



A Study in Collaborative Writing

Lora M. Beseler and Lin Qi

Winona State University, Winona, Minnesota – USA

Received 3 Apr. 2014, Revised 10 Apr. 2014, Accepted 10 Apr. 2014, Published 1 Jul. 2014

Abstract: This article extensively surveys the topic of collaborative writing in the classroom in its literature review. It contrasts the virtues derived from the process of collaborating against the collaborative end product. Through a quantitative study conducted within three groups of L2 students in a small Mid-Western American university, the study seeks to identify the dynamics of the process and students' attitudes towards collaborative writing assignments. Our study considered the influence of student personalities, cultures, and student preferences for interaction, including the availability of technology and social media, in collaborating. In our small sample, we draw the inferences that students prefer face-to-face collaboration despite the availability of technology, and that collaborative writing *scaffolds* lower level learners in shorter page writing assignments, while it *scaffolds* more advanced learners in longer length writing assignments. Finally, we infer that collaborative writing has a positive effect upon learners individually and as team members.

Keywords: collaborative learning, collaborative writing, student-centred

INTRODUCTION

With the emphasis upon learning and knowledge as matters of social construction, and their implications of and for interaction between and amongst students, and students and teachers, collaborative writing presents itself as an avenue of possibilities, potentialities, and a resource for language learning. What is the TESOL field saying and reporting regarding collaborative writing (CW)? Do our university TESOL department students engage in CW in a way that reflects the reported findings?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To collaborate is defined as “to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort” (American Heritage, 1969, pp. 260-261), and as “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor” (Merriam-Webster, 2013). It is within this definitional parameter of productive togetherness that this paper looks at and identifies the current professional views of collaborative writing (CW), its theoretical foundations, along with recent research findings that specify the benefits and drawbacks for CW.

Scholars writing on CW agree that CW is built upon a bedrock of communicative interaction and sociocultural theory (Storch, 2011, 2005). Storch posits that “[T]he underlying premise of sociocultural theory

is that all learning is fundamentally a social process, the result of interaction among humans in the social milieu” (Storch, 2011, p. 277). Likewise, Ede joins Storch in advocating for the notion that meaning and knowledge do not emerge as a result of solitary effort, but that they come into existence as a direct result of human interaction (Ede, 1990). It is through this social interaction that collaborators furnish one another with knowledge bases known as *scaffolding*.

Vygotsky's theory of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) immediately informs CW as a basis for *scaffolding* (McNenny and Roen, 1992; *see also* Storch, 2011). In collective scaffolding the collaborating partners scaffold one another; that is, each provides information and knowledge, one to the other, in the constructing of new knowledge in harmony (Storch, 2011). In this way the collaborative team may arrive at knowledge neither one of them would have arrived at alone (Wigglesworth and Storch, 2012). This scaffolding underpins what Swartz and Triscari call their “unified view ...always emerg[ing] out of a reflective process of adding and challenging each other's view” (2011, p. 332). Additionally, they describe the collaborative partnership as a means of “making possible the creation of new knowledge that neither of us would have come to individually” (2011, p. 332). Swartz and Triscari (2011) believe that mere bodily presence alone is not enough to procure the benefits of CW; there must be an ongoing deliberate



effort for trust and openness with one another in order for rewards of shared cognition to be realized (2011). Reither and Vipond (1989) include short-range tasks, such as co-writing and peer editing, along with long-range goals of meaning-making in order to expand the definitional parameters of CW. Kim (2008) sought to identify whether Korean learners participating in collaborative tasks affected language related events (LRE's) and their corrections as compared to individuals acting alone. Swain's *output hypothesis* recognizes that interaction between language learners creates opportunities for noticing gaps in their knowledge of language forms, their own interlanguage, and the target language (Swain, 1993). Kim (2008) relied on Swain's hypothesis in formulating a dictogloss study that would identify and compare the LRE's of CW pairs with that of individual writers. The CW group and the lone individuals both produced the same number of LRE's; however, the CW group had been exposed to double the number of LRE's because the pair individuals were both subject to one another's LRE's (Kim, 2008). Analyzing the results, Kim was able to conclude that the CW group outperformed the individuals in correct gap-filling of LRE's and that the CW task positively facilitated second language acquisition (2008). Kim's findings suggest that CW work provides an "edge" in positive outcome over work that has been produced as a matter of individual effort.

