffiths and Poursanidou (2004), it was not carried through collaboratively with the other tutors. Indeed, the success was limited precisely because, in the midst of carrying out the self-study, a problem emerged about a lack of collaboration. It is this problem that provides the research question of the Collaborations Self-study reported in this paper: How can I work collaboratively with colleagues in investigating our own collusions and resistances with respect to injustice?

The First Year: Hoping to collaborate (Morwenna)

It was a pleasure and a privilege to work with the other three tutors, Xena, Fodeh and Eric (pseudonyms). We were not homogeneous in respect of race, gender, social class, age, career path, or experience of university teaching. I found my colleagues to be hard-working and easy to get along with. Moreover, they are extremely competent in the area they taught on this module and they were committed to what they were teaching. None of us had been drafted in to make up the numbers; we were all glad to be teaching on the module. At the same time, all four of us were subject to all the usual academic pressures, particularly that of time. We were also subject to the usual

inspection regimes, policy turbulence, university funding crises, and continual restructuring that is part of the landscape of teacher education in England.

I began with the research question for the Diversity Self-study but I had no preconceived ideas about how to carry it out. I tentatively raised the possibility of carrying out such a study with the module leader, Xena, before the first team meeting in the autumn term. She suggested that I present the idea at the first team meeting, which I did. Unfortunately, this discussion was not tape-recorded, because it was a preliminary discussion about the very possibility of doing the research. Since then, the conversation has assumed importance in investigating the research question of the Collaborations Self-study, but necessarily I have to rely on a less than perfect memory of the occasion. As I recall, none of the other three tutors was familiar with “self-study” as a term, though all of us had been involved in action research in some capacity. My colleagues were unwilling to allow any observations in their classrooms, whether or not it was mutual, and they did not wish to carry out any data gathering, other than the regulation end-of-module evaluation, regardless of who would analyse the results. We agreed that I should study my own practice and that I would attempt to find a source of funding so as to get outside help for data gathering. No one wanted to gather data personally. Fortunately, funding became available from within the university and I approached Dina to see if she would be willing to undertake some focus group interviews with volunteer students from the module. Dina was especially suitable because she had never taught these students, and thus they would not perceive her as having an influence over their grades. She would also be able to keep their identities entirely confidential. She agreed, and thus began, so easily that I barely noticed it, my collaboration with Dina.

During the module, I discussed with Xena, as module leader, the processes of data gathering and early indications of how students were reacting. At the end of the module, when data gathering was complete, the two of us set up a meeting to discuss what had been learned. She was very interested both in what had gone well and in what had gone less well. However, I had hardly any informal discussions about the progress of the module or the study, either with her or with the other tutors. Part of the reason that informal discussions did not happen was because I only rarely saw either Xena or Fodeh, who worked in a different building. Although I visited that building regularly, my visits never seemed to occur when they were around, and both of them had very heavy teaching schedules. The third tutor, Eric, I saw fairly often, but there was always a great deal to discuss in relation to other aspects of our jobs. In contrast, I had many discussions about the research with Dina. It was very easy for me to talk to her because her office was near mine, and we often had lunch at the same time in the common room.

The First Year: Becoming involved in the Diversity Self-study (Dina)

My involvement in the Diversity Self-study began while I was employed as a Research Fellow at the Faculty of Education in Nottingham Trent University in 2003. I was a complete outsider to the Professional Studies module that the Diversity Self-study

sought to evaluate, in the sense that I never taught the students on that module, nor was I involved in their assessment. Nevertheless, it is essential to note here that I did know the four tutors teaching on the module, two of them considerably better than the other two. I was based in the Education Research Unit with Morwenna and I was co-teaching with her on a Research Methodology course for MPhil/PhD students at the Faculty of Education. As a result, after almost 3 years of working together, I had already formed a close professional relationship with her. In addition, I had been working closely with Eric for nearly 3 years in my capacity as a Research Fellow. Hence, even though I was a complete outsider to the module that I was asked to help evaluate, it was inevitable that I entered the evaluation with certain preconceptions, personal beliefs, and perspectives on the four tutors teaching on the module.

