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Reflective Practice Research in International Collaboration

Developing Teacher Education in Togetherness

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LIT

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Chapter 7: International Collaboration and Workplace Friendships

Åsmund Aamaas[1] & Vaibhav Jadhav[2]

Abstract

This chapter builds on a concrete experience from an international collaboration in teacher education between India and Norway, Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) and the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN). It is an experience of international collaboration outside university premises, marked by encouragement and doubts, and the beginning of a workplace friendship. We, the authors, two junior academic faculty members at that time, went to the market together. The experience happened at a crucial time for us and the project. Internal and external pressures could have easily led us to withdraw from the collaboration. We experienced place-based learning, which allowed us to explore the market together and discuss real-life and educational challenges and possibilities. Discussing global citizenship and sharing professional and personal knowledge and experiences in the marketplace was inspirational and made sense to us. This marked the beginning of a workplace friendship that contributed to sustaining and expanding the collaboration between SPPU and USN.

Keywords

Reflective practice research, Place-based learning, Workplace friendship, Global Citizenship, Internationalization.

Introduction

Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) and the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) have a longstanding collaboration. The first contact was made in 2005 when two Norwegian teacher educators approached SPPU to look for a common interest in the internationalization of teacher education. This was not the first example of collaboration between USN

and the Indian educational sector. Since 1997, USN has collaborated with schools located three hours' drive from SPPU. In 2005, the move was made to seek collaboration with SPPU, a renowned Indian university. The first meeting between USN and SPPU marked the beginning of a longstanding partnership. Twenty years later, the collaboration in teacher education is more extensive than ever. This is a rare case of two universities from Norway and India finding common ground for a multifaceted and long-standing partnership, including student and staff mobility, as well as joint research activities. This chapter examines the significance of workplace friendships and place-based experiences in the internationalization of teacher education.

Internationalization of higher education has received increased attention over the last few decades, especially since the Bologna process in Europe (1999) and the University turn in teacher education came into effect. The collaboration between USN and SPPU directly resulted from an increased focus on internationalization, mobility, and joint research in teacher education. The leadership at both universities committed themselves to the idea of internationalization and agreed that an institutional partnership could enhance the quality and relevance of the educational programmes on both sides.

The authors of this chapter have been involved in the collaboration since 2012 (Åsmund) and 2014 (Vaibhav). At that time, the respective USN–SPPU collaboration leads, Pro-Rector Duesund and Dean Sonawane, invited us to join the team. Both leaders actively sought their colleagues' involvement in the collaboration and welcomed new initiatives in teacher education and beyond (Duesund & Aasland, 2023). October 2014 was the first time we, the authors, talked together at SPPU. Vaibhav was aware of the collaboration, its educational activities, and its success stories. Project activities primarily took place in the department's meeting rooms. Vaibhav regularly observed faculty at SPPU having discussions with international visitors from Norway, and Åsmund was usually one of them. In October 2014, Vaibhav was called to the meeting room and introduced to Åsmund. This marked the beginning of a close collaboration.

The method of reflexive practice research used in this chapter was first developed by Lindseth (2009) and later expanded upon by scholars such as Weiss and Helskog (2023). The method is used to make sense of and learn from one's own experiences in an open-minded and reflective way which goes beyond the individual experience. The three stages of reflective practice research provide a space first to explore a concrete experience(s) and

critically discuss what is at stake in the example(s) before theoretically reflecting on them. The three stages of this phenomenological-hermeneutical approach facilitate the uncovering of meaning in lived experiences (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

In this chapter and through the three stages of reflexive practice research, we will explore possibilities connected to internationalization in teacher education. The chapter starts with a concrete experience from our international collaboration. It is an experience of internationalization outside the meeting room, marked by encouragement and doubts, and the beginning of workplace friendships. In the second stage, we critically discuss our experience, drawing out the core themes of our individual and shared experiences. In this context, we will focus on what was at stake: our motivation for being a part of the collaboration and the significance of visiting the marketplace together, which opened our hearts and minds towards future collaboration and experiences. In the final stage, we reflect theoretically on our experience, focusing on workplace friendships, place-based learning, and global citizenship.

