Let's Care about Our Students' Preferences!!!
Collaboration or Not?

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Abstract
With the dissemination of a process-oriented approach to teaching writing, collaborative learning, which enjoys a constructivist theoretical foundation, has found its place in most writing classes and has shed light on interesting issues. This piece of research seeks to examine the impact of incorporating collaboration into Iranian EFL writing classes. The participants were 120 Persian-speaking English major students taking their writing courses, and 26 writing teachers, with minimum three years of experience teaching writing at university level. Data were gained from two pre- and post-course student and a teacher questionnaire surveys in order to evaluate the usefulness of different tasks and teachers' perception of student preference, respectively. The findings indicated that the participants welcomed collaboration. There was not a high degree of correspondence between teachers' perception of students' preferences and their actual preferences. If carefully planned, implementation of collaboration, a concerted endeavor made jointly by the students, would allow for an interaction that is meaningful, authentic and supportive.

Key words: EFL writing, constructivist, collaborative learning, questionnaire survey, student's preferences.

INTRODUCTION

"Learners do not learn in isolation; the individual learns by being part of the surrounding community and the world as a whole... collaborative learning has a possibly deep epistemological basis and focuses on social relationships in a community of learners." (Oxford, 1997, p. 447)

More than many other issues in the field of composition studies, the shift from product to process has evoked strong passions. Process-oriented studies are characterized by focusing on the exploration of the ways students write, the behaviors and strategies they employ, and the multiplicity of constraints that they must observe to construct meaning (Murray, 1992; Zamel, 1987). Congruently, attempts are

made to examine the language classroom processes. Classroom-centered research treats language class as the object of investigation. The main concern of such research is not the input or the output but, as Allwright and Bailey (1991, 2) note, "what happens inside the classroom". Classroom research can shed some light on the issue of learning by looking at the ways in which learners approach tasks, activities, and the ways in which they attempt to solve problems. Still another issue of concern is creating a desirable learning environment. Among the many factors contributing to such an environment is team work. There is, indeed, a long and well-documented history of research on the effectiveness of collaboration (Duncan, 1996; Kohonen, 1992; Murray, 1992; Oxford, 1997; Skehan,1998; Underhill,1999). Collaboration, in fact, enjoys a constructivist theoretical foundation. Vygotsky (1986), contributing significantly to social constructivist epistemology, recognized that ideas have social origins; they are constructed through communication in social groups and cannot be separate from social life. The main premise of constructivist approach is that people learn best when they have the opportunity to work with other people through processes of cooperation and collaboration (Oxford, 1997). Collaboration, thus, seems to have the potential to play an important role in the curriculum. So whether the learners opt for working in groups or individually could have important implications in making classroom a desirable learning environment. Careful examination of student, as well as teacher view, on collaborative tasks could be revealing for that matter. It is the main concern of the present study, therefore, to investigate learners' attitudes toward collaborative tasks prior to its implementation in class and after that. Moreover, attempt is made to delve into the degree of match that exists between student and teacher view on such tasks. Indeed, the great value of obtaining learner views on activities and the degree of correspondence with teacher's perception has been emphasized by practitioners (Grifiths, et al; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Spratt, 1999).

Background

'Collaboration', comes from the nineteenth century Latin combination of *com*, meaning together, and *laborare*, meaning to work. It is not a new idea as Nunan (1992) reviews, from the early work of Mills and Dewey (ibid), to studies such as those by Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (ibid), "who believe that peer relationships are the key to reaching students' hearts" (cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 2). Collaboration, as Oxford puts it, has a "social constructivist philosophical base, which views learning as construction of knowledge within a social context" (1997, p. 447). According to Vygotsky (1986), higher psychological operations are first exercised and learned in social interactions through the medium of language. Vygotsky (1986) introduced the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), that is, "the realm of potential learning that each learner could reach within a given development span under optimal circumstances and with the best possible support from the teacher and others in the environment" (Oxford, 1997, p. 442). ZPD suggests that communicative collaboration contributes to the development of learning.