McNenny and Roen (1992) characterize writing as being socially derived, while Sperling likens learning how to write to the process of learning how to speak (Sperling, 1990). Both abilities, Sperling states, are rooted in social interaction (1990). Writing, posits Sperling, is the expression of internalized thought which has, in turn, resulted from social interaction (1990). In an attempt to understand the role of dialogue, Elola and Oskosz utilize *wikis* as a tool for the comparison of CW and individual essay writing, and the *chats* that ensued during the course of the writing of those essays (Elola and Oskosz, 2010). Analyzing their results, Elola and Oskosz found that the CW writers addressed essay structural issues and problems at the beginning of their partnership and essay writing, whereas individual writers revised structure issues and problems in the essay repeatedly during numerous drafts (2010). Elola and Oskosz do note that in "Wheeler, *et al.*'s study ... students ... were resistant to having their contributions altered or deleted by other groups members" (2010, p. 283), suggesting the pervasive notion (and traditional viewpoint) that writing is a solitary activity. CW writers in Elola and Oskosz's study, similar to the *wiki* functions, utilized *chat* functions discussing task labor divisions, task planning, essay content, each other's opinions, topics, structures, and engaged in feedback (2010). These findings are in stark contrast to the

individual writers who had only their own thought processes to rely on, highlighting for Elola and Oskosz the social dimensions of CW (2010). Despite recognition of those social dimensions to CW, Reither and Vipond point out the weakness in merely saying writing is a social activity, or that learning is a social phenomenon.

Rather, Reither and Vipond (1989) take the position that characterizing collaboration as nothing more than just a social process falls short in our understanding of CW. It does not fully inform the characterization and our understanding because it does not elucidate what is actually happening during the CW process; that is, it does not explain or describe what sorts of interactions are taking place between the collaborators (1989). Reither and Vipond instead seek to delve into what people do with regard to one another in their collaborative task, as well as what occurs as a result of that collaboration (1989). For Swartz and Triscari, what people do with regard to one another in CW is as important, if not more important, than the actual end product of CW.

The collaborative *relationship* is importantly designated by Swartz and Triscari as "the distinguishing feature of a collaborative learning partnership" (2011, p. 332). Yancey and Spooner (1998) ask whether it is the collaboration itself or the results of collaboration that is of most significance to people. Yancey and Spooner (1998) distinguish between collaborators and cooperators. Cooperators are defined as solitary individuals who performs discrete tasks "within a larger plan" (Yancey and Spooner, 1998, p. 52). Collaborators, on the other hand, are persons moving towards consensus, integration and harmonious expression (Yancey and Spooner, 1998). Yancey and Spooner characterize this partnership as "a relationship among differences" (1998, p. 56). The collaborative relationship is envisioned as one of re-created identity (Swartz and Triscari, 2011; Yancey and Spooner, 1998). Yancey and Spooner (1998) rely on Monseu, Gerlach, and McClure for the notion of a "blended voice" (1998, p. 48), the end- result in identity as a culmination of the collaborative process. Similarly, Ericka Lindemann (2001) envisions collaboration as embodying not only the blended identities of two individuals, but, in addition, the melding of those identities into the particular discourse community itself within which the CW is occurring.

For Lindemann (2001), CW is necessary in order to move from an individual orientation in process writing to a student-centered orientation in process writing. Acceptance of the theoretical underpinnings of language as social interaction implies the making of meaning through collaboration (2001). Similarly, Elola and Oskosz' *wiki/chat* essay study



promotes a less teacher-centered environment (2010) which buttresses Lindemann's desire for a student-centered writing process (Lindemann, 2001).

A student-centered environment also developed as a result of CW in the form of a group comprised of second language graduate students, primarily Ph.D.'s, in the process of writing theses, and instructors who acted as facilitators in Li and Vandermensbrugge's case study (2011). During weekly group meetings thesis work pieces were shared among the students, and via a projector and the use of tracking device on the revisions (2011). The case study was followed for a semester in length in 2005; data collection was via the facilitators' (the authors) observations, open-ended questions on a questionnaire, and a focus group interview (2011). What developed was a process whereby the students slowly assumed the facilitative role and collaborating on their thesis writings (2011). Collaboration included:

...commenting on the use of language, style of writing, genres and discourses; questioning ambiguous statements, unclear written expression, illogical sequences; discussing grammar, language, style and writing issues arising from the work-in-progress; suggesting alternatives for improvement; summarizing strengths and weaknesses, identifying good and poor examples,... revising...and supporting each other intellectually and socially. (Li and Vandermensbrugge, 2011, p. 198).

Although the case study was small and limited to one university (Li and Vandermensbrugge, 2011, p. 203), the study does illustrate important developments for the graduate students as a result of the CW group. Benefits of CW included enhanced reader awareness (from the sharing of writings with one another), ability to give and receive feedback that is meaningful and useful, and most importantly, the learner-student shift in their perception of the CW group as being a group for "fix[ing] problems" to a group focused on *learning and writing development*" (Li and Vandermensbrugge, 2011, p. 202).

Storch (2005) found that students who collaborated in writing not only produced shorter texts that are more complex and accurate than their counterparts who worked alone, but that they did so because they were "pool[ing] their linguistic resources"(p. 166). Additionally, and just as importantly, Storch examined positive student attitudes towards CW. Although two students felt that collaboration and pair work is best left to oral discussions, overall the students felt that CW was a positive experience for them, contributing to vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and

that it was a "novel, fun activity" (2005, p. 167). Students did express negative attitudes such as the worry of hurting someone's feelings, underestimating their own language abilities, and the concern that CW is a distraction to their own writing (2005). Storch's findings in the quantitative component are not statistically significant; however, students' abilities to generate ideas and brainstorm, to engage in on-the-spot feedback (which does not exist in an individual writer's setting), and to obtain a personal investment in the journey to the finished product are demonstrated (2005).

