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Co-Authoring in Action: Practice, Problems and Possibilities

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ABSTRACT

Although co-authoring is commonly practised, we know little about its actual process. How do authors choose their collaborators? How do they make decisions about the writing process? What obstacles do they face and how do they overcome them? What do they see as the benefits and pitfalls of co-authoring? This article begins by demonstrating the prevalence of co-authoring of journal articles in the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL. The somewhat limited literature on authoring, particularly collaboration, is reviewed. Using a duoethnographic approach, as researcher-participants we research our own co-authoring process and present our findings in a case study. Key ideas related to choosing and working effectively with co-authors and important qualities in a co-author are discussed, encapsulated in the maxims of mutual benefit and relationship building. We also reflect on our experience of using duoethnography to capture disruptions to our thinking about the co-authoring process and developments in our understanding of ourselves as writers and of our relationship as co-authors. The article concludes by reiterating the benefits that both less experienced and more experienced authors can derive from co-authoring and by recommending co-authoring as an important supportive and collaborative practice for professional development.

Keywords: professional development; co-authoring; academic publishing; research writing; duoethnography

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Introduction

One of the ways that academics are evaluated is through their publishing record. In some cases, promotion, and even retention of one's position, depends on having a continuing list of publications. For many academics, a single-authored publication may present a challenge, hence on the assumption that "two hands are better than one", colleagues, particularly junior ones, may prefer to work with others on co-authoring a book or journal article. Collaboration in academic publishing is not a novel idea. If one scans the authors' names on titles relating to language teaching and learning, it is clear that dual- and even multi-authorship is common. Colleagues frequently cooperate to write articles, sometimes when they are at equal stages in their careers, but collaboration is also common between a senior and junior colleague. Colleagues can be people in the same geographical area (even in the same institution) or working at a distance, as is the case with the writers of this article.

Research is available on co-authoring in disciplines such as economics (Cainelli, Maggioni, Uberti, & de Felice, 2012; Cainelli, Maggioni, Uberti, & de Felice, 2015; Hollis, 2001), accountancy (Englebrecht, Hanke, & Kuang, 2008), and academic librarianship (Hart, 2000). There is limited research on co-authoring in the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL. However, Hyland's (2016) book *Publishing: Issues and Challenges in the Construction of Knowledge*, which stands out as a definitive publication on academic publishing, addresses authoring engagement and collaboration. As co-authoring is increasingly prevalent in our field, it is useful to look further at the topic from a theoretical standpoint. As well, investigating co-authoring in practice can provide insights into the gains and potential challenges involved.

This article starts by reviewing the literature on the topic of co-authoring and then reports a case study in which the two authors cooperated to produce a book. Using a duoethnographic approach, we reflect on our process and in doing so identify some areas that need to be considered when deciding to embark on the process of co-authoring. We also reflect on the duoethnographic approach as a means of capturing changes in thinking as a result of dialoguing with a co-researcher.

Why reflect on the collaboration process?

Reflection can play an important part in teacher development, allowing teachers to "systematically examine their beliefs and practices and critically reflect on both so that they can gain an understanding of what they do and why they do it" (Farrell, 2015, p. 83). Though the act of reflection is often thought to be solitary and introspective, Jay and Johnson's (2002) definition shows it to be potentially dialogic and interactive:

Reflection is a process, both individual and collaborative, involving experience and uncertainty. It is comprised of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one's thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others. (p. 76)

Our study embraces the value of both individual and dialogic reflection in critically analyzing our process and perceptions as co-authors. Through reflection, we hoped to gain a better understanding not just of what we did and why we did it, but also of how well we engaged in the collaboration and how we could collaborate more effectively.

How common is co-writing?

Collaboration offers a means of sharing resources, expertise and data and has become very common especially in the sciences (Hyland, 2016). But how common is it in Applied Linguistics? As a first step to writing this article, we compared the ratio of single- to co-authored titles among the top 20-ranked SJR journals in the field of Language and Linguistics in 2017 (<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php?category=1203>). For this purpose, we looked only at full research articles, not viewpoints, research reports, reviews or short pieces giving practical advice to teachers.

