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ENHANCING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INTERACTIVE TELECOLLABORATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BOOK CLUB

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Abstract

The study aimed to enhance core competencies for education for sustainable development through transformative learning and language education. Based on Situated Learning Theory, which views learning not only as the individual acquisition of knowledge, but also as participation in meaningful social practices, the 2022 International Book Club used Conversation Theory to facilitate active online learning. The project focused on Carlotta Walls LaNier's autobiography and involved students from two Polish universities collaborating with peers from Mexico, Ukraine, Montenegro, and Guatemala. This exploratory mixed-methods study employed various data collection tools, such as Padlet, weblogs, and surveys. The findings suggest that the project supported interaction, provided evidence of indicators of transformative learning, helped learners overcome language barriers, and fostered intercultural empathy. The main challenges included time-zone differences, varying participant engagement, and limited opportunities for translating reflection into actionable outcomes, which has implications for the design of future telecollaborative projects.

Keywords: transformative learning; education for sustainable development; learning as conversation; interactive telecollaboration

1 Introduction

The rationale for this study is informed by Polish national policy initiatives, particularly the National Programme for the Development of Reading (Pol. *Narodowy Program Rozwoju Czytelnictwa*), which is the largest governmental project dedicated to fostering a culture of reading. Coordinated by four key institutions – the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the National Library, and the Centre for Education Development – the programme aims to support schools and educational institutions in promoting reading as a lifelong habit and a tool for civic engagement. In alignment with this national strategy, a telecollaborative project – the International Book Club – was offered as a platform where students from various countries could not only read and interpret socially significant literature, but also develop intercultural awareness and critical thinking.

Telecollaboration attains both cultural and linguistic goals by focusing on developing intercultural communication (Guth & Helm, 2012). It is based on a sociocultural view of language learning, whereby learning takes place in social contexts through interaction and collaboration (Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010). It is understood as a form of collective inquiry (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016) during which meaning is socially constructed. Telecollaboration has the potential to provide learners with new digital competencies in EFL contexts (Ekin et al., 2021). The main aim of any telecollaboration is to engage learners in authentic and meaningful communication, especially in collaboration across national and cultural boundaries (Godwin-Jones, 2019; O'Dowd, 2016). The goal for language learners is to become intercultural speakers or mediators who possess the

linguistic skills and intercultural awareness necessary to allow them to interact effectively in a foreign language with people from cultures that are different from their own. O'Dowd (2016) claims that "the learning outcomes of such exchanges have yet to be explored in detail" (p. 296), maintaining that "it is also unclear what collaborative task types are best suited for such exchanges" (p. 297), especially if we consider transformative learning in the context of sustainable development which concerns the biological future of our planet as well as appropriate societal attitudes and behaviours. However, transformative learning (Mezirow, 2012), particularly in the realm of Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2023), is challenging, especially when we consider equipping learners with the capacity to address real-world challenges through reflection and critical thinking. What is more, creating a global classroom, which has the potential to unite participants from different nations, cultures, and social backgrounds, may pose numerous challenges (Nowak & Rążewska, 2024). Additionally, while telecollaboration is a well-established approach to intercultural communication (O'Dowd, 2016), less attention has been paid to book club formats that combine

Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) with Conversation Theory (Pask, 1976) to support the development of linguistic and intercultural skills. The unique contribution of this study lies in examining how an international online book club can function as a space in which learners engage with literature, exchange perspectives, and reflect on social and cultural issues.

2 Transformative learning aiming to facilitate education for sustainable development

Transformative learning is, by definition, learning that leads to a change in an individual's preconceptions, values or feelings that is conditioned by responses or associations to various life situations and experiences (Mezirow, 2012; Sharpe, 2016). It allows learners to question their previously held assumptions and by interacting with others, a person has the potential to induce change because of individual, collective, social, educational experiences, to name only a few.

According to UNESCO (2016), there are two approaches to transformative education. The first, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), addresses such themes as human rights, intercultural understanding, citizenship education, respect for diversity and tolerance. GCED aims to equip learners with the following core competencies:

> (1) knowledge and understanding of specific global issues and trends, and knowledge of and respect for key universal values; (2) cognitive skills for critical, creative and innovative thinking, problem-solving and decision-making; (3) non-cognitive skills such as empathy, openness to experiences and other perspectives, interpersonal/communicative skills and aptitude for networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds and origins; and (4) behavioral capacities to launch and engage in proactive actions (UNESCO, 2013, p. 4).

The second approach, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), is defined by UNESCO (2023) as "a lifelong learning process and an internal part of quality education" (para. 2). According to Lozano et al. (2015), ESD aims to empower learners to help them make informed decisions and take responsible actions towards a sustainable future. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 goals and 169 sub-targets established by the United Nations (2015), which serve as a global reference point for the transition to achieve a sustainable future by 2030. SDG no. 4 aims to ensure quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. Target 4.7 of the Education Agenda aims to "ensure that all learners acquire 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 of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2016, p. 287).

While Sustainable Development (SD) has been incorporated into European higher education, research on how pedagogical approaches contribute to the development of sustainability competences remains limited. Lozano et al. (2019) emphasize the need to introduce diverse teaching methods for effective SD competence development, rather than relying on lectures and case studies only. One promising approach involves using accelerated reading within a Book Club format, grounded in the methodology of Learning as Conversation.

3 Theorizing learning as conversation

Conversation is a powerful mode of communication which allows people to exchange information, express opinions, persuade others and form social relationships. Boyd (2001) highlights that conversation is a satisfying and interesting way to gain life experiences, as participants share a common will to interact. Social interactions shape our reality by juxtaposing our knowledge with shared knowledge, allowing us to learn valuable things. This process, known as meaning-making, involves actively making interpretations, modifying our understanding, creating our reality, and finding truth through active learning. Pangaro (2008) claims that conversation occurs "when beliefs are negotiated through interaction and evolve via goals" (p. 35) and not when meaning is shared among learners. This is especially meaningful when we think of achieving SDGs.

Conversation Theory (CT) involves complex learning (Pask, 1976). The cornerstone of CT emerges from Vygotsky's (1962) social constructivism theory, which states that people learn through social interactions and communications within different groups, and thus conversation plays a pivotal role in the learning process. This way, according to Battle (2017), the CT is a complex learning process based on conversations that may appear on many different levels of learning. When outlining the theoretical framework of the Conversation Theory, Pask (1976) enumerates the following features of a strict conversation: 1) the participants

of the conversation follow the rules of the conventional language, respecting its syntax; 2) the conversation is based or grounded on its specific topic, 3) the topic is discussed in a way that involves commitment, 4) the topic is understandable, 5) if it is not understood it should be explained, not necessarily in a verbal way, and finally 6) the stages of the conversations are understandable within their intervals. Boyd (2004) claims that CT "portrays and explains the emergence of knowledge by means of multilevel agreement-oriented conversations among the participants" (p. 189). In this way, conversation is not perceived as the process of informing about things that other members of the conversation are already informed about.

Conversation Theory, providing a framework for various models and scenarios of learning through dialogue, emphasizes the significance of interactive exchanges in the educational process. Building on this concept, CONVERSATION DESIGN, as defined by Luppicini (2008), focuses on the methods and principles that guide the effective design of conversational interactions, ensuring they are not only engaging for learning but also informative and transformative.

The process of learning shall be based on exchanging different perspectives, discussing topics, negotiating understanding and reaching an agreement. According to Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2022), a "conversational approach to learning engages learners actively. The focus is not on passive consumption of content (watching videos and reading text) but on active engagement. This can involve conversation, collaboration, reflection, experimentation and putting ideas into practice" (p. 24). Harri-Augstein and Thomas (1991/2013) present LEARNING CONVERSATION as a process of recollecting experiences, expressing and turning them into consciousness in order to reflect on them. Battle (2017) further explains that learning conversation shall be perceived "as a set of parallel conversations occurring at different levels, with task-level conversations ranging over practical activities, and higher-level conversations focusing on the learning process itself" (p. 15). This scenario is suitable for more student-oriented learning situations in which conversations happen within peer-to-peer groups of students collaborating on projects and/or assignments. Scott (2001) adds that in such groups, the process of production and control of conversation that used to be hierarchical evolves into one without fixed ordering of control, and that is related to "a self-productive network of processes" (p. 354). All researchers perceive this process as a skill that can be learned.

