ISSN 2663-8169 Vol. 6, Issue 8: 227-234, DOI: 10.25236/IJNDE.2024.060836

Exploring collaborative writing tasks from an L2 teacher's perspective

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Abstract: *Collaborative writing (CW) is gaining more attention in L2 or English as a Foreign language settings. It creates opportunities for learners to produce a piece of text in the target language by using the language itself to communicate with one another, so learners may be benefited twofold (Storch, 2011). Though CW can be group work, it is usually administered in the form of pair work. It is not uncommon that learners in the same class may be at different language proficiency levels and may have varying attitudes towards pair work. This article seeks to answer how an L2 teacher could use collaborative writing activities for the benefits of learners of lower proficiency levels by referring to a small number of empirical studies. It is found that pairing pattern should be adjusted when the aim changes. If the aim is to improve the fluency of learners at a lower proficiency level, they should be paired with an equivalent in language competence. If the aim is to encourage pairs to produce more accurate texts, learners of lower language level should work with another learner who is at a higher language level and in the meantime is willing to cooperate. It is also found that different modalities, such as visual aids, can be introduced to maintain learners' interest and that collaboration can be restricted to planning stage when a lesson is under time pressure.*

Keywords: *Collaborative writing, Language-related episodes (LREs), Pairing patterns, Relationships between partners*

1. Introduction

When two or more writers jointly produce a text, collaborative writing (CW) occurs (Storch, 2011). This task type is receiving much attention from researchers (McDonough, De Vleeschauwer & Crawford, 2018; Shin, Lidster, Sabraw &Yeager, 2016; Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2020). It involves a large amount of peer interaction (Storch, 2013), which may turn a teacher-fronted class more learner-centered (Scrivener, 2011). Also, it confers opportunities to practice the L2 in a meaningful way, which is actually needed in some L2 learning environment where learners hardly use L2 outside classroom (Storch & Aldosari, 2013). From the perspective of an L2 teacher, this article aims to find what an L2 teacher needs to be aware in order to benefit his/her learners with the use of collaborative writing tasks. This article will start with related theoretical background, then move on to specific research questions, continue with summary of five empirical studies which the later discussion is based on, and end with the answers to the questions.

2. Literature Review

In L2 classroom setting, collaborative writing (CW) refers to a writing task completed by two or more learners' cooperation, more often in a pair (Storch, 2013). Collaborating writing gained its recognition as a possibly useful L2 classroom activity due to two the theoretical reasonings: the output Hypothesis proposed by Merrill Swain and sociocultural theory of mind forwarded by Vygotsky (Storch, 2011). Swain's (1993, 1995) output hypothesis holds that comprehensible input is not enough for language learning to happen successful, because some learners under her observation who were sufficiently exposed to a considerable amount of comprehensible input were not able to produce accurate language use. She thus proposed that whether it be speaking or writing, in order to reach a higher proficiency in L2, learners need to have ample involvement in output activities. In this theory, she believes that pushed output activities offer L2 learners opportunities to notice the gap between their current language ability and the target level, and then to generate genuine need for input. In the meantime, learners engaged in these activities can put their understanding of a language into test, and the feedback it entails might in turn inform the leaner whether his / her understanding is right or wrong. Moreover, learners are more

ISSN 2663-8169 Vol. 6, Issue 8: 227-234, DOI: 10.25236/IJNDE.2024.060836

likely to tap into their metalinguistic knowledge, and further improve their language abilities. Vygotsky's theory believes that learning is a cognitive development that takes place in social interaction (Lantolf, 2000). The interaction is between an abler being and the learner. With the learner's utterances, the abler being adjusts the message to a level (ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development) that is above but within the reach of the learner ability. Such adjustment is scaffolding. When learners have to write collaboratively in the classroom, they are engaged in both forms of output-speaking and writing, and interaction with others (Storch, 2011). As suggested by de Guerrero and Villamil (2000), L2 peers are able to provide mutual scaffolding. Thus, collaborative writing is theoretically beneficial for L2 learning.