Between March and June 2003, I carried out evaluative focus group discussions and individual interviews with a number of students on the Professional Studies module, which were tape-recorded. The participants were provided with the appropriate assurances of confidentiality and anonymity as regards the handling of the (group and individual) interview material. I believe that my outsider (outsider to the module) status was a determining factor in enabling the students to trust my assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. I believe that such trust manifested itself very clearly in the honesty that characterised the occasional voicing of critical/unfavourable views about the module and some of the tutors themselves (mainly about those tutors' teaching styles) by some students—albeit only a very small number of them. Lastly, it is essential to note here that all the transcripts generated from my discussions with the students were totally anonymous (both students' and tutors' names were removed) before they were made available to Morwenna, who, in turn, shared them with Xena. Tutors were given the opportunity to identify themselves but only Morwenna took up the offer.

After the First Year: A new research question emerges

At the end of the first year of the Diversity Self-study, the results were presented at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) in Germany and at the Collaborative Action Research Conference (CARN) in England. Morwenna had hoped to write the papers with the other tutors but eventually realised that this was not going to happen. Dina, on the other hand, was keen to write and had produced so much rich data that it made sense for her to contribute. We wrote the papers together, with Dina contributing the section on the focus groups.

Before presenting them, we sent the conference papers, including comments on the lack of collaboration, to the three other tutors. However, there was virtually no discussion of the method or of the findings with any of the other three members of the team, despite their being invited to do so in a one-to-one conversation and despite their saying that they had read the full conference paper and knew it was to be presented at international conferences.

We presented the papers together, and there were lively discussions at both conferences about the first year's findings. Again, these were noted rather than taped.

The discussion at the ECER Conference focused mainly on the difficulties and challenges inherent in researching the longer-term impact that a module covering social justice issues has on the students. In contrast, the discussion at the CARN Conference centred on the difficulties that Morwenna had in developing collaborative work with the other three tutors in the context of the Diversity Self-study. Several members of the audience at the CARN Conference suggested that the other three tutors might have found the Diversity Self-study threatening, as they might have feared that a study of that sort might expose inadequacies on their part about their ability and commitment as teachers or their knowledge of the subjects they were teaching. We both felt that none of this was true of the tutors in question. The discussion at the CARN Conference proved crucial, as it was there that the research question of the Collaborations Self-study reported in this paper began to emerge as particularly important to us.

By the end of the first year of the Diversity Self-study, all that could be said was that Morwenna had not managed to develop any real collaborative work with the team. We still had no convincing explanations. Why is collaboration and self-study related to social justice so difficult? Why was this true with reference to colleagues as excellent as these tutors, who are committed, hard-working and fun to be with? Perhaps it was just that they were very busy. Perhaps they did not realise that such a study might yield some useful conclusions. Or was there something more fundamental? We remained baffled.

We hoped that it would be possible to find out more during the following year. Morwenna's immediate strategy was to put into practice some of the suggestions that had come out of the conference discussions. She decided to make another attempt to ask the others for their perspectives. She also decided to carry out a self-study focused on her own practice and, again, to invite the others to contribute.

A New Research Question at the Start of the Second Year (Morwenna)

In December 2003, Xena scheduled a meeting for the tutors in order to discuss the module, prior to its starting again in January 2004. I asked her if I could raise the issue of the Diversity Self-study at that meeting and she readily agreed. Thus the business of the meeting was twofold: the details of organisation and the self-study. There were to be five tutors instead of the original four, because the number of students had increased. Two of them were to be new to the module because Eric was unavailable for teaching that year. However, only three of us, Xena, Fodeh and I, were able to attend the meeting because of the time commitments all tutors were facing. Xena had already worked out how to deal with the increased numbers of students and tutors, so the first part of the meeting passed quickly.