Overall, this chapter can be read as a meta-reflection on our first collaboration experience, which might have implications for understanding internationalization in higher education, the importance of workplace friendships, and how to integrate place-based education and global citizenship into international projects in teacher education.

The experience – the beginning of a workplace friendship

Vaibhav: That day in October was the first time in my life that I talked with foreign faculty at SPPU. I cannot believe I contentiously spoke with him and explained my research and academic career. I observed that Åsmund was keenly listening and wished for future success for me. This experience was new to me because I had recently started my career at the university. I remember meeting Åsmund at the lunch table the same day. During lunch, Åsmund told me his wish to visit the market. Suddenly, the two of us decided on a plan for a visit to the market in downtown Pune. We went to the market for exploration. It was the beginning of the Diwali season, and the entire market looked shiny and pleasant. He asked a few questions about the Diwali function, and I replied to all of them with delight. He listened to me very carefully.

Åsmund voiced his wish to purchase some Diwali lights for his home. Accordingly, we explored the market and discussed crackers and lights. He made very keen observations and even asked questions about the manufacturing company of the Diwali lights; he probably saw that the materials were made in China. I was worried about the quality and other trade and local production issues. Much discussion happened healthily. Finally, we purchased some lights for his home, and the shopping was completed successfully.

During this visit, he asked me about my specialization in research. A few weeks earlier, I visited UNESCO Bangkok for a workshop on global citizenship education. Suddenly, I replied that my research area was global citizenship education. I felt a bit nervous because I was new to this field, but when discussing it with Åsmund, I felt more comfortable in this area. He was very positive about my work and suggested that I should pursue the topic of teacher education and global citizenship. I felt inspired to continue working in the field.

Åsmund: I remember going to the market with Vaibhav during Diwali. It was very exciting. The Diwali lights were everywhere. It was the first time we really talked together. I was excited. It was easy to talk with Vaibhav. He explained many things, exciting things. I even bought some lights to bring back home with me. I asked Vaibhav for suggestions on what kind of lights to buy. Vaibhav explained to me why lights are used during Diwali and how his family celebrates with lights and sweets. Even the main dishes are sweet during Diwali! Vaibhav bought the lights for me. He insisted. This was after I decided to buy the more expensive light chain. Was I supposed to accept? He also gave me some other things important for celebrating Diwali. It almost felt like he had invited me to celebrate Diwali in Norway. I shared my thoughts on the Diwali celebration, which shares similarities with the Christmas celebration in Norway, focusing on family, good food, gifts, and many people visiting churches. At the same time, I felt confused. It felt like a dilemma. I decided to accept the gifts. I think he said something like, Guests are gods in India. I was unsure if I understood everything correctly. I felt this was not the last time we would go to the market together.

Being stuck in traffic together and walking the market together felt inspiring. I felt able to ask questions related to our shared experience. I had been travelling to India a few times and felt we were a bit stuck discussing statistics and numbers in small conference rooms. The lights at the market sparked exciting talks about his area of research. It felt right to talk about personal issues and global citizenship with him in that context. Vaibhav

talked about the inspiration he took from a recent visit to a UNESCO workshop. In the atmosphere of India's most important Hindu festival, I believe we both felt a connection through our shared interest in global questions within a local context. I felt fortunate to engage in in-depth conversations about the challenges that need to be addressed in society and education. To me, it felt like the beginning of something. We decided to meet the next day for an early morning walk.

Critical reflections

At the marketplace, Vaibhav experienced that people from other countries can be curious about Indian culture and festivals. It was the first time he spent time in Pune with international guests. He had recently been visiting a UNESCO workshop abroad. The workshop provided him with the opportunity to travel and gain academic inspiration. Vaibhav was inspired by the dimensions of learning presented by UNESCO, which focuses on the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural aspects of global citizenship education. He found the idea of connecting people across borders to broaden everyone's perspective to be appealing. Still, Vaibhav was not convinced that internationalization and global citizenship were worth investing much effort in his academic career. At the same time, Åsmund struggled with motivation; he was convinced that internationalization was important but felt frustrated by discussing numbers and tables for his third visit. He was more interested in discussing real-life experiences in an international context and exploring how to incorporate them into teacher education. Two topics were at stake here: the future of our commitment to the SPPU-USN cooperation and the relevance of the collaboration for our teacher education programmes. We both felt inspired at the market to start thinking about how to involve each other in our future work in teacher education. We found that the topics we discussed and the learning environment we shared were important.