Conversations might be extended far beyond the traditional classroom. Live Virtual Classroom (LVC) (Vu & Fadde, 2013) is an online learning environment where teachers and learners interact in real time using various communication tools and technologies. Online learning, as suggested by Thorpe and Godwin (2006), enhances learning relationships and cognitive processes by allowing real-time interaction, chat messaging, and annotation tools. Platforms like Zoom and MS Teams offer video conferencing, real-time interaction, and screen sharing, resembling traditional classrooms in a digital space, enabling remote education and training. This environment replicates the experience of a physical classroom.

Battle (2017) states that collaborative learning environments perceived as settings where students can take advantage of learning opportunities "are provided in the form of technological artefacts and computer-mediated environments" (p. 16), quite frequently playing the role of a space where conversations take place. Sharples (2005) explains that technology can create and enhance the setting of the conversation by offering tools for data gathering processes or by constructing or evaluating models. Furthermore, Emir, and Yangın-Ekşi (2024) claim that telecollaboration plays a transformative role in education as it can broaden the spectrum of activities and the scope of discussion to reflections and metacognitive practices. This way, technology enables space for online classroom discourse for groups or communities. As learning through conversation constitutes a form of pedagogy that can be induced by telecollaboration, it provides opportunities to develop a shared and common language among learners and teachers. Overall, conversational learning is a planned and systematic approach to academic development, professional practice and personal growth that can be enhanced by telecollaborative intercultural digital learning interactions.

4 Methodology

In the 2022/23 edition of the project, students read *A Mighty Long Way* by Carlotta Walls LaNier (2009), which is an autobiographical memoir about the difficult time she lived through when fighting for equal access to education and respect for civil rights in the United States in the late 1950's. The book tells the story of nine courageous high school students and their families who experienced discrimination and racism first-hand. LaNier's account is more than just the story of a brave young girl who persevered in the face of adversity; it is also the story of America and the early days of desegregation. While LaNier recounts events that took place more than half a century ago, project participants were encouraged to consider how her story speaks to them personally and how it relates to the current times. By using case-based learning, which is a form of guided inquiry and includes a practical case or problem to be solved, students had the possibility to engage in group discussions during six synchronous Zoom meetings and share their own reflections by means of blog entries. Prerequisite tests were implemented to see whether the Zoom application was running, ensuring that students were able to log in and could freely use its functions. As part of the project, students from the United States were also able to meet the author of the book in person. Additionally, a college writing contest for the best essay was organized.

4.1 Study aims and research questions

In our study, we drew on Rogers' (1998) model of the holistic nature of transformative learning, which includes the cognitive, affective, existential, empowerment, and action dimensions. The model is useful because it shows that personal growth and change may emerge through the complex interplay of

these dimensions rather than from cognitive reflection alone. It also explains how individuals may evolve through learning. This understanding was complemented by Sterling's (2010) distinction between three levels of learning: (1) conformative (or "doing things better"), (2) reformative (or "doing better things"), and (3) transformative (or "seeing things differently"). In this article, transformative learning is understood as a change in perspective, or a paradigm shift, through which learners begin to see things differently and reconsider their previously held assumptions.

This study used data triangulation and combined qualitative and quantitative analysis. This mixed-methods design made it possible to examine both participants' reported experiences and patterns emerging from their Padlet entries, blog posts, and post-project survey responses. In the study, the following research questions were explored:

> **RQ1:** To what extent have the participants gained from the project what they had initially expected?

> **RQ2:** To what extent has the International Book Club allowed the participants to experience transformative learning?

> **RQ3:** How do Polish learners perceive the interactive experience of taking part in the virtual exchange?

To answer RQ1, a collaborative web platform called **Padlet** was used as a research instrument. Students were encouraged to use Padlet at the beginning of the project to introduce themselves, share hobbies, give reasons for joining the IBC, and write about their expectations. They could also upload a picture and/or short video. This tool allowed the participants to get to know one another better and feel part of a larger, international community of learners. In our analysis, we focused on participants' initial responses, which were juxtaposed with their answers to two of the questionnaire questions (No. 4 and 10) in the post-project evaluation.

Weblog was another virtual space for posting reflections and served as a means to answer RQ2. Each week, there would be new reading comprehension questions (Appendix 1) about the given chapters. There was a "Beyond the book" section with topics and prompts for further discussion. Students were encouraged to submit their answers and interact with one another. Table 1 presents the number of blog post entries to consecutive chapters.

Table 1. The chapter distribution of posts responded to on the CSUB blog platform.

Questions responded to in:	Number of posts
Chapter 1_2	48
Chapter 3_4	18
Chapter 5_6	12
Chapter 7_8	5
Chapter 9_10	1
Chapter 11_12	13
Chapter 13_14	0
Chapter 15_17	0
TOTAL	97

Note. The data were drawn from student responses posted on a private CSUB blog accessible to the International Book Club participants.

The data were analyzed using NVivo 14 software in accordance with the Thematic Analysis (TA) by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2020, 2022, 2023). Braun and Clarke's six-phase model (2022) of reflexive TA was chosen for its emphasis on meaning making and contextual interpretation. The subsequent steps were involved in our analytic procedure: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing the final report. We first engaged in a closer reading of the data, consisting of n = 97 blog posts and the total corpus of 14,130 words, to develop initial codes and generate themes. Initial – "semantic and latent" – codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 57) were developed inductively based on participant responses and refined deductively using the framework of transformative learning. Coding was primarily conducted by the first author; however, a secondary coder reviewed 25% of the data for consistency, and discrepancies were discussed to ensure reliability.

With the aim of answering RQ3, we used a **questionnaire** (Appendix 2), which served as a reflection tool and was conducted at the end of the project. The first part comprised 14 close-ended true/false statements developed by Emerson Case, while the second included 10 open-ended questions prepared by Agnieszka Kaczmarek. The questionnaire was distributed online and was anonymous. The completion of the survey was made voluntary for the Nysa students participating. Most of them, n = 20 of n = 21, completed it. Out of n = 37 participants from Krakow, n = 30 completed the final questionnaire (n = 8 students of Russian philology, n = 22 students of English Studies).

4.2 Participants' linguistic, educational and social backgrounds

The telecollaboration consisted of an exchange of views between n = 98 students (Table 2), mainly from two Polish universities - Pedagogical University of Krakow (PU)[1] and University of Applied Sciences in Nysa (UAS) - and Mexican high school students. Additionally, there were individual cases from other countries, including Argentina, Guatemala, Montenegro and Ukraine.

Participation in the project was made compulsory for sophomores in UAS. The recruitment process for the project among the students of English philology of PU was done through volunteer applications; however, for the students of Russian philology with English, it was necessary to take part in an international project to finish the EFL course. By their own choice, they opted for the IBC. In addition, one of the participants was a high school learner who found out about the project from an advertisement posted on the Institute's website (PU). Every student received a certificate issued by CSUB for participating in the project. To protect anonymity, participants are referred to by assigned codes. The letter indicates the participant group: P for Polish, MX for Mexican, U for Ukrainian, and ME for Montenegrin students. The number identifies the individual participant, for example P_14 refers to Polish participant 14.

Table 2. Characteristics of participants in the study.

Participants	Number of participants	Age	Level of English proficiency	Participation	US-related subjects in the curriculum
UAS Nysa English Studies	N= 21	20-23	C1	Mandatory	English-language Cultures and Literatures
PU Krakow English Studies	N=22	20-23	C1	Self-selected	History of the USA, Civilization of the USA
PU Russian philology with English	N=15	21-23	B1/B2	Self-selected	None
Poland (high school)	N = 1	15	A2+/B1	Self- selected	None
Mexico (high school)	N=32	15	B1	Elected inclusion	None
Guatemala	N = 1	n/a	C2	English teacher	None
Argentina	N = 2	15	B1/B2	Self-selected	None
*Ukraine	N = 1	21	C1	Mandatory	English-language Cultures and Literatures
*Montenegro	N = 1				

**The Ukrainian and Montenegrin students were both studying at UAS Nysa, Poland*

Note. Authors' own data. The table summarizes participant diversity in the International Book Club telecollaboration project.