Collaborative classrooms have four general characteristics. The first two concern the changing relationships between teachers and students. The third one characterizes the teacher's new approaches to instruction, and the last one addresses the composition of a collaborative classroom.

To begin with, in traditional classrooms, the teacher is information giver; knowledge flows only one way from teacher to student. In contrast, in collaborative classrooms the base is shared strategies and cultures that students bring to the learning situations. Describing the importance of students' prior knowledge, Barrel states, "giving learners the opportunity and responsibility of contributing to the class proves to be a major factor in generating high levels of motivation, participation and communication in the language classroom." (1996, p. 3). Another feature characterizing collaborative classrooms is the specific ways in which teachers share authority with students. In most traditional classrooms, the teacher is largely responsible for setting goals, designing learning tasks, and assessing what is learned.

Collaborative teachers differ in that they invite students to set specific goals, to provide options for activities and assignments that capture different student interests and goals, and to encourage students to assess what they learn (Barrel, 1996; Skehan, 1998; Spanos et al, 2001; Underhill, 1999). Collaborative teachers encourage students' use of their own knowledge, ensure that students share their knowledge and their learning strategies, treat each other respectfully, and focus on high levels of understanding. As Spanos et al (2001) comment "the instructor provides students with linguistic materials, strategies, and guides them in learning activities"(p. 318). Teachers help students listen to diverse opinions, engage in critical and creative thinking and participate in open and meaningful dialogs (Skehan, 1998). As knowledge and authority are shared among teachers and students, the teacher mainly emphasizes mediated learning. Successful mediation helps students connect new information to their experiences and to learning in other areas. It helps students figure out what to do when they are stumped; it helps them learn how to learn. Above all, the teacher as mediator adjusts the level of information and support. The appropriate level of difficulty of the tasks is crucial to the learners and highly motivates them. Since they feel that they are being asked to respond to a reasonable challenge, the learners find the experience to be "rewarding, intrinsically interesting and educationally beneficial" (Skehan, 1998, p. 27). And lastly, the experiences and backgrounds of all students are important for enriching learning in the classroom. In collaborative classrooms, everyone learns from everyone else, and no student is deprived of this opportunity for making contributions and appreciating the contributions of others. Thus, a critical characteristic of collaborative classroom is that students are not segregated according to supposed ability, achievement, interests, or any other characteristic. Kohonen (1992) comments that collaborative classes are deliberately heterogeneous. Students who are called unsuccessful in a traditional classroom learn from "brighter" students, but, interestingly, the so-called brighter students do learn from their average peers. Teachers beginning to teach collaboratively often express delight when they observed insights revealed by their supposed weaker student (Duncan, 1996). Thus, shared knowledge

and authority, mediated learning, and heterogeneous groups of students are essential characteristics of collaborative classrooms. These characteristics define new roles for teachers and students and, accordingly, lead to interactions different from those in more traditional classrooms.

Teacher roles in a collaborative classroom are described as facilitating, modeling, and coaching. Most teachers engage in these practices from time to time. Facilitating involves creating rich environments and activities for linking new information to prior knowledge, providing opportunities for collaborative work and problem solving and offering students a multiplicity of authentic tasks (Oxford, 1997; Kohonen, 1992). Modeling refers to sharing one's thinking and demonstrating or explaining something. However, in collaborative classrooms, modeling serves to share with students not only what one is thinking about the content to be learned, but also the process of communication and collaborative learning. Modeling may involve thinking aloud – sharing thoughts about something- or demonstrating – showing students how to do something in a step-by-step fashion (Duncan, 1996). And, coaching involves giving hints or cues, providing feedback, redirecting students' efforts, and helping them use a strategy. Cognitive coaching is based on the idea that metacognition – or being aware of one's own thinking – fosters independence in learning (Kohonen, 1992; Berryman, 1998; Oxford, 1997).