The second part of the meeting began by considering collaboration and the Diversity Self-study. Meetings of the three participants are normally friendly, respectful, and full of laughter. However, the beginning of the conversation, when I introduced the question of collaboration, was sticky and uncomfortable. It was marked by long pauses and by changes of subject. During the conversation, I raised

the question of the research several times, but the other two did not take it up, except that there was some small exploration of whether the question of longer-term impact was a concern, compared with the immediate feeling of success during the module itself. At the end Xena asked me if I would be doing similar research again, saying that it would be good if I did. The discussion about collaboration was difficult, but that was not true of the discussion about how to improve the module as a result of the findings of the Diversity Self-study. As conversation turned to a discussion of these changes to the module, the mood changed entirely. It became a laughing, animated discussion about the proposed changes. Trying to remain optimistic, I transcribed the tape-recording of this conversation and sent it to the other two tutors and to Dina:

Here is the transcription of the tape I made of the three of us discussing the module just before Christmas. If you want a copy of the original recording, let me know. It's not thoroughly edited. I've just done a rough spell check. I haven't even read it through yet. I found it rather cheering and inspiring. If any of you have any comments, I'd be very interested.

Fodeh did not reply at all. Xena replied very briefly, as follows:

Hello Mo. Thanks. Hee hee! Didn't know I said so much? Fodeh was a bit quiet though. I feel so embarrassed ... Am I really that dramatic about things? Do I ever finish a sentence? It's funny seeing what you have said written down. Why was it cheering? Was it because we care so much and want to get it right?

In my reply I focused only on the second part of the conversation, where it had been easy:

Because yes, what you said. Because it looked as if doing all that hard work on the self-study was worthwhile in changing something and knowing why. Because it was such a co-operative conversation. I think one of the reasons that none of us is good at finishing sentences is that we know the others know what we mean, and we want to leave room for them to talk. Some of the sentences that look definite sound much more tentative on the tape.

Dina sent me a long thoughtful reply which she discusses in the next section. I designed a second cycle of the Diversity Self-study very much focused on my own practice and I invited the others to join in. The only response was from one of the new tutors, who was a part-time person just beginning her first foray into teaching in a university.

Reflections on the Collaboration of the Four Tutors (Dina)

The reflections and perceptions of the collaboration between the tutors in the context of the Diversity Self-study presented here are based on my reading and, consequently, my subjective interpretations of the confidential transcript of the discussion between Morwenna, Xena, and Fodeh during the module team meeting in December 2003.

Morwenna sent me the transcript to comment on in February 2004 and she said she found my comments very helpful. The following passage is part of what I wrote to her in an email:

What struck me most while reading the transcript is what I perceive as the two tutors' avoidance of and resistance to discussing/exploring the issue of collaboration between the tutors in the context of the Diversity Self-study. It goes without saying that the comments below reflect my impressions and subjective interpretations of the relevant extracts of the transcript (i.e., I may be wrong!).

Fodeh's response to your first attempt to address the issue of collaboration between the tutors in the context of the Diversity Self-study seems to be making a joke out of it, which could be interpreted as avoidance/resistance. Furthermore, there seems to be a long pause (documented on the transcript) following your statement, "I wondered if you would mind what I put there," i.e., what you put in the Diversity Self-study conference paper in relation to the issue of collaboration. Neither Fodeh nor Xena appear willing to comment on your statement or ask you, for example, how you would have liked them to collaborate more with you.

There seems to be a similar response on the two tutors' part to your second attempt to address the issue of collaboration between the tutors. You talked about the difficulty of "dealing with colleagues," saying that "it's hard enough dealing with colleagues who you feel you can learn from." However, neither Fodeh nor Xena appear to be willing to explore the issue further (i.e., they do not appear to pick it up at all).

Interestingly, later on during the discussion, Fodeh seems to challenge your claim that the other tutors "did not wish to carry out any data gathering" (citing the Diversity Self-study conference paper) [by describing it] as "non accurate." He maintains that they did gather data as they got students' feedback through the formal, written module evaluation. Furthermore, he does not appear to be interested in exploring further what you meant by "[collaboration] in extra data gathering;" for example, he did not ask you what you meant by "extra data gathering". His attitude in that instance could be interpreted as defensive and avoiding of the issue of collaboration in extra data gathering. Similarly, Xena did not make any comment on the issue of collaboration in extra data gathering; she appears to bypass the issue altogether (avoidance/resistance?) and went on to ask you what you regarded as the key issues in managing/running the module.

I felt that your position was particularly difficult when you attempted to address the issue of collaboration between the tutors in the context of the Diversity Self-study and the challenges involved. Given the two tutors' apparent avoidance and resistance (my impression), I thought that you were being defensive (?), constantly emphasising that you were being "questioning" rather than critical, as well as emphasising that you rated the other two tutors very highly (they were "a particularly good group of colleagues"). I suppose the highly sensitive nature of the issue necessitated this kind of defensiveness (?) on your part.