5 Findings and Discussion

In order to answer RQ1, students' Padlet entries (n = 56) providing the most common reasons for joining the club at the beginning were juxtaposed with their answers (n = 58) to survey questions No. 4 and 10 in the post-project evaluation stage (Table 3). The analysis allowed for the identification of the main categories of expectations: general educational gains, cultural enrichment, (language) skill development, and social interaction. The post-project gains

indicated were categorized according to the pre-selected themes and subjected to frequency analysis. Additionally, a new theme emerged. Students appreciated the development of their ability to effectively use and apply Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools. Illustrative statements from participants are quoted in the table below.

Table 3. Participants' initial expectations and their post-project gains.

Categories	The participant's reasons for participating in the project at the initial phase	The participant's post-project evaluation of the gains
General educational gains	*It is a novel experience to learn.* *It is horizon-broadening.*	*Participating in these discussions enriched my learning experience and encouraged personal growth.* *The most important thing that I gained is different perspective on certain matters, that I thought are obvious for everyone all over the World. Doesn't matter if we talk about situations from the past 50 years or 5 years, some situations that happened or that are happening could have been avoided and such meetings help us self-reflect not only on stories of other people but also on what is going on around us.* *Reading about the daily life of black people in a form of a story is moving and makes us feel emotional about it so this way we are going to remember it better than by reading about them in a coursebook and even discussing them. This is better than anything else.* *A positive international experience, both on academic and personal level.* *I definitely widened my horizons about certain topics.* *Spending free time in a valuable way.* *Receiving the certificate from California State University.*
Cultural enrichment	*One can learn about the history and culture of the USA.* *A Mighty Long Way discusses an important/interesting topic.*	*I was always aware of the problem of racism in the United States and all over the world. This book however, helped me understand how much more nuanced it really is and how it affected (and continues to affect) different areas of life for people of colour.* *The online format facilitated connections with individuals from different backgrounds, promoting cultural exchange and expanding my worldview.*
(Language) skill development	*It can contribute to the improvement of reading skills in English.* *It is a great way to practice reading as a hobby.* *It gives motivation to read in general.*	*When you are an English learner, your imagination makes you feel not confident and able to speak. You're afraid you won't be understood. Now I know I can speak and I do communicate with others.* *Enriching one's lexicon.* *Developing reading and writing skills.* *Regaining pleasure in reading.*
Social interaction	*It is an opportunity to share passion for English with other people.* *Participation in the previous editions was encouraging.* *Being a part of the club is a chance to talk with people from different countries and make new friends.*	*I interacted with other students, we had speaking practice, I felt very internationally involved.* *International experience and cooperation with students from a different country.* *Interaction with people from other side of the world was hands down the most important thing for me.* *The discussions allowed me to practice active listening and respectful dialogue, enhancing my communication and interpersonal skills.* *I have developed my ability of shaping my thoughts into words. I had also a chance to speak with strangers, which was also beneficial for my social interaction skill.* *An incredible experience of getting to know many people living very far away in culture that differs in many very surprising little ways.* *Meeting new people.*
ICT competency	-	*I became more comfortable with using Zoom.* *I've gained a more comfortable approach to the online meetings.*

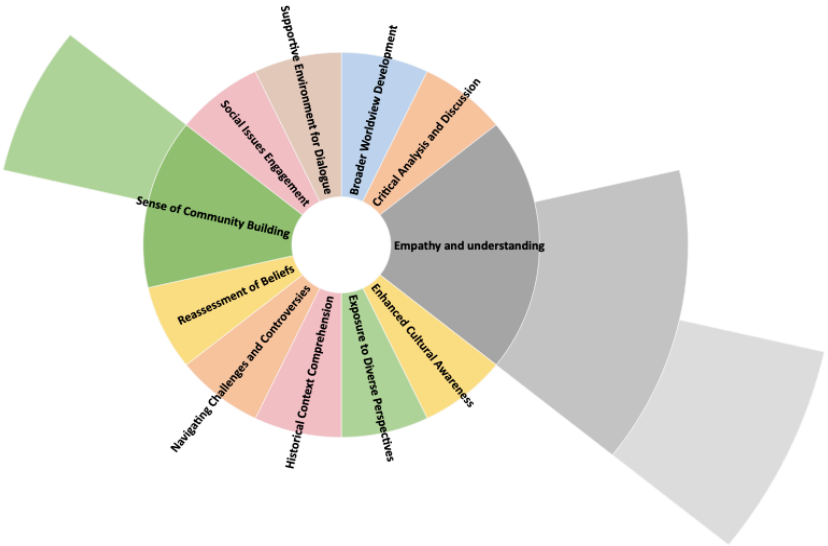
Note. Authors' own data drawn from Padlet entries and post-project survey responses. Students' statements are reproduced as received, with no language correction.

Individuals joined the project mainly for educational benefits, such as learning new things, exploring US history and culture, and enhancing their reading skills. Most participants hoped the international virtual exchange would be broadening, important, or engaging. The desire for social interaction was also a key factor, as they wanted to share their love for English, connect with others globally, and make new friends. Post-test feedback highlighted these motivations, showing that participants appreciated not only reading practice but also improvements in speaking skills through friendly discussions. This aligns with the findings of Guth and Marini-Maio (2010) and Case et al. (2024) on the development of language skills and cultural appreciation.

Answering the key question on the benefits derived from participating in the book club, many students (n = 29) appreciated expanding their knowledge of US history in terms of racism, segregation in education and social justice. They appreciated skills like respectful dialogue, active listening, empathy, and tact. The second main benefit was social interaction with international peers (n = 26). Participants also valued improving their language skills, particularly gaining confidence in speaking English (n = 19). Students felt there was not enough time for meaningful conversations in university classes, and Zoom meetings allowed them to test their language skills. Additionally, students (n = 16) appreciated gaining educational insights and different perspectives from the books. A few (n = 4) improved their ICT skills, and some (n = 3) seemed instrumentally motivated to obtain a certificate.

To address RQ2, regarding the extent of transformative learning facilitated by the IBC, we employed Thematic Analysis (TA) by Braun and Clarke (2022). This methodology allowed for the systematic identification of patterns of shared meaning across the dataset. Based on the initial codes (Figure 1), we developed five themes that incorporated Sterling's (2010) levels of learning. Although our themes encompassed reformative and conformative learning, this analysis centered on two themes directly related to RQ2.

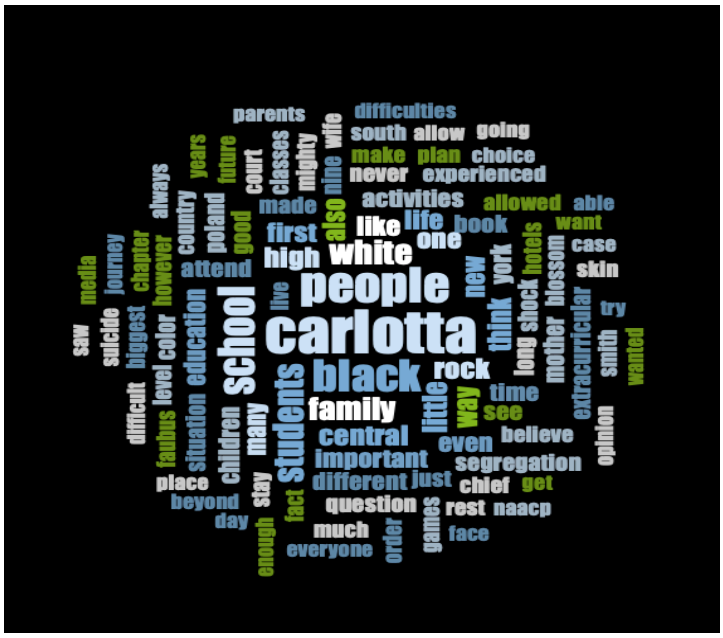
Figure 1. Codes compared by number of coding references using NVivo 14 software.



Note. Authors' own analysis based on the thematic coding of student blog entries collected during the IBC project.