As there is various types of writing, different types writing can be used in a collaborative writing. Several types of collaborative writing tasks are often used in classroom (Storch, 2013). According to Storch's (2013), they can be general divided into form-focused or meaning-focused based on the nature of task outcomes. Meaning-driven tasks emphasize the conveyance of message, that is, the accuracy of information itself, rather than grammatical accuracy. In contrast, a form-focused task is more driven by error-free outcomes. Meaning-driven tasks include collaboratively writing an argumentative or descriptive passage/paragraphs, or jointly writing a "data commentary report" (p. 53), and jigsaw composing. In a data commentary report, learners have to write a summary of information illustrated in a diagram. In jigsaw composition, each member in a group holds a part of a complete message usually in pictorial form (a phot, a picture, a map, etc.) and each part is different. In order to produce a complete passage or story, learners will have to pool the information in their hands through oral communication without showing each other the physical material. Form-focused tasks include editing, "text reconstruction" (p. 54), and dictogloss. In an editing activity, learners correct errors together to improve a text (Storch, 2007). In a text reconstruction task, learners have to jointly decide on appropriate word forms to be inserted into a gapped passage where some clues, such as word stems, are provided. Dictogloss is a more commonly used task (Snoder, & Reynolds, 2019). Unlike the other two, it does not only emphasize on form, but also pays attention to meaning. In a dictogloss activity, learners listen for a recording firstly without taking notes. In the second listening, they are allowed to note down what they hear while listening. Lastly, learners work in groups or pairs to recompose the text together. The text does not necessarily have to be exactly the same as the original, but there is emphasis on both information accuracy. That is, the reconstructed text has to contain as few errors as possible and contain as similar content to the original as possible.

A segment of students' conversation during a task with a purpose to work out language-related problems, such as which word to use, is called a language-related episode (LRE) (Storch, 2013). Based on the focus of these episodes, they are divided into L-LRE, F-LRE and M-LRE. L-LRE involves focus on lexis, such as wording meaning and word choice. F-LRE is focus on grammatical issues such as word form, use of preposition, whereas M-LRE is a mechanics language-related episode that deals with spelling, pronunciation and punctuations (Storch, 2007). Based on the outcome of LREs, they can be classified as correctly resolved, incorrectly resolved and unresolved ones (Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2020). Apart from language related episodes, researchers (McDonough, De Vleeschauwer & Crawford, 2018) also identify other types of episodes: content, organization, task management, and off-task episodes. These episodes address the following types of questions respectively: generating, evaluating and changing ideas; ordering or deleting ideas and structuring paragraphs; assigning roles, clarifying task, keeping time and coordinating; and talking over topics that are not related to the task.

One way to estimate learners' gains in language, assessing the outcome is analyzing LREs quantitively and qualitatively, that is, to count the number of LREs and of subtypes respectively, another way is to assess the outcome of a writing task (Storch, 2011). It can also be performed quantitively and qualitatively. The former is to operationalize text complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF), as the number of dependent clauses per a clause, the number of errors and the total word count (Wigglesworth & Storh, 2009). The latter is usually realized by human raters to grade the text according to rubrics which generally evaluate a text from dimensions like content (ideas/relevance), organization (orders of ideas/paragraph) and structure (Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea, 2020).

When a task involves another learner, it changes the dynamics and adds more variables to the processes of language learning (Storch, 2013). As learners form pairs, individual difference may affect the performance of the task (Shin, Lidster, Sabraw &Yeager, 2016). O'Sullivan (2002) found that familiarity affected the oral performance of female subjects. This also implied that sex may fluence pair interaction as well. Also, how members in each pair interact with each other seems to matter. Watanabe and Swain (2007) observed that pairs that were willing to cooperate produced more language related episodes. They therefore suggested that the relationship learners form in the pair work may play a role. Similarly, Leeser (2004) recorded similar situations, but he concluded it is still not clear how the

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relationship within pair work influences their language gain.