Likewise, Bryan (1996) tracked her cooperative writing students via personal observations and found the same or similar benefits to CW students at the community college at which she taught. Like the graduate students in Li and Vandermensbrugge's study, Bryan (1996) noted an increased audience awareness in her students (*see also* Storch, 2005), and a demonstrated decrease in distance awareness between reader and writer (Bryan, 1996). She also found that CW expanded student confidence, and increased student responsibility for learning (1996). She notes that students felt safer in small groups, assumed a critical awareness of their own writing and its process through discussion of it, and took advantage of opportunities to "rehearse" modifications in their own writing through those discussions (1996, p. 189). When such salubrious effects can be obtained for students, why are "true collaborative learning partnerships so rare?" asked Swartz and Triscari (2011, p. 335). The answer to that question may be found in the recommendation of Reither and Vipond (1989).

Reither and Vipond (1989) strongly advise teachers to lay a foundation for collaboration before presenting collaboration to their students. They believe that properly designed coursework can be designed in ways that naturally beg for collaboration (1989). Such design for the teaching of CW can be created by giving students research questions to investigate; they term such courses as "collaborative investigations" (1989, p. 862). In this way students engage in a division of cooperative labor, "apprentic[e] themselves to its literature" (p. 862), and "collectively develop, through reading and writing, its own knowledge claims..." (p. 862). The teacher sets the stage for cooperation by dividing students into teams that must intermittently report their findings (Reither and Vipond, 1989). Teachers should encourage a flexible space for collaboration say Swartz and Triscari (2011). All forms of cooperation and collaboration should be encouraged by the instructor and modeled for the students (Reither and Vipond, 1989; *see also* Wilhelm, 1999). Although it will not guarantee true collaboration, it will point the



way to what Swartz and Triscari designate as salient characteristics of the true collaborative relationship: “communication and acceptance, valuing the relationship, diversity of experience, transparency, mutual respect, and acceptance or open-mindedness to different perspectives” (Swartz and Triscari, 2011, p. 331).

THE STUDY

We were curious to discover how our small mid-western university students would reflect, or not reflect, the attitudes of students in the reported field literature. A quantitative plan to survey student attitudes was devised to identify CW processes used. A survey questionnaire was developed that would query students as to the types of activities they used as tools for collaboration; their preferences in activities and how they rated their preferences, and what they deemed to be benefits or drawbacks in collaborative writing. We were interested in how students view the supervision of teachers and their feedback during the CW process, and how students prefer to be paired or grouped for purposes of CW.

Additionally, we were interested in how students reported their personality types and how they perceived their personalities as influencing CW. Equally as important, we wanted to know how students perceived their respective native cultures as influencing CW dynamics, such as the ability to compromise, the ability to express one’s opinion, and the ability to think critically. Finally, we wanted to know whether students like CW, or not, and to what degree, and whether they believed the quality of their writing was positively or negatively affected as a result of collaborative writing.

QUESTION PRESENTED

How do L2 writers engage in cooperative writing? As corollaries we ask: what are L2 attitudes towards cooperation, and do they believe that cooperative writing strategies and activities are effective in producing their writing? What strategies do they actually use?

THE SUBJECTS

For purposes of this study we chose three classes of ESL students which were representative of ESL students at the graduate level, mid-level ESL students, and lower-level ESL students in the English Language Center of the university for a total of 44 students. The 44 students originated from seven countries, including China (19), Japan (1), Turkey (1), Korea (5), Saudi Arabia (16), Sudan (1), and Benin (1). Of these nationalities 21 students ranged between 18 and 25 years old; 12 students ranged between 25 and 35 years old; and three students ranged between 35 and 50 years old (as reported).

METHODOLOGY

The question presented for study asked how L2 writers engage in cooperative writing, and, as corollaries, what attitudes do L2 students have towards CW, and whether they believe CW facilitates and benefits their writing. Given that a great amount of literature speaks only of CW in terms of peer review strategies, we are interested to know whether students employ strategies other than peer review to collaboratively write. We believe this is an important question because, if there are other possible strategies available for utilization of CW, a classroom teacher is not restricted and constrained by peer review strategy alone. Further, strategies for CW that students enjoy and prefer will serve to motivate them in their writing and have the additional benefit of creating autonomous learners.

We first administered a survey questionnaire to three groups of L2 students within TESOL classrooms at the graduate level (582), at a mid-level L2 writing course (107), and at a lower-level L2 course in the English Language Center of the university (ELC). The survey questionnaire was constructed in multiple choice/Likert Scale format. After administering the survey, by means of convenience sampling, we chose two L2 students from each group to form three separate focus groups for purposes of interviewing with follow-up questions for explanation and expansion of responses.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In the initial stages of the survey analysis, it was decided that we would omit numbers resulting from “neutral” or “neither/nor” responses as those responses lacked any commitment to any particular orientation.