Drawing from the blogs of students, we observed evidence of transformative learning as captured in the selected themes (Appendix 3). Theme 1, Empathetic understanding and cultural awareness, reported participants' commitment to feel empathy gained via increased cultural sensitivity. The data excerpts revealed a deep understanding of racial segregation, cultural differences, and unequal educational access. Participants mostly voiced their understanding of the difficult situation Carlotta had found herself in. The examples of critical reflection were usually precipitated by vivid descriptions of discrimination (P_14). Students also expressed new understandings of racial injustice (P_37) and developed empathy towards Carlotta and the Little Rock Nine. On the one hand, participants often noticed the hardship and struggles of Carlotta (P_25), and people who surrounded her, and on the other, they stressed that perseverance and persistence in the face of adversity (P_16) is possible. The participants' reflections on historical, political and educational events highlighted a collective disbelief at the extent of cruelty and misunderstanding previously unchallenged, which were often voiced by expressions such as *"I cannot believe"*, *"I cannot (even) imagine"*, *"it was horrible/unimaginable"*. The participants exhibited numerous perceptions of the events from Carlotta's life (Figure 2), often feeling discomfort and anger towards the protagonist's oppressors. The blog entries reflected their outlooks regarding the challenges Carlotta faced, laying the ground for transformative learning.

Figure 2. Word frequency from weblogs (NVivo 14).



Note. Authors' own analysis based on the frequency count of words found in student blog entries.

The data suggest several indicators of transformative learning, particularly in relation to cultural awareness, empathy, and reflection on social justice. For instance, Carlotta's culture shock encountered in New York (P_12, P_26) led students to reflect on social norms and values. Culture shock (Bennett, 2015, p. 819), also known as cultural disequilibrium, "can initiate a critical reappraisal of deeply held assumptions by strangers in how they make sense of their world", potentially intensifying participants' experiences. The enhanced levels of awareness and understanding concerned the rule-of-law culture of values like freedom (U_1), tolerance (P_26), and equity (P_12), and were based on participants' reflective and intuitive thoughts. Drawing on Bennett's (2015) conceptual framework, the project successfully elicited Carlotta's culture shock among participants, acting as a catalyst for them to critically reassess their assumptions and ideologies, thus facilitating transformative learning. However, the results are not in line with the findings of Baker et al. (2002), who notice that "conversation transitioned from a reflective stance toward deeply held issues to that of a desire to actively transform the ideas and concepts gained through reflections into a greater purpose in the benefit of a larger community" (p. 22). This discrepancy may be explained by the notion that willingness to change may not necessarily lead to action and sustainable development in the future, as the feelings of helplessness may prevail or inhibit learners' transition from thought to action.

Theme 2, Recognition of historical events and social impact leading to deep personal reflection, involved the acknowledgment of history's impact on contemporary social dynamics, fostering an understanding of the insignificance of the triviality of superficial differences between people.

The depths of participants' engagement with the book varied, ranging from retelling historical facts (P_29) to shifts in the perceptions of social (in)justice (P_33). Very few participants applied the insights gained from the project to their personal lives, and those who did (P_22) indicated that Carlotta's story influenced their perceptions of the world. Most students, however, expressed a dichotomy between their optimism for positive social changes and the more pessimistic view and feelings of helplessness of the challenges in seeing positive changes or creating a sustainable global future (P_6).

In their reflective thoughts, the participants expressed a respect for family values connected with problem-solving and decision-making. Specifically, Carlotta's mother's advice on dealing with ignorance (P_23), and the broader themes of perseverance and resilience seem to have resonated with participants. Changes in the participants' mindsets were remarkably visible when they referred to or reflected on how to apply Carlotta's mother's lessons in their own lives (P_17, P_43), underpinning crucial awareness needed for transformative learning and laying the foundation for a nuanced comprehension of present-day social interactions. By highlighting the tension between the desire for a better future and feelings of helplessness on the larger scale (P_7), they encapsulate the controversies and challenges still encountered nowadays.

This theme also encapsulated the students' recognition of an individual's capacity to face challenges when family or community support is there in overcoming adversity. A sense of awareness and rationality was reflected in participants' statements pursuing what feels right nowadays. It also reflected the belief that people (both individuals and groups) can be equal, irrespective of race, age, or personal backgrounds. The ideas clearly resonate in Bawden's (1997) words: "together we would learn how to see the world differently, and in the process, discover just how difficult a transformation this is, for individuals and the community both" (p. 1). This theme shows not only the participants' increased cultural awareness, but above all, an important improvement in how people shall approach their relationships with others (P_43), which is indicative of transformative learning *"seeing things differently"*. Overall, it focused on the shared aspects of human experience, the importance of empathy and compassion in interpersonal relations.

Overall, both themes underscore the transformative learning qualities of the IBC - emphasizing growth in empathy, social and cultural awareness, critical thinking, and appreciation for social justice - but above all, developing core sustainability competences. In the context of education, sustainability refers to integrating and developing Key Sustainability Competencies (KSC) into educational practices. Brundiers et al. (2020) outline eight main competencies that are important in higher education. They include systems thinking, strategic thinking, future/anticipatory thinking, values/norms thinking, interpersonal thinking, intrapersonal thinking, implementational thinking, and integrated problem-solving competencies. Out of the above-mentioned competencies, strategic thinking was the least mentioned of all in the blog posts. Annelin and

Boström (2022) define STRATEGIC THINKING as "the ability to construct action plans that can help solve sustainability problems and create transformation for sustainability" (p. 58). Such findings are crucial for understanding the transformative nature of educational initiatives like the IBC, highlighting the beneficial aspects of learning as a conversation towards Education for Sustainable Development that can respond to global phenomena and world problems. Through guided conversations around the personal narrative, the book club enabled learners to engage with key GCED competencies such as empathy, respect for diversity, and global awareness (UNESCO, 2013). These align directly with SDG Target 4.7, which advocates for education that promotes sustainable lifestyles, human rights, and global citizenship. By integrating reflective dialogue and collaborative interpretation, the study contributes to broader educational goals such as social responsibility, global citizenship, and sustainability in education.

With regard to RQ3, the Polish students perceived taking part in the telecollaborative project as a positive experience (Table 4). Many students viewed their participation in the IBC as a valuable social and collaborative experience (% scores ranging from 70 to 80%). The largest difference, 20 percentage points, was observed in participants' evaluation of the academic value of the project. 90% of the students from Kraków, as compared to 70% from Nysa, rated the experience as academically valuable. In a similar vein, more participants from PU than UAS (73% vs. 60%) felt they were part of a larger learning community. However, telecollaboration did not significantly increase students' comfort with new technologies (43-55%). This may be because many were already familiar with tools like Zoom, blogs, and virtual boards before the project began. Additionally, students in the more populated area of Kraków found using modern technologies less challenging than those in the less urban area of Nysa.

Table 4. Participants' post-project survey responses in percentage terms.

Survey statements	PU Krakow	UAS Nysa
1. I enjoyed reading *A Mighty Long Way*.	**100 %**	**60%**
2. I would recommend *A Mighty Long Way* to others	**100 %**	**65%**
3. I talked to my friends about *A Mighty Long Way* outside of class.	77 %	85%
4. I talked to my family about *A Mighty Long Way* outside of class.	43 %	50%
5. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* encouraged me to read more.	**63 %**	**40%**
6. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* has made me want to read more about this subject.	**57 %**	**40%**
7. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* caused me to explore ideas and issues that I might not have thought about otherwise.	77 %	85%
8. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* caused me to have a change in attitude toward education.	43 %	50%
9. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* has helped me understand English better.	60 %	60%
10. Participating in the International Book Club was a valuable *academic* experience for me.	**90 %**	**70%**
11. Participating in the International Book Club was a valuable *social* experience for me	77 %	80%
12. Participating in the International Book Club was a valuable *collaborative* experience for me.	77 %	70%
13. Participating in the International Book Club has helped me feel like a part of a larger community of learners.	**73 %**	**60%**
14. Participating in the International Book Club has helped me feel more comfortable with new technologies such as Zoom, blogging, and vlogging.	43 %	55%

Note. Authors' own analysis based on the online questionnaire.