Storch (2002) devised patterns of dyadic interaction to describe the relationship formed by pairs during collaborative tasks. There are four patterns of pair relationship: "collaborative, expert-novice, dominant-dominant and dominant-passive" (Storch, 2002, p.128) There are two dimensions to coordinate the four patterns: "equality and mutuality" (Storch, 2002, p.128). Equality concerns the degree that a learner contributes to and controls the task. Mutuality is dealing with the degree of involvement in the discussion that is initiated by the other. According, a collaborative pair is a couple of learners who participate with high equality and mutuality. A dominant /dominant pair are two participants who seek to control the conversation and tend to ignore each other's suggestion or question. When a dominant/passive pair relationship pattern surfaces, one member always controls and decides whereas the other contributes little and just accepts every offer without discrimination, that is, low in both mutuality and equality. When interaction is in an expert/novice pattern, one participant also seems to take most control of the conversation but still tries to involve the other side actively.

Another factor that has received much research attention is the learners' proficiency level (Kim & McDonough, 2008; Leeser, 2004; Watanabe & Swain, 2000; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). Storch (2011) summarizes that low-proficiency learners are less likely to benefit from collaborative task whereas advanced learners can make the best out of them. She bases the idea on the observation that lower proficiency learner often left the majority of LREs unresolved, whereas advanced learners tackled almost all of them. She cautioned that if the aim is to benefit low-proficiency learners in a collaborative writing activity, their partner's proficiency level should be purposefully chosen and the relationship the pairs form should be closely monitor.

3. Questions

Based on this relevant literature, this article seeks to find the answer to what a language teacher needs to be aware in order to benefit learners when he/she uses a collaborative writing task. Such a comprehensive question is further specified as:

1) How does pair relationship affect lower proficiency learners in terms of linguistic benefits?

2) Can intermediate learners benefit from collaborative writing tasks?

3) Are there other ways to carry out collaborative writing tasks?

4. Summary of Empirical Studies

Storch and Aldosari (2013) explored how pairing learners of different proficiency levels and the relationships of these pairs affect the use of the target language during a co-writing task in an EFL setting. The study was carried out in Saudi Arabia among male college students. Researchers selected learners from the high-level and low-level language profiles to form pairs and write a short essay collaboratively in 20 minutes. The pairing patterns were H-L, H-H, L-L (H-a high language-level learner, L- a low language-level learner). Pair talks were recorded and transcribed word for word for analysis. Five recordings randomly selected from each pairing pattern were used.

Explicit attention to language use was operationalized as language related episodes (LREs). The numbers of three sub-categories (F-LRE, L-LRE, and M-LRE) were also tallied. The amount of L2 use was operationalized as L2 word counts and then number of L2 turns. The length of a L2 turned (in words) was also derived. Four types of dyadic interaction (pair relationship) were identified: collaborative, expert-novice, dominant-dominant and dominant-passive. Data analysis was conducted with pairing patterns and types of dyadic interaction as independent variables, and LRE count, sub-scale count, L2 word count, the number of L2 turns and length of l2 turns as dependent variables.

The results of the study showed that in terms of the L2 use for the composition (LREs), high-level pairs focused more on language used than low-level and mixed-level pairs. The major focus of low-level pairs was on word meanings, and learners sometimes used L1 to give definitions. Only three collaborating interaction were observed during the experiment: collaborative, dominant/passive, and expert/novice. That is to say, the dominant/dominant relationship did not happen during the study. They also found that H-L pairs with a produced more LREs than low-level pairs only when they formed a collaborative relationship or an expert/novice relationship. If the pair interaction was dominant/passive, there were few LREs. For high-proficiency learners, they produced more LREs as long as they adopted

ISSN 2663-8169 Vol. 6, Issue 8: 227-234, DOI: 10.25236/IJNDE.2024.060836

a collaborative attitude with their partners, whether it be with a low-level learner or with a likewise high-level learner. High-level learners produced fewer LREs if the interaction was expert/novice when they worked with a low-level learner or a likewise high-level learner. High-level learners' production of LREs was the fewest, when they were in a dominant/passive relationship with their partners. Regarding the amount of L2 use, they revealed that pair work was mainly carried out in L2 without regard to interaction or proficiency pairing patterns and that L1 was only used to a very limited extent (less than 5%). A closer look revealed that when the interaction was collaborative, no matter what level partner they paired with, higher level learners produced shorter language turns than when they interacted in an expert/novice or a dominant/passive mode. That's high-level learners produced longer turns when they were in greater control of the task than when they were in an equal control over the task. However, lower-level learners generated the longer turns when the pair interacted collaboratively, regardless of their partners' proficiency. Limitation of this research was a small sample size and the learners' language level were not strictly tested before the experiment.