Workplace friendship

The friendly, confusing, and open dialogue at the marketplace became important to us and the future of our collaboration. Could the beginning of a workplace friendship be a reason why we consider this collaboration still relevant many years later? The visit to the marketplace laid the foundation for a new friendship, both academically and personally. During our shared

educational experience, we talked about human values and global trade in the context of the upcoming Diwali celebration. The visit gave us an experience of respect towards each other's culture and feelings. We discussed the divine importance of light during Diwali and the production of light chains in China. The conversation sparked discussions about Diwali, lights, trade, China, Christmas, India, and Norway. The dialogue focused on the principles of Global Citizenship Education (UNESCO, 2020). We felt a real bond. When Åsmund inquired about purchasing the lights and requested a two-metre-long chain, Vaibhav replied that a one-metre chain would be sufficient. Vaibhav's concern was the quality of the lights. Åsmund, on the other hand, was more focused on the cost of the lights after realising that he would not be allowed to pay for it himself. This negotiation and shared experience allowed us to discuss topics such as education, culture, society, and trade that Åsmund and Vaibhav had not previously encountered in Pune. At the same time, the discussion left both in a state of confusion. Could the different perspectives on buying lights become problematic when more is at stake?

Our interest in each other's academic work was equally important to the situated and shared experience. Especially important to Vaibhav was that Åsmund showed much interest in the UNESCO workshop, which Vaibhav had completed only a few weeks earlier on global citizenship education. Vaibhav was surprised that a researcher from Norway listened to him very carefully and asked numerous questions regarding global citizenship education and his perspectives on how this could be incorporated into education more broadly, specifically in Indian teacher education. The dialogue brought a sense of shared interest in the academic relationship. This sparked a conversation about further collaborations and projects. The sustainability of our involvement in the collaboration was at stake.

Place-based learning

When visiting the market, Åsmund searched for renewed motivation and purpose. He felt that many days spent discussing quantitative data in conference rooms took some of the curiosity out of the collaboration. Perhaps the coordinator on the Indian side felt the need to create a new momentum in the collaboration and to include Vaibhav. At the marketplace, we developed a sense of community by experiencing a place and trying to make sense of it together. We discussed both the academic and cultural aspects of the experience. Especially for Åsmund, it was very refreshing to have

these conversations outside the university grounds. It allowed us to speak openly, not to become restricted by formalities and get trapped in the idea of doing more of what we already did because this is the way things are done. Together, we developed a hope that we could contribute to increasing the focus on global citizenship in our educational programmes. Motivation and hope were at stake, perhaps also the continuation of our project.

Theoretical reflections

The collaboration in teacher education between SPPU and USN is extensive. It includes both online and on-site teaching and learning activities, as well as joint research. Students travel both ways on short courses, placements, and semester exchanges. Virtual mobility is facilitated through webinars and guest lectures. Staff mobility is extensive, encompassing development and research work, as well as organising workshops and facilitating student mobility. Today, we serve as the coordinators of the SPPU-USN collaboration in teacher education, which keeps us quite busy. We are usually in contact weekly, and during periods of joint courses and research activities, we communicate daily. According to Leask & Bridge (2013), the academic staff involved in internationalization are the most central actors in the projects. At the same time, there is a need for more research on individual reasons for engagement (Dewey & Duff, 2009). In a more recent study focusing on an international research project in higher education, Dusdal and Powell (2021) argue that:

> Beyond broadening knowledge, the considerable benefits deriving from the project, a perhaps surprising result is the social significance of team members' friendships, the reinforcement of existing relationships, and networking. Thus, this social dimension should not be marginalized in future analyses of research collaboration. (p. 242)

The following section focuses on workplace friendships, place-based education, and global citizenship.