The reading experience showed notable differences among participants. All students from Kraków enjoyed the book and would recommend it to others. In contrast, only 65% of students from Nysa liked it, and 60% would suggest it to other would-be readers. This difference may be due to the Kraków group participating voluntarily, while Nysa students were required to join for a course on English-language Cultures and Literatures. Their lower motivation was acknowledged in an open-ended survey. Nevertheless, most of the IBC participants (77-85%) were prompted to talk to their friends about the content outside of class, and some (43-50%) also to their family members.

The students who read the book found it led them to consider new ideas and issues (Kraków - 77%, Nysa - 85%), and had made the Kraków group willing to read more (63%), including the subject of racial segregation (57%). In the Nysa group, the results were not so satisfactory as among the Kraków readers. Only 40% of the Nysa participants expressed their willingness to read more, in general, and to peruse more about racism and segregation. This difference may relate to the students' motivation levels. Additionally, fewer Nysa students expressed an interest in reading books when asked about their regular reading habits

during class. The memoir did not significantly change students' attitudes toward education in Nysa (50%) and Kraków (43%), despite their enjoyment of reading and viewing the IBC as valuable. However, 60% of participants from both groups agreed that reading helped them understand English better.

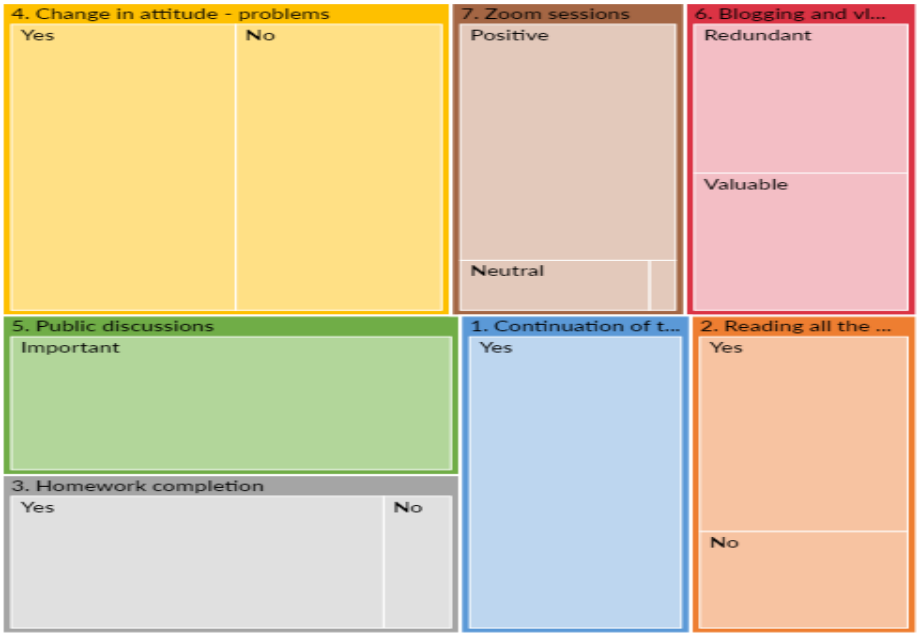
Template Analysis (King, 1998) was used to analyze student responses from the second part of a questionnaire. This method helped to understand the reasons behind the quantitative data collected earlier and explore different viewpoints of participants. TA was chosen for its ability to identify themes in advance. Seven themes (Table 5) emerged from the survey questions, and a detailed analysis of responses confirmed that these initial themes accurately represented the data, leading to the creation of main codes.

Table 5. 'A priori' themes derived from survey questions in TA.

Code No.	'A priori' themes	Corresponding survey question No.
1	Continuation of the project	1
2	Reading all the chapter	2
3	Homework completion	3
4	Change in attitude - problems	5/6
5	Public discussions	7
6	Blogging and virtual board	8
7	Zoom sessions	9

To graphically illustrate the distribution of participants' responses, a hierarchy chart of codes (Figure 3) was developed by means of NVivo 11 software. This time, however, no comparison was made between students from Krakow and Nysa, since there were no significant percentage differences in the responses.

Figure 3. Hierarchy chart of codes prepared with NVivo 11.



Note. Authors' own analysis based on the online questionnaire.

The most noteworthy finding was that all participants supported the continuation of the IBC (code No. 1), even though 4 survey respondents from the UAS in Nysa stated that the participation should have been made voluntary. As the students' responses illustratively assess the project, selected reasons why the next editions of the IBC should be held are listed in Table 6. The reasons indicate the students' mature approach to the project and their appreciation of the value of international collaboration. This finding is consistent with that of Chun and Turula (2015), who have demonstrated that their participants also perceived collaboration as an educational experience.

Table 6. *Participants' reasons for the continuation of the International Book Club project.*

Code 1	*Participants' reasons*
	having the perspective of people from different countries and cultures is helpful to see the issues at hand in a more objective way
	it helps to bridge the gap between North American, Latin American and European cultures, and helps participants to understand those cultures
	international telecollaboration is a great opportunity to meet people from abroad, to socialise and cooperate
	Zoom sessions allow you to broaden your horizons band discuss difficult topics in a pleasant way
	it is a good way to encourage people to read books.
	participation in the project contributes to improving speaking and reading skills in English
	it gives a chance to talk to a native English speaker
	students from all over the world learn a little more about American history and literature
	this project is a nice idea for students and professors to share their academic experiences
	it is a unique experience, different from regular classes
	it raises awareness about many issues of the world that many of us wouldn't have learned otherwise

As for the regularity of reading (code No. 2), one-third of students did not read the entire book, often skipping chapters due to university responsibilities, part-time jobs, and time constraints. Regarding individual work (code No. 3), 85% of students prepared answers to homework questions after reading chapters, using notes and marked sections. Fu (2014), who examined learner motivation through reading, faced similar issues of incomplete reading. His research indicated that learners who completed the book experienced higher satisfaction, which positively affected their motivation to learn a foreign language. Students were also asked if their attitude had changed toward any of the problems touched upon in the book (code No. 4). Participants' opinions were almost evenly divided. Nearly half of them (48%) answered "no", though they clarified that they had already been aware of the issues before the project. However, reading *A Mighty Long Way* gave them a deeper insight and a new outlook.

Although a considerable number of students had already been familiar with the issues addressed in the memoir, 52% of the participants considered the book to be genuinely eye-opening. They gained a new perspective on racism in the States and learnt not to take certain privileges, like the postulated inalienable and inviolable human rights, for granted. All students claim that the topics mentioned in the book are socially relevant and worthy of public discussion (code No. 5). In particular, they drew attention to the various manifestations of racism in different countries and cultural circles. Moreover, the participants believe that people ought to be properly educated about human rights and be able to assert them and react in case of any violation. However, as for the modes of interaction (codes No. 6), blogs and virtual boards were viewed as redundant by slightly

more than half of the students (52%). They treated them rather as additional mundane tasks. This finding is in line with that of Wu and Wu (2011), however, with a slight difference that our participants would definitely prefer synchronous meetings and discussions raised during Zoom sessions to asynchronous virtual exchanges. Still, many students (48%) found weblogs helpful for expressing themselves and reading through other students' posts. They found answers to reading comprehension questions helpful for live Zoom sessions. Some reserved participants found it easier to share reflections in written form. Padlet entries with personal introductions fostered a sense of community among participants from different countries. 82% of students rated Zoom meetings (code No. 7) positive, worthwhile, and essential for the project. They eagerly awaited hearing other perspectives, especially American ones, and found oral practice helpful in overcoming language barriers, reducing anxiety, and lowering stress levels. As one student reported: "I definitely understood that it is not worth stressing about speaking English and that it is best to learn the language through conversation." (P_26). Finally, one participant underlined that those online meetings pushed the boundaries of time and place (8 p.m. for Polish students, 11 a.m. for those from California) and "connected a group of people willing to lead an educational and compelling discussion" (P_51).