Two Collaborations, Not Just One (Morwenna)

In the second year I slowly came to see that there were two collaborations, not just one. One was the problematic one and was the focus of my attention. The other was with Dina, but it was such an easy relationship that I barely noticed it *as* a collaboration. We sent the paper we had given at CARN to a journal and it was

rejected because the referees were confused about whether the collaboration we were talking about was between the co-authors or between the tutors. At the time, we were irritated, thinking the referees had not read the paper properly. All through the year, I continued with the self-study of my own teaching. However, there was still no move on the part of the other tutors to join in, except for several informal conversations with one of the new tutors who had expressed an interest. I continued to collaborate with Dina, even though she was no longer officially part of the project because the funding had stopped. Our collaboration continued even though she got a new job at Christmas and was no longer on the same campus.

In our joint paper for the Herstmonceux Castle Self-Study Conference in 2004, we focused on the Diversity Self-study, including the collaboration between me and the other tutors. I continued not to notice the fact that the collaboration between Dina and myself was a research collaboration that was not only working, but also developing and growing. It was only at the very end of the year, when we were thinking about how to present the paper at the conference, that I remembered the journal referees' comments and wanted to ensure that the audience did not assume that the collaboration in question was the collaboration with Dina.

Reflections on My Collaboration with Morwenna (Dina)

My collaboration with Morwenna in the context of the Diversity Self-study worked quite well. The fact that I had already formed a close professional relationship with her over almost 3 years of working together (see above) constituted a critical factor that made our collaboration feel effortless and unproblematic to me. I feel that I functioned as a critical friend for Morwenna throughout my involvement in the first cycle of the Diversity Self-study (2003). Nevertheless, it is essential to note here that I was also very aware of the differences of status and in level of experience between Morwenna and myself, with Morwenna being a Research Professor and myself being a junior researcher. Such differences, however, did not seem to hinder our collaboration.

Throughout my involvement in the first cycle of the Diversity Self-study, Morwenna and I had long conversations about a range of issues. For example, we collaboratively decided on the questions and areas that my focus group discussions with the students were to explore and we discussed at length what we perceived as resistance to participation in the Diversity self-study expressed by some students in Morwenna's seminar groups. Furthermore, I shared with Morwenna some of the themes and issues that had emerged in my discussions with the students, while being particularly vigilant to remain true to the assurances of confidentiality and anonymity that I had provided to the students. Most importantly, we discussed the fact that the other three tutors on the Professional Studies module had not been at all keen to participate in the Diversity Self-study. We felt that Morwenna had not managed to develop any real collaborative work with those tutors in the context of the Diversity Self-study, even though the tutors in question were colleagues for whose commitment, passion, and integrity Morwenna and I had a great deal of respect.

We talked about this matter on numerous occasions in an attempt to identify possible reasons behind the tutors' unwillingness to take part in the Diversity self-study but we both remained constantly puzzled.

Reflections on the Two Collaborations (Morwenna)

In some ways the collaboration with the three other tutors actually had worked. It was a partnership from which different partners wanted different things and to which they brought different things. In some ways this is precisely what characterises most real partnerships. Looked at in this way, the conversation about the module was inspiring and cheering, precisely for the reasons I gave in the email quoted previously. In other ways that collaboration had not worked at all. Yes, the partnership had meant that things had improved on the module. But it had not meant that the four of us were able to help each other investigate our own collusions and resistances with respect to injustice. Nor had we been able to ask the hard questions about what we do: that it might merely feel good or, much worse, exacerbate the reasons why injustice flourishes in school.

Meanwhile, my collaboration with Dina was not only going well, but was growing stronger and more significant in the research. However, I continued not to notice it, perhaps because it came so easily, and was not a continual puzzlement to me like the other one. With hindsight, this not noticing is remarkable. I believe that part of my puzzlement, and my not noticing, may have been arrogance about my own ability to collaborate. I usually find collaboration very easy. I have written papers and book chapters about it. A very large proportion of my own research is collaborative with a variety of different partners and, because my own research tends to be about social justice, it confronts difficult problems and issues. Yet collaboration has usually worked. When it has gone wrong, I usually have a good sense of why.