Villarreal and Gil-Sarratea (2020) investigated whether CW benefits L2 learners in secondary school. 32 high school Spanish students at intermediate English proficiency (B1-CEFR) participated. They sat in two nature classes, one as experimental and the other as a control group in the study (EG & CG). Session 1 of the study was the administering of a test, confirming the comparability of two groups. After that, students in the EG group into upper-intermediate, intermediate and low-intermediate pairs to minimize the influence from dyadic interaction. Session 2 consolidated all participant's knowledge of argumentative writing. All subjects wrote an argumentative essay individually, used as a pre-test data for session 3. Students in both the EG group and the CG composed a new similar argumentative text in session 4, where the EG coauthored in 40 minutes, whereas the CG wrote alone in 25 minutes. During the treatment, the conversations in the EG were recorded. Four recordings were randomly selected for analysis. The language related episodes (LREs) from the recordings were tallied and categorized as lexis-, form- and mechanics-focused episodes (L-LRE, F-LRE, M-LRE). The resolution of the LREs were counted as un-, incorrectly, correctly resolved. All essays were coded quantitively regarding complexity, accuracy, fluency. They were assessed qualitatively with rated scores regarding its content, structure, organization and accuracy.

Results showed all pairs in the EG group generated LREs, with observable tendency to tackle lexical and grammatical issues over mechanical ones and that a majority of issues were correctly addressed. Computation demonstrated no statistically significant lexical complexity differences within groups or between groups, no significant improvement or advantage in fluency in or for the EG group. However, results revealed that EG group achieved better than CG in global accuracy, and that the collaboration reduced errors remarkably and resulted in more grammatically accurate compositions. Qualitative analysis revealed that although CG group started with higher attainment, the collaborative products lastly outperformed individual work in the experimental task. A limitation admitted is that no measure after was taken to gauge the effect size of L1 use during the CW.

Shin, Lidster, Sabraw and Yeager (2016) inspected whether and to what extent CW tasks affect the language performance in a dictogloss task concerning especially content accuracy.Participants were 38 intermediate ESL learners in the USA. Based on previous exam results, learners were assigned to form pairs with different proficiency patterns: high-low (HL), high-high (HH), low-low (LL). A week before the experiment, learners were familiarized with the procedure of a dictogloss task. Two dictogloss tasks were administered in 2 consecutive weeks, with physical environment and familiarity between learners controlled. In each task, students listened, took notes and reconstructed individually the text in the first round. After that pairs as aforementioned were formed and collaboratively (as observed) reconstructed the text. When a pair could not be formed due to the odd number situation, a volunteer performed the task alone with external resource at disposal. The content accuracy was operationalized as the number of idea units (a segment of a clause that contains a topic and a comment on it). Three sub-scores were calculated as dependent variables: total units scores, scores by unit quality (rated by researchers against rubrics), the number of extraneous units. The partner's linguistic proficiency as an independent variable.

Results showed learners worked in pairs reproduce more idea than when they reconstructed alone and successfully eliminated extraneous information like personal comments. That means, collaborative writing enabled learners to restore content more accurately. Also, collaborative products were more grammatically accurate. Furthermore, gains in idea units was not systematically related to pair patterns, although lower-level learners tended to benefit more from cooperation regardless of the partner's proficiency. As factors such as genders and personality possibly affecting pair dynamic were not controlled here, future research was called for to take them into consideration.