Students, too, assume new roles in the collaborative classroom. Their major roles are collaborative and "active participator" (Kohonen, 1992). Goal setting is a critical process that helps before-, during-, and after-learning activities. Although teachers still set goals for students, they often provide students with choices. While teachers plan general learning tasks, students assume much more responsibility for planning their own learning activities. Self-regulated learning is important in collaborative classrooms. Students learn to take responsibility for monitoring, that is, checking one's progress towards goals, and adjusting changes in what they are doing to reach their goals. A major goal is to guide students to evaluate their own learning.

Self-assessment is an indication of one's progress toward achievement of learning goals. In a collaborative classroom, assessment means more than just assigning a grade. In such classes students learn self-assessment. And because decisions about materials and groups performance are shared, students feel freer to express feelings of success, and uncertainties than when they are evaluated by a teacher.

In summary, application of principles of collaborative learning, as reported by its practitioners, leads to success in class and proves to be highly effective(Duncan,1996; Kohonen,1992; Murray,1992; Oxford,1997; Skehan,1998; Underhill,1999) . What follows is a list-like rationale for the implementation of collaboration in the classroom as proposed by its practitioners: promoting positive attitudes among students and teachers, fostering autonomy, encouraging creativity, heightening self-esteem, developing learner's inner personality, self-confidence, interpersonal and intellectual skills, and generating energy. For these reasons, it is believed that the potential role collaboration might play in the teaching of writing to Iranian EFL learners is worth investigating. Surveys of teacher perception of studetne preference, as Grifiths (2001) emphasizes would add to our knowledge "in order to facilitate the language learning process more effectively"(p. 253). Moreover, we often have the feeling that students are similar (Raimes , 1987) . Yet we have not systematically examined them to see if discrete groups of ESL students at different levels react differently. This study is, accordingly, led by the following research questions:

1. *How do collaborative tasks affect learners' attitudes towards these tasks as far as proficiency is concerned?*

2. *Do teachers have an accurate perception of learners' preferences for collaborative tasks before and after the learners' experience with such tasks?*

3. *How does student view toward different class activities change?*

Participants
120 English major (39 English Literature and 81 English Translation) students of ages between 18-42 served as subjects. Being in their third

or forth semesters, 67 of these students were taking their advanced writing and the rest, 53, their essay writing course. Also, 26 teachers whose age ranged between 35- 56, with minimum three years' experience of teaching writing courses at university, were invited to take part in the teacher survey.

Materials

CELT Test: A proficiency test was used to classify students into different groups because one of the aims of the study was to find out whether language proficiency affected student preference for taking part in collaborative tasks. Based upon the results of the CELT Test, the participants were classified into low, average and high groups. To ensure that the subjects in each level of proficiency were significantly different from those in other levels, their scores on the test were plotted on the normal curve. Those subjects whose scores placed them on the area of the curve that was half a standard deviation above the mean were considered as high group. Those between half a standard deviation above and below the mean were considered as average group. And the subjects whose score was half a standard deviation below the mean were included in the low group. A descriptive statistics for the scores is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the CELT Test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
High	42	77.5238	8.1846	67	95
Average	36	58.1111	4.9672	50	67
Low	42	39.2857	8.3295	16	49
Total	120				

Table 2: ANOVA summary for the mean scores of the different levels on the CELT Test

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	30707.363	2	15353.682	278.310	.000
Within Groups	6454.603	117	55.168		

Total	37161.967	119			

Later on, the scores were submitted to one-way ANOVA to see if the three levels were meaningfully different from each other. The results (Table 2) showed a significant difference between the mean scores of the three groups, F (2,117)=278.310.

The post-hoc Scheffe Test results (Table 3), too, indicate that the three levels were significantly different from each other.

Table 3: Scheffe Test multiple comparison results for the mean scores of the different levels on the CELT Test

(I) Level	(J) Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
High	Average	19.4127*	1.6870	.000
	Low	38.2381*	1.6208	.000
Average	High	-19.4127*	1.6870	.000
	Low	18.5254*	1.6870	.000
Low	High	-38.2381*	1.6208	.000
	Average	-18.8254*	1.6870	.000

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Questionnaire

Student survey: Two questionnaire surveys at the beginning (week 3) and towards the end of the course (week 13) were performed: pre-course, post-course questionnaires (See Appendices A and B for the full text of the questionnaires). The pre-questionnaire included two parts, the first part yielding personal information and the second part 11 statements on a Likert scale. The respondents were asked to choose from among five options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree, and were rated from 5 to 1, respectively. To eradicate the probability of misunderstanding items, the questionnaires were developed in Persian. In the post- questionnaire, too, 20 statements on the Likert scale were included.