Preparing the Castle Presentation (Dina)

As we prepared our presentation for the Herstmonceux Castle Fifth International Self-Study Conference in 2004, we became increasingly aware that there were two collaborations implicated in the Diversity Self-study: the collaboration between Morwenna and the other tutors teaching on the Professional Studies module, on the one hand, and my collaboration with Morwenna, on the other. In an email conversation about a week before the conference, Morwenna sent me the following thoughts:

I think there is an ambiguity in the Castle paper about which is more important: the self-study about teaching, or the self-study about collaboration. In one way there is bound to be an ambiguity, because the two are interrelated . . . So I think in the Castle presentation, the self-study on teaching might just be background . . . There are two collaborations going on. And this puzzled the referees of the paper we sent in. And I think we need

to address that directly. I suppose we collaborate so easily, we didn't even notice it. That's quite interesting in itself. And then there are all the puzzles about the other collaboration between me and the three other tutors ... So, at the Castle presentation, we might have my and your different perspectives on the two collaborations.

Morwenna's thoughts were particularly helpful to me in terms of making sense of the different parameters of the Diversity Self-study and of the study on Collaborations. I came to the realisation that my involvement in the Diversity Self-study, and subsequently in the Collaborations study, had increased, evolved, and changed in nature as the studies progressed. In the beginning, my role in the Diversity Self-study was confined to collecting and analysing group and individual interview data for Morwenna's self-study of teaching social justice issues to pre-service student teachers. I collected the data for a little bit of extra money in my capacity as a contract researcher while I was employed at Nottingham Trent University. As the Diversity Self-study progressed, however, I found myself increasingly interested and involved in another parameter of the study; that is, Morwenna's self-study of collaboration with the other three tutors. I remained interested and involved, contributing to writing and presenting conference papers jointly with Morwenna, even though I was no longer officially part of the project and had moved to another university. But what I found most interesting of all is the fact that, like Morwenna, I hardly noticed the collaboration between us, as our collaboration grew so naturally and "organically", despite our differences of status and level of experience. Like Morwenna, I blindly continued not to notice it and name it as a separate collaboration, despite the fact that the referees of the paper we sent to a journal had called attention to it. I only became clear about the two collaborations implicit in the Diversity Self-study in the process of preparing the Castle presentation and with the help of Morwenna's thoughts on the topic.

Reflections on the Castle Presentation (Morwenna)

After the Castle presentation I had a conversation with Dina where we compared our notes from the presentation and reflected together on the discussion that the presentation had generated. I tape-recorded our conversation. The reflections that follow are based on that tape-recorded conversation with Dina and on my subsequent thoughts about what we said.

We presented the research as a self-study of a failed collaboration, and we contrasted it with the successful collaboration between Dina and me. We distinguished the two different collaborations by differentiating types of professional relationship. Dina and I chose to work together but, if she had chosen not to be part of the research at any stage, it would not have been more than a personal disappointment for me. The module team, on the other hand, found itself working together and had much less choice about it. The lack of participation had serious consequences for the kind of research that could be undertaken. The distinction, which was only formulated well after the conference, was helpful in preventing one kind

of collaboration being conflated with the other in the discussion that followed the presentation.

The conference discussion demonstrated for us the value of presenting research to people who participate wholeheartedly and reflectively, contributing their experiences and insights. They asked questions and made suggestions that illuminated the issue and increased our understanding of it. Three of the questions were particularly helpful to us.

1. Do the other tutors know we are talking about them?
2. Why should the other tutors want to collaborate with you?
3. Did you ask the other tutors to formulate their own self-study questions?

These questions enabled me to see the issue in a new light. As I formulated answers, I found it almost embarrassing to realise how obtuse I had been. The embarrassment is tempered by the knowledge that I am not alone in my obtuseness. When collaboration is successful, as it is with Dina, it appears effortless. Perhaps this makes it all the more difficult to see the many different factors that may contribute to success or failure.

