

AN OVERVIEW OF USING COLLABORATIVE WRITING METHOD TO INCREASE STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY

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Abstract

This study reviews the effectiveness of using collaborative writing method to enhance students' writing ability. It also tries to expand the scope of collaboration in all aspects of the EFL College writing process. First of all, this article explains the operational definition of collaborative learning process based on EFL writing instruction. In what follows, the article headlights the benefits of collaborative writing process in the EFL classroom. The remaining phase of this article discusses the steps and procedures in practicing writing based on collaborative process in the classroom. Anchored in this collaborative process based writing framework, a teacher enables students to engage in collaborative and dialogic activities through the process of writing. The definite aim is to help EFL college students in writing academic pieces better and more easily as they go through the writing process from pre- writing to post-writing.

Key Words: *Collaborative Writing, the EFL classroom*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is a form of 'writing together' or 'multiple authorship' and refers to acts of writing in which two or more individuals consciously work together to produce a common text. Even if only one person literally 'writes' the text, another person contributing ideas has an effect on the final text that justifies calling both the relationship and the text it produces collaborative. For other critics, such as (Linda, 2002), collaboration includes these situations and also expands to include acts of writing in which one or even all of the writing subjects may not be aware of other writers, being separated by distance, era, or even death."

The most obvious advantage of the collaborative writing process is summed up well in the old saying, "two heads are better than one." Having more than one person working on a writing project increases the amount of combined knowledge of the authors, (Lai, 2002). In areas of intelligence where one person is weak, others may be strong, and vice versa. If utilized properly, the collective intelligence of a group of writers can be a powerful resource. In other words, collaborative writing involves knowledge and linguistic resource sharing, mutual engagement, negotiation, and a jointly completed product.

An empirical findings and literature have discussed the benefits and efficacy of collaborative learning (i.g., group work

activities and collaborative dialogs) in the ESL/ EFL classroom. According to Nelson and Murphy, (1992) the advantage of the collaborative process is having multiple pairs of eyes to proofread the writing. Having a fresh perspective is vital when proofreading, so the more people looking at the writing, the higher the likelihood that mistakes will be identified and improvements will be made. Creativity can be fueled when multiple writers brainstorm with each other. That is another great advantage to the collaborative writing process. One writer can propose an idea, and another can expand on it and complement it.

1.1 Collaborative Writing in EFL students

The potential relationship between collaboration-based pedagogies and social/ collaborative online platforms is almost proverbial. At the same time, anyone who's ever tried to get first-year students to take peer review seriously knows that there is often real resistance to meaningful collaboration. Not insurmountable resistance—but it can be the case that students are uncomfortable sharing their work with their peers, or from a slightly different angle, have a hard time seeing how they would benefit from such sharing. In that context, there's an interesting study about "Sharing and Collaborating with students' writing, Stroch, (2011: 275) compare various approaches to co-writing, ranging from outright joint writing (where multiple students could edit or contribute text to a common draft) to situations where peers made

suggestions for, but did not directly edit, one another's drafts.

Stroch learned two things: first, that in general students felt that collaborating with partners improved the quality of drafts. On the other hand, the students mostly felt that their edits improved other people's drafts, whereas other people's edits worsened their own drafts. Murphy, (1992) posits that a sense of ownership of the draft was pedagogically useful—that students' perceptions of the overall quality of their work increased as they felt responsible for it. As a consequence, they conclude that the best way to reap the benefits of collaboration and psychological ownership of writing is to have students make suggestions to one another's drafts, but not to edit one another's writing directly. Stroch, (2011) have published another discussion of this study, in which they argue that there's a kind of "tension" between collaboration and ownership, and that this tension is important to learning.

A disadvantage of this process is the possibility of opposing opinions on how best to represent the given information. If some members of the collaborative process are unwilling to compromise, this can be a serious obstacle. Additionally, conflicting schedules of a writing team can make it hard for a project to be completed. In a collaborative process, if certain tasks are assigned to members of the group, the writing will only be as good as the weakest portion of the project. If not all members of the group are

professional and serious-minded, the work will suffer. Individual processes might be preferable when writing about personal experiences, or when the subject matter is very narrow and the deadline is tight.

1.2. Approaches in collaborative learning of writing class

Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of students working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. According to Gerlach, "Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves (Gerlach, 1994). It is through the talk that learning occurs."

There are many approaches to collaborative learning. A set of assumptions about the learning process (Smith and MacGregor, 1992) underlies them all:

1. Learning is an active process whereby students assimilate the information and relate this new knowledge to a framework of prior knowledge.
2. Learning requires a challenge that opens the door for the learner to actively engage his/her peers, and to process and synthesize information rather than simply memorize and regurgitate it.
3. Learners benefit when exposed to diverse viewpoints from people with varied backgrounds.
4. Learning flourishes in a social environment where conversation between learners takes

place. During this intellectual gymnastics, the learner creates a framework and meaning to the discourse.