Table 1
Pattern of Authorship in Top 20 SJR Language and Linguistics Journals (2017)

| Rank | Journal Title | Single Authored | Co-Authored | Total Articles 2018 |
|------|---|-----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Journal of Communication | 13 | 44 | 57 |
| 2 | Annual Review of Applied Linguistics | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| 3 | Journal of Second Language Writing | 7 | 13 | 20 |
| 4 | Applied Linguistics | 22 | 17 | 39 |
| 5 | ReCALL | 7 | 12 | 19 |
| 6 | Cognition | 15 | 212 | 227 |
| 7 | Language Teaching Research | 9 | 25 | 34 |
| 8 | Communication Theory | 9 | 14 | 23 |
| 9 | Modern Language Journal | 17 | 22 | 39 |
| 10 | Communication Research | 7 | 41 | 48 |
| 11 | Journal of Memory and Language | 3 | 55 | 58 |
| 12 | Linguistic Inquiry | 13 | 19 | 32 |
| 13 | Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning Memory and Cognition | 2 | 133 | 135 |
| 14 | TESOL Quarterly | 13 | 17 | 30 |
| 15 | Language Learning | 25 | 22 | 47 |
| 16 | European Journal of Communication | 14 | 18 | 32 |
| 17 | Studies in Second Language Acquisition | 9 | 22 | 31 |
| 18 | Brain and Language | 0 | 51 | 51 |
| 19 | Language in Society | 16 | 8 | 24 |
| 20 | Natural Language and Linguistic Theory | 17 | 19 | 36 |
| | | 220 | 770 | 990 |
| | | (22%) | (78%) | |

In only three out of the 20 journals were there more single-authored than co-authored articles: *Applied Linguistics* (56%), *Language Learning* (53%) and *Language in Society* (66%). In fact, especially for the more scientific of these, single-authorship is rare: *Cognition* (7%), *Journal of Memory and*

Learning (5%), Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning Memory and Cognition (2%). In one journal, *Brain and Language*, there were no single-authored articles. This data echoes Hyland's (2016) findings about the prevalence of co-authoring in journal articles. Our simple analysis of the percentage of single- versus co-authored articles demonstrates that co-authoring is not uncommon and that, like academics in other disciplines, particularly the sciences, those in the field of Applied Linguistics are also engaging in this practice.

Why do authors collaborate?

Reasons for collaboration are varied and the decision is sometimes serendipitous. More often the collaboration arises when people have overlapping interests and a combination of complementary skills. Authors who have similar interests and experiences may want to collaborate as the process often leads to “synergistic creativity” (Hyland, 2016, p. 78). In an example one of us has recently experienced, one partner initially had the “name” which might help something to be published while the other had skills in technology and graphics which allowed the data to be presented in a more readable way. A co-author may also serve as a “critical friend”, challenging assumptions and pointing out shortcomings. Finally, especially for larger publications such as books, collaboration allows authors to share the burden and complete the task in a shorter time frame. In these cases, the main goal of the collaboration is to produce a manuscript for publication. Publishing joint research is not the only reason for co-writing. Sometimes the process starts with a nudge from outside, such as the request from a publisher to one person to write a book. The future author likes the idea but thinks the process would be more enjoyable and enriching if a second author were involved. A more experienced author may even see it as an opportunity to mentor a less experienced colleague.

The literature on co-authoring from other disciplines lists a range of benefits ranging from practical to affective. Hart (2000, p. 342) lists nine benefits of collaboration in order of importance to his respondents:

- “(1) Improved quality of article;
- (2) Expertise of co-author was useful;
- (3) Co-author provided valuable ideas;
- (4) Division of labour;
- (5) Learned from the co-author;
- (6) Additional publication for promotion/tenure;
- (7) Get to better know a colleague;
- (8) Mentor a junior colleague; and
- (9) Be mentored by a senior colleague”.