McDonough, De Vleeschauwer and Crawford (2018) explored whether it benefits the learners

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similarly as it does in collaborative writing when cooperation is restricted to the pre-writing stage. Four classes of Thai undergraduates, from the same faculty, participated. They were at A2-B1 level (CEFR). Based on their admission to the same major, they were considered as linguistically comparable in linguistic competence. The four classes were assigned to three conditions to write a problem-solution paragraph: two classes performed collaborative writing (CW), one class carried out the pre-writing stage orally and collaboratively and then wrote individually (CPW), and one class did the task alone as a control group. All groups carried out pre-writing and made notes at this stage. In collaboration groups, learners paired voluntarily, and their conversations were taped and no inequality in participation was observed during the task. Although all audio data was transcribed, only the recordings from pre-writing stage were analyzed. The written texts were measured quantitively regarding subordination (dependent clauses/clause) and accuracy(errors/word). They were rated qualitatively concerning content, organization and language and coded in scores. Episodes in student talk during pre-writing were classified as off-talk, clarifying and managing task, content, language, organization related.

Results showed only collaboration throughout the task generated more accurate texts. Collaboration only in the pre-writing stage did not benefit the text regarding accuracy. Individual work used more subordinate clauses per clause, that is, more complex. When collaboration was limited to the pre-writing stage, learner focused on content, language and organization, that is, the final product rather than other issues concerning task management. Results also found that all collaboration paid little attention to the organizing and selecting ideas prior to actual writing. Analysis also suggested when student collaboration was limited to the pre-writing stage more focus on content during pre-writing tended to result in text complexity. The generalizability might be limited by the fact that some planning happened in the head of students work alone throughout the whole task was not collected, which could be made available by think-aloud protocols in future research.

Sun conducted an experiment to examine the effects of three pedagogical methods - picture-book reading only (PRO), picture-book reading plus vocabulary instruction (PRVI), and picture-book reading-based collaborative output activity (PRCOA) - on vocabulary acquisition and retention. 84 Taiwanese university EFL learners participated. They were from 3 comparable classes (Group A, B, C), as a test confirmed, with a low-to-intermediate proficiency level. Three weekly sessions composed the treatment, where the three groups read the same picture book, but each group received a different mode of instruction every week. Thus, all groups read three books and experienced the three methods. In PRO, individual student read a picture book silently, answered reading comprehension questions to make sure they read for meaning and had extra thematically related reading to guarantee each group used the same amount of time. In PRVI, learners, after finishing the comprehension questions, received teacher-led instruction, which emphasized on the strategy of guessing meaning from context. In PRCOA, after reading the book, learners worked in a group of 4 to complete in a creative writing task collaboratively to reflect on what they learned from the book either before or after the comprehension questions depending on the book they read. During the collaborative task, they were allowed to communicate in L1 if necessary but required to present and share their writing product in English. A week before each intervention session, learners sat in a pre-test. After each session, an immediate post-test, the same one as in the pre-test, was administered to subjects to measure their acquisition, and the same test was taken again one month after each session to gauge retention. The vocabulary test was a self-report adopted from Paribakht and Wesche's (1997) VKS, through which learner's knowledge of a word ("not knowing / not remembering" regarded as not known; "giving meaning/synonym" as known receptively, "giving the target in a sentence" as known productively, both considered as known) could be detected and calculated.

Data analysis showed that all groups experienced marked acquisition and retention; that for vocabulary acquisition, PRO significantly outperformed PRCOA, which statistically outgained PRVI, although for retention, PRCOA statistically beat PRVI and PVO, two modes presenting similar mean retention rate in delayed test; that for immediate acquisition in productive vocabulary knowledge, PRCOA was significantly more effective than PRVI, which were statistically more effective than PRO; and that for productive knowledge retention, PRCOA again exceled statistically, with the other two bearing no significant difference. A confounding factor might be the practice-effect caused by the repeated use of the vocabulary test. A confounding factor might be the practice-effect caused by the repeated use of the vocabulary test.