For both the 582 and ELC groups, the CW that had been most engaged in was the pair and group work (two or more persons finishing one writing task in cooperation); this was followed by the 107 group which reported having engaged in peer review work most, followed by group work. The ELC group reported having used email as a second choice and peer review as a third choice. In their native countries the majority of students had engaged in CW three to four times, with only five persons having engaged in CW more than five times. The vast majority of students preferred pair/group work, and *all* groups liked CW (only four persons remained neutral). In the focus groups the students all expressed like sentiments regarding CW: “discuss with classmates”, “refin[e] ideas”, “exposure to other perspectives”, and “share information and help one another face to face”. It was the “face to face” component of pair/group work that most appealed to the students. The ability for students



to *see* facial expressions, body language, and to be able to demonstrate ideas to one another made pair/group work the top choice.

When asked “*how* do you like CW?”, students ranked CW activities with striking results: the lower-level 107 and ELC groups ranked pair/group work very strongly as compared to the 582 group which ranked peer review more strongly. Telephone use for CW was generally disliked by all groups with only the 107 group giving email the same high ranking as group work due to the lack of “face to face” contact.” Unsurprisingly, the 107 and ELC groups reported CW as “time saving”. Only the 582 group perceived CW as “time consuming”; the 582 group alone, however, preferred the 8 to 12 page paper for purposes of CW. In the 582 focus group it was articulated that longer assignments are ideal for CW as there is much more time to “negotiate the task and effort expended”, and there is time to “connect souls” (Anonymous, focus group, 2013).

All groups reported preferring a one to four page paper length. The lower levels felt that pair work was preferable as “pair work is good for shorter papers”, and it “reduces work load” (Anonymous, focus group, 2013); whereas, the 582 group preferred to work alone on shorter papers. The 582 and ELC groups both reported five to eight page papers as being acceptable for CW purposes. The 107 group reported a decided disfavor for any CW involving five to 12 pages or more in length. And, understandably, the 107 and ELC groups both ranked a paper more than 12 pages in length unfavorably. The 107 and ELC groups liked teacher supervision during CW; as for the 582 group, it reported neutral for teacher supervision. Overall, however, all groups believed that constructive teacher feedback was useful to them in CW, and *all* valued teacher feedback.

All groups believed that a clear rubric affects CW work. Students voiced clear opinions for the furnishing of rubrics: “without a clear rubric don’t know what to do”(Anonymous, focus group, 2013). Rubrics should be “specific, precise, and short”(2013). A good rubric allows students to “share and divide up tasks”(2013). One student insightfully observed that an effective rubric will “depend on the language level” (Anonymous, focus group, 2013).

Overall, students preferred that the teacher assign collaborators. Collaborators chosen “by myself” came in as second choice; only the ELC had a preference for choosing one’s collaborator(s) individually. Students in the focus group voiced a preference for teacher assignment of collaborators because “it is more fair if teacher picks”, “the teacher knows the students best”, and if the teacher picks partners then I “avoid hurting someone”(Anonymous, 2013). Some students reported that they themselves

like to choose a classmate they know because they are familiar with that classmate’s abilities and can trust the person; short of that, those students believed a teacher should choose.

We were curious to know how students in these groups perceived themselves as personality types and the interplay of that perception upon CW, as well as the impact of their cultural backgrounds upon CW. The 582 group perceived themselves as introverted individuals; they remained neutral as to the effect of their personalities upon CW. Both the 107 and ELC groups perceived themselves as extroverted individuals whose personalities positively affect the dynamics of CW. However, in focus group interviews it was the introverted students who reported that their personality types (described as “shyness”) had a negative effect on CW because of their shyness and hesitancy to speak up. All groups responded that their native cultures have a positive effect upon CW. Students originating from collectivist cultures particularly voiced positive effects for CW as the “group is oriented to helping others” (Anonymous, focus group, 2013).

As to the dynamics of the CW pair/group itself and its members, while five students in the 582 group reported that CW increased their confidence, the largest number of responses for increased confidence was found in the 107 and ELC focus groups. Responses include the following: “I’m more motivated and inspired”, “...I become more comfortable”, and “I learn from others”. Likewise, CW garnered 23 positive responses from all group members for their perceived improving critical thinking ability. Students in the focus groups remarked that participation in CW served to “create more ideas”, “inspire more ideas”, “share ideas and find problems easier”. Greater still, 28 positive responses were given by student group members for CW improving their communicative ability. Students in the focus groups expressed that CW was an “opportunity to show your ability and be confident”, “good opportunity to practice”, “opportunity to practice and debate”, “practice language but sometimes disagrees”, and “by talking learn the language”(Anonymous, 2013).