Other studies confirm the benefits listed above, especially those more directly related to professional goals (Ductor, 2015; Cainelli et al, 2012; Cainelli et al, 2016; Hollis, 2001). There is strong evidence that “co-authorship is a systematic determinant of scientific productivity” (Cainelli et al, 2012), providing better outcomes in terms of acceptance to higher impact journals and increased citations (Hollis, 2001; Hyland, 2016) as well as greater frequency of publications (Hollis, 2001). Interestingly, the literature emphasizes mainly pragmatic reasons for co-authoring with production of a final manuscript for publication seen as the main goal. Little is said about the

value of the process itself, though Smith and Lewis (2018) recommend co-authoring as a valuable form of professional development and academic collaboration.

While co-authoring may bring many benefits, an array of problems can arise. These relate mainly to crediting decisions, co-author behaviour and co-author relationships (Bozeman & Youtie, 2016; Youtie & Bozeman, 2016). A common complaint is that deserving participants may be excluded and undeserving ones included. Problems can also occur in naming order on the publication, in other words, whether an author is listed first, in the middle or last (Hyland, 2016). The significance of author order varies according to discipline, but in Applied Linguistics, first authorship is generally conferred to those who contribute more significantly. Other problems include using a “ghost author”, someone who contributes significantly but is not listed; or having “honorary, courtesy or guest” authors (Hyland, 2016, p. 86), i.e. those who contribute very little or “played no significant role in the work” yet are listed (Hyland, 2016; Youtie & Bozeman, 2016). The above issues as well as that of inequitable workload occur where the power dynamics vary and co-authors are unequal in status. For instance, in collaborations between supervisor and graduate student or established and emerging scholars, there may be potential for such ethical problems to arise. Co-writing may not always be intentional. It is a recent practice in some countries or universities that a PhD is granted either contingent upon or through publication. The lengthy process of supervision, as described by Wisker (2005), means that the supervisor is already part of the research well before publication, guiding the student in exploring the topic in detail right up to ensuring coherence in the final piece of writing.

For whatever reasons authors decide to collaborate, on balance, there is sufficient evidence mainly from other disciplines to support the assertion that co-authorship yields mainly professional and, to a lesser extent, affective benefits to the participants involved in the collaboration. Despite the potential pitfalls, there appears to be consensus that co-authoring is an increasingly common practice not just in the hard sciences but also in the social sciences.

How do writers collaborate?

Two important aspects of co-authoring are the nature of the co-authoring relationship and the division of labour. In describing models of co-authoring relationships, Hart (2000, p. 342) identifies three models: “collegial”, “mentoring” and “directing”. In the first, authors share the work as colleagues; in the second, a senior colleague mentors a more junior one, with the latter learning from the former; and in the third, the first author leads the research and writing.

The key tasks involved in co-authoring include coming up with the idea for the research; reviewing the literature; carrying out the research; drafting, reviewing and revising the paper; submitting the final draft; undertaking any necessary revisions; and completing publication procedures (e.g. signing copyright forms). At each stage of the process, authors have to decide who will take responsibility for different tasks. It was found that the workload was more equitably distributed if co-authors shared a collegial rather than a mentoring or directing relationship (Hart, 2000).

The actual process of collaboration may vary considerably. Of all the processes that lead to collaborative writing of articles (and sometimes of books), one of the most common is that the two authors are reporting on a joint project that they have worked on. Smith and Lewis (2018) suggested practical ways in which this could happen. One is to use a template that “starts with an article title and abstract, moving through to results, discussion and conclusion, showing examples at each stage” (p. 179). Another is for a co-author to contribute entire sections or chapters in a

particular field of expertise. An obvious example is in recent technology, where a long-established author may invite someone, (usually) younger, to contribute one chapter to a book or perhaps to add details to each chapter. In Lee and Sze's (2015) report on the place of non-native speakers in TESOL, the authors chose to publish their book in a format that alternates chapter by chapter between the two authors.