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by the participants in this study and those described by other researchers. Hartwell and Zou (2013) report increased speaking skills, enthusiasm and adaptation of social register. Other studies confirm that such projects improved learners' language skills, motivation and intercultural communication (Taskiran, 2020). Comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms that such intercultural telecollaboration "provoked reflective conversation" (Sharples & Ferguson, 2019, p. 4), allowed for the "negotiation of meaning" (Beglar & Hunt, 2002, p. 101), and aided in the development of "shaping competence[2]" (Rieckmann, 2011). These results are in agreement with Coll-García's (2020) findings, which showed that the students' perceptions toward international collaboration were positive as they voiced their concerns for more direct interaction time spent with their partners online. Contrary to the study by Juniari et al. (2022), participants in the present study did not perceive writing the blog posts positively. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to the idea of initiating "unprompted comments[3]" (Vu & Fadde, 2013, p. 48) in the LVC environment.

Overall, the following implications can be formulated: (1) articulating thoughts, ideas and their explanations – whether to other students, teachers or oneself – will facilitate interaction better when it is goal-oriented, (2) constructing multiple representations of new knowledge understanding, as an important step in transformative learning, must be done using various modes of communication between learners, both synchronous (Zoom, breakout rooms) and asynchronous (blog posts, survey), (3) collaborating with international partners requires not only pairing learners with similar language proficiency levels, background knowledge and age, but above all should be based on voluntary participation

rather than mandatory presence. Adapting blended learning opportunities for the participants is recommended, as "blended learning applications have the great potential to tackle the economic and social issues of sustainability (…) because the various types of technologies employed in blended learning help to make education inclusive" (Ramalingam et al., 2022, p. 12).

6 Conclusion

The International Book Club Project, which is firmly rooted in the principles of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2012), emphasises the use of critical reflection, perspective transformation and active meaning-making. Through structured intercultural dialogue and engagement with Carlotta Walls LaNier's memoir, learners confronted ethical, cultural, and historical challenges, prompting them to reassess prior assumptions and cultivate empathy. This experience aligns directly with the two UNESCO-endorsed approaches to transformative education: Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). GCED fosters critical thinking, empathy, and respectful diversity - core competencies that emerged prominently in participants' reflections on race, justice, and cultural norms. The framework of Key Sustainable Competencies (Brundiers et al., 2020) – particularly interpersonal, intrapersonal, and normative thinking – was clearly observable in students' personal reflections and blog entries. These frameworks are essential for preparing students not just to learn about sustainability and justice, but to actively contribute to shaping inclusive and peaceful societies. The telecollaborative and intercultural nature of the IBC exemplifies how transformative pedagogy can be operationalized in higher education settings to meet the urgent educational imperatives of the 21st century.

The adoption of transformative learning within an Education for Sustainable Development context turned out to be an essential step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through telecollaboration. The project not only equipped learners with the necessary competencies but also instilled in them the competences needed to participate in the creation of a more sustainable future. The International Book Club was *interactive* as the online conversations were based on some questions and themes to be discussed, negotiated and further developed. It was *collaborative* as it allowed the participants to exchange their views and opinions in an online international and intercultural environment. Although it was not *problem-oriented,* the project gradually led the participants towards finding answers to difficult questions and ways of solving social problems. This aspect of the project not only encouraged reflection on the learning process but may have led to *transformative* learning (Mezirow, 2012). Students were able to develop affective learning strategies that may help them interact with foreigners and solve some challenging problems in the future. While many students reported increased empathy and critical awareness, these did not always translate into behavioural or activist outcomes. This gap between intention and

transformation echoes findings by Baker et al. (2002), who caution that reflective learning does not always culminate in collective action.

These findings make several contributions to the field by suggesting several courses of action to be taken in higher education institutions. First, educators should consider integrating such telecollaborative projects into their curricula to enhance students' **interactive skills**. By engaging learners with discussions on global issues, the necessary competencies for sustainable development can be developed. This can be achieved by designing projects that align with ESD's goals, as continued efforts are needed to make sustainability more comprehensible for learners (Cook, 2019; Kaur, 2022; Santillán et al., 2023; Ocetkiewicz et al., 2023). Second, knowledge should be constructed through **social interaction** and engagement in meaningful activities (Tanaka, 2022). Incorporating telecollaboration in language education can provide students with authentic learning experiences. This will lead not only to increased intercultural understanding but also to the development of critical thinking among students. Another practical implication is that higher education institutions should make more effective use of technology to create **interactive learning environments.** ICT tools like Zoom, virtual boards, or blogs (Balagué, 2012) will help students communicate and collaborate more efficiently across cultural boundaries. The Conversation Theory principles were observed in participants' engagement during Zoom discussions and blog interactions, where learners negotiated meaning, expressed emotional insights, and developed shared understandings. This framework guided data interpretation on empathy, social responsibility, and injustice awareness. The structured discussion questions used in the project stimulated critical thinking and dialogue, encouraging meaningful exchange of cultural experiences and knowledge co-construction across international institutions. This model can be adopted by educators in future telecollaborative projects to foster sustainability competencies and intercultural empathy through literature-based education.

The main limitation of the project was that, although it encouraged reflection, intercultural dialogue, and awareness of social issues, it did not create sufficient opportunities for student agency and social action. Its inability to develop actionable outcomes, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2020), is seen in its pedagogical design. The international telecollaborative project did not fully move beyond reflective exchange towards action-oriented learning, in which students could design, implement, or evaluate concrete responses to the issues discussed. The reported themes do not fully realize the potential of mediation strategies and activities (Council of Europe, 2020). The study's data collection methods, primarily self-reported, may also not fully capture the depth and complexity of students' transformative learning experiences. Future editions of the project should include tasks that give students more responsibility for initiating action, collaborating on a socially meaningful outcomes, and translating reflection into practice. Future research should also incorporate more objective methods, such

as in-depth interviews or observational studies, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the transformative learning process over time.

These findings have significant pedagogical implications for the understanding of how to introduce similar telecollaborative projects based on the use of **microcredentials** (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2022), which are "small amounts of learning for which individuals can receive formal acknowledgment - a badge, a certificate, academic and/or professional credit" (p. 21). We are inclined to believe that participation in such projects may be a valuable form of gaining 1 or 2 ECTS points for students. By focusing on specific social experiences and delving into participants' beliefs, values and social norms, both conscious and unconscious, learners may critically evaluate their biases and prejudices. Understanding another person's lived experiences may evoke feelings of empathy, allowing learners to experience greater learning and transformation. According to Mercer and McDonagh (2021), such transformative pedagogy is called the **pedagogy of discomfort**, which is a process of self-examination that requires students to critically engage in mediation with others about issues such as social injustice and racial oppression and is integral to transformative learning. Following the Common European Framework of Reference - Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020), the action-oriented learning (AOL) calls for interaction and mediation that leads to action. Therefore, educators shall consider such learning opportunities, as advocated in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020), to bridge learners' understanding with the transformative action that leads to change, practical solutions to problems and action plans to be devised.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT: Data available pending contact with correspoding authors.

End notes

1. On 1 October 2023, the Pedagogical University of Krakow (PU) was renamed the University of the National Education Commission, Krakow.
2. Some examples of shaping competence are competency in anticipatory thinking, competency in cooperation, competency in dealing with conflicts of goals, competency in independent action, competency in ethical action, capacity for empathy and solidarity.
3. "Unprompted comments" are those "that students offered without being directly prompted or called on" (Vu & Fadde, 2013, p. 48)

Appendix 1. Questions for discussion about Carlotta Walls LaNier's book *A Mighty Long Way* in telecollaborative One Book Project. Developed by: Emerson Case and Agnieszka Kaczmarek.