Students in all three survey groups believed that CW influences the efficacy of a team and its dynamics. CW teamwork appeared to galvanize the survey and focus group participants, particularly the ELC and 107 groups. Focus group individuals expressed their increased interest in CW projects. Comments by them included “CW increases teamwork confidence to talk”, “a lot of time is spent talking with others”, and “group is better than an individual”. One ELC individual expressed that “if I work alone, I get bored – I concentrate too much on sentence level or which word to use – CW increases my interest”. The



582 students also report positive effects in writing interest; however, those responses are smaller in number.

Students in all groups report that overall they are able to express their opinions during CW with a small number of students expressing the concern that they have a tendency to compromise or to abandon their opinion in favor of another's opinion. One ELC student stated, "Yes, I can express myself fully, but if my friend disagrees with me, I will accept her opinion".

Finally, the vast majority of students (30 in positive response) felt that work produced in tandem with one or more persons served to positively influence the quality of their writing. "Groups are better than individual", and a "group is better than one person." Group dynamics, the sharing of ideas, the creativeness in developing new ideas and new perspectives, the ease in identification of problems with more than one head addressing a topic, and the overall ability in being fully able to express opinions are all reasons that serve to improve quality in an individual student's writing.

We asked students to offer suggestions for ideas in improving CW effectiveness. Some of the responses included the following: "teacher feedback is important" and "more feedback from professor during the process of CW"; group members should share the same or similar rubric, which, in turn, will produce "effective and efficient work". In addition to students using the same rubric, one student offered that the instructor ought to control the number of students comprising a group. "Too many people can slow down and distracting [sic]", a student wrote in the survey comments (we interpret this comment to mean that too many people in a group slows down the task at hand). Other students suggested that instructors provide "clear and detailed timelines" (Anonymous, focus group, 2013) for completing CW; and "specific guidelines to students about how to make group work go well" (2013). Not only did one student recommend that teachers "need to give explicit guidance about the CW", but another student offered a particularly important suggestion: "It will be better if students could practice CW before working on a big assignment."

DISCUSSION

We believe that our three groups of ESL students exemplify the communicative dynamics of CW described in the literature, such as the dynamics of meaning-making, the combining of individual knowledge in order to fill knowledge gaps, positive student attitudes towards CW, and exposures to differing points of view (Storch, 2005). As stated above, one student in our study echoes a suggestion by Storch that CW ought to be implemented "with prior class preparation" (Storch, 2005, p. 169).

The students' descriptions to us of CW and its dynamics for them are a description of what Wigglesworth and Storch describe as being, relying on Swain (2006), "linguaging" (2012). At once a result and a process, "linguaging" is the "social construction of meaning through talk about language..." (Wigglesworth and Storch, 2012, p. 365). Student responses included the observation that CW provided an environment for "find[ing] problems easier". Wigglesworth and Storch characterize CW as an experience of direct focus for students upon language problems and difficulties (2012, p. 365). Language learning is enhanced because a student notices gaps in his/her language knowledge (2012, pp. 365-366). In focus group interviews, one student articulated that peer review as a CW strategy "identifies grammar problems and vocabulary competence" (2013). Another student remarked that in CW "by talking learn the language [sic]" (2013).

It is through all the talking, the sharing, discussing, creating and considering of new ideas in performing assigned tasks that students scaffold one another, specifically "collectively scaffold" (Storch, 2005) one another. What one student is lacking, another student supplies in performing the task, and vice versa. As one student described it in the focus interview, we "help one another face to face". CW not only provides the setting for the social construction of language for the students, but it is the means to enable that construction as well (Wigglesworth and Storch, 2012). CW is inherently communicative and interactive, and, as a strategy, scaffolds in multiple ways.

In particular, our findings indicated that the lower level L2 students (those in 107 and ELC groups) strongly perceived CW as being "time saving" (Anonymous, focus group, 2013). This is another indication to us that CW scaffolds those lower level students, provides them with an affective "safety net", and increases their confidence in their language learning. In contrast, the 582 advanced L2 learners reported CW as being "time consuming" (Anonymous, focus group, 2013). We infer from this response that the 582 learners are far enough advanced in their language abilities that they do not require the lower level scaffolding that the 107 and ELC students do.

We earlier considered whether people assign more value to the collaborative product than they do to the process of collaboration (Swartz and Triscari, 1998). We believe the answer to this question, for our students at least, is to be found in their responses of preference in page lengths. Students of the 582 focus group articulated that the longer the assignment, the more time there is "to negotiate the task and effort expended" (Anonymous, 2013). Even more richly expressed, one student stated that "there is time to



connect souls". In apposition, the shorter a page assignment, the greater the preference of 582 students work alone. We make the inference that, whereas shorter page assignments provide strong scaffolding and affective safety nets for lower level learners, longer CW page assignments provide scaffolding and affective and supportive environments, if not safety nets, for more advanced learners.