As discussed above, the existing literature on co-authoring explores the benefits and pitfalls, and to a lesser extent, the processes involved but mainly in other disciplines. Despite the prevalence of co-authoring in the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL, little is known about the actual experiences of co-authors: how they decide whom to co-author with, what benefits they derive, what challenges they face and how they overcome these. An understanding of what actually goes on during the process may offer insights to others wanting to embark on a similar journey. This article hopes to make a contribution by shedding light on this practice, specifically doing so by answering the following research questions:

1. What are some benefits of co-authoring?
2. What are some challenges associated with this practice?
3. How can co-authors collaborate successfully?

A Case Study

The next section reports on a case study. It captures our experience of collaborating on writing a book. Using a duoethnographic approach, a collaborative research method which enabled us to juxtapose, examine and challenge each other's responses, we first responded separately to a series of questions posed by the scholar who had introduced us to each other as potential collaborators, then read and commented on each other's responses (sometimes continuing over several cycles of question and answer) and finally reflected on how the duoethnographic process had changed our perceptions of our experience. Looking at the exchange in the duoethnography, we then identified key points pertaining to the different stages of co-authoring, desirable characteristics of co-authors and suggestions to prospective co-authors.

Methodology

This study employed a duoethnographic approach to the research process. Norris, Sawyer, and Lund (2012) described duoethnography as a

collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers of difference juxtapose their life stories to provide multiple understandings of the world. Rather than uncovering the meanings that people give their lived experiences, duoethnography embraces the belief that meanings can be and often are transformed through the research act. (p. 9)

As noted by Breault (2016), this approach combines elements of different qualitative approaches, including autoethnography, autobiography, self-study and life history interviews and "self-interrogation is extended to the Other as an act of mutual reclamation of self" (p. 778). In simple words, duoethnography affords opportunities for a trusted other to question a researcher's ideas and opinions leading to greater understanding of self. This process combines the benefits of member checking and peer review, activities that, according to Cresswell and Miller (2000), increase trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative enquiry.

Our case study employed the duoethnographic approach akin to that used by Rose and Monkantawong (2018), where the two researchers read and responded to each other's narratives and then read and reflected on each other's responses to gain a deeper understanding of their own views and experiences. In the spirit of duoethnography, described as "a new, evolving form of inquiry" and for which "precisely defined procedures" (Breault, 2016, p. 777) are absent, instead of writing narratives, we wrote responses to questions that had been posed by a third party who had introduced us. Acknowledging the potential for bias in situations where the researchers are themselves the research participants, having an outsider pose questions reduces the potential for bias in research design, hence increasing trustworthiness of the case study. The questions posed by the third party were as follows:

1. What prompted you to embark on this project?
2. How did the two of you first connect?
3. What are the advantages of working together rather than singly?
4. What issues arose as you got into the project?
5. Were there any unexpected benefits and insights that developed once you got started?
6. What do you think are the requirements if two colleagues wish to work together in this way?

The preference for duo rather than autoethnography was guided by our desire to delve more deeply into our responses and to establish a dialogue where we could ask for clarification or challenge each other's ideas. This bivocal and dialogic quality of duoethnography serves to "disrupt" univocal narratives that result from solitary writing, identify and discuss differences, question meaning and allow reconceptualization (Breault, 2016), all of which we believed would provide more meaningful data for the case study. The episodic nature of duoethnography allowed us to analyze each round of responses and pose further questions throughout the co-authoring process, resulting in a more complete and thorough analysis and more accurate and insightful reporting of the data.

Findings and Discussion

Our responses to the questions are summarized below. To enhance trustworthiness, we quote extensively from our written responses in order to provide thick description to substantiate our claims. We then discuss key themes from our responses in relation to the topic of co-authoring.

Q1. What prompted you to embark on this project?

As a well-published, retired academic with no pressure to publish, when asked to author a book on professional development, ML sought a co-author to make the task "more pleasant" both in terms of writing and mentoring. MY was keen to seize the opportunity of working with an established author with whom she shared a common background, both having worked in Cambodia at different times in the past, and both interested in teacher development in developing contexts.

In response to each other's comments, ML acknowledged that her co-author was "the right fit" and that, in addition to the original project, they had decided to collaborate on three further projects. MY was grateful for the "role modelling" and mentoring she was receiving and has vouched to "pay it forward" in the future.