5. In the collaborative learning environment, the learners are challenged both socially and emotionally as they listen to different perspectives, and are required to articulate and defend their ideas. In so doing, the learners begin to create their own unique conceptual frameworks and not rely solely on an expert's or a text's framework. Thus, in a collaborative learning setting, learners have the opportunity to converse with peers, present and defend ideas, exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks, and be actively engaged.

Collaborative learning processes can be incorporated into a typical 50-minute class in a variety of ways. Some require a thorough preparation, such as a long-term project, while others require less preparation, such as posing a question during lecture and asking students to discuss their ideas with their neighbors (see concept tests). As Smith and MacGregor state, "In collaborative classrooms, the lecturing/listening/note-taking process may not disappear entirely, but it lives alongside other processes that are based in students' discussion and active work with the course material." Regardless of the specific approach taken or how much of the ubiquitous lecture-based course is replaced, the goal is the same: to shift learning from a teacher-centered to a student-centered model.

2. THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING

There are many advantages and disadvantages in collaborative writing. Three advantages that come to mind are having a wider knowledge base. Teams of experts have a wider base of knowledge than a single writer. Similarly, there is a wider range of expertise. Collaboration offers a wider range of expertise and skills that one writer may possess. Divergent opinions play a factor in the advantages of collaborative writing by the group offering divergent opinions, raise more questions, and point out more problem areas than a single writer. Thus, there are a few more advantages in collaborative writing such as; wider responsibilities and respect for co-workers.

Another advantage of the collaborative process is having multiple pairs of eyes to proofread the writing. Having a fresh perspective is vital when proofreading, so the more people looking at the writing, the higher the likelihood that mistakes will be identified and improvements will be made. Creativity can be fueled when multiple writers brainstorm with each other. That is another great advantage to the collaborative writing process. One writer can propose an idea, and another can expand on it and complement it.

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working on a writing project increases the amount of combined knowledge of the authors. In areas of intelligence where one person is weak, others may be strong, and vice versa. If utilized properly, the collective intelligence of a group of writers can be a powerful resource.

In contrast, along with advantages, there are also disadvantages. Some of the disadvantages may be workload disparities. The workload may have disparities and some people may have to work harder than others that will lead to resentment that will need to be addressed and mollified. In contrast, a disadvantage of this process is the possibility of opposing opinions on how best to represent the given information. If some members of the collaborative process are unwilling to compromise, this can be a serious obstacle. Additionally, conflicting schedules of a writing team can make it hard for a project to be completed. In a collaborative process, if certain tasks are assigned to members of the group, the writing will only be as good as the weakest portion of the project. If not all members of the group are professional and serious-minded, the work will suffer. Individual processes might be preferable when writing about personal experiences, or when the subject matter is very narrow and the deadline is tight.

2.1 Key Principles of Collaborative Writing

As we have seen in previous sections of this workshop, cooperative groups work best when:

1. Each student is involved. In groups where students are dominated by one leader, where a shy student hesitates to join in and contribute, or where you are just trying cooperative groups for the first time, you may wish to assign specific roles. One person might be the "organizer." That person will tell the students what step should come first, second, third, and so on. Another would be the "reporter," who writes down the directions and reports back to the group about their progress and goals. A third person is the "questioner," who generates questions to ask along the way in order to involve every member. A fourth member could be the "assessor," who uses a set rubric or guide to evaluate the progress of each meeting. The roles are clearly defined in advance, so that each person is accountable, and everyone in the group plays an important part.
2. Seats face one another. When students face their coworkers, they are more likely to interact well with others. Seating arrangements really do make a difference, and sometimes students need to be reminded that they should move chairs closer together or place them in a circle. You can set up the room with seats in clusters to facilitate this process.
3. Students assume personal responsibility. Invite students to report back to their group or to another group after each session. Give clear guidelines on paper for each person's role and go over them, so that students

understand the criteria for his or her role. Change roles regularly, so that students can learn to assume responsibility in a variety of areas.

4. Students relate well to others. Some students are better than others at interpersonal exchanges. You may wish to provide those who are weaker in relating to others with practice opportunities to engage in social contacts. This can be as simple as teaching others a favorite subject or joining a teammate for a special class duty.
5. Members reflect in order to improve group effectiveness. Students can be given a list of questions to consider, such as the conflict-resolution inventory presented in an earlier section. They will improve their performances as they learn to reflect on past performances and create new goals based on those reflections.

3. CONCLUSION

As Stroh (2005) points out, the difficult task that writing teacher encounter in

collaborative process based writing is to respond to students' preferences to work alone. Nonetheless, teachers should prepare their students to write collaboratively to facilitate students' writing skill development. The success and failure of collaborative process based writing rely on a number of factors such as teacher competence in teaching writing and managing the process of writing, the particular writing classroom context, the nature of the school curriculum and class syllabus, and individual students' differences (i.g., a students' proficiency level in language and writing or motivation to write collaboratively). Above all, writing teachers should not lose sight of the fact that writing is a social act and takes time for students to be competent writers who are aware of their writing goal or purpose, context, and intended audience (Hyland, 2007)

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