



TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AS CO-RESEARCHERS IN THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN PHILIPPINES: STRENGTHENING RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

BY

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Abstract

This study aimed to find out both teachers' and students' views about implementing the concept of students as co-researchers based on Kellet's (2010) classification or types of research involving the learners.

The study was undertaken at the College of Arts and Communication using a variety of data collection methods. A set of three workshops were organized to enable 10 teachers to explore their own classrooms in conducting research involving their learners as co-researchers.

All teachers kept diaries and gave presentations at the workshops and both teachers and learners were also interviewed. Secondary data sources included materials (such as posters, or books written by the teachers), activities produced by learners in class, and audio or video recordings of some classroom episodes. There were two types of project undertaken in classrooms depending on the circumstances and the local levels of support available to each teacher. Some teachers simply elicited student's voices and opinions, and this led to more engagement with learning, more meaningful choices, and learners taking on more responsibility for their own learning. Some learners enabled to undertake an actual inquiry into a matter of interest to them, using questionnaires or interviews.

The data included overall that the activity was an overwhelmingly positive experience for both teachers and students. In fact, none of the teachers who embarked on this activity dropped out. They even showed their incredible commitment to the core idea of working with students as co-researchers. In terms of the positive results and benefits, there is a great deal of agreement across the data drawn from learners and teachers. Students as well as teachers enjoyed the fact that learners behaved responsibly and maturely when they had the chance to find things out for themselves. Students commented on their enthusiasm in research because it became real, meaningful, and relevant in their lives as students.

Keywords: *co-researchers, research, strengthening research, audio/video recordings, research Activities*

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Introduction

The number of students learning English in the tertiary level all over the country has been increasing at an unprecedented pace (Enever 2011) and yet relatively little research within applied linguistics has been conducted in classrooms (Rixon and Smith 2010; and Smith and Knagg, 2012), although, overall the amount of research focused on English for young learners is slowly increasing. Current researches were largely adult-dominated and almost no research considers the

perspectives of the learners themselves (Pinter, 2011). One of the reasons could be the lack of interest from among the student learners. Students think that doing research activities would be expensive and time-consuming. Some would even drop out from their research or writing classes.

Yet, for decades, research that seeks to find out about students' views and perspectives has been popular in other fields of inquiry, such as sociology, anthropology, or education (Christensen and James, 2011). In contrast to traditional research rooted in developmental psychology, such

sociological research aims to explore teenage lives and perspectives more with a focus on their current perspectives as teens rather than as a stage en route to adulthood. The subjects in such research are described as 'social actors' (Christensen and Prout, 2012), and for the last few decades, proponents of adolescent studies have been exploring how they can be given opportunities to exercise their rights in all matters that affect their everyday lives.

This study would give insights to both teachers and students as to the type of activities that they are going to explore and discover in their research/writing classes. For years, it has been a challenge for some writing and research teachers on how they are going to motivate the students to embark on writing especially research papers. Some students would find it difficult and uninteresting, and this is one of the obstacles that teachers usually encounter. This particular study would enlighten the burden given to teachers of research. Through the activities and workshops, teachers will be able to motivate and encourage students to do research works. Through the tasks that are given to the students, they will learn the value of doing research and somehow motivate them to write more.

The study centered on selected teachers working with students as co-researchers. It was the first time that such activity was undertaken, thus, it could be taught of as exploratory.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to find out both teachers' and learners' views about working as co-researchers. Specifically, it sought answers to the following queries:

1. What are the teachers' views about working with students as co-researchers?
2. What are the benefits and challenges?
3. What are the students' views as co-researchers?
4. What do they like and enjoy about research activity?
5. What would they like to explore in research?

Methodology

This qualitative research aimed to collect data from both teachers and students, their views in learning research activities, and their experiences of working together as co-researchers.

This activity was undertaken in language and literature classes using a variety of data collection methods. A set of three workshops were organized to enable 10 teachers to explore their own classrooms in research cycles involving their learners as co-researchers.

All teachers kept diaries and gave presentations at the workshops and both teachers and learners were also interviewed. Secondary data sources included materials (such as posters, puppets, and even materials written by the students), activities produced by learners in class, and audio-video recordings of classroom episodes.

There are two types of activity undertaken in classrooms depending on the circumstances and the local levels of support available to each teacher. Some teachers simply elicited students' voices and opinions and this led to more

engagement with learning, more meaningful choices, and students taking on more responsibility for their own learning. Some students were able to undertake an actual inquiry into a matter of interest to them, through using questionnaires or interviews.

The data indicated overall that the project was an overwhelmingly positive experience for both teachers and learners. In fact, none of the teachers who embarked on this project dropped out, which shows their incredible commitment to the core idea of working with students as co-researchers. In terms of the positive outcomes and benefits, there is a great deal of agreement across the data sets drawn from learners and teachers. Learners as well as teachers enjoyed the fact that learners' views were sought, elicited, and taken seriously. Teachers were genuinely surprised by the fact that learners behaved responsibly and maturely when they had the chance to find things out for themselves.

Students commented on their recent interest in research because it became more real, more meaningful, and more relevant to their lives, the very essence of doing research activities.

Findings Teachers

For teachers, they all enjoyed seeing their students' confidence, and in some cases, language proficiency grows. Enthusiasm in research during the activity is also evident. It can be gleaned that the more students become motivated, the more that they become mature learners. As for teachers, every time they observe that their students are enjoying the activities, they too are ardent to give more.

They also commented on the fact that their classrooms were transformed into learning contexts where high levels of engagement and participation became the norm. This classroom scenario is an important aspect of this study since the outcome is optimistic. Both teachers and students are learning from each other.

Teachers also reported a growth of independence in their students. They further reported a close bond and better and less hierarchical relationship between students and themselves. Many teachers reported lasting changes in their perceptions and beliefs about students learning in research. Students became acquainted with this type of learning. Aside from the fact that they are enjoying the activities, they are also building friendship in each other.

Some challenges were reported, such as lack of support from colleagues, lack of time, and finally lack of confidence regarding their own understanding of research and the concept of students as co-researchers.

Students

Students shared their views about what topic or research activity they wanted and enjoyed. They favored doing research activities on stories, bilingual writing, poetry, and communicative tasks such as interviewing peers. They also

commented on the important role of the teacher in their learning and research activities.

The students noticed that when they were invited to discover knowledge for themselves in their classrooms, they started to participate fully, made decisions for themselves, and worked in collaboration with others. According to some linguists, there is language learning if the learners are motivated to learn. In this activity, students are discovering and exploring on their own. They become independent learners, thus, more engagement in learning.

The students commented on the importance of being able to voice their views, being independent, and being able to learn for one's self-confidence and in some cases, language proficiency during the activity. They also commented on the fact that they learned much from the research activities, hence high levels of engagement and participation became the norm.

Conclusion

In its stronger form, where students were actually undertaking some sort of investigation usually using questionnaires and interviews, the whole process led to a great deal of learning and to students developing a strong sense of ownership and pride in the research.

Whatever form (weaker or stronger) of the concept of working with students as co-researchers was done, both teachers and students enjoyed the process and benefited in many ways. Giving students voice and choice led to increase levels of participation in class, and better relationships between learners and teachers.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should consider eliciting students' views and opinions and giving them more responsibility to make choices and decisions in research activities.
2. College students can productively be encouraged to work alongside their teachers as active participants/co-researchers.
3. A workshop-based action research activity may be conducted, which could be considered for future work with other groups of teachers.
4. Similar study may be conducted in other colleges to strengthen research activities and output.

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