Chapters	Questions for discussion
1-2	1) What did the everyday life of colored people look like at the beginning of the twentieth century based on Carlotta's family story? Think about the occupations, the men's/women's roles/ways of traveling, etc. 2) Enumerate the segregation rules mentioned in Chapter 1? How did they affect Carlotta's family? 3) The advice Carlotta was given by her mother was: "we must be patient with ignorance and never, ever bring ourselves down to their level." Was it good or would you have given another advice to Carlotta? 4) Why did Carlotta get back from New York as "no longer the same girl," as she stated, "I'd tasted the sweetness of freedom and seen more than my eight-year-old mind could fully understand." What did she mean by the statement? 5) Explain why Brown v. Board of Education is regarded as a historic document in the US. 6) How did Little Rock Central High School differ from Dunbar? 7) Based on the picture [photo of Little Rock Central High School] and the book – what was Carlotta's first impression about the new school? 8) Why was Madame Curie inspirational for Carlotta? 9) What happened on the bus at the end of Chapter 2?
3-5	1) Why was Carlotta able to join Little Rock Central High School, the school that was meant to be for white students exclusively? 2) How did the family react when they heard that Carlotta had got into Little Rock Central High School? Why did she sum it up as "Nothing was ever quite so black and white"? 3) What were Carlotta and other colored students afraid of before the school year started? What were the white students and their parents afraid of? 4) Were the colored students allowed to take part in extracurricular activities? What did Carlotta think about it? 5) What did Superintendent Blossom tell the black students at their first meeting? How did Carlotta and her parents feel about it? 6) Carlotta in the book asserts that "The advantage – or disadvantage – of youth is that you don't know how much you don't know; you can barely conceptualize those things you've never seen. Youth can give you an unfailing faith that the world will give you back what you give to it, what you expect. Youth can give you untainted hope." What is your stand on the opinion? How can you comment on this quotation? 7) What was the Arkansas Governor's attitude toward desegregation? What actions did Governor Faubus take? 8) Why was the Arkansas National Guard engaged during the first days at school? 9) Who supported the Nine when they were refused to enter the school? How important was that support? 10) How did the first day at school look like? How did Carlotta feel about that day? 11) How did the teachers treat Carlotta and other enrolled black students? 12) What was President Eisenhower's statement about? How did he call the protesters? How did he react? 13) Why were the events in Little Rock called historic? 14) What did the military escort look like?
6-11	1) Many different newspapers, some national, want the inside scoop for how integration is going inside Central High School. What do the white students interviewed by the Arkansas Gazette have to say? How does this clash with the message Mrs. Bates and the NAACP want to convey? 2) Carlotta eventually has time to go to summer camp; why does she find it important and precious? Have you ever attended a recreational camp? How important do you think they are? 3) When Carlotta briefly stays with Mr. and Mrs. Christopher to attend a high school in Cleveland, they offer to help her get accepted into college early. Do you think Carlotta made the right choice to instead return to Central High School's reopening? Would you have chosen the option to go to college early? 4) What does "a normal high school social life" mean to Carlotta? How is American high school social life different from the one in your country? Is it similar by any means? 5) After the bombing of her family's house, Carlotta comments: "*Then I knew for sure: The segregationists had bombed my home. They'd restored to dynamite to run me away from Central. They would stop at nothing, even murder, to keep me out. My knees felt week as that terrifying reality sank in: My family and I could have been killed. I suddenly needed fresh air. More than that, I felt compelled to see the damage for myself. At least then I'd know for sure what they had done. For me, knowing was a comfort. I could handle what I knew. It was not knowing that made me feel vulnerable and afraid."* Do you agree with Carlotta's statement? What would make you vulnerable and afraid in that situation? 6) No one at school comforts Carlotta after the bombing of her home. What do you think this silence could mean? 7) Bearing in mind the events related in Chapters 10 and 11, how did the American system of justice attempt to falsify evidence to be provided in court when efforts to desegregate the US were being made at that time?

12-15	1) How did Carlotta's parents attempt to make her participate in the graduation festivities? How do high school graduation events in your country differ from American habits? 2) According to Carlotta's statement, what does the metaphor of "a mighty long way" stand for? 3) How was Maceo Binns's case different from Herbert Monts's one? How was it similar? 4) What made Harlem jazz clubs legendary? Do you know any places that constitute your country's cultural heritage? 5) How does Carlotta feel about the 1963 events that made American history? Do you remember any event that carries a similar persuasive political power in your country's history? 6) Bearing in mind Chapters 13 and 14, think of the reasons why Carlotta does not recount her college experiences as fully as her high-school struggle for education. 7) In Chapter 14, Carlotta states: "And new, defiant black voices like the Black Panthers were emerging, finding converts in urban neighborhoods impatient with the pace of change. I had watched from a distance as my people burned down their own neighborhoods after King's death. D.C. burned. Baltimore burned. Cleveland and Chicago burned. I understood their rage." 8) Do you understand their rage? Why? Why not? What solutions seem to be workable if there is an issue that polarizes a nation/group/community? 9) In what ways does Carlotta finally find her voice? In what area do you think her voice is the strongest? 10) When arguing for establishing the Little Rock Nine Foundation, Carlotta asserts*: "We're grown now, and it's time to stop complaining about people using us, ... Let's take control of our own name and get on the same page about what we accept and not."* How important was the establishment of the foundation? How important is it to discuss our background, our experience, our heritage? What impact might our stories have on others? Do you find Carlotta's suggestion useful somehow?
16-17	1) How did the police and other law enforcement agents infringe Herbert Monts's rights stipulated in the Sixth Amendment to the American Constitution? 2) What irony could be found in the story related by Herbert? 3) When Carlotta gives talks about the Little Rock experiences, there are some students that know little or nothing about this chapter of American history. Who does she blame for that? Do you agree/disagree with her? Who do you think should be blamed for not letting students know stories of this kind? 4) How have different organizations attempted to make the story of the Little Rock Nine more commemorable? Do you think their ways work in the twenty-first century? Why? Why not? 5) What does Carlotta mean when she asserts that "the nation's public schools have largely become resegregated"? Give a few exemplifications proving and/or disproving the case. 6) Who is Carlotta's candidate for a US president in 2008? How does she justify her choice?
Beyond the Book	1) As LaNier speaks throughout the book about the people whom she has encountered in her life, she provides great detail about their backgrounds, their education, and their occupations, often highlighting their accomplishments, or recounting difficult events the people may have struggled through. (For example, she mentions Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Joel Elias Spingarn, and Thurgood Marshall, among many others in Chapter 7.) 2) Why do you think she provides many details about each person? Does it affect our understanding and perception of these people? How does this tie in with the greater themes of the book? What part does understanding or getting to know someone well play in matters of respect and tolerance, for instance? 3) Watch and listen to a song "Morning in America" performed by Durand Jones & The Indications, accessible at here. How do you think the song reflects black people's hopes to receive education? 4) How important is it to commemorate events of historic importance nowadays, for example, the celebration of Independence Day in Poland, observed on 11 November? 5) Carlotta was forced to find ways to cope with all of the insults and taunting from her classmates in school? How have you coped with insults from your peers or teachers? Where do you seek solace when you find yourself in a rough and challenging environment?

Appendix 2. Survey questionnaire developed by Emerson Case and Agnieszka Kaczmarek.

T/ F statements:

1. I enjoyed reading *A Mighty Long Way*.
2. I would recommend *A Mighty Long Way* to others.
3. I talked to my friends about *A Mighty Long Way* outside of class.
4. I talked to my family about *A Mighty Long Way* outside of class.
5. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* encouraged me to read more.
6. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* has made me want to read more about this subject.
7. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* caused me to explore ideas and issues that I might not have thought about otherwise.
8. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* caused me to have a change in attitude toward education.
9. Reading *A Mighty Long Way* has helped me understand English better.
10. Participating in the International Book Club was a valuable *academic* experience for me.
11. Participating in the International Book Club was a valuable *social* experience for me.
12. Participating in the International Book Club was a valuable *collaborative* experience for me.
13. Participating in the International Book Club has helped me feel like a part of a larger community of learners.
14. Participating in the International Book Club has helped me feel more comfortable with new technologies such as Zoom, blogging, and vlogging.

Short answer questions:

1. Do you think that the International Book Club project, in cooperation with California State University, Bakersfield, should be continued? Why? Why not?
2. Have you read all the chapters of the book you were assigned to? If not, why?
3. After reading a chapter, did you prepare answers to the questions assigned as homework? If yes, how? If not, why was it the case?
4. What have you gained by taking part in the project?
5. Has *A Mighty Long Way* changed your attitude to any of the problems touched upon in the book? What are these problems?
6. In what way has the book changed your attitude to the above-mentioned problems? If the book has not changed your attitude to any of the issues described in *A Mighty Long Way,* why do you think this is the case?
7. Do you think that public discussions on topics mentioned in the book are important? Why? Why not?
8. How important to you were the blogging and vlogging online discussions based on Carlotta Walls LaNier's *A Mighty Long Way*?
9. How important to you were the Zoom session virtual discussions based on Carlotta Walls LaNier's *A Mighty Long Way*?
10. What have you gained by taking part in the online and virtual discussions?