5. Discussion

The first question here is how pair relationship affects lower proficiency learners in terms of linguistic

ISSN 2663-8169 Vol. 6, Issue 8: 227-234, DOI: 10.25236/IJNDE.2024.060836

benefits in a collaborative writing activity. To answer how a relationship formed by a pair during interaction affect low-proficiency learner's language use, it needs to be made clear that Storch and Aldosari (2013) interpreted "language use" in two ways: first, they use learners' focal attention to language-related issues during CW reflected by language-related episodes (LREs); second, they measure the amount of L2 utterances in pair talks. In terms of the focus on language use, the two researchers found that H-L pairs in a dominant/passive interaction produced fewer LREs than L-L pairs, but they outproduced L-L pairs in a collaborative or expert/novice interaction. It means that even when a lower-level learner pairs with a higher-level learner, if they did not collaborate, the lower level may learn less than he/she works with another learner with a similar level collaboratively. Also, they found that H-L, H-H pairs produced more LREs when they were collaborative, but they produced fewer LREs when the pair relationship was export/novice, and they generated the few LREs when in dominant/passive relationships. In other words, when learners cooperate, both sides will be benefited; but when the interaction is lopsided, less language learning happens. Interaction mode seems to play a more influential role in inviting learners' attention to language use than proficiency pair pattern does. Regarding the amount of L2 use, they revealed although generally pair work was mainly carried out in L2 without regard to interaction or proficiency pairing patterns. Further analysis found that when the interaction was collaborative, no matter what level partner they paired with, higher level learners produced shorter language turns than when they interacted in expert/novice or dominant/passive mode with lower-level leaners, whereas lower-level learners generated the longer turns when the pair interacted collaboratively, regardless of partner's proficiency. Simply put, although pair activity successfully elicited L2 use, the likelihood of practicing L2 use seems again to be decided more by interaction pattern than by proficiency pairing pattern. In sum, Storch and Aldosari's (2013) finding is that pair relationship had a more important impact on language focus and use than proficiency pairing pattern does. This concorded with what Watanabe and Swain's (2007) study implied learners were more likely to perform better when the interaction was collaborative, whether with a higher or lower proficiency partner. The answer echoes suggestion that L2 teachers need to take the relationship between learners into consideration when they assign groups in order to promote language learning (Scrivener, 2011).

Based on their findings, Storch and Aldosari's (2013) went on to suggest that the ideal pairing of learners depends on the aim of the activity. If the aim is to promote fluency, that is, to produce longer turns, a lower-level learner will benefit from pairing with a fellow learner at with similar proficiency. If the goal is to encourage focus on language use, inviting more language related episodes, pairing with a more advanced learner who is willing to collaborate will benefit the low proficiency learner. Therefore, the answer to the question is that in general, interaction pattern plays a more influential role than proficiency paring pattern and if we consider the learners who need more scaffolding, the pairing pattern should be changed according to the aim of the lesson or teaching. One concern, though, is that the whole sample in Storch and Aldosari (2013)'s study only consisted of male learners, as gender could also influence group dynamics (O'Sullivan, 2002), future study can be conducted with a more gender-balanced sample to verify the answer.

Storch (2011) holds that low-proficiency learners are less likely to benefit from collaborative task whereas advanced learners can make the best out of them. She did not mention how another huge group of learners- the intermediates-may be affected by CW. Thus, the second question here is whether intermediate learners can benefit from collaborative writing tasks. The affordance by collaborative writing is reflected in the focus on language (LREs) during pair talks, but also manifests itself in the task outcome (Storch, 2011). She implies that advanced learners could benefit from writing collaboratively, whilst low proficiency learners may not. The question whether intermediate L2 learner can benefit from CW therefore arose. Villarreal and Gil- Sarratea (2020) and Shin, Lidster, Sabraw and Yeager (2016) replied positively.

Results from Villarreal and Gil-Sarratea (2020) suggested that learners in secondary school were willing to participated in collaborative writing tasks and were able to focus on language use. Collaboration overtly enabled learners to produce more grammatically accurate and overall better-quality language product albeit limited improvement in complexity and fluency. Subjects were all at B1 (CEFR), and according to CEFR specifications, they were intermediate proficiency learners. This means learners at this level might actively and collaboratively participate in such activities, pay more attention to language use and write more accurately. The researchers, however, admitted subjects at this proficiency level might sometimes have to turn to L1 to resolve language or task management issues, as noted in their LREs, but the heightened metalinguistic awareness and deliberate attention to language seemed to contribute to language gains as well (Storch, 2008). As it is found in the study by Storch (2008), it is the devoted engagement and elaboration on language that facilitates learning or consolidation. Thus, if learner need some aid here to help them to elaborate, they may be better off being allowed to use some.