The first question highlights the fact that the self-study is just that: a SELF-study. The study is not about my co-tutors; it is about me, myself. The aim of the self-study is to discover what I might do similarly or differently in a future collaboration. Of course, anyone working with other people must be mindful that there are matters (personal, social, political) that some or all of them might find particularly difficult and sensitive. It is very unlikely that one member of a group would know what these matters were for all the others. Thus, if an individual is generally good at working with others, that says something about the individual's character and social skills. In this context, it was very helpful that members of the audience who knew me well were able to make comments about my own individual presentation of self, which might on occasion help and on another occasion hinder collaboration.

The second question, about why the other tutors should want to collaborate with me, took me aback. I was surprised to find that not only did I have no answer, but also I had not thought about it enough to notice that an answer was needed. An apparently obvious question had been neglected. The subsequent discussion at the presentation revealed a range of possible reasons both for and against collaboration. In particular, there were also helpful suggestions and comments about the part that differences of status and level of experience might have played in hindering my collaboration with two of my co-tutors (two lecturers who had not been long in higher education) in the context of the Diversity self-study. There was also a useful discussion about institutional factors and systems that may support or hinder collaboration.

Later, reflecting on the discussion, I concluded that I had been trying to treat the collaboration with my co-tutors as if it were like the one with Dina. I had assumed that they would all see the research as I did: as worthwhile in itself and as a professional imperative. I also thought that they might see that it could lead to other personally and professionally desirable outcomes, such as presenting a conference paper. Because I respected them as equal colleagues from whom I could learn, I had assumed that

there would be no status barriers. I had not thought that my professorial status or experience might weigh with them. And perhaps it did not, but that is not something I should assume. In general, my assumption seems to have been that the others would see things as I did and that the others were not genuinely “others.” I am not proud to have discovered this assumption lurking within my actions. However, the self-study is all the more worthwhile for uncovering uncomfortable truths that need to be addressed in relation to future collaborations.

I was equally taken aback by the third question, about whether I had asked if the others wanted to formulate their own self-study questions. I know this very well indeed in relation to teachers and action research. Over the last two decades I have been working like this with teachers, and I still do. However, as with the second question about the reasons for collaborating, I had somehow assumed that precisely because these are respected colleagues, my questions were theirs. Further, because I am so deeply concerned about getting teacher education right in relation to social justice, I strongly wanted the teachers to see my questions as important. But of course there is no reason to suppose that my questions will be their questions. In this situation, where I know everyone is passionate about social justice, any of their questions would have been relevant to my own concerns. Indeed I would have learned from them as I have from teachers research questions.

Conclusions

This is a self-study about the important matter of collaborating with colleagues to examine issues related to our teaching of social justice to beginning teachers. As noted earlier, self-study is located within a personal-constructivist-collaborative framework. Thus collaboration is at the heart of self-study practices. However, also as noted earlier, it is not very much studied, and this is a significant gap in published research. Available studies show, as this one does, that collaboration is a complex set of processes. Moreover, while self-study collaboration can be fulfilling and energising, it can also be difficult. As a result of this self-study, the following points have become clearer.

1. A self-study about collaboration is about the person conducting the self-study, rather than about her colleagues. As Shakespeare put it, “The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves” (*Julius Caesar*, I, i).

The strength of self-study is that it is an approach that begins with the personal as it addresses what are also relational and structural issues in education and teacher education. Further, it is an approach that emphasises each individual taking responsibility for her or his own agency within a professional life and recognising that doing so can be a powerful catalyst for change. That is, self-study looks at what an individual can do in her or his personal circumstances. The human temptation is to focus on the circumstances, including the individuals with whom one is in relation, rather than facing uncomfortable questions about the self. However, it is important

for anyone wanting to collaborate on challenging issues to recognise what it is about oneself that will help or hinder. Sometimes this means facing uncomfortable, difficult questions not only about one's own personality but also about professional roles and about perceived power and status.

2. Helpful institutional factors are just that: helpful. They are not essential.

Action to improve teaching and teacher education, including in the area of social justice, cannot wait until the context is right. Indeed, self-study is one way of improving contexts. Similarly, getting the context right is part of achieving collaboration and social action. Just as it is tempting to locate problems of relationship with immediate colleagues, it is tempting to locate difficulties in the institution.