The above exchange reveals that for some writers, the process of co-authoring, which involves mentoring, sharing of ideas, learning from others and building professional relationships, is as important – possibly even more important – than the product (publication). It is unfortunate, however, that with the "publish or perish" imperative faced by many academics these days, the idea of publishing for the pleasure it brings is not often considered. In the same way, publishing is generally seen as an act of gaining recognition for oneself. While this is pragmatic and necessary, co-authoring with a less experienced colleague should perhaps be encouraged and recognized as service to the profession.

Q2. How did the two of you first connect?

The co-authors were introduced by a mutual professional contact who was aware of the background and expertise of both and had worked closely but separately with each. In response to this question, MY expressed how excited she was at being given the opportunity to work with ML, not just because ML was an experienced and established author but also because of their previous interactions. MY wondered why ML was willing to work with her. ML explained that it was because of the introduction made by their mutual contact and because of her previous connection with MY's institution.

To some extent, the responses above show the importance of professional contacts and networks as academics often recommend colleagues for speaking and/or writing opportunities. Cainelli et al (2015) found that "stable partnerships" with others in their field, whether connected geographically or ideologically or through discipline, led to greater productivity in co-authoring. Hyland (2016) notes that "brokers" are a key resource for authors. These are "the friends, peers, editors, translators, reviewers and others not co-authoring the paper who mediate academic text production" (p. 107). Our initial introduction had been brokered by a mutual contact and without that introduction, the co-authoring relationship could not have occurred. Within our industry, it is sometimes a case of "who you know" as this may afford opportunities and exposure. That said, once the introduction has been made, it is up to co-authors to establish the "right fit" as has occurred in this case, with the two colleagues deciding to work on further projects.

Q3. What are the advantages of working together rather than singly?

Both co-authors identified affective and professional benefits, with motivation as one of the key factors. Having their co-author waiting for their contribution provided a kind of extrinsic motivation, as explained below by MY:

It has been hard for me to prioritize research and writing as teaching and family responsibilities always seem to get in the way. One way that working together has helped me is in providing extrinsic motivation. As a highly (overly) responsible person, I feel mildly pressured (completely self-imposed!) to respond to ML, and this has helped me to avoid procrastinating.

In the same way, ML noted that there was "more impetus to get on with something when another person is waiting for it". Besides motivation, both expressed enjoyment at the development of a deeper relationship: "The two of us started to know one another via e-mail exchanges into personal exchanges beyond the topic of the project" (ML). MY also noted that personal exchanges had made the collaboration more enjoyable "than if we only communicated about our writing".

For the less experienced writer, co-authoring serves as a kind of apprenticeship in writing and publishing and a chance to experience and examine the process of research and writing with a seasoned academic. As explained below,

Working with ML has been a kind of “apprenticeship” in writing for publication. I have been able to see first-hand the process of writing a book. ML’s writing process is very different from mine. I feel that I need to read and research extensively, then plan, then compose systematically, completing and perfecting sections before going on to the next. However, ML’s process is to draft her ideas in sections, going forward and back as needed. In simple terms, I have not been comfortable sharing “unpolished” writing but I can see now that this is counter-productive in developing as a researcher and writer.

For many early stage academics, writing a book or even a journal article can be a daunting task. Working with an established writer with a different writing process can be liberating as it provides a safe space for sharing preliminary ideas without fear of judgement. The fact that the more experienced author was willing to share “unpolished” and incomplete pieces of writing reinforced the idea of co-construction, empowering the less experienced writer to contribute more fully to the final product. A final professional benefit, as stated by ML, is that “two parties bring different experiences and skills to the project”, each having “gifts” that complement each other.

Interestingly, both respondents emphasized the value of affective benefits over practical ones, suggesting that academic publishing is as much a case of motivation as ability. The enjoyment derived by the co-authors in their interactions, which sometimes meandered off the task at hand, added to their motivation to advance their writing. The affective gains of co-authoring do not seem to be emphasized in the existing literature on the benefits of co-authoring though “getting to better know a colleague” and “mentoring a junior colleague” are both noted by Hart (2000). It appears that most co-authors take a more pragmatic view about the value of this activity in helping them to achieve professional goals, mainly gaining a publication.

