



The Role of Collaborative Skills in Enhancing Powerful Group Learning and Understanding of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

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Further Information

This poster and further information is available at <http://www.theibsc.org/>

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Introduction

It was the aim of my project to explicitly teach collaboration skills using the study of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as the medium for this instruction. I wanted to investigate if the **power of group learning and understanding** could be harnessed if the boys were equipped with effective collaboration strategies.

"To do well in today's fast-paced, highly social, ultra-competitive and globally connected world, our children need twenty-first-century skills."

Dr Shimi Kang (2015)

Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication and **Collaboration** are the skills teachers should be focused upon developing.

"Effective groups are made not born"

Harvey and Daniels (2015)

Harvey and Daniels (2015) state that "effective collaborators have a mostly unconscious repertoire of social strategies they use to operate effectively in group situations" (p. 54). It is the authors' belief that **these strategies can be taught, monitored and effectively utilised**. They go on to state that "...if we want a classroom – not to mention a community or a world – where all children and teenagers can team up effectively and reliably, day in and day out, these skills need to be modelled and taught." (p. 56)

The Research Question

How might the explicit teaching of collaborative skills in a study of *Macbeth* enhance powerful group learning and understanding for Year 7 boys?

Research Context and Participants

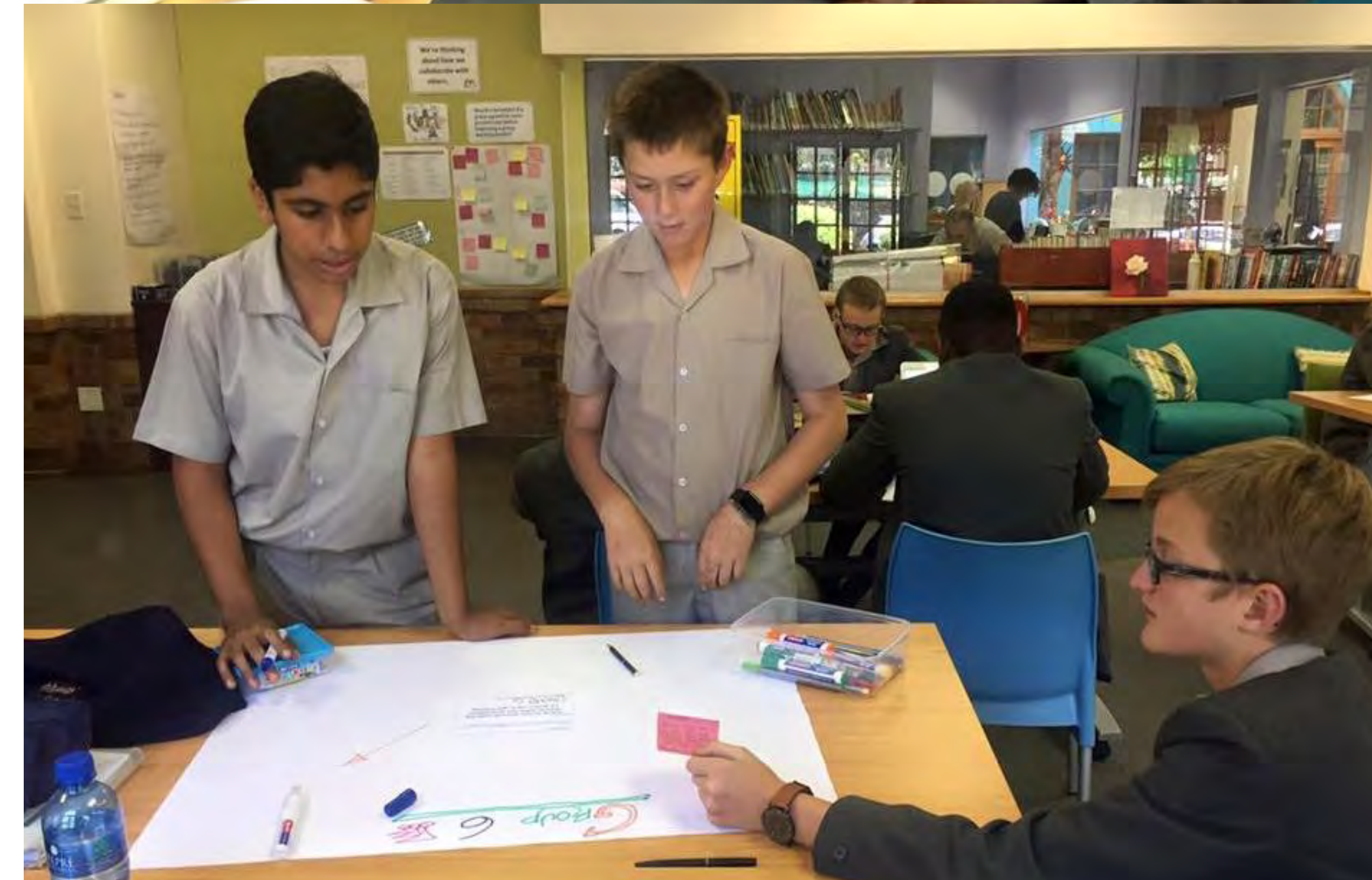
St John's College is an independent Anglican day and boarding school situated in Johannesburg, South Africa. The school has a strong reputation of academic excellence and it is the aim of the College to be a 'world class Christian school for Africa'.