Similar to the students in Storch's 2005 study in which positive attitudes towards CW were expressed, describing it as a "novel, fun activity" (2005, p. 167), our WSU students exhibited positive attitudes towards CW also, even to an ELC student commenting that "I think we can get more interesting subject than we can talk about it more fun [sic]".

Although the literature is rife with much discussion regarding CW within the sphere of technological advances, such as wikis, our student/respondents gave little time to CW discussion within the purview of technology, including social media. Although there had been modest use of email and token instant messaging, technology was, by and large, dismissed out of hand. Telephone use was dismissed as well, accompanied in most cases by strained expressions. The reason given anytime this subject came up was always the same: it is not face-to-face interaction.

Cementing notions of interactivity and communicativeness, as well as social construction of meaning, were the student responses regarding critical thinking: creating, inspiring, sharing, motivating, finding problems, learning, expressing, debating, sometimes disagreeing – all of these in concert with one's collaborator(s). Most importantly, the students said, at every turn, always: practice, practice, practice. We believe that CW provides opportunities to talk, to exercise one's skills and abilities, and to achieve confidence. Bryan (1996) found the same increased student confidence in her community college students. As we noted earlier, CW provides both the setting, known also as Swartz and Triscari's (2011) space for creating meaning and interaction, and the means inherent within the process itself.

Teacher feedback during the CW process is valued overall by the students in our three groups. Students viewed feedback as necessary for keeping one on the right track, and for pointing out errors and difficulties. Whereas, the thesis students of Li and Vandermensbrugge (2011) achieved a shift in how they view the CW process, from one of fix it to one of learning and writing, our lower level students have not yet achieved the competency levels of those thesis students, and, as such, remain at the fix it level of perception. Also all three groups have not engaged in a long-term collaborative project such as the thesis students had. We anticipate that with similar language

competencies and long-term CW task engagement, our students could also make this shift precisely because of their positively articulated attitudes towards CW.

Although the literature we looked at does not discuss personality types per se, we did wonder how our students perceived themselves. Those who reported their personality as positively affecting CW reported themselves as extroverts. Those whose personalities were reported as introverts, perceived themselves as negatively affecting CW. We report only their perceptions in this regard as we did not collect any data that would quantifiably support, or not, either perception.

We believe that the suggestions our students offered for improvement of CW strategies are embodied in the recommendations of Reither and Vipond (1989). Students ask for clear, short, and precise rubrics, reliable timelines, and guidance from the instructor to the students as to how the CW process is to unfold. Important advice was given by one student when he/she suggested that students practice CW first before taking on a big assignment for an instructor. This student advice can be utilized within the recommendations of Reither and Vipond for an instructor to model all forms of cooperation and collaboration (1989). Practice in "collaborative investigations" can be created by the instructor (1989, p. 862). Without modeling and practice in collaboration, students are left guessing as to the behavior expected of them.

CONCLUSION

We recognize the smallness of our student sample and realize that these responses are not generalizable beyond the confines of our small university setting. However, we are pleased to note the similarities of our student responses as gauged against the findings of larger studies in the field of ESL teaching and learning.

In gathering the responses from a spectrum of L2 students at a small Mid-Western university, we have demonstrated that student attitudes towards CW are positive and that they envision CW as an interactive and vibrant tool for language learning. We infer that students prefer face-to-face interaction in collaboration. We also draw the conclusion that lower level learners engaging in CW are scaffolded in shorter page writing assignments, while more advanced L2 students are scaffolded in longer length writing assignments. We believe that the potentials for CW in the language classroom are without limit, and are constrained by only the instructor's imagination. The views of the students discussed here articulate attitudes that speak of a responsibility for their language learning, a thoughtful assessment of needs and concerns, and a joy and enthusiasm for learning and the process of making knowledge.