Teacher survey: The great value of obtaining learner views on activities and the degree of correspondence with teacher's perception has been emphasized (Grifiths, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Spratt, 1999). To this end and to gain information on the accuracy of the degree of correspondence between instructors' beliefs about leaner

preferences for collaborative tasks and learner actual preference, a third questionnaire was developed (See Appendix C). The first section aimed at eliciting information regarding the instructor's academic background and the other section 8 statements intended to investigate the match between instructor perception of student preference for collaboration and the students' real preferences.

Procedure

Scoring System: To evaluate student attitude and teacher perception on collaboration, it was necessary to score them based upon their responses in the questionnaire. A couple of questions were indirectly measuring student interest for a given task. *"I often preferred to work alone in class"* is such an instance. The scores were reversed with questions like this. In other words 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 were plotted as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, respectively.

Patterns of Classroom Interaction: recently, attention has shifted from the nature of input to the nature of interactions between language learners (Gais, 1983). Thus, to gain a clear image of the collaborative interactions in class, it is deemed necessary to describe it here. The classes met for approximately 90 minutes, during which time, participants were engaged in a variety of activities. These activities were designed and arranged in a way to motivate and encourage participants for non-stop involvement: collaborative planning and writing, problem-solving, and discovery learning. The group members were not fixed as in Roskams' (1999) study since it was not practical or feasible. Working in small non-threatening group discussions helped the students understand some important concepts. This liberated them from anxiety of speaking out in front of class or directly addressing the teacher. Teamwork prepared them for such coming situations. A few students always chose to sit at the back and seldom participated in class discussions. They hardly turned in their assignment as scheduled. What was fascinating was how they gradually came to do an excellent job in writing and in reading their assignments aloud with great emotion. It must be mentioned here that the students were invited to toss topics and examples to class to make

class activities still livelier and more realistic. Citing one particular example could be clarifying here. Once when the students were convinced that 'television' was too broad a topic for a paragraph, we started narrowing it down. 'TV programs' was next proposed. From among 'TV programs', 'Sports TV programs' was the following suggestion. The tension was seen broken when '90' was on the board. (This is the title for a TV sports program discussing weekly news on Iranian football leagues.) I had never seen the students, even girls, so enthusiastic and engaged to the point that they did not want to leave the class even when time was over. One could hope it might be contagious!!! Thus when those students who did have relevant experiences were given an opportunity to share them with others, the whole class was accordingly enriched. When the learners saw that their experiences and knowledge were valued, they were motivated to listen to others and learn in many ways; this is congruent with Tinzmann et al's (1990) observation. The participants were likely to make logical connections between their own learning and class discussion. Interestingly, they made suggestions for improving the effectiveness of collaboration. A few students mentioned the importance of seat arrangement. Sitting in semi-circles seemed more facilitative for activities to take place. (Once when the class was held in Conference Hall, the students experienced sitting in circles). Students had multiple roles in their group: author, audience, critic, spokesperson, etc. Through collaboration, students in both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups "can build social skills and become more sensitive listeners and more apt conversationalists, more reflective readers and more creative writers" (Tinzmann et al, 1990, p. 5). One immediately apparent result of collaborative classes is a student-centered classroom. In this way, more time is spent working with students and less time is spent lecturing. Do we expect still more from a class? During these conferences, my role in the classroom became that of a consultant, listening, answering questions, and offering suggestions. I would not stand in front of the class but among groups. I attempted to wait until groups asked for help. As the students were doing the task, the researcher would walk among groups and supervise what they were doing, providing help if necessary. Often in