I chose to conduct my research with my Year 7 English class. They were a heterogeneous class of twenty-two 12 to 13-year-old boys.



The Research Action

Two tiers of action were identified in this project's design. The first tier involved the explicit teaching of collaborative skills and the second tier utilised these skills and strategies in the class's study of the play, *Macbeth*. All activities were designed to be completed as group learning tasks.



Data Collection and Analysis

- Online surveys – pre-project, for the duration of the project and at its conclusion
- Exit tickets
- Self- and peer-assessment rubrics
- Written artefacts including notes, posters and journals
- Photographs of work and group participation
- Video interviews



- Using the process of categorising and coding, I reviewed the responses and comments and identified various emergent themes. These results were shared with the boys and their consensus sought
- The process of triangulation allowed for the clarification of meaning and a better understanding of the perspectives of the participants (Stringer, 2014).

Key Findings and Discussion

- The need for a structured approach to planning a project that includes the **establishment of ground rules**
"If we had no ground rules it would lead to more arguing and disagreeing which would lead to us falling behind."
Boy H
- The need for **strategies for effective group communication**: active listening; turn taking during discussions
"I enjoyed being able to discuss my findings with my group and being able to produce a better project with my group."
Boy J
- The need for a deliberate focus on **respectful interaction** and **responsibility** towards the group
"If I didn't understand something I could refer to a group member to help me instead of trying to figure out one of Google's complicated explanations. If we all didn't understand something then we could all discuss it and probably come up with an amazing idea. I also loved the fact that I didn't have to do all the work."
Boy D

Conclusions

- Because group interactions were optimised through the effective use of specific collaboration skills, each group truly benefitted from group thinking
- Many powerful discussions were had and complex themes were explored with a greater level of depth, focus and maturity
- In future, more attention will be placed on teaching the boys how to manage differences of opinion and to reach consensus
- Key findings need to be shared to ensure that as a school, we all have the same understanding of how to harness the power of group learning

"The focus on collaboration helped us a lot because this time, we worked together instead of against each other."

Boy T

Key Readings

- Harvey, S., & Daniels, H. (2015). *Comprehension and collaboration* (Rev ed.). Portsmouth, UK: Heinemann.
- Kang, S.K. (2015). *The dolphin parent*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Penguin Books.
- Lotan, R.A. (2003). Creating caring schools. *Group-worthy tasks*.
http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/mar03/vol60/num06/Group-Worthy_Tasks.aspx
- Ritchhart, R. (2015). *Creating cultures of thinking. The 8 forces we must master to truly transform our schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The collaborative skills that were identified and which formed the focus of the project were:

The need to establish group rules | Active listening | Active participation (sharing the air, encouragement of others' participation and supporting views and findings) | Reflection and Correction