Finally, the idea of co-authoring as an apprenticeship holds much promise for beginning writers. Within sociocultural theories of learning, working with a more capable peer would enable less experienced writers to learn how to write for publication purposes. This aligns with the findings of McGrail, Rickard and Jones’ (2006) study of interventions to increase academic publication rates, which showed that writing support groups and writing coaches were effective in increasing publication rates among academics. Smith and Lewis’s (2018) claim that mentors and mentees could benefit from working together to carry out research and publication is certainly supported both from theoretical and practical perspectives.

Q4. What issues arose as you got into the project?

A key issue identified by MY concerned the amount of time she could dedicate to the project especially since her co-author was retired. She sometimes felt that she was letting ML down by not being able to work fast enough. When commenting on MY’s concerns, ML expressed that she “absolutely did not see this as an issue” and that at no time was there a sense of “keeping the other waiting”. ML added that she herself had taken time to attend a conference and fulfil family commitments. In the words of MY: “This has taken the pressure off me considerably as I can manage my time more effectively without fear of keeping someone waiting”. A further positive outcome of the exchange was that a time line for completion of the projects was agreed upon. As reiterated by ML, “We must both work at reassuring each other than deadlines are made by us and can be broken by us”.

A second issue concerned authorship roles, specifically who would be the first primary author. ML, who genuinely was not concerned about being identified as the lead author, felt that it would benefit MY to take the lead role. However, her co-author felt uncomfortable about being the lead author as she was younger, less experienced and was less confident about the value of her contributions. After ML explained that being lead author would provide experience of liaising with the commissioning editor, MY could see the point and was more comfortable with the idea. In fact, it prompted her to take more responsibility. In her comments to ML's explanation, MY expressed gratitude and commented how nice it was that neither author was trying to promote herself but "wanted the best for the other".

The situation described above is somewhat unusual as there is often jostling for prominence among co-authors, yet it was not the case in this situation. This is largely because of the goals of the co-authors, one of whom saw it as a mentoring opportunity and the other as a learning opportunity. If both authors were equally experienced and needed to publish for career advancement, it is possible that the situation might have been different as noted in Bozeman and Youtie (2016) and Youtie and Bozeman (2016) where authors "duel" over authoring and contributorship credit.

Q5. Were there any unexpected benefits and insights that developed once you got started?

In addition to the benefits identified above in response to Question 3, both respondents were pleased that the collegiality had developed into a personal connection. ML was also pleased to rekindle her connection with her co-writer's institution as she had previously attended a conference and published there. Both authors acknowledged the importance of being connected via email, which sometimes allowed them to "chat" by sending immediate responses to each other's email. However, the fact that the authors were operating in different time zones (with ML five hours ahead of MY) meant that most of the interactions were asynchronous. MY noted that "email is super as the asynchronous nature of it means that we can respond to each other as and when we are able, respecting each other's time commitments".

An unexpected benefit was further collaboration that went beyond the original publication, with three further projects identified. ML, though more experienced than MY, found that she was also receiving "mentoring": "The mentoring process works both ways. Remember how you gave me such helpful feedback on my book review?"

These responses show that beyond the benefits of co-authoring that are usually mentioned in the literature, such as greater recognition and citation, opportunities for sharing of resources and workload, and synergy in research and writing (Ductor, 2015; Hart, 2000; Hollis, 2001; Hyland, 2016), developing closer working relationships, though less easy to quantify, is perhaps an equally important outcome.

Q6. What do you think are the requirements if two colleagues wish to work together in this way?

The requirements identified related to background and expertise, style of working and interpersonal relations. ML felt that both needed to have a balance of similar yet different experiences and this was affirmed by MY, who agreed that having shared experiences and beliefs was important. However, MY also pointed out that because her co-author had a different way of writing, it provided a valuable learning experience. ML added that co-authors need to be sensitive when providing feedback and suggesting improvements, and this is particularly the case for the more experienced partner. The feedback should not come across as an evaluation or judgement (such as when a PhD supervisor is giving feedback to a graduate student, though one may argue that this too needs to be done sensitively), but as a suggestion.