doing collaborations, each group member's thinking was so different and they sometimes could not agree with each other. My intruding helped settle the controversy. The task being done in groups, the students would read out what they had written and I was amazed by the discussions among groups. When they were not exactly sure what they were expected to do, I volunteered to act out. We teachers are quite ready to serve as a model of spoken English, why not of the written language, as well? It was so demanding a task on the part of the teacher, though. So, I would think aloud, share my thoughts with them, and demonstrate my thought processes in a step-by-step fashion. With this technique, I really saw lights went on as I modeled. It is worth noting that I did have my own pauses, revisions, and corrections to prove them that even for their teacher writing was not an easy task. At other times, as the group members began their discussions, the researcher would sit out of students' circle, would sit at her desk, skimming through the text so that students would be free to discuss their ideas without worrying that I was judging their performance. Nevertheless, I could still discretely observe events in groups. Approximately, a quarter of students had never participated in their group's discussions. Several students asked others for clarification and received helpful explanation from their peers, mostly in Persian, of course. As a spokesperson for each group read the final product, if problematic or quite genuine, one of the group members or me would then put it on the board. Comments and discussions started at this point. Unsurprisingly, in collaborations, students had more difficulty in identifying problems in their own texts than in others' when asked to make judgments. Generally students were never given the full solution to a problem on a plate, but "they are finally steered in a direction where with thought, they should be able to arrive at a solution' (Caudery, 1997, p. 17). I felt encouraged. What began as a group activity, intended to add a little variety to class, ended up in making fundamental discoveries about teaching writing and value of group work. Any experience gave me a glimpse of the rich potential this innovation offered. Rapport was strengthened among students, and needless to say, self-confidence blossomed. Writing process could

be better illustrated in this light. The process of writing is likely to involve a variety of activities that focus on different aspects of the writing process. Increasing students' awareness of the process by which they write is likely to be necessary if they are to improve their writing strategy.

Results

In addressing the first question and investigating the impact of proficiency level on learner preference for collaboration, a one-way ANOVA was conducted; the results are presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4: ANOVA results for students' proficiency levels and their degree of interest in collaboration prior to and after the study

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.148	2	.574	3.649	.029
Within Groups	18.405	117	.157		
Total	19.553	119			

There was a significant effect for level: $F_{(2,117)}$=3.649. The results of Post Hoc Scheffe test (Table 5), conducted to determine where exactly the difference lies, show that there is a meaningful difference between levels high and low, but the results show that the differences between the average level and the other 2 levels are void of any statistical significance.

Commenting on task types, Kumaravadivelu (1991) has stated "... the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes" (p. 98). To answer the second question and to gain information on the accuracy of teachers' beliefs about their learners' preferences as an input to syllabus and materials planning, and classroom practice, the researcher conducted two t-tests. Indeed the researcher was inspired to see whether teachers' perceptions of learner preference for collaboration differed from students' actual preferences. The results showed that prior to the study teachers' perception of learners' preferences for collaboration (M=3.173, SD=.501) was not different from learners' actual preferences

(M=3.335, SD=.405). And $t_{(144)}$=1.767 was not significant. Similarly, investigating teachers' perceptions and learners' attitudes towards collaboration once the students had actually experienced it throughout the semester made me discover whether there is any difference between teachers' perception of learners' preferences for collaboration

Table 5: Scheffe results for students' proficiency level and their degree of interest in collaboration prior to and after the study

(I)	(J) NORM	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High	Average Low	.1032 .2333*	9.0008E-02 8.655E-02	.521 .029	-.1202 1.874E-02	.3265 .4479
Average	High Low	-.1032 .1302	9.008E-02 9.008E-02	.521 .355	-.3265 - 9.3197E02	.1202 .3535
Low	High Average	- .2333* -.1302	8.655E-02 9.008E-02	.029 .355	-.4479 -.3535	- 1.8740 E-02 9.320E-02

and learners' actual preferences for that after they had experienced it. For that matter, a t-test for independent samples was conducted. The results showed that students' preferences (M=3.885, SD=.485) exceed teachers' preferences (M=3.173, SD=.501). According to $t_{(144)}$=06.767, the difference was significantly meaningful. Having collaborated with other students throughout the semester, students had better perceptions than the teachers. The students' evaluation of their interest for collaborative tasks was primarily (M=3.335, SD=.405) less than their interest after the study was conducted (M=3.888, SD=.485),t(119)=12.329; it can be stated that they welcomed collaboration and they liked the experience.