REFERENCES

- Bryan, L. H. (1996). Cooperative writing groups in community college. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 40(3), pp. 188-193.
- Collaborate. (1969). In *The American heritage dictionary of the English language*. Boston, MA: American Heritage & Houghton Mifflin.
- Collaborate. (2013). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved April 2, 2013, from merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaborate
- Ede, L. S. (1990). Pedagogy of Collaboration. In L. S. Ede, *Singular texts/plural authors: Perspectives on collaborative writing*, (pp. 107-126). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Elola, I. & Oskoz, A. (2010). Collaborative writing: Fostering foreign language and writing conventions development. *Language Learning & Technology*, 14(3), pp. 51-71. Retrieved from <http://llt.msu.edu/vol14num3/elaooskoz.pdf>
- Kim, Y. (2008). The contribution of collaborative and individual tasks to the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(i), pp. 114-130.
- Leki, I. (1992). *Understanding esl writers: A guide for teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Li, L. Y. & Vandermensbrugge, J. (2011). Supporting the thesis writing process of international research students through an ongoing writing group. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 48(2), pp. 195-205.
- Lindemann, E. (2001). *A rhetoric for writing teachers* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- McNenny, G. & Roen, D. H. (1992). The case for collaborative scholarship in rhetoric and composition. *Rhetoric Review*, 10(2), pp. 291-310.
- Reither, J. A. & Vipond, D. (1989). Writing as collaboration. *College English*, 51(8), pp. 855-867.
- Sperling, M. (1990). I want to talk to each of you: Collaboration and the teacher-student writing conference. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 24(3), pp. 279-321.
- Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14, pp. 153-173.
- Storch, N. (2011). Collaborative writing in L2 contexts: Processes, outcomes, and future directions. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, pp. 275-288.
- Swain, M. (1993). The output hypothesis: Just speaking and writing aren't enough. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 50(1), pp. 158-164.
- Swartz, A. L. & Triscari, J. S. (2011). A model of transformative collaboration. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 61(4), 324-340. doi: 10.1177/0741713610392761
- Wigglesworth, G. & Storch, N. (2012). What role for collaboration in writing and writing feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21, pp. 364-374.
- Wilhelm, K. H. (1999). Collaborative do's and don'ts. *TESOL Journal*, 8(2), pp. 14-19.
- Yancey, K. B. & Spooner, M. (1998). A single good mind: Collaboration, cooperation, and the writing self. *College Composition and Communication*, 49(1), pp. 45-62.

APPENDIX A: Research Questionnaire

Nationality: _____ Class session: _____

Questionnaire about Cooperative writing

Definition: Cooperative writing (CW) is a writing activity performed with two or more people.

Circle all answers that apply to you.

- What forms of cooperative writing have you engaged in?
 - peer review
 - group work (two or more persons finish one task in cooperation)
 - online cooperative writing
 - telephone conversation
 - informal get-together outside of class
 - other _____
- Which kind form of cooperative writing do you prefer?
 - peer review
 - group work with two or three persons
 - group work with 4 to 6 persons
 - telephone
 - email
 - other _____
- Which kind of cooperative activity helps you the most?
 - peer review



- B. group work with 2 or more persons
C. group work with 3 to 6 persons
D. telephone
E. email
F. other _____
4. How do you prefer to select your writing collaborators?
A. by myself
B. by the designation of the teacher
C. waiting for others to select me
D. other _____
5. What writing project page length is acceptable to you in a cooperative writing environment?
A. 1 - 4 pages
B. 5-8 pages
C. 8-12pages
D. more than 12 pages
6. Do you think CW beneficial to you time-wise?
A. extremely time consuming
B. time-consuming
C. neither time consuming nor time-saving
D. time-saving
E. extremely time-saving
7. Do you like the supervision of teachers when you cooperatively writing?
A. strongly like
B. like
C. neither like nor dislike
D. dislike
E. strongly dislike
8. How would you describe your personality?
A. very extroverted
B. extroverted
C. neither extroverted nor introverted
D. introverted
E. very introverted
9. How does your personality affect CW?
A. Strongly positively affect
B. Positively affect
C. Neither positively affect nor negatively affect
D. Negatively affect
E. Strongly negatively affect
10. How often would you estimate having engaged in cooperative writing in all university courses you have been enrolled in?
A. more than 5 times
B. 3 to 4 times
C. less than 3 times
D. 1 time
E. 0 times
11. Do you like CW?



- A. strongly like
 - B. like
 - C. neither like nor dislike
 - D. dislike
 - E. strongly dislike
12. What type of effect do you think your culture has on how you feel about CW?
- A. very positive effect
 - B. positive effect
 - C. neutral effect
 - D. negative effect
 - E. very negative effect
13. Do you think timely constructive feedback from an instructor is useful for CW?
- A. very useful
 - B. useful
 - C. neither useful or not useful
 - D. not useful
 - E. very useless
14. Do you think a clear rubric for the writing task affects CW?
- A. very positive effect
 - B. positive effect
 - C. no positive or negative effect
 - D. negative effect
 - E. very negative effect
15. How does CW influence your confidence?
- A. it strongly increases my confidence
 - B. it increases my confidence
 - C. it neither increases or decreases my confidence
 - D. it decreases my confidence
 - E. it strongly decreases my confidence
16. How does CW influence your critical thinking ability? (critical thinking is defined here as the ability to create more ideas and identify potential problems)
- A. it has a very positive effect
 - B. it has a positive effect
 - C. it has neither a positive or negative effect
 - D. it has a negative effect
 - E. it has a very negative effect
17. In what way do you believe CW influences your communicative ability?
- A. a very positive effect
 - B. a positive effect
 - C. neither a positive or negative effect
 - D. a negative effect
 - E. a very negative effect
18. How does CW influence your teamwork concept?
- A. very positive effect
 - B. positive effect
 - C. neither positive or negative effect
 - D. negative effect
 - E. very negative effect
19. How do you believe CW influences the quality of your work?