Appendix 3. A selection of themes with corresponding code labels indicating the transformative level of learning. The themes were generated from data extracts, mostly written by Polish (P), Mexican (MX), or Ukrainian (U) and Montenegrin (ME) students.

Themes	Codes	Excerpts from the Blogs
THEME 1: Empathetic understanding and cultural awareness	Empathy and understanding	(P_14) *Carlotta still faces bullying and racism in many ways, such as spitting, bumping, shouting offensive words, walking on her heels. Many teachers pretended not to see that and I think if all of them took action to punish the bullies, it would help at least a little. And of course they should at least try and not turn a blind eye to that because students felt like they could do anything and wouldn't suffer any serious consequences. Classmates wouldn't be able to do much as they would face bullying themselves if they openly opposed bullies' behaviour. The military guards should have stepped in more, as I see it, because they were next to black students all the time and they saw everything but on the other hand not everything could be prevented and they couldn't punish students themselves, while reporting the incidents didn't help because teacher didn't care enough. I think the teachers' and also parents' attitude was the most important factor.* (P_16) *Carlotta and the other eight black students attend only in 3 classes because they had to evacuate after the third lesson. Carlotta was terrified and paralyzed with fear. I can't imagine such a terrible situation in which I would have to go through so many difficult and sad situations in order to be able to learn like other students* (P_37) *She faced bullying on both physical (a girl stepping on Carlotta's heel on purpose) and emotional (seeing posters with racist message). In the book, she mentioned that only once she managed to fight back, and it was a dangerous act because she could have been expelled from the school. Most of the time, she had to be silent about her problems because she could have gotten into a bigger problem. It's difficult to judge if others could have stepped in more, because everyone was scared of getting themselves into a problem with segregationists. On the one hand, I think it was horrible that Carlotta did not feel safe with her classmates and teachers, but on the hand, I can understand that white people were afraid of the change as well.* (P_3) *Being in a situation like this is scary enough but not knowing what was going on and living with a constant fear for your life is unimaginable.* (P_25) *As for classes, it will be difficult for black students to integrate. These black students could be called white crows, so for children at school it would be very difficult to get along with them for fear of being suspected to be their friends and get alienated at the end. So black students will be isolated and have to go through a lot of hard*ships in classes and school in general.
	Enhanced cultural awareness	(P_12) *Carlotta's culture shock in New York was one of my favourite parts of the book - as a person who always felt distant from my hometown, I saw big cities as different world that would allow me to express myself differently and achieve greater goals. Her shock was, of course, of deeper meaning but I believe that it is important, especially for children, to experience such shocks. I think it made her see the possibility of how life could be like and that it's worth fighting for.* (U_1) *Carlotta said "I'd tasted the sweetness of freedom, and seen more than my eight-year-old mind could fully understand." The key word here is 'freedom'. She saw a more liberal approach to lifestyle, society, and people of color. In New York, she felt free to be what and who she is. Personally, I am experiencing a culture shock now, as an exchange student in Poland.* (P_26) *Carlotta has never seen anything like it before her visit to New York. The city was much bigger than her hometown and so was the difference in culture. The people living in New York were much more tolerant. The cultural mix that was already visible there was what made her impressed. I can relate to Carlotta's shock during the visit to New York to some extend because I come from a village and moved to Cracow just 3 years ago. Surely, the difference is nowhere near comparable to the situation described in the book. However, even today there is a noticeable* ***difference in people's mindsets*** *in bigger cities and smaller ones.*

THEME 2: Recognition of historical events and social impact leading to deep personal reflection	Historical content comprehension	(P_29) (*Q re: The Brown vs Board of Education) *I don't think that local court case will be enough. The case of Little Rock Nine is primarily related to Little Rock, but the topic of integrating schools is of the wider range. The topic is serious because it brigs huge changes to the way of living for all Americans. That's why this will need to go to the federal court, in my opinion.* (P_33) *it is easy to notice that the segregation is practically non-existent in the North. Carlotta was shocked because all the rules she has had to learn growing up were disregarded in NYC. I was wondering whether that came from the fact that the North was pro-abolitionist and fought for ending the slavery during the Civil War? I cannot really say that I have experienced anything similar, ever.* (P_22) *The NAACP stands for "National Association for the Advancement of Colored People". I see that nowadays they are dealing with a lot of different topics, such as climate justice, education innovation, as well as race justice, and they have more than 2 million activists fighting for the end of inequality. One of the interesting things I have found on the site is the information that "50% of staff on CBS TV shows must represent the Black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) community for the 2022/23 broadcast season". This is important because mass media effects nation's view on the world. By properly including and presenting minorities in mass media, the animosity towards them can be avoided.* (P_6) *I am sure it won't be enough. Local white people grew accustomed that black ones have a lower status and that they are beneath their own level. Being slaves in the past how whites can easily except to be on equal grounds with blacks. From my point of view integration of black and white students looks like just a first step in making all the people living on the South equal. This opinion understood a lot of people who didn't want to accept it, so they created and joined segregation groups. So, they would fight to the dead end for their own belief which would escalate to higher authority to solve the problem.*
	Critical analysis and discussion	(P_37) *One of the biggest lessons Carlotta learned from her mother was to "never stoop to their level", "their" meaning white people who would visibly and/or audibly show their disgust towards people of colour. I too believe this is the right approach to such situations. I learned from experience that talking back or showing your frustration is exactly what bullies want. By reacting this way, you basically reward them because they can see they achieved their goal. On the other hand, by ignoring them (and thus preventing further conversation), you show how insignificant stingy comments are to you. Anyone can call someone names. Those with real pride know it can't be damaged this easily.* (P_7) *One of the biggest lessons that Carlotta learns from her mother is to ignore offensive comments and do not behave like someone who orally hurts others. Her mother tried to explain her that these intolerant people are the ones who should deal with their own problems and do not step on somebody. Personally, I try to live by that mindset, but during tough days it's just impossible.* *(P_17) One of the biggest lessons that Carlotta learned from her mother growing up was to be patient with ignorant people and to never bring herself down to their level. I personally agree with that mindset and I always try to be as composed as possible and I don't think that we should fight hate with more hate.* (P_43) *Carlotta`s mother is a wise and reasonable woman, and I believe a very good counselor in the life of her daughter. She didn`t boast her words with pompously arranged phrases. She just told her daughter to be patient with ignorance and never, ever bring herself to the level of offenders. These words served as a manual for Carlotta's attitude and shaped her reaction to similar situations in the future. Mother didn`t want to turn her daughter into the constant hatred, which could make her an oppressed and vicious personality, so that in her life she would only try to search for the revenge. I can call this way of acceptance the most suitable in such situations, the daughter learned the true way of response and despite all evil, she will cherish kind but strong attitude during her life.* *I can`t say that I try to live a similar mindset, but it is true that my mother gave me some close advice. The bulling is everywhere and social differences vary in all countries. I believe that the poverty or riches of your family your appearance are often the course of some inconsistencies. However, I am convinced that to protect and stand for yourself is always the best choice. Your uniqueness is the things that matters first. The fight might be hard, but the effort is always worth the result.*
	Social influence *Initial code:* Carlotta's mother advice	(P_15) *Vocalizing support is crucial for teenagers, especially. As a teenager myself, I can say we deal with a lot of self-criticism, low self-esteem, and overthinking. Sometimes even a nice word can make a difference for someone who is struggling. In Carlotta's case, support gave her the strength to survive all of the bad things she came across. In my case, friends vocalized their support for me, which lifted my spirit.* (P_39) *Vocalizing support by family and strangers gave Carlotta strength and made her think that her sacrifice was important for whole her community. I think support is important for everyone because then we feel that we do something good.*

Note. Underlining in the table indicates emphasis added by the authors.

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