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Study by Shin, Lidster, Sabraw and Yeager (2016) showed when intermediate learners worked in pairs, they retrieved more ideas and reconstructed the text more accurately than when they worked alone. Some might argue that the significant gains showed in pair work sourced from practice effect since leaners in collaborative reconstruction had listened and reconstructed once already. But the fact that soloist with external sources did not showed as substantial improvement in turn proved it was the pair work that mattered. The findings suggest that for intermediate learners, peers could be effective source of learning than some seemingly more powerful resources, such as authority websites. Brook and Swains (2009) indicate such an effect might be that peers are closer to the leaners' zone of proximal development than other more 'proficient' sources, and thus more likely to enable learning. The researchers showed that learners might be readily engaged by collaborative tasks like dictogloss or composing texts collaboratively, although learners might sometimes need L1 to assist them through some challenges. Generally speaking, collaborative writing tasks might be conducive to intermediate level learners as well.

Having said this, Williams, Cunningham and Moor (2013) remind that learners at this stage can be hard to manage, as constant proficiency-appropriate challenges and diversity are needed to maintain their enthusiasm for learning. One fair question to ask further at this moment is whether there are other ways to carry out collaborative writing tasks. McDonough, De Vleeschauwer and Crawford (2018) and Sun (2017) might say yes.

Sun (2017) found that collaborative output task was the most useful way to help learner acquire and retain vocabulary from reading, outperforming the means of explicit instruction, and that the effect was more significant in word retention. Apart from embedding a collaborative writing for incidental vocabulary in a meaning-driven reading lesson, another feature of the study was the combination of drawing and writing. This brought visual support for vocabulary learning (Webb & Nation, 2017). So, the take-away here might be that embedding CW in other meaning-driven class and incorporating other modalities, such as vision and audios, can be conducive. McDonough et al. (2018) showed the limiting collaboration to the pre-writing stage pushed learners to focusing on generating ideas, and that the cooperation throughout whole writing process elicited more accurate results. To put it another way, limiting or extending the collaboration phases could probably drive learners to focus on different aspect of language, and therefore the teacher can change the length of collaboration according to the aim of the activity. If the aim is meaning-driven, the teacher can limit the collaboration to the pre-writing stage. If the goal is to encourage accuracy, the teacher can allow collaboration to last the entire task.

One extra finding could probably be extrapolated here. The two studies both involved low-proficiency learners, and results showed that learner did produced better results when worked together. This finding seems contradicts Storch's (2011) claim that low proficiency learners may not benefits. Possible reason is that Storch's (2011) measured learning for low-proficiency learner by mainly using the analysis of the resolution of LREs. When she moved on to research language gains from the aspect of the outcome of the task, her study only involved advanced learners. Therefore, it seems that low-proficiency learner might also be benefited. She probably did not look at lower-proficiency learner's gain from the perspective of the quality of the final product. Like intermediate learners (Villarreal & Gil-Sarratea,2020), less proficient learners used their L1 to fare through (Sun, 2017). L1 assistance might be needed for lower proficiency learners to reap language gains from collaborative writing tasks. It is an inference future study can verify.

6. Conclusion

The finding of this article is that collaborative writing might also be conducive for lower-proficiency learners, i.e. both intermediate and low proficiency learners, although they may sometimes have to turn to L1 to fare through the task. If learners use L1 for such purpose, an L2 teacher should allow them to. Pairing patterns should be adjusted when different needs of lower proficiency learners are taken into consideration. If the need is to improve fluency of lower proficiency learners, they should be paired with another learner with similar proficiency. When the need is to encourage this group of learners to focus the language used for the task, they should be paired with an advanced learner who can form a collaborative relationship with them. To maintain the interest in a class, a teacher can incorporate other modalities, such as visual aids or audio materials, into collaborative writing. If the aim of a lesson is to elicit ideas, collaboration could be limited to the pre-writing stage; and if the emphasis of a lesson is on accuracy, collaboration throughout the task can be adopted.

ISSN 2663-8169 Vol. 6, Issue 8: 227-234, DOI: 10.25236/IJNDE.2024.060836

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