Some hindrances that were identified as factors that might prevent co-authors from working well together included when “one party does more than the other” or when co-authors are unwilling to accept a different point of view. However, both ML and MY agreed that as long as both parties were relaxed and flexible, “even an uneven partnership can work” with MY explaining that it may not be “so much a matter of how much work each one does but the way in which each contributes according to her expertise”.

Finally, according to MY, “the willingness to learn from each other and accept a different point of view, as long as it’s reasonable and sound” is a key requirement. MY also identified the importance of establishing a relationship of trust and promoting collaboration instead of competition. A suggestion made by ML was to get a recommendation from a third party who is familiar with both and believes they could work well together. This “match making” of co-authors seems sensible to avoid obvious mismatches in background, personality, attitude and approach to work.

As each co-authoring relationship is different, it is difficult to generalize about what one should look for in a collaborator. The literature on co-authoring does not address the topic of qualities of a good co-author, but it would be fair to say that flexibility and openness are important. As well, working with a co-author who is from a different background and has a different working style may result in better outcomes as co-authors may challenge and extend each other’s thinking.

Conclusion and Implications

In response to our research questions on the benefits, challenges and recommendations for successful co-authoring, the findings of our study and the implications for practice can be summarized as follows:

1. What are some benefits of co-authoring?

Interestingly, the benefits identified by the co-authors in this study were mainly affective though pragmatic gains such as sharing of the workload, having extrinsic motivation to meet deadlines, bringing complementary perspectives and skills to the process and collaborating beyond the initial project were also noted. The responses suggest that the less experienced of the co-authors (MY) derived greater practical benefits, working with a role model and mentor, but the more experienced co-author (ML) gained mainly *but not exclusively* affective benefits, with the collaboration making the process more enjoyable and collegial.

This finding reinforces Smith and Lewis’s (2018) claim about the reciprocal rewards that are derived from mentoring relationships and its value in developing research and writing skills. It also offers some insights into the way PhD students and early career academics can be helped by working with more experienced writers. To promote this, seasoned academics can be incentivized through grants to undertake research with early career academics. As well, key performance indicators for performance appraisal could include mentoring of younger colleagues in research and publication.

2. What are some challenges associated with this practice?

Some issues that arose in this case study were over *perceived* expectations about deadlines, roles and responsibilities, with the less experienced author feeling pressurized to work more quickly despite her co-author having made no demands on her. She was also unsure about the value of her contributions and unwilling to take on the role of lead author. These issues may have been caused by a lack of communication between the authors about their expectations vis-à-vis meeting deadlines and even their motivations for co-authoring. Once it became clear that both authors placed more precedence on the process rather than product and once a workplan with specific deadlines had been established, a more relaxed working relationship was achieved. In the same way, once the roles and responsibilities had been discussed and reasons provided for the division of labour, the co-authoring relationship was able to proceed more smoothly.

In practical terms, when deciding to co-author, it is good to ask the following questions: Do writers agree beforehand about how strict or relaxed to be in terms of meeting deadlines? Which of the partners wants to be the corresponding author with the publishers, in the case where one has already been found? While it may seem self-evident that effective communication between co-authors is paramount, the tendency is to communicate about the content, in other words, the ideas that are being written about rather than the process, or how the authors should collaborate. However, it is important that co-authors also reflect on their process as this may reduce friction and result in better working relations.

3. How can co-authors collaborate successfully?

The case study found that having complementary skills and expertise, respect for one another, flexibility, openness as well as effective communication (as discussed above) are key to successful collaboration. While less experienced authors may want to collaborate with “big names”, finding a co-author who shares similar goals and expectations is even more important, so it may be useful to get a recommendation from a mutual professional contact to find someone who is flexible and open. Co-authors should not rush into a project but should spend time discussing either face-to-face or online their research goals (beyond the publication of a paper), their expectations of one another's roles and responsibilities and the time frame for the project. Finally, there may be occasions when co-authors begin to diverge as the research proceeds due to differences in backgrounds or research goals. In some cases, the differences may be resolved by reaching a mutual agreement, but at other times, it may be preferable to abandon the present collaboration in favour of maintaining the professional relationship. The authors can then decide whether to continue as a single author or find another co-author.