Workplace friendship

The *belongingness hypothesis* developed by Baumeister and Leary (1995) argues that people "are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments" (p. 522). Workplace friendships appear to be important

across various contexts, with both advantages and pitfalls. In the Indian context, classical literature emphasises the importance of friendship, with the story of Krishna and Arjuna being a prime example. Krishna and Arjuna discuss their duties to human beings. This is the classic example of Sakhya. Krishna says, "Let it be understood that Arjuna is one half of my body" and that we are really "one self that has been made twofold" (Parekh, 2008). To many modern-day Indians, this unity, friendship, and sense of obligation to work together guide them in pursuing their goals.

According to Morrison and Cooper-Thomas (2016), the fundamental objective of friendships in a workplace setting is to support emotional and relational well-being. Other research suggests that friendships and a sense of belonging associated with the workplace may lead to increased engagement with work (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995), innovative behaviour (Durrah, 2023), enhanced motivation (Bergin & Bergin, 2009), and psychological safety (Zhang et al., 2010). Psychological safety might lower the barriers to contributing with ideas and taking action to implement these (Edmondson & Lei, 2014); it might enhance the information and knowledge flows (Siemsen et al., 2009), make it less threatening and increase the motivation to share knowledge (Zhao et al., 2016) and be important for creating a culture of suggesting changes and improvements (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Nielsen (2000) demonstrated that employees in workplaces where friendships are more likely to occur are less likely to quit their jobs.

Jadhav and Salunke (2011) argue that workplace friendships in teacher education institutions in India reduce vulnerability and encourage adaptability and humility, which are essential for success in the workplace and achieving targets. The community of teachers must come together to create plans for their learners, which is vital for the overall development of learners and, in turn, the development of society. In addition, friendships at the workplace can boost job satisfaction and professional pleasure, even though they might lead to increased work orientation and not necessarily release from the stern demands of duty, which are often characterised by other forms of close relations and friendships (Jadhav & Salunke, 2011).

Other studies on workplace friendships have shown no effect or even risks. According to Gupta (2020), while positive effects might be found in the global north, developing countries like India might find themselves in a different position. Friendships that cross the boundaries of the hierarchy can cause negative reactions among colleagues. Contrary to other studies shown above, Akila and Priyadarshini (2018) found that in an Indian context, "friendships do not affect the degree of organizational com-

mitment and intention to leave" (p. 5). Furthermore, Kunday (2014) found that workplace friendships could lead to additional work for the sake of friendship with colleagues of different ranks. In a study from the Netherlands, Ellwardt, Steglich, and Wittek (2012) found that gossip may lead to workplace friendships; however, high levels of gossip activity may have the opposite effect. Morrison and Nolan (2007) found in their study from Australia that workplace friendships could lead to "blurring of boundaries; having to devote time to the friendship; and distraction from work can create numerous difficulties" (p. 32). In a study from Norway, Brunstad (2022) argues that good leadership requires a high level of awareness about inclusion, transparency, and community, as well as the importance of providing equal space and opportunities to all. In this context, workplace friendships can pose a risk.

A report written by Duesund and Aasland (2023) about the collaboration between SPPU and USN, based on their own experiences and interviews, highlights that one success factor behind the long-lasting collaboration between SPPU and USN was "close relations between participants from the two countries, both on an academic and private level [and that] this seems to be crucial for building trust and sustaining the collaboration" (p. 11). This supports the findings of Dusdal & Powell (2021), stating that "for complex international projects, teamwork is challenging; thus, necessary trust – including support and friendship – is crucial, especially beyond the official project duration, to complete publications and design follow-up projects" (p. 243). Ma and Montgomery (2019) propose that "linking the strategic and contingent through interpersonal relationships [. . .] build[s] sustainable international partnerships" (p. 30).