- A. very positive effect
- B. positive effect
- C. it does not affect my work positively or negatively
- D. negative effect
- E. very negative effect

20. How does CW affect your interest in the writing task?

- A. very positive effect
- B. positive effect
- C. it does not affect my interest positively or negatively
- D. negative effect
- E. very negative effect

21. To what extent do you express your own opinions in CW?

- A. I fully express my opinions
- B. Sometimes I express my opinions
- C. I seldom express my opinions
- D. I often compromise my opinions
- E. I seldom compromise my opinions

22. How do you treat feedback for CW from your instructors?

- A. I strongly value the feedback
- B. I value the feedback
- C. I neither value it nor ignore it
- D. I ignore the feedback

23. I am:

- A. 18-25
- B. 25-35
- C. 35- 50
- D. Over 50

24. My ethnicity is:

- A. Caucasian
- B. Afro-America
- C. Native American

25. Please give some suggestions for CW: _____


APPENDIX B: Analysis of Questionnaire for 582 Graduate

Question Option	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
1	4	7	3	0	3	1	3	0	0	0	
2	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
6	1	5	2	1	0						
7	0	3	4	2	0						
8	0	3	2	4	0						
9	0	2	6	1	0						
10	1	0	4	2	2						
11	0	4	4	1	0						
12	0	3	4	2	0						
13	4	5	0	0	0						
14	5	2	2	0	0						
15	0	5	4	0	0						
16	3	3	2	1	0						
17	1	8	2	0	0						
18	2	6	1	0	0						
19	0	8	1	0	0						
20	1	3	4	1	0						
21	0	6	2	1	0						
22	3	3	2	1	0						
23	4	3	2	0	0						
Q3		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	A	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
	B	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	1
	C	4	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	E	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q4		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	A	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	4
	B	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	0
	C	4	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
	D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q5		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	A	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	0
	B	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	0	1
	C	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	1
	D	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0



APPENDIX C: Analysis of Questionnaire for 107

Question Option	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
1	10	6	4	1	3	1	2	0	0	0	
2	4	9	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	
6	1	4	4	4	0						
7	0	7	4	2	0						
8	2	6	4	1	0						
9	1	6	5	1	0						
10	2	4	4	2	1						
11	0	4	5	4	0						
12	1	4	8	0	0						
13	2	9	2	0	0						
14	4	6	3	0	0						
15	1	8	4	0	0						
16	3	5	5	0	0						
17	0	11	2	0	0						
18	3	8	2	0	0						
19	1	11	1	0	0						
20	1	7	2	1	2						
21	2	7	4	0	0						
22	4	7	2	0	0						
23	12	1	0	0	0						
Q3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	A	3	0	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	0
	B	0	1	0	2	1	1	3	3	1	1
	C	5	0	4	1	0	0	0	2	0	1
	D	3	0	0		1	2	1	2	2	2
	E	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	A	2	0	3	1	2	0	0	2	2	1
	B	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	3	1
	C	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	2	0	0
	D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	A	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	10
	B	5	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	0
	C	8	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
	D	10	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0



APPENDIX D: Analysis of Questionnaire for ELC

Question Option	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
1	3	5	4	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	
2	3	5	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	
6	1	2	1	5	1						
7	1	8	1	0	0						
8	3	2	3	2	0						
9	2	5	4	1	0						
10	1	4	6	0	0						
11	2	7	2	0	0						
12	0	5	5	1	0						
13	5	5	1	0	0						
14	3	4	3	0	0						
15	2	6	3	0	0						
16	2	7	2	0	0						
17	4	4	3	0	0						
18	5	3	2	1	0						
19	3	7	0	1	0						
20	3	5	3	0	0						
21	3	6	2	0	0						
22	4	4	2	1	0						
23	5	4	1	0	0						
Q3		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	A	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	2	1
	B	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	0	5	1
	C	2	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
	D	1	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	0
	E	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q4		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	A	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	1
	B	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	2	1	3
	C	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	3
	D	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q5		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	A	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	5
	B	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	1
	C	0	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
	D	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0



APPENDIX E: Focus Group Questions

1. Do you prefer collaborative writing? Why/why not? Do you *like* it? Why/why not?
2. In your opinion, how should collaborators be chosen? Why?
3. What paper length do you prefer (1-4; 5-8; 8+)? Why?
4. Do you believe CW is beneficial time-wise? Why/why not?
5. How do you feel about the supervision of instructors during CW? Why?
6. How would you describe your personality? Introvert, extrovert, etc? Does your personality affect CW? How?
7. What is your cultural background? Do you think it affects CW? Why/why not? How?
8. What is your opinion on instructor feedback for CW? Is it helpful? Why/why not?
9. Do you believe CW requires a rubric? Why/why not?
10. Do you think CW influences your confidence level as a learner? How?
11. Do you think CW influences your critical thinking skills? How?
12. How does CW influence your communicative abilities?
13. How does CW influence your ability to engage as the member of a team?
14. In what ways does CW influence the quality of your work?
15. Does CW influence your interest in a writing task? In what way, how?
16. Are you able to speak up and express your opinions freely and fully in CW?