3. It is important to distinguish the different kinds of context in which collaboration happens.

Different contexts may mean that an individual collaborates:

- (a) as a team member (Morwenna's position in the Diversity self-study),
- (b) as a facilitator or leader,
- (c) as part of a group in which all perceive the same problem, for instance of justice,
- (d) as a practitioner/researcher deciding to work with congenial colleagues on a matter of mutual interest (the position of the two authors).

As noted earlier, there is a wide variety in what is counted as collaboration in self-study. It is sometimes possible to miss this because the English language does not distinguish easily between different possibilities. However, it is important to acknowledge these differences, because they are significant for group dynamics, even though differences may be masked by apparently informal relations. Interventions in group dynamics, for instance to make them more collaborative, must take into account how they work in the different cases. The two collaborations in this study show that it is easy to confuse one kind of situation with another. Morwenna started by thinking she was in situation (c) as part of the group in which all perceive the same problem, when in fact she was in situation (a) as a team member. Moreover, she discounted the idea that her status and position within the institution as a whole might affect what appeared to be informal and easy group relations. She was surprised to find that others, like Dina, might see this differently.

4. A researcher wanting to collaborate with colleagues, particularly when wanting to research something that might be challenging to all of them, needs to think about and respect

- (a) what their questions might be, and
- (b) why they might want to collaborate at all.

It is relatively easy to understand and acknowledge that collaborators who do different jobs may have different interests. For instance, teacher educators, classroom teachers,

head teachers, policymakers, and students are likely to have different motivations and perspectives on what is important. On the other hand, it is all too easy for somebody trying to set up collaborative work with close colleagues, especially ones who share many of the same passions, to assume they also share perspectives on research. In fact, it is all too easy to assume that they really *should* see things in the same way! This is not surprising because profound value positions attach to the way we see our jobs. On the other hand, the strength of collaboration is precisely that people *do* see things differently. This is why it is worth doing.

There is another reason collaboration is worth doing: without it, social action will be nearly impossible. If colleagues do not see the necessity for some particular piece of social action, they will not collaborate about it. The difficulty for everyone is that each person has to adjust personal direction in response to everyone else. This can be both slow and frustrating, yet it is a dilemma that must be resolved. Each case will be different and there are few easy resolutions. However, realising what is involved and realising that difficulties are normal should lead to a more realistic, less frustrating, and possibly more successful outcome. It should also be said that there is enormous satisfaction in working closely with other people, and achieving things that none could have managed individually.

5. Congenial personal relations are necessary but are not enough on their own.

Congenial personal relationships are necessary, but they are not sufficient. It is extremely unlikely that collaboration will work if the personal relations among the participants are conflicting or negative. It is very likely that highly successful collaborations are built on respectful, open, honest, trusting relationships, and these can take years to build. Most successful collaborations lie between these two extremes. There is some degree of respect, openness, honesty, and trust, but to say this is only to make a beginning.

The issues explored in the first three of our conclusions need to be taken into account. Moreover, professional relationships are affected by the necessity to continue working together, perhaps for years. If too much honesty or openness would upset a colleague, it may be necessary to keep quiet. Indeed, regardless of such considerations, any relationship has to achieve a balance between, on the one hand, being open and honest and, on the other hand, being sensitive to the feelings of others and not treading roughshod over sensitivities. Bodone et al. (2004, p. 748) ask: "Is it possible to navigate collaboration beyond the comfort zone of encouragement and affirmation?" As they suggest, collaboration can be experienced as a safe, but also as a harsh and contradictory space.

We give the last word to a colleague, Roy Corden, who carries out collaborative, classroom-based research with teachers. While he would not consider himself part of the self-study community, his work is located within an allied paradigm that is also constructivist and collaborative. The following is also very personal:

Partnership . . . just crept up on me really. At some stage in my life, I cannot recall when, at some intellectual or emotional crossroads it ambushed me. I'm not sure that I put up

much of a fight. I must have done. After all, I was fiercely independent. I travelled alone: it was quicker, quieter and remarkably amicable ... Until now I have not attempted to analyse what happened or to question why I capitulated so readily. With hindsight I realised that I allowed it to happen for selfish reasons. I found that I could no longer reach my journey's end alone. I needed companions to shield me and share responsibility. (Corden, 2003, p. 109)

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