As summarized above, the duoethnographic process yielded responses to the questions posed for the case study which, in turn, provided insights relating to co-authoring in practice. The choice of co-author seems to be one that requires consideration and having an introduction or recommendation from a mutual colleague may be useful. When working together, it is necessary for authors to focus not just on the product but also the process: the production of a manuscript may be the main goal but efforts to develop the co-authoring relationship may be equally important as it might avail opportunities for future collaboration. Developing personal bonds may enhance the current working relationship making the process more enjoyable and enriching. The importance of openness cannot be overstated as this will allow issues to be aired and solved. The co-authoring relationship can benefit from a relaxed and flexible attitude with co-authors working hard to offer continued reassurance to each other. In a nutshell, the co-authoring process and the relationship between co-authors will be different according to the personalities, backgrounds and working styles of each partnership, but the maxims of mutual benefit and relationship building seem to be key in an effective co-authoring relationship. ML expressed this succinctly with the quote: “Both benefit; neither counts the amount of work done.”

In evaluating the value of the duoethnographic approach in data collection, analysis and interpretation, we can see some distinct benefits. By reading each other's responses and further commenting on them either to answer any questions posed or to clarify or extend earlier points, the co-authors were able to gain a better understanding of themselves as authors and of their relationship as co-authors. For example, the duoethnographic process, which allowed for multiple episodes of question and answer, allowed ML to reassure MY that her fears about keeping her co-author waiting and about not wanting to take on the role of main author were unfounded, and this would not have become apparent if an autoethnographic or monologic narrative approach had been used.

Our article has been based on a combination of reviewing published sources, analyzing publications and researching our own experience of co-authoring. While some of our findings regarding the benefits and issues of co-authoring echo those found in the limited literature available on this topic, the findings of this case study emphasize the affective dimension of co-authoring in motivating authors and sustaining their efforts to achieve their publication goals.

Our final note is intended as a word of encouragement to academics who might be asking the most important question of all: "Why should I co-author?" or, to express it more selfishly, "What's in it for me?". The answer is probably more obvious for less experienced writers. Being associated with a known author provides a higher chance of being accepted for publication. As well, the mentoring offered by an experienced writer is also valuable. However, as we have found, the relationship is not necessarily one-sided as our own experience has shown ways in which co-authoring can also benefit well-established authors by providing motivation and collegiality. Established authors may be highly specialized in particular areas but lack experience and knowledge of other topics so could benefit from the input given by a co-author. The other reason might sound more nebulous. It is the affective outcome of having support in one's writing and, in turn, of offering support to someone that makes co-authoring rewarding.

Limitations

As there is little written about the benefits and issues of co-authoring specifically in the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (with the exception of Hyland, 2016), we have referred to literature from associated fields such as economics, accounting and librarianship for theoretical support. Furthermore, as the case study was undertaken six months into the co-authoring experience and prior to the completion of the project, the responses of the co-authors may not capture the benefits and issues of the entire process of co-authoring. Nevertheless, insights may be gleaned that relate to decision making, benefits, issues and actions taken during the co-authoring process.

Further Study

Since, as noted above, the topic of co-authoring, particularly in the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL, is under-studied, further research is needed. Fruitful areas include the actual experiences of authors at different stages of their publication careers and expectations of peer reviewers and editors. It is somewhat surprising that journal editors, many of whom are academics, have not taken the opportunity to combine both roles by researching and writing about academic publication. Of course, there may be restrictions from publishers and ethical considerations in using peer review data and the necessary permissions would have to be sought.

It would also be useful to investigate the process that authors go through from the conception of a topic, to research and writing, to submission and review and finally to publication.

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