In our opinion, our workplace friendship is relevant. Our experience serves as an example of the importance of interpersonal relationships in international projects. As coordinators, we have received massive support and some criticism. To facilitate and increase student and staff mobility, we have challenged institutional structures and ways of organising internationalization at our institutions. We have spent many evenings and nights working on the collaboration, more than our leaders would have allowed, a situation not unknown in the university sector. It has been time-consuming, but it was worth it to us. However, our collaboration is not a two-man show. With support from leadership and an institutional Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) as a basis, and with a team of colleagues from both sides participating in the project as a necessity, we found our shared motivation to coordinate the collaboration on shared goals and experiences. Acknowl-

edging the risks, including the potential for oversimplifying our different contexts, we will argue that the workplace friendship that developed from our first meeting at the marketplace had a positive impact on our future collaboration and joint projects.

Place-based experience

Our shared experience took place at the market; we believe this made a significant difference. Strolling around the market, our conversations were interrupted by the busy environment; real life was present, and questions came naturally, as there was much to explore and discuss. The walk-and-talk method is sometimes used for interviewing people; it "connects a person's narrative with the place, with the space where it is narrated" (Pranka, 2020, p. 2). Our experience was nothing like an interview, but we did experience some of the benefits of the walk-and-talk method. Leaving the meeting room behind, focusing on the place and shared experience opened a space to share knowledge and ask questions relevant to real-world challenges in a local context. This has many similarities to place-based education (PBE). In many ways, PBE might be seen as a response to a lack of attention given to place in educational activities.

In PBE, learners explore a place with all their senses. It is an authentic, hands-on approach to problem-solving and critically engaging with the surroundings to enrich learning. Khadka et al. (2020) argue that PBE "is designed to enhance appreciation for the natural environment and to stimulate citizenship" (p. 80). Lowenstein et al. (2018) suggest implementing PBE in teacher education, as it allows for a "significant shift in thinking and practice around learning, teaching, and community" (p. 36). McInerney et al. (2011) suggest that learners using PBE, in their case, young people, should be encouraged to think holistically and:

> ... to connect local issues to global environmental, financial, and social concerns, such as climate change, water scarcity, poverty, and trade. It invites teachers and students to question the established order, view things from the most disadvantaged position, and work for the common good. (p. 11)

Corbett (2020) rightly argues that PBE "is a powerful, generative, and yet inherently problematic educational idea that demands critical interrogation, particularly in the current global climate of inward-looking nationalist and place-based politics" (p. 1). PBE is usually used to learn in a local context. A recent study by Aamaas et al. (2025) has demonstrated that PBE can also

be beneficial in an international context, especially when some participants are local. An advantage of taking PBE out of context and placing it in an international setting is the inherent widening of perspectives.

Webber et al. (2021) highlight the risks associated with PBE in reproducing Western value systems. They question whether PBE has the potential to challenge exploitation or "is only one more method to engage students in learning curricular content" (p. 23). Perhaps the Indian philosopher and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore can inspire us to challenge the curricular content and ways of teaching and learning. He suggests that learning is most effective when surrounded by trees and nature. To Tagore, nature meant not only hills and mountains, valleys and forests, mountain streams and quiet lakes; they were symbols of a living presence which for him was both intensely real and spiritual (Mukherjee, 1970). One of the ancient Indian education systems emerged from the Vedas. The Rishis, the guru or teacher, focused on conversation-based education for learning and understanding the content (Srivastava, Atreya & Sharma, 2022). Gurus called their disciples or learners to preach in an environment free from the walls of a building, in nature. Learners accompanied the guru to various places. In Vedic philosophy, listening is fundamental, but dialogue, debate, discussion, and sightseeing were also adopted as teaching methods in the Vedic education system (Pammi, 2017).

Our encounter at the market was important for broadening our perspectives and developing a sense of workplace friendship in a context exciting and new to Åsmund and familiar and safe to Vaibhav. This might be seen in the light of another success factor put forward by Duesund and Aasland (2023) in their report about the longstanding SPPU-USN collaboration, where they highlight the importance of "developing an understanding of each other's culture and traditions" and that "arrangements have been made to spend time getting to know the context and local communities" (p. 11). Our experience in the market suggests that place-based learning and PBE can play a crucial role in strengthening ties through shared experiences. This has also strengthened our focus on PBE in student mobility and faculty collaboration between SPPU and USN. The method has enabled us to learn more about each other and ourselves and to explore global and local challenges in situ.