Finally, to address the question, how student view towards different class activities changes, Table 6 was prepared with 4 pairs of

questions. In each pair, the questions addressing the same issue in the 2 questionnaires (pre- and post-) were included. For example, in the third pair, question number 3 in the pre-questionnaire:

"When I don't understand a point, I ask my teacher," was matched with its counterpart in the post-questionnaire, i.e., question number 2.

Table 6: Distribution of questions addressing similar themes in questionnaires pre- and post

Theme	Pre- Study Mean	Question	Post -Study Mean	Question
Student interest for group work	5.533	1	3.983	11
Class interest for group work	3.658	2	4.08	1
Student tendency to ask questions	3.225	3	4.025	2
Improvement in language proficiency due to collaboration	3.925	4	4.65	9

Generally, it was hypothesized that there was no difference between the 2 sets. In other words, the students' views did not change throughout the semester. In this way, six paired samples t-tests were conducted. The first set of questions aimed at comparing student interest for group work prior to and after the study. As expected, student interest increased (M=3.983, SD=1.06) in comparison to the beginning of the study (M=3.533, SD=.84), and $t_{(119)}$=-3.78 was significant. Questions 2 and 1 from pre- and post-questionnaires meant to investigate the difference as far as the whole class interest for group work was concerned. For this pair, too, interest among students at the end of the study (M=4.08, SD=.77) significantly exceeds that as reported in the pre-questionnaire, (M=3.658, SD=.99) and $t_{(119)}$ was =4.129. A look at the following pair, addressing student tendency to ask vague points from his teacher, well suggests that collaborative interactions made students more relaxed in posing their questions (M=4.025, SD=.92) compared to their experiences before the study (M=3.225, SD=1.09). $t_{(119)}$=-21.817 confirms the difference statistically. Whether interactions in class brought about any improvement in student language proficiency made me compare the next pair: (4,9). This change from (M=3.925, SD=.89) to (M=4.65, SD=.62) and $t_{(119)}$=17.015 statistically is a support for the previous studies (Roskams, 1999). Figure 1 illustrates the change in attitude as far as these 4 pairs of questions are concerned.
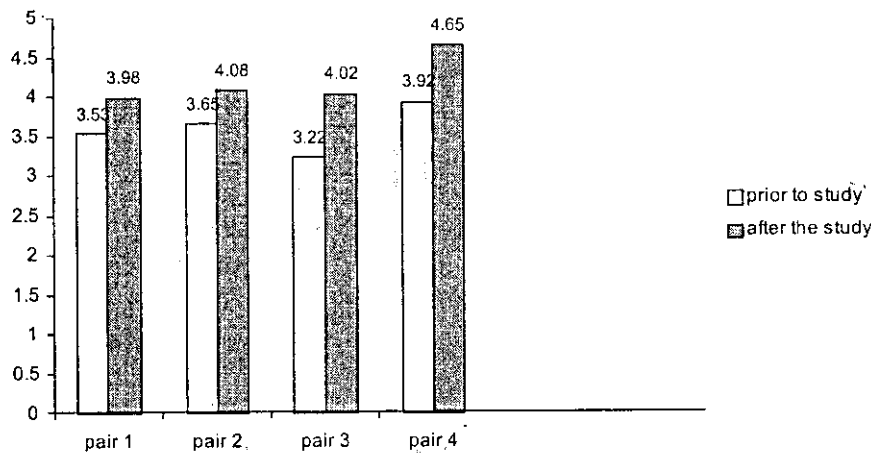
Figure 1: Student interest for certain activities prior to and after the study

Conclusions

In presenting the findings from the questionnaires, the researcher here briefly highlights the trends that emerged: The participants welcomed collaboration and more so at the end of the study. As far as teamwork was concerned low and high levels cared more for that in comparison to the average level. Considering collaboration, it can be said that teacher perception and student evaluation equaled before the study. But, after the study, students reported higher interest than that viewed by the teachers.

Now that the small pieces are put together, the interpretation of the big picture becomes clear enough. A general positive evaluation of group work led the researcher to the conclusion that the role of collaborative learning was equally telling, that of success. In big classes, the teacher cannot check students one by one, pushing some students to take part in class discussions seems next to impossible, and students, simply put, have a negative view toward writing. Given this state of affairs, collaboration comes to teacher's help.

Talking is a foundation of making knowledge and bringing personal growth (Vygotsky, 1986). Bruffee (1997), following Vygotsky, contends that learning occurs through talk. He asserted, "talk is the sea upon which all else floats." (Bruffee, 1997, p. 127). Questions raised in the conversations could activate thought and facilitate communication. Collaboration allowed for an interaction in a complete sense: meaningful and authentic. It was such a good tool for using language meaningfully. Through conversation between students, the relationships and supports developed. Class became a community for affective support. In this light, the findings validate Vygotsky's (1986) notion that learning is socially mediated or originates from interaction with others. The findings also support the view that peers are as collaborators in learning. In fact, learning in collaboration with others is important for students to develop their learning. As Vygotsky (1986) contended "What a child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow" (p. 188). Similarly, the students offered their comments, supports, and critiques and gained such encouraging or critical responses. The rapport they built was unique; hardly experienced in other lasses. As the findings indicate, the students in this class learned from each other as well as from the teacher. Competition gave place to cooperation, and the teacher was no more a corrector of mistakes but a knowledgeable peer guiding the students to learn within their ZPDs (Vygotsky, 1986). All in all, the results of the study suggest that collaboration is helpful in writing instruction.

There are numerous articles, studies, theories where teamwork, collaboration, grouping, etc. are emphasized. This is now a major trend in the field of language studies. As teachers we like our students to work with each other on joint projects, and learn from each other. In fact, the ability to do work with others as a team is noted as a qualification nowadays. So what is the problem? Why is it that our students highly prefer individual work, even if they have to work harder? Why is it that joint projects are reluctantly viewed? If we believe that language classes should reflect real-life situations, be authentic, and motivate students then why don't language teachers include such elements into their classes? The power of collaboration can be seen in its ability to prepare students to critique each other's

writing, to understand each others' perspectives, and to respect others' opinions, to develop discussing habits, to tap their prior knowledge, and to employ higher-order thinking skills. Such a class is characterized by maximum involvement and no longer an inactive situation. Such a class comes to be more interdisciplinary. Collaboration seems to be "cognitively challenging, socio-culturally rewarding, and affectively appealing." (De Guerrero et al, 1994, p. 491).

Collaboration is there for you to enliven your classroom atmosphere, to encourage student participation, to develop student attention, to avoid teacher bias towards students, and to deviate from routinalized ways of doing things. One word of caution! The researcher would like to emphasize the need to provide learners with preparatory training to ensure effective communicative interaction during the group work. A similar feeling made Nunan claim that

The most important implication for this research is that for collaborative teaching to be effective, teachers need appropriate training and support. It is insufficient to throw teachers together without giving them the opportunities for developing the skills they need for success. (1992, p. 6)

If teachers need this training, the students, too, deserve access to this training to better appreciate teamwork.

Need for further research

Audio- and video-tape recordings of student collaborations would certainly tell us more about what actually happens in student-student interactions. They could even be used in our classes as a resource to give still more taste to our language classes. Triangulation, the use of a variety of research tools in a single investigation, offers results that better inform theory and practice (McGroarty et al, 1997; Villamil et al, 1998). An interview with the students at the end of the study could enhance teacher's understanding about the students' thought and their thinking processes involved in solving their writing problems.

A picture is beautiful because we can look at it as a whole. Similarly, learning a language can be beautiful when students have an opportunity to experience it as a whole. Collaboration offered my students such an experience!

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