Global citizenship

At the marketplace, Vaibhav told Åsmund about his recent visit to Bangkok. In Thailand, he attended a workshop focused on global citizenship education. Global citizenship education highlights three complementary and intertwined dimensions of learning: cognitive, social, and emotional and behavioural (UNESCO, 2021). Global citizenship is also an integral part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG, target 4.7, gives direction:

> By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development. (United Nations, n.d.)

Global citizenship education aims to empower all learners worldwide to come together and work for sustainable futures in their specific contexts. The International Commission on the Futures of Education published its report, "Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education", in 2021. The report states, "[. . .] despite the urgency of action, and in conditions of great uncertainty, we have reason to be full of hope" (p. 6). The report argues that this hope is evident in the increasing access to knowledge and tools that enable collaboration across contexts and has great potential "for engaging humanity in creating better futures together" (p. 6). Of course, collaboration alone is not enough. The report has been criticised for being naïve and lacking an understanding of challenges such as power relations (Elfert & Morris, 2022). Others have argued that critical hope might be necessary "to avoid succumbing to fatalism in imagining global social justice" (Tarozzi, 2023, p. 52).

To us, our collaboration has been important for exploring and learning more about global citizenship. Our collaboration led us to expand our understanding of cultures, languages, and power relations and develop intercultural skills. The title of our joint SPPU-USN project, Teacher Education for Sustainable Futures in India and Norway (2020–2025), reflects our common goal to enhance the quality and relevance of teacher education through internationalization focused on SDGs and its inherent focus on social justice, culture's contributions to sustainable development, and global citizenship.

Our first meeting at the marketplace gave direction to our future collaboration. We were inspired to move away from solely teaching about global citizenship and culture and instead incorporate methods such as place-based education into our teaching and learning environments. Furthermore, our collaboration provided us with access to a wide range of new learning environments, including international webinars and student mobilities. The SPPU-USN cooperation brings people together across contexts. Global citizenship education aims to strengthen a sense of belonging to a common humanity, where we all share rights and responsibilities for our shared future, thereby fostering social and emotional learning (UNESCO, 2021). In our projects, we strive to gain a deeper understanding, broaden our perspective, and think critically about the interconnectedness and interdependence of different places, countries, societies, and populations. Action competence is crucial in following up on the SDGs; together, we discuss, explore, and develop teaching methods and ideas for working towards sustainable futures in education. In many ways, this aligns well with UNESCO's proposed three dimensions of global citizenship.

Our journey from the marketplace

In 2014, we were both seeking meaning in our collaboration. We were both aware of the climate emissions associated with internationalization, the time constraints on both sides, potential administrative hurdles, and the risk of becoming politicised and reinforcing power structures. Acknowledging these dangers, we decided to continue our collaboration, believing in the potential positive impact on students, colleagues, and ourselves. Teacher resilience might help us to understand our decisions. Clarà (2016) argues that situations of perceived crisis can be "reappraised by teachers in ways that allow them to transit from states of suffering and despair to states of restored well-being and commitment" (p. 82). Our situation might not have been adverse per se. However, the accumulated internal and external pressures might have led us to stop participating in the collaboration without a sense of workplace friendship, shared real-life experiences, and a sense of purpose and hope in continuing our collaboration.

Our shared experience at the marketplace gave us hope that sustaining and expanding our collaboration was both possible and needed. Together with our colleagues, we agreed that internationalization matters. We agreed that there was a need for a change in our teacher education programmes

to foster closer partnerships across borders, contributing towards more sustainable futures. Reflective practice research has provided us with a tool to understand our experiences better. It made sense for us to embark on a joint venture to strengthen our focus on education for sustainable futures and global citizenship.

Notes

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[2] Vaibhav Jadhav is an Associate Professor at Savitribai Phule Pune University. Jadhav is particularly interested in global citizenship education, the internationalization of teacher education, mixed methods and microlearning strategies.

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